



Food and Culture Tours

**Meet the producers
and sample the food**

**Enjoy a truly
memorable
experience
in the Târnava Mare
area of Southeastern
Transylvania**

**Find out more by
contacting the Tourist
Information Centre in
Saschiz or visit the
web site**

The Târnava Mare area of Southeastern Transylvania is one of the most important natural and cultural landscapes in Europe. It includes some of Europe's finest surviving wildflower-rich grasslands.

The traditionally managed landscape is the result of centuries of good husbandry by the Saxons. The village communities still manage and nurture the land today in a way that has long protected the countryside and created a unique sense of place.

The landscape is a mosaic of ancient oak and beech forests, wildflower-rich meadows and pastures. Unspoiled villages centred on fortified churches lie peacefully in the valleys. Traditional farming is carried out in ecological balance with nature. The landscape supports an astonishingly rich wildlife of plants, birds, mammals and insects.

Giving proper value to local food and local tourism is key to the survival of the area. Friendly villagers, traditional homemade food and the timeless rhythms of country life such as the evening procession of cows returning from pasture give the traveler a glimpse of an older Europe, one not seen for generations elsewhere.



www.fundatia-adept.org

Discover Târnava Mare

Many tourists already come to the area because of some 30 churches, of which 10 are fortified and four are UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Biertan, Saschiz, Sighisoara and Viscri).

There are many more activities in Târnava Mare to experience:

- In most of the thirty villages you can see the cows come home for milking each night in the summer. The exact time varies in each village, and the time of year, but it is generally about an hour before sunset.
- Traditional **bread making** (the bread goes into the oven at approximately 0930), village walk and church visit while the bread is cooking, returning to see bread taken out of oven at 1200.
- An **organic farming** training scheme for young people. Taste their organic milk, cheese, bread and vegetables.
- **Barrel making, blacksmith, charcoal burning, weaving and embroidery** demonstrations.
- Meet the bees, wear a fully protective bee suit and discover how honey is produced. Taste and buy different types of honey.
- Visit the goats / **cheese making**. Courtyard meals can be arranged.
- Horse and cart ride through wild flower meadows to see sheep being hand milked and cheese being made. Picnic lunch can be arranged.
- Fresh produce markets are held daily in Sighisoara, with a wide range of local produce on offer. Wednesday and Saturday are the busiest days. Rupea has a market every Friday.

A series of meadow and forest walks have been developed that will eventually be linked into a long distance hiking footpath across the Târnava Mare area. These are available as alternative activities for the more active. Guides can be hired by the day.

In Saschiz walk to the citadel or around the village following marked trails, visits to gardens and courtyards can be arranged.

Traditional herbal tea, cakes and lunches can be arranged in some courtyards.

Please respect the privacy of the people offering these activities and only visit by pre-booking tours and visits through the Tourist Information Centre in Saschiz (the availability of some is seasonal).

Alternatively plan to spend time in one of the villages and just observe country life.



ADEPT have published the guide book **'The Historic Countryside of the Saxon Villages of Southern Transylvania'** by John Akeroyd (2006) and a 1:50,000 tourist map of the Târnava Mare area. Both are available from the Tourist Information Centre, or at www.amazon.co.uk

Courtyard Farming & Food

A courtyard garden is central to the way of life in the villages. Every household raises a range of fruits, vegetables and livestock for their own consumption. Some of the produce is eaten fresh but much is preserved for the winter.

Vegetables are grown in enclosed gardens. Many are stored in the cellars or preserved by pickling, in summer the salads are fresh and full of flavour.

Soft fruits are grown in the gardens, whereas stonefruits are in orchards behind the barns or individual trees in the courtyard. Much of the fruit is made into jams and juices or used in baking.

Vines are grown in every courtyard, although this is no longer a commercial wine-producing area. The grape varieties are hardy enough to survive the severe winters.

Herbs are cultivated in courtyard gardens or collected from the wild. They are used in cooking, in refreshing teas, and are still extensively used medicinally for many ailments. Solar dried herbs and teas are available for sale at the Tourist Information Centre in Saschiz.

