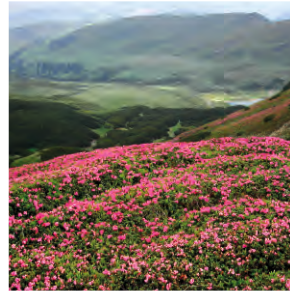
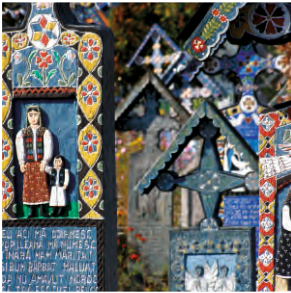




12 reasons  
to visit Maramureș



Top 12 in Maramureș



Marmureş is a place all its own, a mosaic of sights, sounds, sensations, tastes, and smells that remain imprinted in your memory and have the gift of evoking ever-pleasant recollections. Here are a few reasons why we claim that Marmureş is unique, a veritable world apart, a state of mind that really has to be visited, explored, felt, lived.





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UITATI BINE LA MINE  
MA POATE OCARI NIME  
FOST DE TREABA BOREASA  
I FOST GAZDOAE ACASA

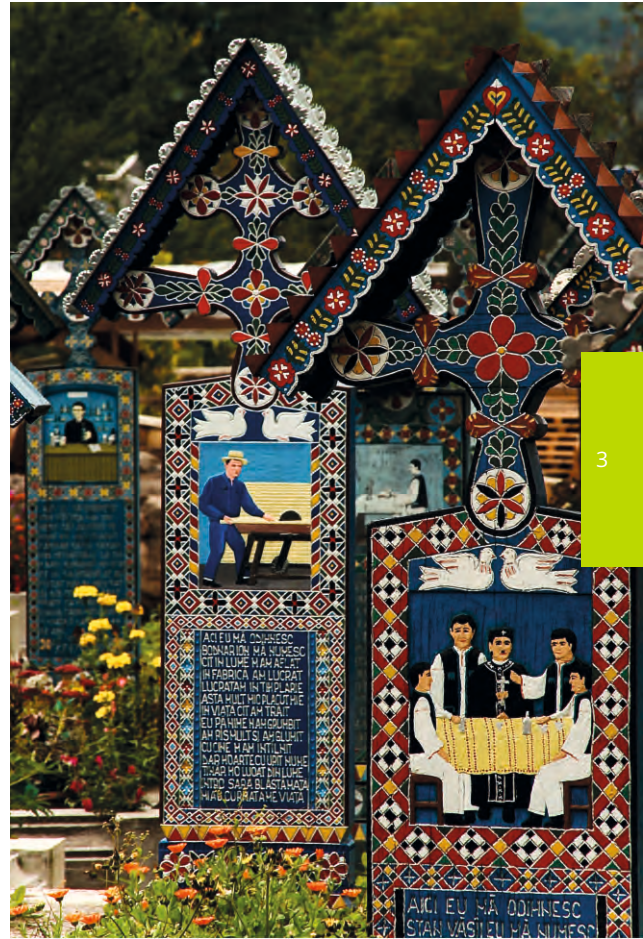
# 1. The Merry Cemetery of Săpânța

The Merry Cemetery of Săpânța, a unique and world-famous cemetery where the epitaphs sometimes have a humorous and satirical edge, is the creation of the master woodcarver Stan Ioan Pătraș, starting from the 1930s.

Today, the cemetery in the centre of the village is home to over 900 wooden grave markers carved with epitaphs and images of the deceased and painted in vivid colours, dominated by 'Săpânța blue'. The epitaphs make up a veritable chronicle of the community in verse, proclaiming the virtues of the villagers, but not forgetting their vices.

The images on the wooden crosses show the folk of Săpânța on horseback, on bicycles, in cars, singing, at school, down the mine, cooking, weaving, in the forest, harvesting their crops, watching over their sheep, at the mill, partying, fighting, loving... The farmer, the doctor, the teacher, the soldier, the shopkeeper now rest together, with all that was good or not so good in them.

The most popular epitaph of all this is the one dedicated to a mother-in-law: 'Under this heavy cross / Lies my poor mother-in-law / If she'd lived three more days / I'd be lying here and she'd be reading this / You who pass by here / Try not to waken her / For if she comes home / She'll be nagging me again / But I'll act in such a way / That home she won't return / You who read this here / May you not suffer like me / Find yourself a good mother-in-law / May you live happily with her.'



