



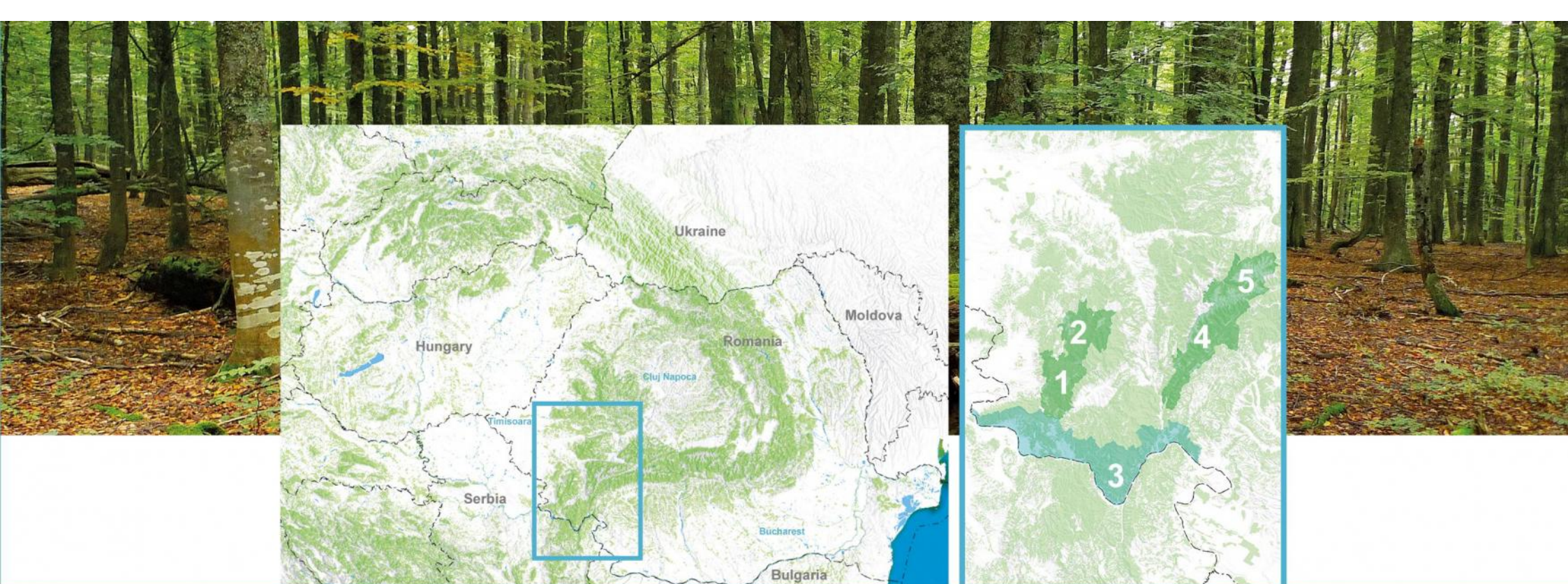
Wild Carpathians

Dare to explore!



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The Carpathians in brief

The Carpathian Mountains still host landscapes and wild animals that have long disappeared from other parts of Europe. With over 6 million hectares of forest, the majority of it in the Carpathian Mountains, Romania also has the largest area of virgin forest on the continent. Equally, the Carpathians are home to some of the biggest populations of bear, lynx and wolf in Europe. These large carnivores often share the same territory with flocks of sheep, their shepherds and dogs. Sheep farming is one of the oldest human occupations in these places, so ancient traditions are still observed by the shepherds, who venture high in the mountains every spring.

This makes the Carpathians a unique place in Europe, where nature is free to show itself as it has always done for millennia.

WILDERNESS AREAS

What are wilderness areas?

A wilderness area gives you the feeling that you are the first one to have set foot in a place where, as far as you can see, there are no other signs of human existence. In such an area you can discover wildlife tracks and, if quiet, you may be able to spot a capercaillie, a woodpecker or hear the roaring of stags. "Wilderness" is what you experience when you only have a myriad of stars as companion during the night and when you listen to the concert of nature from your sleeping bag. For this type of experience you need to put aside time and patience in order to disconnect from the hustle and bustle of everyday urban life and to really be able to take in the peace of nature.



