

# Tourist destination in Romania: Maramures

Romania is a very interesting *European travel destination* where you can visit a variety of *tourist attractions*. Among those beautiful *tourist places in Romania*, there is Maramures, a place still elapsed in time.

## Pin Maramures on your Romania tourist map

One of the most *beautiful places in Romania*, surrounded by mountains, hills and crossed by rivers, is the Maramures region – a magnificent land that speaks about the origins of the Romanian people, kept untouched due to their love and respect for the history and traditions.

*Visiting Maramures* during an early summer, and discovered a fairy-like landscape. Nestled between Oas, Gutai, Tibles and Rodnei mountains, Maramures is an area with thick forests, crossed by crystal waters of the Tisa River. The whole area is populated by villages with old buildings made mostly of wood.

## Maramures, an unaltered way of life

The houses have brightly colored, tall, carved wooden gates, which mark the entrance into the family space.

The churches of Maramures, tall and also built of wood, are unique in Europe. Wooden and glass painted icons, true works of art, some of them hundreds of years old, are exhibited here all year round.

## Maramures traveling: traditions and customs

During my 5-days *trip to Maramures* I had the luck to assist to one of the most beautiful rituals of this area: the transhumance (migration of herds of grazing sheep).

In early May, Maramures villagers are celebrating the departure of flocks of sheep led by shepherds from the hills to the mountains, where they are going to stay for the summer. This old tradition is celebrated with fresh milk and specific dishes, thus respecting the traditions, religion and ancient customs.

## TOURIST ATTRACTIONS:

**Borsa** town is a starting point for visiting Maramures.

- **Maramures county**, a small and unique location in northern Romania, has carefully and distinctively preserved the culture, traditions and lifestyle of a

medieval peasant past. Situated in the northwest of Romania, the region occupies an area of 6304 square kilometers, borders Ukraine and also the counties of Suceva, Bistrita Nasaud, Cluj Napoca, Salaj and Satu Mare. Almost 50% of the region is considered mountainous and has a temperate continental climate, with a yearly average temperature of +9.4 °C.

The Gutai, Tibles and Rodna Mountains, running northwest to east, separate Historical Maramures from the rest of the region, while the Maramures Mountains form a natural and political boundary with Ukraine in the northeast.

Maramures is considered by many to be the heart and soul of rural Romania. With its picturesque countryside of small villages, rolling hills, pastures and meadows full of wildflowers, Maramures epitomizes all that the rural lifestyle encompasses. Visitors to Maramures have a unique opportunity to step back in time and bear witness to simpler times and simpler lives.

Distinctive wooden architecture clearly distinguishes Maramures from other regions of Romania. In particular, ornately carved wooden gates convey an undeniable local identity to this land. Maramures is also home to many wooden churches which have been visited and admired by people from all over the world. These special monuments, particularly the 8 UNESCO World Heritage churches can be admired if you take a trip along the Iza Valley.

- In **Borsa Tourist Complex**, those fond of winter sports can enjoy skiing for all ability levels. People can ski from December to April on all four ski slopes; there are also two ski jumps 113 m high, chair lift (2 km long) and rope tow (2.9 km long). Hikers and mountain trekkers can enjoy Maramures' breathtaking landscapes accessible through a large network of trails.
- **Pietrosul Rodnei Natural Reservation**, housing the highest peak in Eastern Carpathians, is biosphere reservation and part of the UNESCO reservations system. The protected territory covers an area of over 3,000 ha. Various species of plants and animals are protected here. Among the rare species of plants that are to be found here are: the edelweiss, "the bear's honey" and "the dove's crop". The protected fauna includes the chamois, the marmot, the lynx, the rock eagle, the birch cock and the mountain cock. The reservation also includes an especially beautiful natural scenery untouched by the man.
- **Sighetu Marmatiei** offers the tourist a wide palette of architectural styles including Gothic, Baroque and Eclectic. The building at no. 1, Bogdan Voda Street, houses the **Ethnographic Museum of Maramures** which displays a wide variety of objects related to folk culture: icons, agricultural objects, traditional

furniture and costumes, rugs, ceramics, masks and architectural elements. Tourists eager to learn more about traditional wooden architecture of Maramures are invited to visit the open-air section of the museum called the **Village Museum**.