## 2. Bârsana Monastery

The Monastery of the Holy Apostles, the largest and most impressive in the north-west of Romania, stands on a plateau looking down on the Iza River. It was rebuilt starting in 1993, on the site of an old monastery abandoned two centuries before, and is now home to an Orthodox community of nuns.

The church, designed by the architect Dorel Cordoș (who also designed the monastery of Săpânța-Peri), is probably the finest example of contemporary Romanian religious architecture in wood.

The church is on two levels. The lower is built in masonry, and the upper, built of oak wood in the Maramureș style, is adorned with a luminous fresco, painted in the traditional local manner by the artist Octavian Ciocșan, who also restored the frescoes of the UNESCO-listed church of Desești. The amphitheatre-like enclosure of the spectacular monastic complex also includes an interesting ecclesiastical museum (with old icons on wood, rare books, and various ethnographic items), a summer altar, and other buildings so attractive that they have convinced many Maramureș folk to return to the style that made the region famous, all connected by a network of paths lined by the most beautiful flowers in Maramureș.





### 3. The Memorial to the Victims of Communism in Sighetu Marmatei



In the 1950s, the prison in the centre of Sighetu Marmatei was the place of detention of almost 200 former state officials (more than fifty of whom died there, including such notable political figures of interwar Romania as Iuliu Maniu and Gheorghe Brătianu), fifteen Roman Catholic and Uniate (Greek Catholic) bishops (nine of whom have recently been beatified), members of the Romanian Academy and other intellectuals, and army generals.

Now given a new purpose as the Memorial to the Victims of Communism, it is the most visited museum in the north of Romania (with over 150,000 tourists crossing its threshold annually). In 2018, it was accorded the European Heritage Label by the European Commission. It is so far the only museum in Romania that enjoys this distinction.

The many impressive items on display include the bullet-riddled clothes of an anti-Communist partisan and letters embroidered on fragments of a shirt (in the absence of paper and pencil).

The interior courtyard features an underground Place of Recollection and Prayer and the statuary group 'Cortege of the Sacrificial Victims' by Aurel Vlad, comprising eighteen human figures in bronze, who seem to be advancing towards the wall with watchtowers that shuts off the horizon in front of them, directed by a nineteenth, headless, representing the communist dominator.

The Sighet Memorial is a place with a high emotional charge that seeks to prevent the mist of forgetting from descending over the sinister communist dictatorship, in the hope that history will never repeat itself.





photo: Phe

## 4. The Vaser Valley *mocănița*

The last narrow-gauge forestry train (Ro., *mocăniță*) still operating in the EU crosses the forested basin of the River Vaser, where in places there is still virgin forest.

Sites to be seen along the Vaser Valley include dozens of mineral springs, a dam for rafts at Măcârlău, the remains of a former military hospital, the wooden church of Făina, and two German military cemeteries.

The railway line used by the *mocăniță*, 43 km long in total, was laid in the 1930s, using material salvaged from the German railway line that was laid over the Prislop Pass between Maramureș and Bukovina during the First World War.

The old steam locomotives, fuelled with wood and coal, that carry tourists 21.5 km up the valley to Paltinu, deep in the forest, are 'Reșița' and 'Reghin' models. The most senior among them is a venerable old German 'O&K' locomotive, made in 1910.

The line is also regularly used by the railcar *Rossia* and a number of Diesel locomotives and draisines. Visitors can visit the railway park, which includes old steam locomotives made in Romania, Hungary, Poland, and Austria that have been withdrawn from use, an automobile on railway wheels, various railway carriages, etc.

An excursion on the steam-puffing *mocăniță* has a special charm. It feels like a journey back in time.



activeMaramureș

## 5. Museums

Among the county's many museums, large and small, don't forget to visit:

In Baia Mare: the internationally significant *Victor Gorduza County Museum of Mineralogy*, which displays minerals ores, fossils, and rocks, including many rare or even unique specimens; the beautiful *County Museum of Ethnography and Folk Art*; the *County Museum of History and Archaeology* (including the former gold refinery); the *County Museum of Art*, etc.