Virgin forests

Our virgin forests are the last pieces of wilderness where nature exists without any kind of human intervention. Over 13,000 species of plants and animals can live together there, and a visit to a virgin forest is an unforgettable experience. Ancient trees with hollow trunks, covered in moss and lichens, or dead wood on the ground are home to thousands of species that would not find a suitable living environment elsewhere.



Large carnivores

Romania is home to over 30% of the population of bear, wolf and lynx in Europe (except Russia). Their presence is very important to people, being a good indicator of the health of nature, its good state of conservation and the balance between people and nature. Villagers know how to coexist with the large carnivores, shepherds have been defending their flocks against wolf and bear for millennia with the help of dogs, and tourists find here a way of life that disappeared in the rest of Europe centuries ago.



Unfragmented landscapes

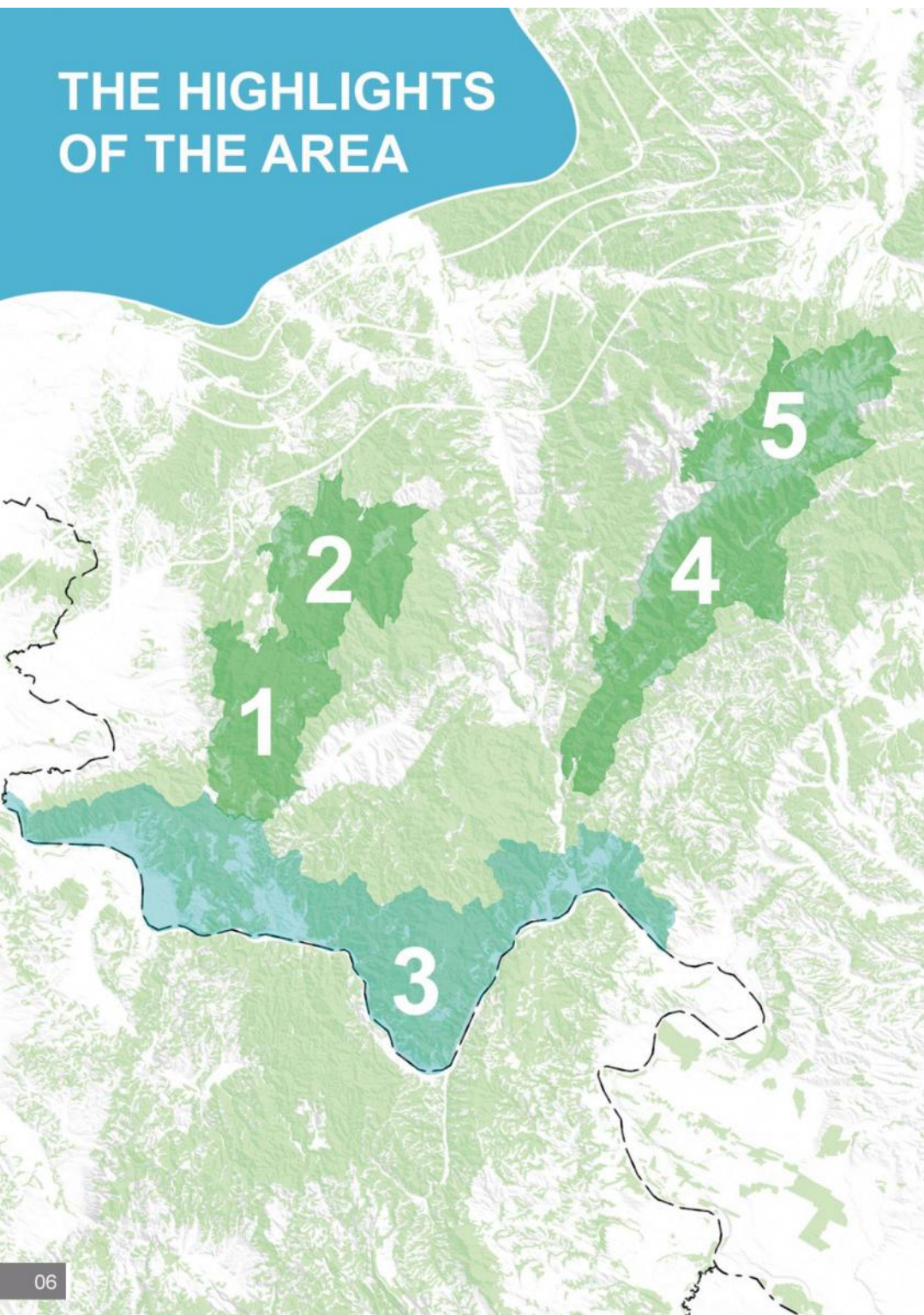
This is the largest protected area in Europe still unfragmented by major infrastructure. Wild animals can move from Retezat Mountains to the Danube Gorge without coming across unsurmountable obstacles. Due to the low accessibility of the area and the lack of vehicles, some virgin and quasi-virgin forests have still been preserved. The highest mountains are grazed by thousands of sheep, an ancient traditional occupation that contributes to the preservation of the biodiversity of the area.