Poultry are totally free-range and hens and guinea fowl produce eggs with dark yellow yolks, ideal for breakfast or for baking. Geese, ducks and turkeys also roam freely.

Pigs are reared in pens in the courtyards but often spend their early days in the summer meadows with the sheep.

Cows graze communally in the village pastures by day. They are generally milked by hand morning and evening in the courtyards.





Saxon Village Preserves

Created in 2006, this group of producers participated in the international food festival organised in Turin by Slow Food. They were overwhelmed by the positive reaction to their jams and honey and returned to Romania enthusiastic and motivated.

Honey is perhaps the most symbolic product of the traditional hay meadows, which contain many rare and endangered species. In recent years, this polyflora honey has been exported in bulk for blending but honey of this quality is highly sought after in many parts of Europe where such meadows no longer exist, but is now bottled for local sales. 'Meet the Bees' is an opportunity to find out how honey is produced – fully protected in a full-length bee suit! Forest honey is also available in some areas.

Jams are a local speciality and are made from wild, orchard and garden fruits. Typically they are high in fruit, low in sugar, full of flavour and contain no other additives. Wild or forest fruits include strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, rose-hips and cornelian cherries. Orchard fruits include apples, pears and plums.

Pickling is the traditional method of preserving produce for winter and the jars stored in cellars.

Sauces such as zacusca made with tomatoes and peppers, and smoked aubergine or salata de vinete are also made from courtyard produce.

A selection of this traditional peasant food, prepared for modern people, is available from the regular small producers market held in Bucharest or from the Tourist Information Centre in Saschiz.

These courtyard farmers are totally self sufficient.





Cheese & Milk

Most households own two or three cows and 10-20 sheep. Cows are milked at home morning and evening, and milk, sold to dairy companies, is often the only source of household income. Sheep, goats and buffalo are kept for milk and particularly cheese.

The production of sheep cheese in Transylvania is a tradition that has remained unchanged for hundreds of years and is intimately linked with village society, local customs and the maintenance of the spectacular flowery grasslands of the area. Milking two or three times per day and cheese-making are all done by hand up in the hills where the sheep graze in summer. The unique richness of flowers and herbs in the grassland gives the cheese a special character.

Each spring at a village meeting one or two shepherds are chosen according to their reputation and to the amount of cheese they offer to the owners for 'rent' of their sheep. The sheep are kept at temporary summer sheepfolds (stâna) often several miles from the village. Once lambs have been weaned, the sheep are milked two to three times a day. Each stâna usually has about 300 sheep, and a special cheese room with immaculately clean wooden trays and troughs for coagulating the milk and draining off the whey. Spare whey is fed to pigs, which are fattened nearby over the summer.