Other museums of interest in Sighetu Marmatiei include: **The History and Archeology Museum** and the **Museum of Natural Sciences** (15, Libertatii Square).

**The Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance**, popularly known as The Prison Museum, is located in the former political prison, right next to the civic centre of the town.

- Less than 20 km far from Sighet is the town of **Sapanta**, famous for its truly unique "**Merry Cemetery**", a must-see for anyone visiting Maramures. The cemetery owes its name from the vivid colours of the headboards on which naively painted scenes narrate the biography of the deceased. The rhymes are deprived of usual clichés and remain fresh and original.
- Very close to Sapanta is the **Peri Monastery**, home to the tallest wooden church in the world, with a spire reaching 78 m. The monastery, built in the Maramures architectural style, is situated beautifully in the middle of a forest.
- After visiting the Peri Monasteri, the trail returns to Sighet continuing along the road south into Vadu Izei where you will turn left and begin the journey along the **Iza Valley**, through a series of small villages and hamlets set amidst rolling hills. 20 km far from Sighet lies **Barsana**, one of the largest villages in the Iza Valley. The signposted wooden church at Barsana, known as **the Holy Mother's Entrance**, was originally built in 1711 and later moved to its present location on Jbar Hill in 1806. The interior frescoes were painted in the Baroque style. the side walls of the naos depict scenes from both the Old and New Testament. Of particular beauty are the flocks of angels.
- Another site in the neighbourhood is **Ocna Sugatag**, featuring salt water mineral baths as the main attraction.

- The village of **Ieud** was first mentioned in documents in 1364. You shouldn't miss the wooden church on the Hill, inscribed in UNESCO's World Heritage List, made of fir tree wood and considered to be the oldest wooden structure in Europe. In the attic of this church, a document dating from 1391 known as **The Codex of Ieud** was found, generally considered to be the first example of written Romania.
- **Bogdan Voda** village was first mentioned in documents in 1353 and was once the residence of the ruler Bogdan Voda who founded the feudal state of Moldavia. "Saint Nicholas" wooden church was built in 1722.
- About midway through the village of **Dragomiresti** you will see a quaint house museum focusing on the life of the **Romanian peasant** in Maramures. On display there are traditional costumes including wedding costumes, textiles, pottery and wood carvings.
- **The wooden church of Rozalvea** is considered one of the most remarkable architectural creations of Maramures art. The first document in which it is mentioned dates back in 1353. The building was owned by the feudal Bogdan family.
- **The wooden church of Surdesti**, devoted to the Saint Archangels Michael and Gabriel, was built in 1712 under the direction of Toma Macarie. The church steeple is claimed to be the tallest old wooden structure in the world, measuring 54 m. In the past, people believed that the taller the church tower was, the easier their prayers could reach up to heaven.
- **Mocanita Forestry Steam train , Viseu de Sus.** You are on one of the last railway lines in Europe where more than 90 years old steam engines still operate. A wonderful trip in the romantic wild landscape of Maramures Vasser Valley lies ahead of you. Vasser Valley deep forests became part of the forestry economy only by the end of the 17th century, while Maramures was under the rule of Austro-Hungarian Empire. Until the appearance of the railway the tree trunks were transported up to the wood factory using rafting on Vaser river. The works on the narrow (769 mm) gauge have started in 1832, but a little time before the Second World War they stopped. When going up in the mountains, Mocanita pulled both wagons for workers and empty ones; when the train returned to the village, the weight of the transported wood was used as pushing force for the engine all the way back to the wood factory. In Romania, until 1976, the total length of forestry railways covered approximately 6000 km. After this year, because of devastating floods in all country regions, forestry railways were one by

one replaced by roads, and Mocanita trains were replaced by forestry tractors. Viseu de Sus forestry railway line is the only one still in operation in Romania and it is not just a museum as many other similar lines in Europe. Over the last years the old Mocanita trains have been restored in order to transport both the necessary wood for the factory works, and the tourists eager to enjoy the traditions and the natural beauties found in Maramures Mountains National Park. The train departs from CFF Viseu station (at 8:30) up to Faina station.

- **The Blue Spring of the Iza Natural Reservation**, near the area of Sacel village, is made of a karstic intermittent spring, unique in point of flow and beauty and a cave, with a total length of 2500 m.