Traditional occupations

The sparse villages that dot the valleys or the hilltops are not very numerous. The area is largely unpopulated and agriculture is the main occupation of the local people, which they continue to practise in the same way as their ancestors. The traditional land management reflects the tight bond between people and nature. The cutting periods and the traditional techniques have preserved a remarkable variety of species that would not have continued to exist without human intervention.

THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE AREA



1 Cheile Nerei - Beușnița National Park

The Nera Gorge, stretching over 24 kilometres, is spectacular due to the path and tunnels dug in the rock during the short Ottoman occupation of the area. Today the path is used by tourists who want to discover the attractions of the place. The local roads are excellent for cycling and there is plenty to see for bird watchers, bat or orchid lovers. Not far from here you can travel on the oldest railway line in Romania, a technological wonder from 150 years ago. The train still operates twice a day on a route that reaches the top of the mountains.



2 Semenic - Cheile Carașului National Park

The gentle slopes of the Semenic Mountains preserve important fragments of virgin forests which are rather hard to cross. Here we can discover the vast biodiversity of this type of natural ecosystem unaffected by human intervention. The waters that spring from these mountains have carved a spectacular gorge sector – Cheile Carașului. Along its wildest section you need neoprene drysuits and climbing equipment in order to access it.



3 The Iron Gates Natural Park

The most spectacular sector of the Danube River is characterised by ethnic diversity and Mediterranean influences, which enable the existence of surprising species of flora and fauna that are not native to Romania. The varied hiking trails make us enjoy these beauties and lead us to some of the most breath-taking viewpoints of the gorge. North of the Danube, on the mountain tops, 19th century Czech settlers built a string of villages which are nearly deserted today but which have retained their traditional charm.

4 Domogled - Valea Cernei National Park

In Valea Cernei nature and mythical legends blend in harmony. It is said that through here passed Hercules on his way to the Caucasus in search of the Golden Fleece together with his Argonauts. The mythical hero is said to have regained his strength in the thermal springs that once brought fame to these places. In more recent times, Austrian emperors and empresses used to come here for treatment.

Mountain tops that rise abruptly are dotted with a few hamlets seemingly from times long gone. Without roads and electricity, the families who still live here organise their life according to the eternal laws of nature.



5 Retezat National Park

The first national park in Romania, Retezat is a top destination for nature lovers. A dense network of trails, cabins and mountain lodges facilitate access to any hiker. The blue-eyed realm, as the Retezat Massif is also known due to the numerous glacial lakes that reflect the sky, is a mosaic of crenelated ridges, rocky outcrops, virgin forests and wildflower meadows. In its foothills lies a rural area rich in historic vestiges, some 2000 years old.

DISCOVER THE AREA





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LONG-DISTANCE CYCLING

Further information and a description of the route on www.eco-romania.ro

If you are a fan of long cycling routes, we have the perfect offer for you: a 5 day route that includes local roads and mountain paths. Occasionally, you will reach villages or hamlets but you will mostly be surrounded by nature. You will cross a string of three national and nature parks, pass through remote areas and have the opportunity to interact with local people who form an amazing cultural mosaic: Romanians, Czechs, Serbs, Croats and Germans. The route passes through places that were heavily industrialised in the 19th century but whose glory has long gone, follows forest tracks and crosses thick forests where wild animals take shelter. The nearly deserted villages on mountain tops above the Danube are still inhabited by Czech settlers who came here from Bohemia in the 1830s. Further down, on the shore of the Danube River, you will come across the deepest gorge in Europe and the spectacular area of the Cazane, where the canyon is very narrow.