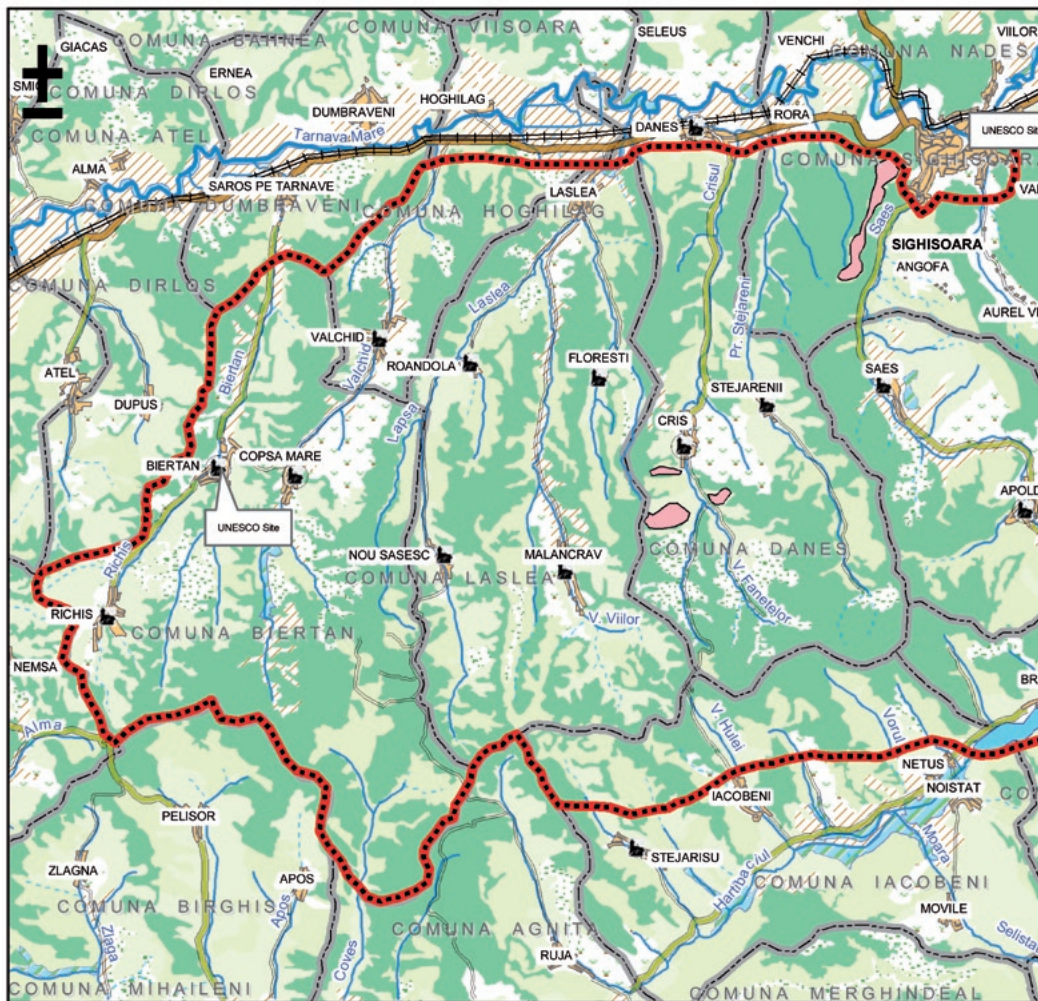
Cheeses produced at the stâna include:

- Telemea is fresh feta-type cheese, typically cut into 1kg blocks and kept in salty water.
- Caș (pronounced 'cash') is a higher-fat, rather salty cheese from which whey has been drained.
- Brânza de burduf has a strong taste, and keeps very well. After several days the caș is cut into small pieces, salt is added and the mixture kneaded by hand in a wooden trough before being placed in a sheep's stomach, carefully shaved sheepskin or a tube of pine bark, which are then sewn up. Pine bark adds a slight resinous flavour.
- Urda is made with the whey of the caș. Similar to ricotta, it is relatively high in protein and low in fat. Like telemea, it is eaten fresh, and is a delicacy.

Each summer, every stâna will usually have a few sheep taken by the wolves and bears that roam the area, and as a result the sheepfolds are guarded by ciobanesc, the fierce native sheepdogs.

Take a trip back in time and spend a day walking in these meadows, see the sheep being milked and enjoy a traditional Saxon picnic while the cheese is made for you to sample.

Discover Târnava Mare



Legenda / Legend

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| Curs de apa temporar \ Temporary water course | Zona proiectului / Project area | E |
| Curs de apa permanent \ Permanent water course | Zona protejata propusa / Proposed protected area | E |
| Drum local \ Local road | Zona protejate existenta / Existing protected area | T |
| Drum judetean \ County road | Sat, oras / village, town | L |
| Drum national \ National road | Lac / Lake | F |
| Limita administrativa \ Administrative boundary | | F |



Bread

Bread is eaten with almost every meal – these days more commonly bought from the local gas-fired bakery, but sometimes still the special sourdough bread baked in traditional courtyard ovens. A visit to see this bread being made is truly memorable and quite unique to this area of Transylvania.

