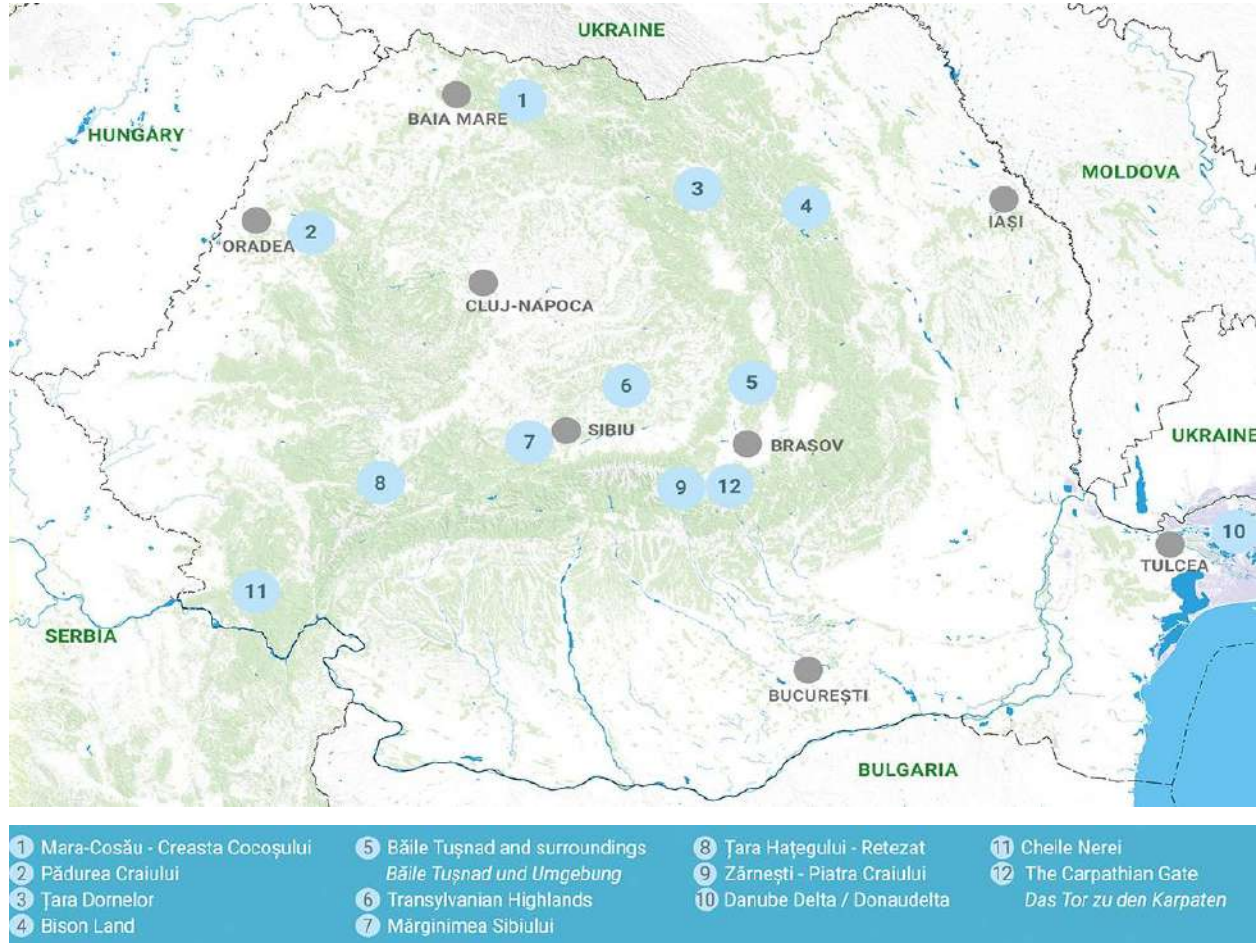


Ecotourism in Romania/ Discover Eco-Romania



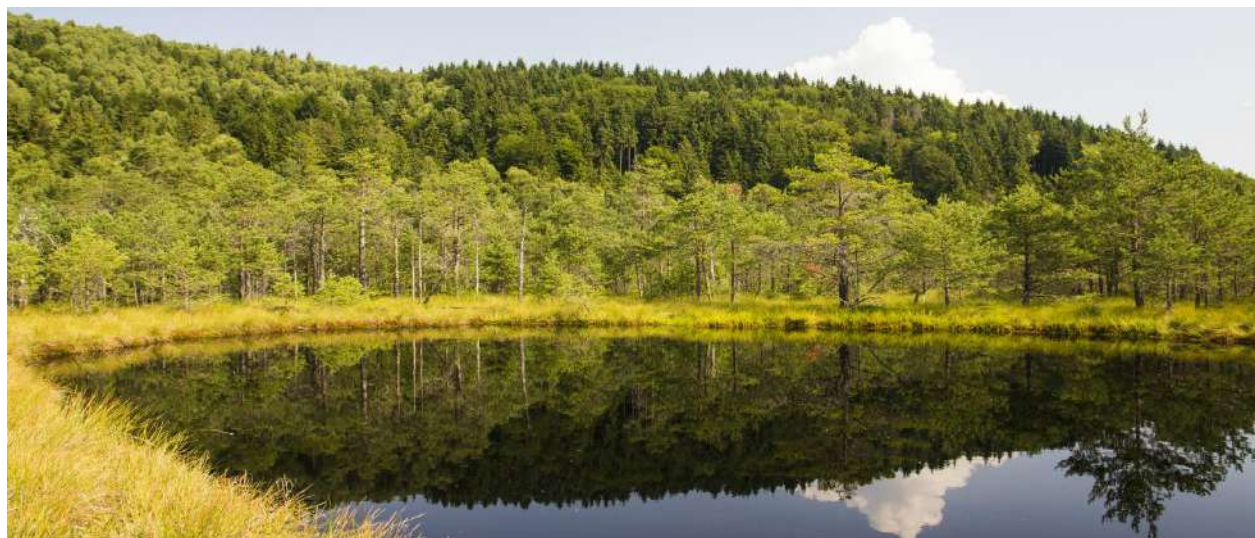
There are spectacular areas in Romania that are worth to be discovered! By visiting them, one feels good in the midst of nature, one is introduced to the local culture, still vibrant with vitality, one is offered high-quality local services and products... and they make one's vacation turn into a small "investment" into a local economy that starts to work by integrating nature preservation and local culture in the economic equation through ecotourism.

AER (The Association of Ecotourism in Romania) is a partnership for nature conservation and tourism development in Romania, bringing together tourism associations, non governmental organizations or projects focused on local development and nature conservation, and tourism agencies. The innovative concept promoted by AER starts from creating a partnership between the public sector and the private sector, empowering all nature conservation actions and contributing to the long lasting development of ecotourism. The Association's main purpose is to promote the best ecotourism services and destinations in Romania.

The Association of Ecotourism in Romania and its partners invite you to discover **12** destinations where ecotourism becomes the engine for development. These destinations use the innovative concept of ecotourism, combining the attraction of protected areas (e.g. national parks, nature parks or Nature-2000 sites), with the enjoyment of discovering the real lives of traditional local communities. These communities are encouraged to develop family businesses in tourism (e.g. guesthouses and guiding) and to use local products. In this way, the destinations begin to develop a unified tourism identity, using images of nature and the local communities. Thus respect for nature and the local people becomes the essential value of local development, both for the business sector and for the local administration.

The status of Ecotourism Destination is officially granted by the National Tourism Authority (ANT) following an evaluation according to criteria developed on the basis of international expertise in the field of ecotourism. For 10 years, the Association of Ecotourism in Romania has been supporting the development and promotion of various micro-regions in Romania, by applying the ecotourism destination model. Two destinations are already officially recognised by ANT, and the others are currently undergoing the necessary measures in order to fulfil the requirements for nomination as ecotourism destinations.