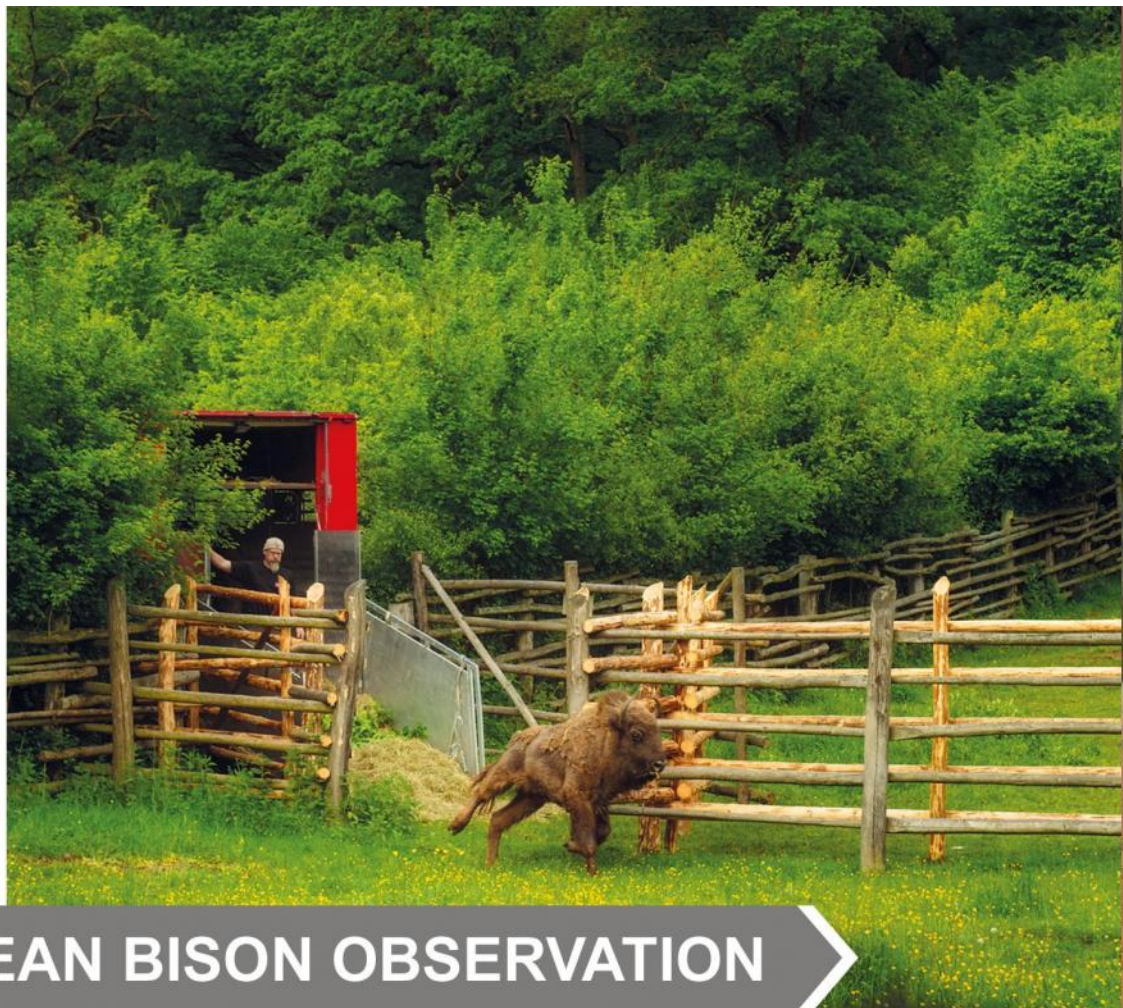
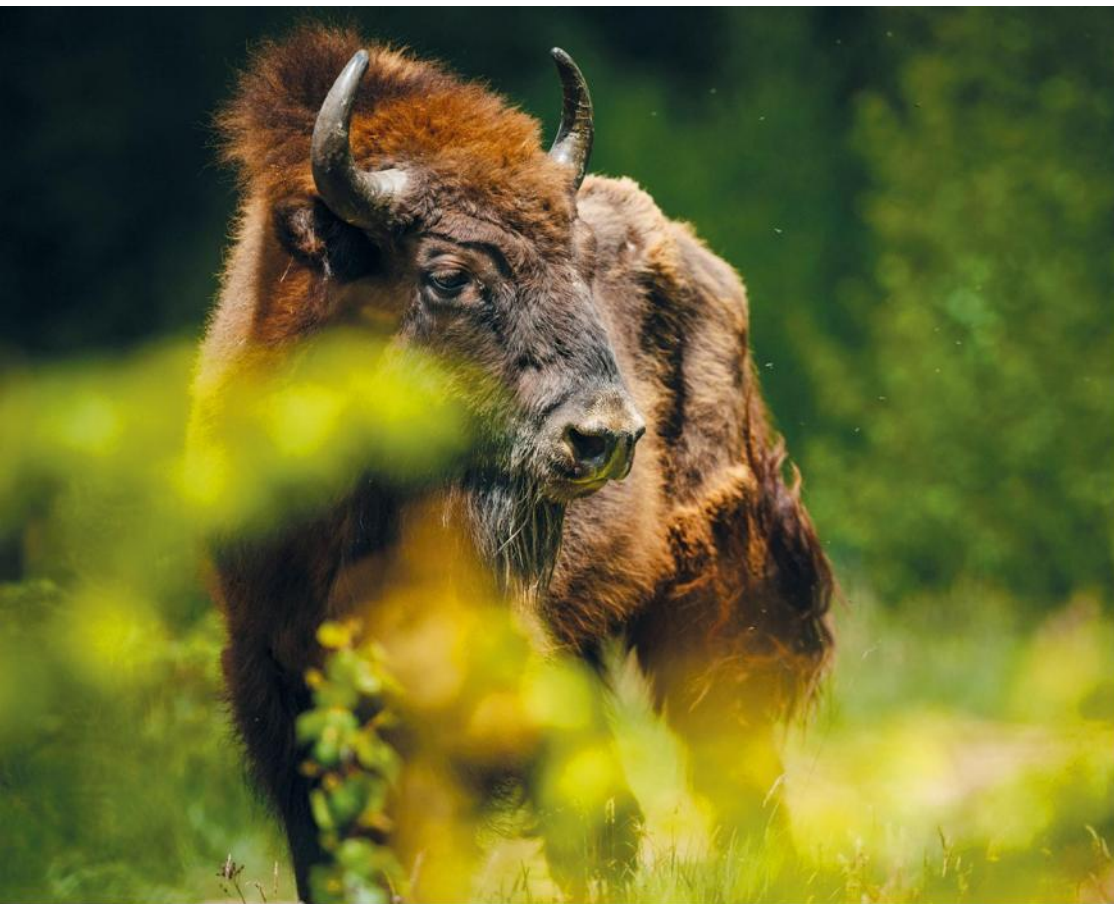


