

Cluj-Napoca

Overview

Cluj-Napoca is to be found in the north-west of Romania in the heart of Transylvania. The origins of the city are unclear but it is believed to be somewhere in the middle ages although earlier signs of habitation in the region exist. The current name of the City is quite a recent change, having been in use since 1974. During the Soviet era the city saw a high degree of industrialisation which overshadowed its cultural past, but the post Soviet era has seen the city quickly regain its identity and culture.

The city has some of the countries most outstanding old architecture which is immediately evident on reaching the older parts of Cluj-Napoca, not only its churches but also its pre Soviet era architecture are pleasing to the eye. The museums and galleries of the city are also in some eye-catching buildings as well as the concert halls, the opera house and theatres. The “Alexandru Borza” Botanical Garden close to the city centre has some impressive glass hot-houses that are well worth visiting and some of its structures such as the building in the Japanese garden give a pleasant counterpoint to the parks other architectural style.

For shopaholics Cluj-Napoca has a lot to offer with shopping malls in the city centre and in the suburbs. In the city centre you will find Polus and the Iulius Mall, both of which include hypermarkets and others are in the process of being built. There are also a number of shopping centres away from the city centre. The shops within the malls and centres include many internationally famous brand names. The city also has many small local shops and art galleries, all selling local wares which make for much better souvenirs than a tee-shirt or baseball cap.

As one of Romania's larger cities, Cluj-Napoca has a wide selection of cuisines to choose from, Romanian, Hungarian and Transylvanian are of course the main stay but there is also a range of international restaurants. If you do not want to try the excellent local food there are a few international fast food chain restaurants in evidence. For night-life, Cluj-Napoca has quite a few places to choose from; clubs, pubs and bars are all in evidence in the city with enough variety to satisfy most people, as Cluj-Napoca is a University town you can also expect to meet a lot of students in the venues. For lovers of opera and classical music the city has a number of excellent venues to listen to some of the world's favourite music.

Accommodation in and around Cluj-Napoca ranges from 5 star to bed and breakfast and hostels. In general accommodation in Cluj-Napoca is of a good quality and reasonably priced. Ultimately where you stay is down to your personal taste and budget, but you will easily find somewhere to suit you in or outside the city. If you prefer not to stay in the city there is a good selection of B&B's and guest houses within a reasonable radius of the centre. Staying outside of the city has the advantage of often being located in outstanding rural locations surrounded by beautiful scenery and peace and quiet.

Weather in the region is considered to be continental, with winters seeing temperatures below -1 degrees Celsius and summers reaching around 27 degrees Celsius, higher and lower temperatures have been recorded though. By and large Cluj-Napoca is by European standards a relatively safe and clean location.

Very close to Cluj-Napoca there are a lot of places to visit, one of which will come as a surprise ‘the Turda Salt Mines’. Dating back to Roman times, the mines have been extended over the centuries and include vast chambers the look like sets from a James Bond or science fiction movie and indeed would not look out of place in a modern computer game. Close to the mines is the Turda Gorge, an area of outstanding natural beauty with mountains, cave's, rivers and forest all in all a perfect place for walking, hiking, climbing, camping and just generally marvelling at natures wonders.

Places to Visit

Piața Unirii (Union Square)

The largest plaza in Cluj-Napoca is located in the heart of the city and is a focal point of the city's culture. The plaza is in walking distance of many of the sights of Cluj-Napoca such as theatres, parks, palaces and universities.

The Church of Saint Michael (Biserica Sfantul Mihail)

Completed somewhere around the mid 1400's and built in the Gothic-style, the Church of Saint Michael is said to be the second largest of its kind in Transylvania. Its original tower was erected in the 16th century and replaced in the 19th century. The church itself is a Roman Catholic place of worship overlooking Piața Unirii.

Tailors' Tower (Bastionul Croitorilor)

The Tower is a tourist attraction in the making, until 2007 it was almost forgotten but now is intended to be a cultural centre. Originally built and rebuilt between the 15th and 17th centuries the tower is certainly worth a look even before the centre opens.