The starter dough, saved from the previous bake, is mixed with flour (typically 20 kg) and water to start the fermentation process and left overnight. Early the next morning the dough is kneaded before being left to rise for approximately four hours in a traditional poplar wood tray.

The oven is prepared by burning branches and twigs until the desired temperature is expertly reached and the coals raked to the side. The dough is carefully handled and placed directly on the floor of the hot oven using long handled wooden shovels. Some use oiled baking tins to get more efficient use of the space in the oven and use cabbage leaves on the base of the tins to extend the shelf life of the bread.

Now is a good time to take a walk around the village and perhaps explore the church, returning within two hours to see the bread being taken out of the oven. By now the crust is jet black and while still hot is beaten with a wooden stick and then scraped off, revealing a golden brown loaf of bread underneath.

Tourists' interest in this unique bread is helping create local demand which will keep this traditional process alive.

After the bread is taken out of the oven it is common for cakes to be baked such as cozonac, flavoured with walnut paste, or even meat casseroles slowly cooked.

Târnava Mare is not the best area for growing milling wheat and some home bakers say the best results are obtained using flour from a local mill that sources its wheat from a specific farm in southern Romania. Occasionally the villagers grind locally grown wheat at home and use it to bake a tasty wholemeal bread.

In winter, boiled potato is often added to the dough to extend the keeping quality of the bread.

"A visit to see this bread being made is truly memorable and quite unique to this area of Transylvania."



Meat

Meat is a central part of the village diet. Pork is generally eaten in the winter months, lamb at Easter, poultry during summer and mutton in autumn. King of the meats in Transylvania is pork.



The villagers still kill and butcher their pigs in their courtyards. They cook and heat their houses with wood of oak, beech and hornbeam collected from the nearby forests, and every village chimney has a special chamber for hanging meat for smoking. They produce delicious speciality pork products which include:

- Home-smoked Transylvanian fat bacon, slanina (photographed on the front cover). Kaiserspeck is a variant of slanina with slightly more meat, marinated in wine and herbs.
- Home-smoked ham, sunca afumata. The lean hams of the pig are hung in the smoking chamber of the chimney to cure gradually. Cured hams were traditionally hung in the rooms within the church walls. In some villages hams still hang in the churches, but generally they are now stored in the cellars.
- Pork liver-paté sausages, caltabosi. These are prepared using the cleaned intestines of the pig for the sausage casings. The casings are stuffed with cooked chopped pork offal, including the heart, liver, kidneys and lungs, to which garlic, sautéed onions, salt, pepper, and herbs are added. Some chopped green vegetables or cooked rice may also be added. The sausages can be fried or eaten cold.
- Salami is also produced.



The pigs are generally Durac or Large White (Marele Alb) breeds and are well-cared for in the courtyards of the farmhouses. They roam free when young and in the summer are sometimes kept with the sheep where they are fed on whey from cheese-making. When older they are penned in the courtyard and fed scraps from the household. The rearing and butchering of pigs at home is the secret of the villages' high-quality pork products – the household is responsible for the whole process, from raising the pig to serving it at the table.



Home slaughtering of sheep, lambs and pigs ensures an unbroken line from the young animal to the table. Mangalita, a native pig breed of Romania, used to be favoured for rearing in Saxon households. This breed, black with a white stripe on the belly, yields much fat as well as lean meat. However, with the change of taste from fat to lean pork products, the domestic breed of preference has changed to Large White. Producers say that the taste of the pork products has changed little, as it is influenced more by the pigs' diet than by breed.





Wines, Spirits & Beer

A notable feature of a visit to any Transylvanian courtyard is the friendliness and hospitality of the people you meet.

Most households will produce several hundred litres each year of wine for their own consumption. Due to the cool climate, these tend to be fresher and crisper white wines than those produced in the rest of Romania. The vine is a local grape variety, and varies in colour from rust to red. Wine is stored in barrels in the cellar and often served at the table in jugs straight from the barrel.