LONG-DISTANCE HIKING

Further information and a description of the route on www.eco-romania.ro

Little covered by hikers, the area is excellent for those brave enough to step out of their comfort zone and who don't shy away from challenges. To forget daily life for a few days is a tremendous challenge, but here it means a lot more!

Be ready for four or five days of demanding hiking where you will be crossing the Retezat Mountains all the way to the Danube Gorge, you will be admiring rural landscapes typical of the Carpathian Mountains and understand the tight connection between man and nature. With a little bit of luck, at night you will be able to admire the sea of stars that flood the sky and you will be listening to the insect sounds in the hay meadows nearby in one of the most beautiful concerts of nature. The network of trails is badly developed but with a good map and compass or a GPS you can find your bearings. Ski touring can also be experienced here in winter. We recommend that you use a local guide in order to have a complete experience.



EUROPEAN BISON OBSERVATION

WE RECOMMEND WWF (www.wwf.ro/rewilding | magurazimbrilor@gmail.com | 0040 757 810905)

In the heart of the Carpathian Mountains a programme of European bison reintroduction is being implemented, this species having disappeared from Romania about 200 years ago. The European bison is one of the umbrella species, a missing link in the trophic chain, with a real impact on maintaining ecological processes that are specific to wilderness areas.

Visit Măgura Zimbrilor to find out more about these animals who used to roam free around the forests of Europe and are now rarer than the black rhinoceros. We offer you a one day trip guided by rangers specialised in the rewilding area, where the bison learn “again” how to live free, how to find the most nutritious food in this new habitat and, most important, how to defend themselves against predators. You will learn about their behaviour, their group interaction and their favourite food, and you will see the impact that these animals have on the balance of the landscape, the bison being rightly nicknamed “landscape architect” among other large herbivores.



