

ROMANIA

Romania is a sovereign state located in Southeastern Europe. It borders the Black Sea, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Hungary, Serbia, and Moldova. It has an area of 238,397 square kilometers and a temperate-continental climate. With almost 20 million inhabitants, the country is the seventh most populous member state of the European Union. Its capital and largest city, Bucharest, is the sixth-largest city in the EU, with 1,883,425 inhabitants as of 2011.

The Black Sea is a body of water and marginal sea of the Atlantic Ocean between Eastern Europe and Western Asia. It is supplied by a number of major rivers, such as the Danube, Dnieper, Rioni, Southern Bug, and Dniester. The Black Sea has an area of 436,400 km² (not including the Sea of Azov), a maximum depth of 2,212 m and a volume of 547,000 km³.

The River Danube, Europe's second-longest river, rises in Germany and flows in a general southeast direction for 2,857 km, coursing through ten countries before emptying into Romania's Danube Delta.

The Carpathian Mountains or Carpathians are a mountain range system forming an arc roughly 1,500 km long across Central and Eastern Europe, making them the second-longest mountain range in Europe (after the Scandinavian Mountains, 1,700 km).

Modern Romania was formed in 1859 through a personal union of the Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia. The new state, officially named Romania since 1866, gained independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1877. At the end of World War I, Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia united with the sovereign Kingdom of Romania. During World War II, Romania was an ally of Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union, fighting side by side with the Wehrmacht until 1944, when it joined the Allied powers and faced occupation by the Red Army forces. Romania lost several territories, of which Northern Transylvania was regained after the war. Following the war, Romania became a socialist republic and member of the Warsaw Pact. After the 1989 Revolution, Romania began a transition towards democracy and a capitalist market economy.

Wallachia or Walachia is a historical and geographical region of Romania. It is situated north of the Lower Danube and south of the Southern Carpathians. Wallachia is traditionally divided into two sections, Muntenia (Greater Wallachia) and Oltenia (Lesser Wallachia). Wallachia as a whole is sometimes referred to as Muntenia through identification with the larger of the two traditional sections.

Wallachia was founded as a principality in the early 14th century by Basarab I, after a rebellion against Charles I of Hungary, although the first mention of the territory of Wallachia west of the river Olt dates to a charter given to the voivode Seneslau in 1246 by Béla IV of Hungary. In 1417, Wallachia accepted the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire; this lasted until the 19th century, albeit with brief periods of Russian occupation between 1768 and 1854. In 1859, Wallachia united with Moldavia to form the United Principalities, which adopted the name Romania in 1866 and officially became the Kingdom of Romania in 1881. Later, following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the resolution of the elected representatives of Romanians in 1918, Bukovina, Transylvania and parts of Banat, Crişana and Maramureş were allocated to the Kingdom of Romania, forming the modern Romanian state.

Bucharest is the capital and largest city of Romania, as well as its cultural, industrial, and financial centre. It is located in the southeast of the country, on the banks of the Dâmbovița River, less than 60 km north of the Danube River and the Bulgarian border.

Bucharest was first mentioned in documents in 1459. It became the capital of Romania in 1862 and is the centre of Romanian media, culture, and art. Its architecture is a mix of historical (neo-classical), interbellum (Bauhaus and art deco), communist-era and modern. In the period between the two World Wars, the city's elegant architecture and the sophistication of its elite earned Bucharest the nickname of "Little Paris". Although buildings and districts in the historic city centre were heavily damaged or destroyed by war, earthquakes, and above all Nicolae Ceaușescu's program of systematization, many survived. In recent years, the city has been experiencing an economic and cultural boom.

The Palace of the Parliament is the seat of the Parliament of Romania. Located on Dealul Arsenalului in central Bucharest (Sector 5), it is the largest administrative building in the world with a height of 84 metres, an area of 365,000 square metres and a volume of 2,550,000 cubic metres. In terms of weight, the Palace of the Parliament is the heaviest building in the world, weighing in at around 4,098,500,000 kilograms.