Traditionally the Saxons do not drink wine until after the meal, usually accompanying food with schnapps made from plums, pears or apples. These fiery spirits are a Romanian institution, and often offered on arrival at a home as a gesture of hospitality, regardless of the time of day! Visinata is a delicious variant made by mixing schnapps with sour cherry cordial, and being sweeter and less strong, often preferred by ladies.

Some houses have their own copper stills, often very old, and most villages have a communal still. The fruit is harvested in autumn, left to ferment naturally in wooden barrels for 2-3 months, and then the resulting liquid is distilled once to make tuica (more common in southern Romania) and distilled twice to make palinca (significantly stronger, more common in Transylvania). If you visit over the winter, ask if it can be arranged for you to see palinca being distilled in a village courtyard – a perfect antidote to the winter frost.

Beer is seldom offered in private houses but can be readily purchased from bars and shops. Good Transylvania beers include Ciuc, Ciucas, Silva and Ursus.

A range of non-alcoholic drinks is also made in the home including fruit juices, cordials (such as elderflower or suc de soc) and compotes.

Beware – bottles in private houses are often re-used and rarely contain what they say on the label!





Restaurants & Cafes

Biertan

Medieval Restaurant for traditional dishes in a superb location near the Saxon church.

Mihai Viteazu

Motel Tranzit is a transport cafe offering good simple local food, including one of the best bean soups in the area.

Saschiz

Hanul Cetatii has a bar, back garden terrace and BBQ.

Sighisoara

Casa cu Cerb has a terrace on the main square.

Casa Wagner for a meal or drink.

Hotel Sigishoara has a peaceful rear courtyard restaurant.

International Cafe for quiche and salad followed by fruit pie and cream.

Casa Cositorarului for traditional cakes.

Stejarenii

Hanul Dracula offers traditional dishes on their terrace or restaurant in a peaceful valley setting.

Village shops often serve beer and soft drinks in addition to a limited range of groceries.

Look out for the 'local products' pledge that will increasingly be displayed in cafes and restaurants as a demonstration of their commitment to promote local products on their menus.

Saxon cuisine is special to the area but combines Saxon, Romanian, Hungarian and Turkish influences.

"Wine is stored in barrels in the cellar and often served at the table in jugs straight from the barrel!"



The Târnava Mare area (85,000 ha, population 23,000 in 27 small villages) is the site of a highly innovative approach to sustainable development, integrating two EU programmes: Natura 2000 for nature conservation and LEADER for rural community development. This will ensure local benefit from and local support for nature conservation.



The Tourist Information Centre is located by the Clock Tower in Saschiz and has been established by ADEPT to help visitors book accommodation and a range of cultural and food related activities. Local produce, maps and guide books are available for sale.



Fundatia ADEPT (ADEPT Foundation) is a charity working to protect this special countryside and give local people a secure future by promoting sustainable agriculture and the marketing of high quality food products, along with encouraging ancient crafts and skills, rural tourism and nature conservation.

The Natura 2000 Network is the European Union's main instrument for nature conservation, a network of designated sites across the EU in which vulnerable plant and animal species and important habitats must be protected. Târnava Mare was given Natura 2000 protection by the Romanian Ministry of Environment in 2007.

LEADER is the European Union's main instrument for rural community development, though which Local Action Groups open to all local people directly decide how development funding is spent. Târnava Mare is a pilot LEADER area in Romania, recognised as such by the Romanian Ministry of Agriculture in 2006, and established as a legal entity in 2007.



Slow Food*
Tarnava Mare

Slow Food Sighisoara, renamed Slow Food Tarnava Mare in 2007, is the founder of the Slow Food movement in Romania with the first convivium or chapter being formed in July 2005. A regular Farmers Market in Bucharest will be a major initiative to help create demand for local produce from small producers nationwide.

***Slow Food** is an international non-profit organisation based in Italy and currently made up of nearly 1,000 convivias, or chapters, with a growing network of over 80,000 members in over 100 countries.*

For further information visit: www.fundatia-adept.org

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