PHOTO TOURS

WE RECOMMEND Phototour (www.phototour.ro | contact@phototour.ro | 0040 722 630730)

The area is like a rare precious stone, still to be fully discovered by photographers. Valea Cernei (Cerna Valley), the Danube Gorge and the Retezat Massif offer some unique photographic opportunities such as a waterfall that can be photographed from behind, varied karst relief in terms of form and development, the deepest gorges, flooded caves and attractive glacial lakes, among many others. You will have the surprise to discover unexpected landscapes which, captured at the right time, can result in innovative and spectacular images. You will be accompanied by a professional photographer, always ready to guide you through the process of obtaining the perfect photo. You will capture nature in all its splendour, irrespective of the weather. The spectacle of nature is complete if you add to it forlorn villages, isolated hamlets and gentle people, the perfect subjects for portrait photography.



CYCLING

WE RECOMMEND CarpatBike (www.carpatbike.ro | home@carpatbike.ro | 0040 723 389833) My Romania (www.myromania.com.ro | office@myromania.com.ro | 0040 723 191755)

Visit the area slowly, along the Danube River, or going up the gentle slopes that host Czech villages. Cross the spectacular valleys through gorges or canyons, interact with local people and observe the wildlife. Catch your breath at a wine tasting session or while you enjoy a traditional meal prepared by local people. The landscapes you will come across vary from the snow-capped heights of the Retezat Mountains in late summer to rolling hills covered in vines. There are also places you cannot reach by bicycle so prepare for a short hike or a boat trip in Europe's most spectacular gorges, located in the Iron Gates Nature Park. Experienced local guides will show you the secrets of this less known and hardly explored corner of the country.