One of the oldest towns in Wallachia, Curtea de Argeș was the capital of a small local state which was the start for the unification of the lands south of the Carpathians. The oldest archeological evidence of it being the seat of such a ruler date from the 13th century.

This Argeș court was the residence of the Wallachian hospodars until Mircea I of Wallachia, included. The following rulers used both Argeș and Târgoviște as the seats of the court and traveler Johann Schiltberger mentioned that in 1396 both cities were capitals.

While Mircea I lived in Curtea de Argeș, Michael I, Mircea's son and co-prince lived in Târgoviște, where he continued to live even as a single ruler. Dan II preferred Curtea de Argeș and he was the last hospodar to rule from that city, the court being finally moved to Târgoviște by Alexandru Aldea in 1431.

Throughout the period it was the capital of Wallachia, the Princely Court in Târgoviște had been constantly refurbished and extended. The compound was surrounded by stone walls and a moat and a new church and a tower had been built. Vlad III Dracula ("the Impaler") later added the Chindia Tower, now a symbol of the city.

The tower was begun during the second reign of Prince Vlad III the Impaler over Wallachia and took its final form during the 19th century. It initially had a military purpose, but during history it has been used as a guard point, a fire spotter, and for storing and protecting the state treasury. Between 1847 and 1851, the Chindia Tower was completely restored by Gheorghe Bibescu who added 5 metres to its height. The building in its current form has a height of 27 metres and a diameter of 9 metres.

The Chindia Tower, the most important tourist attraction in Târgoviște, is considered the city's symbol; the tower elements are present in the city's emblem, at the top and also at the bottom. As a monument the tower now houses an exhibition of documents, weapons and objects which belonged to Vlad the Impaler.

Poenari Castle, also known as Poenari Citadel, is a ruined castle in Romania, notable for its connection to Vlad the Impaler. Access to the citadel is made by climbing the 1,480 concrete stairs.

In the 15th century, realizing the potential for a castle perched high on a steep precipice of rock, Vlad III the Impaler repaired and consolidated the structure, making it one of his main fortresses. Although the castle was used for many years after Vlad's death in 1476, it eventually was abandoned again in the first half of the 16th century and was in ruins by the 17th century. The size and location of the castle made it difficult to conquer.

Nadia Elena Comăneci is a Romanian Olympic gold medalist, who at the age of 14 in the Olympic games during the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, became the first gymnast to be awarded a perfect score of 10.0. In all, she received six more perfect 10s in Montreal, as well as three gold medals. Four years later, she won two gold medals at the 1980 Olympics in Moscow. She won nine Olympic medals and four World Championship medals during her career.

Gheorghe "Gică" Hagi is a Romanian former professional footballer, considered one of the best attacking midfielders in Europe during the 1980s and '90s and the greatest Romanian footballer of all time. Galatasaray fans called him "Comandante" ("The Commander") and Romanians call him "Regele" ("The King").

Simona Halep is a Romanian professional tennis player. Halep first broke into the world's top 50 at the end of 2012, reached the top 20 in August 2013, and finally the top 10 in January 2014. She won her first 6 WTA titles in the same calendar year in 2013 (a feat that was last achieved by Steffi Graf in 1986 when she won her first 7), being named the WTA's Most Improved Player at its end, as well as being named ESPN Center Court's 2013 Most Improved Player.

The complex of monuments which form the Royal Court of Targoviste represents one of the most important architectural group from Tara Romaneasca (the Romanian Country) and has a great artistical and historical value. Being a royal residence for many centuries, the Royal Court offers the possibility of revealing a chapter of the romanian medieval art and history.

Vlad the Impaler

Starting with the year 1967, the Royal Court was transformed into a museum ensemble of the Muzeul Judetean Dambovita (the Museum of the County Dambovita) and now is part of the National Museum Ensemble "the Royal Court" of Targoviste. Besides the outdoors museum there is an exhibition dedicated to Vlad Tepes (Vlad the Impaler), founder of the fortifications; a lapidarium at the Royal Court's basement built by Petru Cercel and an exhibition of religious art in the great Royal Church.