In Sighetu Marmăției: the *Maramureș Village Museum*, with over thirty old homesteads (look out for the Arba House, cut in two by two brothers who fell out over their inheritance: they rebuilt the two halves in different parts of the village, only for the house to be discovered by the Museum a century later and put together again); the *Ethnographic Museum*; the *Elie Wiesel Memorial House*, birthplace of the celebrated Nobel Prize-winner; and the *Saint Joseph Cultural-Pastoral Centre*, which houses exhibitions of both religious and secular art.





In Vișeu de Sus, the Museum of History and Ethnography and the Elefant Museum-House also have to be seen, as do the Museum of the Romanian Peasant Woman in Dragomirești, interesting local museums in the villages of Ieud and Rogoz, the Teleki manor in Coltău, memorial houses in Băsești and Șișești, and the list is still not complete.

Cultural tourism enthusiasts can be sure they will be spoiled for choice in Maramureș!



Museums





## 6. Wooden churches

The wooden churches of Maramureș constitute one of the high points of ecclesiastical architecture. Their interior plan is typically Byzantine, with pronaos, naos, and sanctuary, but clothed in Gothic forms: pentagonal apse, pointed steeple, and steeply sloping roof. Their wall paintings, executed in tempera either directly on the wood or on a textile support, impress all who see them, as do the icons on wood and glass that enhance their beauty.

Out of the ninety-five wooden churches built between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries in the present-day county of Maramureș (a third of them in the historical Land of Maramureș and the remainder in the Lands of Lăpuș, Chioar, and Codru), eight—Bârsana-Jbâr, Budești-Josani, Desești, Ieud-Deal, Plopiș, Poenile Izei, Rogoz, and Șurdești—were added to the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1999.

In addition, the last few decades have seen the erection in the county of some fifty-five new wooden churches, in an exceptional display of creative effervescence. Among them are the four tallest wooden churches in the world, namely: Săpânța-Peri, Ieud-Crucifoare, Rozavlea-Șesu Mănăstirii and Mănăstirea Bârsana.

And don't forget to pay a visit to the beautiful monasteries with wooden churches at Moisei, Rohița, Borșa-Pietroasa, Botiza, Budești-Roșia, Dragomirești or Strâmtura.

In sacred spaces built in wood, it is as if one's eyes rise in a different way to the Heavens.



Wooden church



## 7. Warm-hearted folk

Most people who visit Maramureş declare themselves amazed and delighted by the locals—by their way of being, their smile, their openness.

Traveller, you will find your heart is soon won, whether you meet them on a working day, making hay, busy with household chores, in workshops plying their crafts, or running a guesthouse, whether you exchange a word or two when you meet them on a village lane or in the churchyard, dressed in their finest clothes in honour of Sunday, a saint's day, or a wedding. For country life in Maramureş is largely ordered, as it always has been, according to the work of the fields and the great Christian festivals.

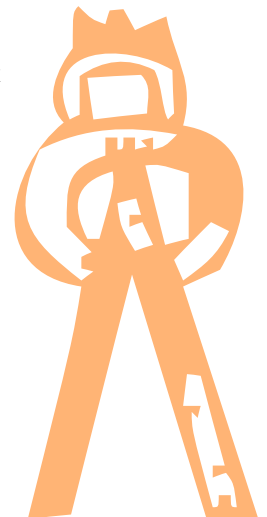




In the villagers' way of being, straightforward and sincere, in the wisdom behind their words, in the way they welcome you into their homes, and in the joy with which they share their childhood memories, there is something that will win you over from the start.

The host always happy and welcoming, the generous table, the scent of freshly cut grass, or of firewood and cinders, the taste of milk fresh from the cow, a truly restful sleep: these are some of the ingredients that the visitor will fall in love with forever.

And there are plenty of places to stay. You just have to choose the place where you want to stop and rest.



## 8. Music and dance



Maramureș music has a resonance all its own, an archaic quality, at times something of a Celtic feel. The traditional repertoire covers the full range from the sorrowful *doină* to merry songs with a dynamic rhythm. The traditional line-up consists of *ceteră* (fiddle, playing the melody), *zongură* (a guitar with from two to four strings, providing a rhythmic accompaniment), and *dobă* (a large drum with cymbals attached, reinforcing the beat).