Băile Tuşnad and surroundings: the ideal destination for rejuvenating your body and soul is "bathed" in mineral waters with healing powers. You can roam, on foot or by bike, under cool fir trees up to the only volcanic lake in the country (Sfânta Ana Lake) or through small fortified peasant citadels, manor houses and medieval noblemen's houses: spoil your senses with delicious foods with Hungarian influences.



Transylvanian Highlands: green hills, with mosaics of agricultural crops, meadows and forests, Transylvanian Saxon villages and fortified churches are part of the setting of a true storybook. The villages, protected by fortified churches, filled with history, are part of the UNESCO World Heritage, making up for one of the last truly medieval landscapes in Europe.



Danube Delta: this land, forever young, always changing, is a magical place where life is celebrated in every corner. The sight of migrating bird colonies is unique in Europe, and rare oak, ash, and alder forests are hidden between the sand dunes and the vast waters. The hospitality and perseverance of the local people, a mosaic of ethnic groups, in keeping traditions turn the Danube Delta into an unforgettable destination.



Tara Hategului – Retezat (ecotourism destination since 2016): a true amphitheatre surrounded by mountains, Hațeg Country is like a story that always surprises you: meadows and grassland you can feast your eyes on, myriads of flowers and butterflies, and far away, to the south, Retezat Mountain, the huge giant proudly rising, covered in snow. The Dinosaur Geopark invites you to discover fossils of dwarf dinosaurs and other small treasures related to the history of the Earth.



Bison Land (ecotourism destination since 2016): as if on the border between reality and fairy tales, this land hosts a priceless spiritual and natural heritage. The renewed appearance of the aurochs roaming freely, after years of efforts, really is like a story come true. The monastic community here is the second largest in Europe (after that on Mount Athos), and the monks' villages represent a feature unique in all Europe.



Zărnești – Piatra Craiului (ecotourism destination since 2014): a castle of limestone and forest, the spectacular Piatra Craiului Mountain invites the mountaineers on chained paths, alongside ravines, through caves and on tricky rock debris slopes. On the road, they can come across chamois, Piatra Craiului alpine pink (*Dianthus callizonus*), edelweiss, and the wonderful reward on the ridge always takes their breath away.



Tara Dornelor: the wondrous land, surrounded by mountains, at the border of old empires, has an impressive business card: a traditional nature and lifestyle that have maintained their original purity and charm. The mountains have stories millions of years old, written in lava formations, with mountain landscapes rarely encountered in our country.



Mara-Cosău – Creasta Cocosului (ecotourism destination since 2014): between the valleys of the Mara and Cosău rivers, bordered by volcanic mountains to the south, lies an "island" of authentic traditional life, part of the historic region of Maramureș, which still dazzles ethnographers and philologists. The mosaic-like landscapes with alpine pasture land, meadows, brooks, orchards and century-old forests line up harmoniously alongside wild areas, which host brown bears and lynxes, chamois, wild boars or wolves.



Pădurea Craiului: Pădurea Craiului Mountains are a land of caves, spectacular gorges and waterfalls. Vast forests, meadows full with flowers, narrow and steep valleys, all show the path towards incredible underground worlds. Above ground, old timber churches, water mills and traditional households fill up the idyllic landscape.



Mărginimea Sibiului - the mountain villages southwest of Sibiu: On the roads of transhumance, walking along shepherds and their herds, one naturally blends in this pastoral world where the path takes you from the heart of the village up to the sheepfolds in the mountains. The tradition of shepherding has shaped the specificity of crafts and here you can find the most skilled masters in making cheese. On foot or on two wheels, you can discover a region that was awarded the title of "European destination of excellence".



The Carpathian Gate: enjoy the natural and traditional environment in the foothills of the Bucegi, Leaota and Piatra Craiului Mountains. Practice old crafts, taste traditional food and discover the labyrinth of ecotourism trails. Exploring the trails has a particular beauty, up and down on the surrounding hills and meadows in Fundata and Moieciu. Pick the route either by walking, running or even biking or in winter on skis when the snow is suitable. Enter the landscape!



Cheile Nerei: 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.



For further information regarding ecotourism, the destinations that AER promotes, recommended accomodation and touroperators, please contact the following web-site: www.eco-romania.ro