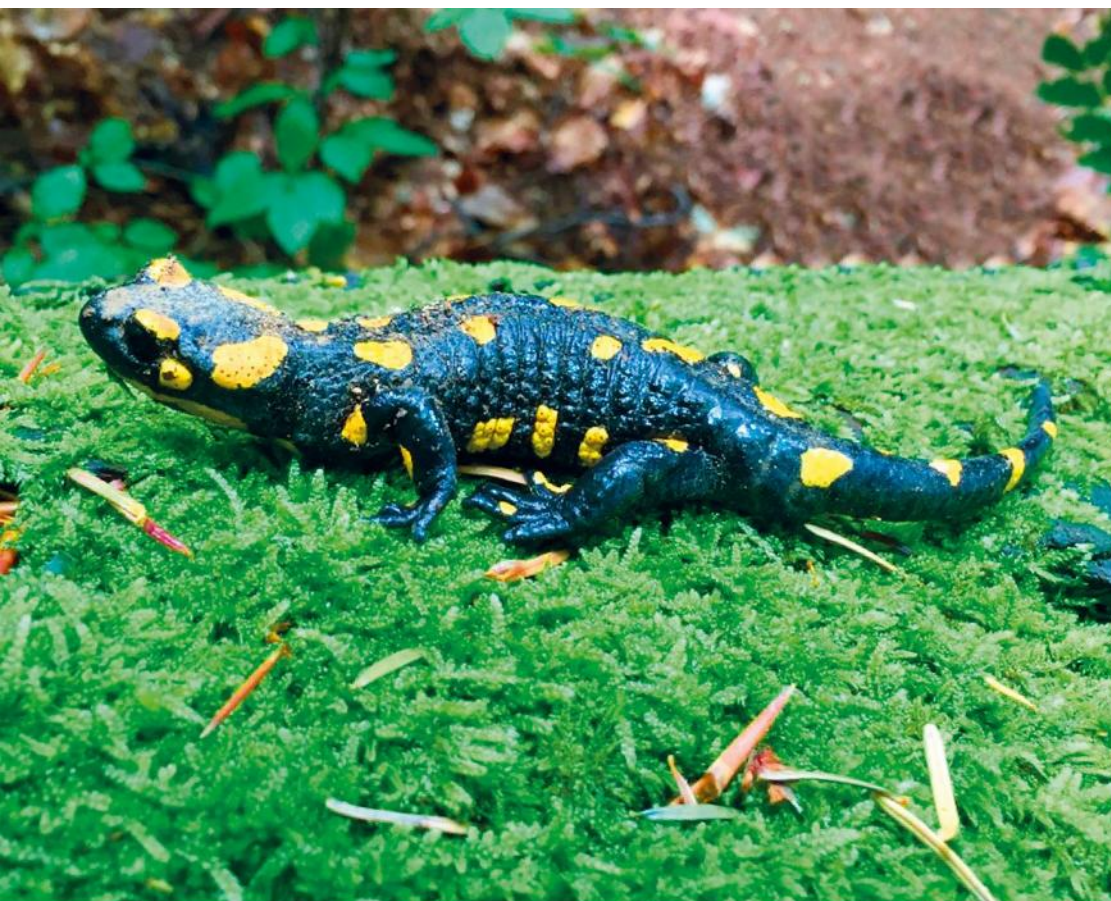


IN SEARCH OF WILD ORCHIDS

WE RECOMMEND Tymes Tours (www.tymestours.ro | info@tymestours.ro | 0040 722 525734)

While searching for the wild orchids you will cover incredibly beautiful landscapes between the Danube, Cerna and Nera rivers. On Valea Cernei you will get to experience sheer wilderness and remote hamlets while hiking slowly, with your belongings carried on their backs by horses. You will dine with local people and learn from them how to live in complete harmony with nature.

Mountain paths that cross deep valleys will take you to spectacular lime plateaus and you will be able to go up to the glacier-carved heights. Experienced guides, who have been exploring the area for years, will share their knowledge with you. You will enjoy the surprising diversity of the area from the alpine ridges of Retezat Mountains to the fig orchards along the Danube, but you will also get in touch with local people and find out the less known details about the history of this place.



DISCOVER THE VIRGIN FORESTS OF ROMANIA

WE RECOMMEND Carpathian Nature Tours (www.cntours.eu | office@cntours.ro | 0040 745 512096)

Specialised forest guides will lead you onto paths known only to them in the heart of some of the most beautiful forests. Ancient trees will tell century-old stories and will reveal the mysteries of these complex ecosystems. Virgin forests have survived to this day where man's traces, if there ever were any, have completely disappeared. You will walk through beech or hornbeam forests and will cross young beech and plum stands. You will climb onto the rocks that guard over the Danube Gorge in order to reach breath-taking viewpoints.