In the historical Land of Maramureș, the shepherd's *trâmbiță* (a sort of metal alpenhorn) is also common. In the Lands of Chioar and Codru, the music belongs to the north-Transylvanian tradition, in which the double bass (*gordună*) and viola (*braci*) also have a place. And the Land of Lăpuș is famous for the distinctive glottal effects of the '*hora* with knots', the most archaic type of *doină* in the Carpathian basin.

Emblematic of Maramureș dancing is the spectacular *învârtita*, danced by couples at high speed for hours on end, while *strigături* (vocal improvisations, with humorous and sometimes biting verses) are shouted out over the music to the delight of the gathering. Another characteristic dance is the warlike and initiatory *fecioresc*, danced by young men.

Traditional music and dance can be heard and seen at a number of guesthouses and restaurants, not to mention numerous folk festivals.





## 9. The house, the tree of pots, and the wooden gate

*The Maramureș house*, which looks as if it might have emerged from the tales of the Brothers Grimm, is built in oak or fir wood, with a roof of shingles. It comprises two or three rooms and a veranda with carved ornament. Inside, it is easy to recognize which is the 'festive' room. It is dominated by the 'dowry pole', on which are displayed the woollen and hemp fabrics woven by generations of women of the house. The walls are decked with glass icons, family photographs, and rows of antique plates adorned with richly embroidered towels, while the wardrobe and the storage benches below the windows hold the traditional clothes that the family keep for festive occasions.

*The tree of pots* (known by various local names, depending on the area), is a veritable trademark of Maramureș. It consists of a tree trunk with the branches cut to short stumps, set up in the yard of the house and hung with brightly-coloured enamel kitchen vessels. In the past, in some villages, it was the sign of a house with a marriageable daughter, and indicated the wealth of the family or what a good housewife the woman of the house was.

*The wooden gate*, a veritable triumphal arch, with a roof supported on between three and eight carved three-metre posts of oak, nowadays announces pride and monetary wealth. In the past, however, such a gate was the sign that the householder was of noble status and thus exempt from taxation. They are decorated with a rich variety of ancient animal, plant, human, or celestial motifs, or symbols with a magical protective role.



## 10. Traditional crafts

There are very few places where you can find as many traditional craftspeople as in Maramureş, practising dozens of crafts: weaving woollen rugs coloured with dyes produced from flowers, leaves, and bark (an art included in the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage), operating and maintaining traditional water-powered installations (fulling mills, carding mills, and the wooden 'whirlpools' that channel the force of a stream to wash rugs), making ritual masks, and many more.

In the place of honour is work in wood, whether it be constructing the impressive gates, churches, and houses with their carved ornament that have already been mentioned, carving on a smaller scale to make spoons, the distinctive 'rattle spindles' for spinning wool, and the complex 'Maramureş knots', or patiently assembling miniature stairs, gates, and wells inside bottles.



Countless women in Maramureș work hard to make the complex traditional costumes of the region—and everyone has them, in both summer and winter versions! Items include the *cămeșă* (blouse) embroidered in the distinctive styles of the Lands of Maramureș, Chioar, and Lăpuș, *gatii* (loose summer trousers) of home-woven cloth and *cioareci* (thick winter trousers) of felt for men, *zadii* (ornamental aprons) for women, the *gubă* (a heavy woollen winter coat), the *pieptar* (leather or textile jerkin), the *laibăr* (waistcoat), the *clop* (small men's hat) of Maramureș, Codru, or Chioar, *opinci* (traditional sandals with criss-cross laces) and wide belts of leather, bead necklaces and bridal crowns.

All these have to be seen close up, and the men and women who make them will be glad to show you their work.