The Lucian Blaga National Theatre (Teatrul Național Lucian Blaga)

Built close after the turn of the 20th Century and opened its doors to the public for the first time in late 1906. Over the years the theatres reputation has increased to make it one of the most important theatres in Romania. Until 1919 the building was home to the Hungarian National Theatre, before becoming the Romanian National Theatre. In the 1950's the building was extended to include more seating. Throughout the year numerous theatrical performances take place and include international titles alongside Romanian productions. Additionally the building is home to the Romanian Opera, extending the range of entertainment on offer.

The Hungarian Theatre of Cluj

Dating back to the late 18th century The Hungarian Theatre of Cluj has a long established theatrical history within Romania as well as an excellent international reputation. Throughout the year productions by modern and classic playwrights are staged, it is also possible at times to find there is a simultaneous translation into Romanian or English.

The “Alexandru Borza” Botanical Garden

At 14 hectares the garden is the city's biggest area of greenery and less than 2 kilometres south of the city centre. The gardens are currently owned by the Babes-Bolyai University and were the creation of Professor Alexandru Borza in 1920. The garden has many themed areas such as Japanese and Roman gardens. Housing in excess of half a million specimens, both outside and in its hothouses. The gardens themselves are a perfect place to peacefully stroll or picnic despite being so close to the city centre and over the years have become popular with newly-weds for their wedding photographs.

Bánffy Palace and the National Museum of Art Cluj-Napoca (Palatul Bánffy)

Built in the mid 18th century the Bánffy Palace was constructed in the Baroque style, in the past a number of Royals have stayed in this impressive building. In 1951 the building was emptied to be used as the National Museum of Art Cluj-Napoca. The museum houses work by many of Romania's most important artists as well as a

exhibits of a large number of European artists.

The Fortress Hill (Dealul Cetatuia)

Some of the best views of the city and the surrounding region are to be seen from the top of Fortress Hill. The fortress took around 20 years to complete from 1715. Comfortable shoes are recommended if you visit the hill, but the sights you are presented with make the climb worth it.

Regular Events

February - Dragobete

A holiday celebrated throughout Romania, another name for the holiday is "the day when the birds are betrothed" due to it being around the time of the birds mating season. The day is similar in fashion to Valentines Day, 10 days earlier.

May - TIFF (Transylvania International Film Festival)

2010 saw the 9th occurrence of this annual event, which over the years has grown in status within the film community. In the past the festival has attracted over 50,000 visitors to see numerous feature films and short films. Apart from the films, the event includes parties and concerts as well as seminars and workshops. Directors, producers and actors from around the world attend TIFF, also the makers of smaller productions are there to find recognition for their work and to make contacts within the industry.

June - Cluj Rally

The Dunlop Championship Rally and the Mobil 1 Lubricants Star Final have evolved into a growing event in the region with in excess of 15,000 visitors viewing the rally.

June - Movies Cluj

A 10 hour screening marathon of short films from around the world; the event is staged simultaneously in Cluj-Napoca and 3 other Romanian city's

August - Folk Festival "Szent István" (St. Stephen)

Since 1998 the folk festival drawn performers and audience's from around Europe, held in both the Cluj-Napoca City Hall and Union Square. The festival is also held in five other cities and deals with European ethnic and regional cultures. Performances of folk dance and music from a number of Central European countries feature in the event.

August - Transilvania International Guitar Festival

2010 saw the eighth year of the festival held in the city. The festival features internationally renowned guitarists performing during the event, as well as lectures and an international competition. Additionally there is an educational aspect to the festival, since 2006 the ACT GUITAR Camp has been held at Baisoara around 25 kilometres to the south of the city. The camp is for young guitar students and covers other guitar genres, not just classical, also it is not purely held for Romanian students, international students are also welcome.

Getting Around

Bus/Trolleybus/Tram

Between them there are around 35 lines covering the city making getting to almost anywhere in the metropolitan area relatively easy. Additionally there are a number of private bus companies operating within the city.

Bicycles

The size of the city lends itself well to two wheel travel and bicycles can be rented in Cluj-Napoca at reasonable rates. For traversing the city, cycling offers more freedom and is often faster point to point than motorized transport.

On Foot

With so many of the city's attractions being only a short distance from the centre walking is not a problem, allowing you to move around freely at your own pace.