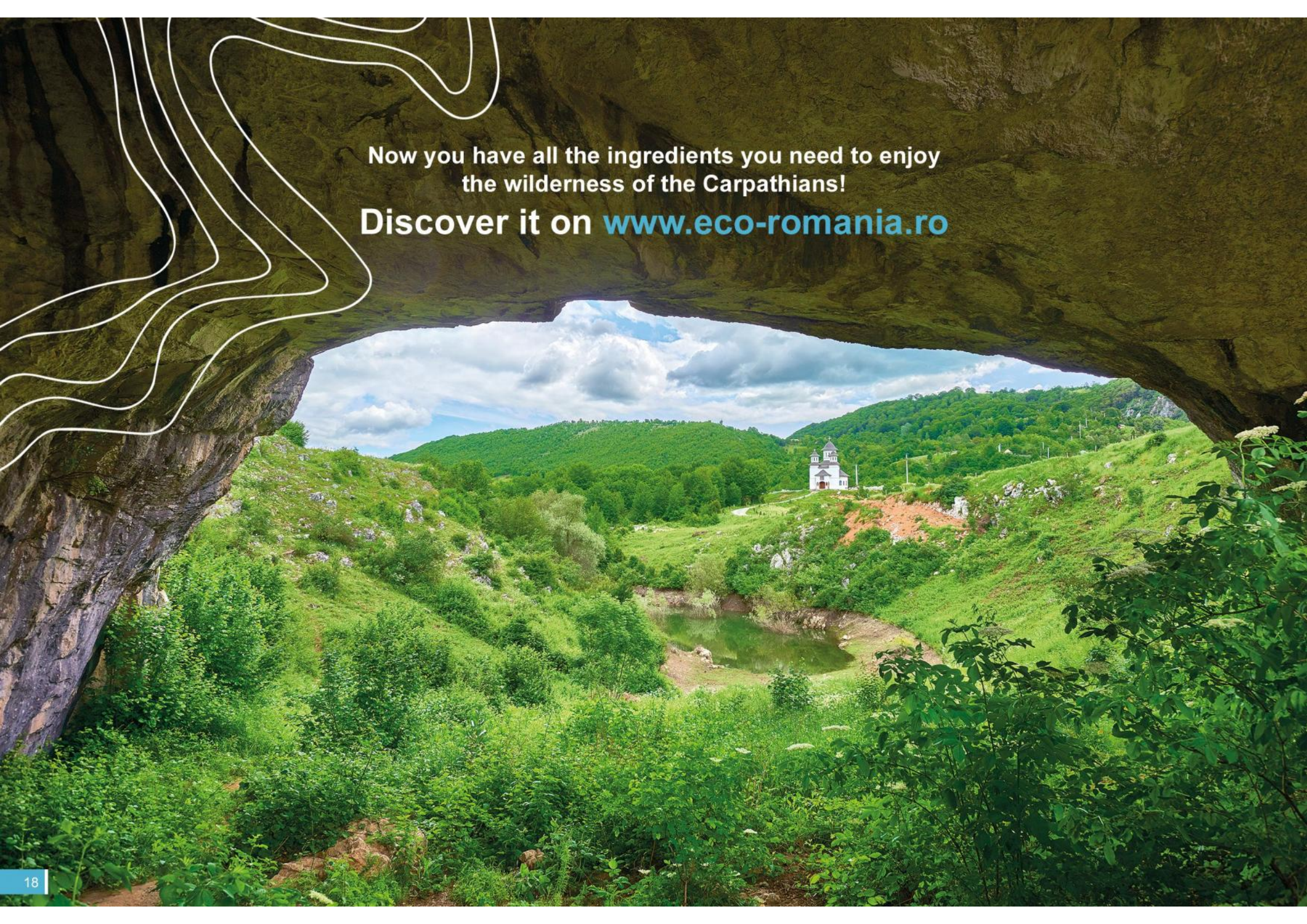
After you have seen all these wonders of nature, you will have the opportunity to discover the technological wonders that animated this area in the past: the steam engine museum in Reșița and the oldest railway in Romania, also known as the Banat Semmering.



MOUNTAIN BIKING

WE RECOMMEND RO Mountainbike (www.romountainbike.ro | pedal@romountainbike.ro | 0040 726 187399)

Mountain biking here brings challenge, adventure and relaxation. Noisy waterfalls, deep caves, rocky paths, alpine ridges and giant crests, lakes and deep gorges, lush vegetation and well preserved natural wonders – all of this can be seen while mountain biking through these places. You can go through secular forests towards valleys with remote villages that have preserved their old charm. The influence of various peoples and cultures is still very much present in these places; the numerous ethnic groups have preserved their traditions and characteristics in time, communities seeming untouched by the passing of time. Mud and stone tracks, well-trod paths, light clearings and steep valleys turn it into a perfect hiking destination.

The image is a full-page background photograph taken from the interior of a cave. The cave's ceiling and walls are dark, textured rock. On the left side, several white, hand-drawn contour lines are visible on the rock face. The cave's opening frames a bright, scenic view of a lush green valley. In the distance, a small white church with a dark roof and a small tower sits atop a grassy hill. A small pond is visible in the middle ground of the valley. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and natural.

Now you have all the ingredients you need to enjoy
the wilderness of the Carpathians!

Discover it on www.eco-romania.ro

The Association of Ecotourism in Romania (AER) brings together in an innovative way the public and the private sector in a partnership for nature conservation and sustainable tourism development. AER contributes to the improvement of the quality of ecotourism services and promotes nature as an essential element of Romania's image as a tourist destination. AER aims to improve the quality of ecotourism services and to develop the infrastructure in the ecotourism destinations, to contribute to nature conservation and sustainable development in Romania.

What does AER do?

AER's mission is the development and promotion of REAL ecotourism in Romania. AER members participate in international tourism promotion fairs in Europe, promote ecotourism activities and promote Romania as an ecotourism destination. Currently AER is in the process of establishing a series of ecotourism destinations in Romania, supports the development of local services and products, contributes to the maintenance of high quality standards in tourism and supports the local and national nature conservation efforts.

www.asociatiaaer.ro





PROGRAMUL DE COOPERARE ELVEȚIANO-ROMÂN
SWISS-ROMANIAN COOPERATION PROGRAMME



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