Crafters



## 11. Nature

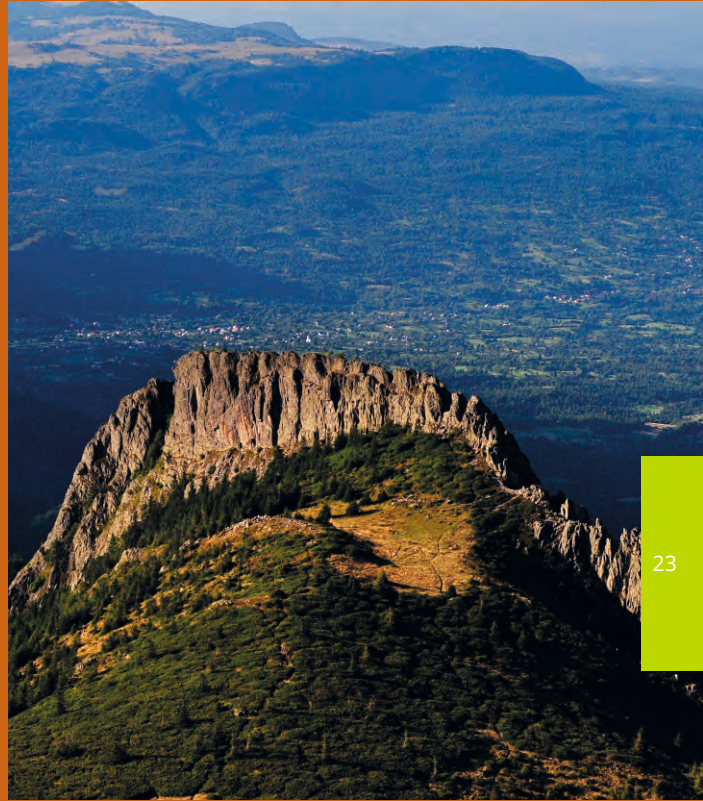
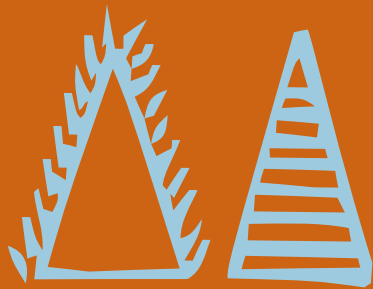
As soon as you climb the mountains to enter Maramureș, the landscapes will grab your attention: tree-covered mountains with fast-flowing streams, gentle hills of an unbelievable green, haystacks spread over the scented terraces of the lower slopes, thundering waterfalls, 1,600 plant species (including edelweiss, a number of orchid species, and three insectivorous plants), 8,400 animal species (fifteen of which, previously unknown to science, have only been discovered in recent years!): everything invites you to stop, to look, to photograph.

Thirty-five protected areas of national interest, twenty-two Natura 2000 sites, a natural park, and a national park cover much of the northern part of the county.



mountainsMaramureș





The ancient woods of Băiuț (in the Văratec Mountains) and Izvorul Șurii and Preluci (in the Țibleș Mountains), with their giant fir, beech, ash, and sycamore trees, were recently included on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Then we have Cascada Cailor ('the waterfall of the horses'), the highest waterfall in the Carpathians, the rich nature reserve around the dramatic rock formation of Creasta Cocoșului ('the cock's comb'), Pietrosul Rodnei (at 2,303 m the highest peak in the Eastern Carpathians), the wild Lăpuș Gorges, the crystal pools of Vinderel Lake, perched improbably on the edge of a precipice, or the Blue Lake, the superb Tătaru plateau, and many other place on which to feast your eyes, confirming the truth of the well-known local song: *'Maramureș, plai cu flori'* ('Maramureș, land of flowers').

## 12. Festivals

foto: Vali Tămaș



Nowhere are the traditional festivals of the calendar more beautiful than in Maramureș...

In the spring, we have Saint George's day, followed by the celebration of the first householder to start ploughing: *Tânjaua* in the Mara valley, *Udătoriul* ('the wetting') in Șurdești, and *Căruțul* 'the cart') in Cufoaia.

Over the three days of the celebration of Easter, in addition to spiritual cleansing, there is a considerable emphasis on specific food-stuffs—lamb, *pască* (a yeast cake with sweet cheese), painted eggs, ham—which are blessed in the night of the Resurrection or on Easter Sunday morning. In many localities, a Village Dance is held on Easter Monday.

The most important days in the summer are *Rusalii* (Pentecost) and Great Saint Mary's day (the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, 15 August), when there are important pilgrimages to the monasteries of Moisei and Rohia, with many pilgrims dressed in traditional costumes.

In the autumn, the people of Maramureş honour the saints according to the calendar and commemorate family members who have passed away. And when it comes to the magical season of Christmas, which also extends over three days, the valleys of Maramureş resound with the voices of *colindători* (carol-singers) and the clang of the bells worn by 'devils' (in fact young men wearing ritual masks). The action takes place both on stage, in the *Viflaim* (Bethlehem) play, and on village lanes and in the yards of households.

Generous, open, and always glad to welcome guests... for all who come here, Maramureş means a home from home!



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