

## ROMANIA: HOREZU DEPRESSION

The Horezu depression or valley combines six localities, namely Horezu town and its adjacent main villages, Costești, Măldărești, Vaideeni and Slătioara. It is located at the foot of the Căpățâni mountains and sub-Carpathian area. Horezu is at the heart of the valley which characterises a community united in its linguistic, cultural and traditional features.

The valley has an exceptional cultural and natural patrimony which the area benefits from. From the tourist's point of view, the valley is characterised by many peculiarities which grant this destination individuality and uniqueness. There are numerous natural monuments and as many as 93 cultural and historical monuments, enlisted by the Ministry of Culture.

### A unique landscape

The area's natural geographic environment consists of a mountainous area covering nearly two thirds of its surface, woods, pastures, hay fields and orchards. The Căpățâni mountains offers the highest peaks such as Ursu (2 124 m) and Coșana (2 011 m).

The region is criss-crossed with many brooks – Costești, Bistrița, Bistricioara, Horezu, Râmești, Luncăvecior, Luncavăț, Recea, Marița and Cerna. Most of these brooks cross the limestone streak at the southern end of the Căpățâni mountains, especially in the Buila-Vânturarița massif, where the water left its mark on the karst relief made of impressive gorges (Bistrița) and caves (the bat's cave).

The climate differs depending on the relief and altitude. The temperate and Mediterranean influenced climate of the valley contrasts with the high mountainous area's snow that lasts over 180 days a year and offers an extended skiable domain such as Zmeuretu, Govora and Văleanu. The flora develops according to the geographic features of the region – coniferous forests and orchards cover the hills.

### An enriching walk

Orthodox Romanian heritage and culture marks the region. The Hurez monastery, a UNESCO monument, is one of the region's symbols. The diversity of the natural surroundings and historical buildings in the area is astounding and offers a wide array of possibilities to tourists. Among other religious monuments, the 500 years old Bistrița monastery housed the first printing press in Wallachia, and the first book ever to be printed on Romanian land in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Măldărești fortified houses (Cule) are perfectly preserved fortified dwellings that served for defence during the medieval period. They offer a perspective of local architecture that dates back to medieval times. They are also rare sights of ethnography and folk art that can only be found in some localities.



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Mineral springs in the Costești village with therapeutic properties have been proved over time with a treatment base in the Costești baths and balneoclimatic spa. The gorges of the Bistrița, Costești and Pietreni are Romania's narrowest and most impressive limestone gorges.

A visit to Peștera Liliacilor, the bat caves, can be an interesting affair. The Trovanți museum national park in Costești is a natural reserve strewn with huge gritstone rock formations that are of scientific and tourist interest due to their dimensions and zoomorphic aspect.

### **Traditional assets**

The Horezu enamelled pottery – unique to Romania through its chromatics and floral motives – is emblematic of the region. And, its ceramics are known worldwide. These objects preserve the local tradition and display Byzantine influences that have turned the craft into a brand for the Horezu valley. Traditional tools such as the potter's wheel, the jay, the horn or the oven, and decorating elements such as the stylized flowers, the spirals, the garlands or the dots, as well as the "Cocoș de Hurez" (the Hurez cock) highlight Horezu pottery's uniqueness.

Elements of material and immaterial ethno-culture in the mountainous Oltenia and Mărginimea Sibiului have great artistic and tourist value and have been integrated over time to become part of the local culture. Due to the landscape, shepherds found a place to preserve and perpetuate their own pastoral traditions; the area's shepherds still move their flocks to and from the mountains. Shepherds long influenced the regional cuisine bringing together milk-based products (jintiță, urdă, balmoș), and lamb and mutton-based products.

Several villages preserve traditional crafts and folklore – traditional costumes, weaving, embroidery, as well as the making of sheepskin coats, artistic woodwork, wool processing, architecture. Fairs and cultural events with choirs, whistle-players and folk dancers emphasise this ethno-cultural richness. ■

