Romania is situated in South Eastern Europe and is renowned for its fabulous gymnasts like Nadia Comaneci; the legendary Count Dracula of Transylvania, and sometimes for its deposed communist dictator, Nicolai Ceausescu.

Yes, Transylvania does exist! Yes, Dracula ‘exists’ too, but only in Bram Stoker’s book and in our imagination. The legend of Dracula is only partly based on traditional Romanian folklore. In fact, modern Romanians had not heard of Dracula until 1989 when the Communism was overthrown and finally had access to the book. The guy who inspired Stoker was in real life one of Romania’s most popular rulers- Vlad Tepes (Vlad the Impaler) who ruled between 1456 -1462. Although Vlad was quite blood-thirsty when meting out punishments to wrong-doers, he was also regarded as fair and loyal by law-abiding Romanians.

Vlad the Impaler was notorious for his brutal punishment methods, he gained the name Tepes (impaler) after his favourite form of punishing his enemies - impaling on a wooden stake.

History

Romania’s history is rich. Due to its geographical location, Romania was always a flash-point for political and territorial interests. The Roman, and later the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, have all tried to take over this land. The native inhabitants of Romania are called Dacians. The Dacians must have been hard to subdue because the Romans celebrated their victory against them in 106 AD, for 123 days. The name Romania itself comes from Rome. The Romanian language is based on Latin. The Ancient Greeks also influenced the early civilisation by establishing three cities in Romania.

Traianus’s column in Rome: celebrates the victory over the Dacians.
After the collapse of Roman rule, the country entered a very dark period. Up until the 19th century, Romania’s history was one of struggling against its powerful neighbors. Its efforts were rewarded in 1859 when the country finally united into one. A few years later, it gained its independence. The First World War brought, along with the great sacrifice of about 800,000 soldiers, the joy of complete reunification.

**The (very) Cold War**

Unfortunately things went backwards after World War Two, when Russia, under Stalin, gained control of Romania behind the Iron Curtain. Romania suffered under probably the worst communist regime in all of Eastern Europe.

As a child I remember doing my homework by candlelight, not because we were trying to stop global warming, but because our electricity was cut systematically for 2-3 hours every day. The Americans were portrayed as ‘evil’, neighbors were spying and dobbing on each other, people died in prison for their beliefs, and basic food was rationed. We had TV programs on air for only 2 hours a day (8-10 pm), and in the late 1980s the programs were only about the dictator, ‘our father’ and his family. Very boring! But on the positive side it meant that we read a lot. In 1989 communism in Europe fell, Romania then joined NATO and by 2007 had become a full member of the EU. It is now rapidly modernizing and has embraced democracy.

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**Romanians in South Australia**

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Romanian community in South Australia was relatively small. In the post-war years, Romanians joined the large influx of European migrants to Australia. Initially, they immigrated under the International Refugee Organization scheme; then the installation of a communist government in 1947 prompted thousands more to emigrate. From the 1970s to early 1990s, Romania endured a repressive government, financial mismanagement and national economic difficulties. Emigration was very restricted, but many Romanians fled ‘illegally’ and sought asylum in the West (Source: [http://immigration.museum.vic.gov.au/Origins/history.aspx?id=49](http://immigration.museum.vic.gov.au/Origins/history.aspx?id=49)). Currently there are about 15,000 Romanians in Australia, and about 1500 in South Australia.

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Magdalena and Dragos Moise, in traditional Romanian dress

Australia Day 2007
Romania is quite mountainous and has quite a lot of snow and skiing in winter. Transylvania in particular is strikingly beautiful, with a patchwork of small, but well kept farms that are dominated by a background of jagged mountains, all dissected by fast-flowing white-water rivers.

The climate is temperate-continental, typical of Central Europe, with hot summers, cold winters, and very distinct seasons.

I grew up in the small town of Racari, near Bucharest (pop. 3 million), the capital city of Romania. Racari is a historic place, like most places in Romania, dating back to the 17th century.

**Education**

The Romanians place a high premium on education. When I was at school, in contrast to Australia, there were many examinations in most subjects, starting with year 5. In year 8 students face their first 3 hour long national examinations on the Romanian language, Maths and History/Geography.

This exam is very important, since based on the results students will go to their chosen high school. I still vividly remember that year. Every day after school I would study. I don’t remember doing anything else other than that. During that year I only had one day off: for my birthday when I stubbornly said to my Mum that I will not do any homework.

**Coming to Australia**

My husband and I arrived in Australia in 2002. It was his idea to emigrate for a better life. Emigrating is a scary, yet exciting process. I was looking forward to new experiences. Adapting to Australia was/is not easy. Arriving at Melbourne at 2 am did not prove to be very auspicious. Our bags of luggage, containing our clothes, were “lost” somewhere between Dubai and Singapore. They found them 3 days later, but in the meantime we had to manage with what we had.

The biggest hurdles though were adapting to the language and cultural differences. After a couple of weeks I felt like screaming: ‘Speak Romanian!!!!!’ Improvised sign language proved very useful. The typical Australian slang was particularly hard. Expressions such as ‘What are you up to?’ would sometimes put me in a spin.
There were also many cultural differences. For example, we thought ‘BYO’ meant that the host did not have enough plates for the guests, and had asked us to bring our own. Imagine the embarrassment of coming to a party with an empty plate!

- Driving on the ‘wrong side’ of the road; (Europeans all drive “on the left”), even now I am still confused when crossing the road.
- ‘What are you having for tea?’ used to be a question that would give me trouble. I used to think that it was tricky question as I would translate it literally as tea. “I am not having tea tonight; I am actually hungry, so I’ll have dinner” I would answer to my conversant’s amusement.
- One of the most used auxiliaries (verbs) in Romanian sounds exactly like a swearing word in English. Although nobody has said anything so far, we try to use it less in public.

Some common Romanian greetings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Romanian</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buna. Ce mai faci?</td>
<td>Hello. How are you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pe mine ma cheama...</td>
<td>My name is....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buna dimineata</td>
<td>Good morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buna ziua</td>
<td>Good day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buna seara</td>
<td>Good evening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La revedere (formal)</td>
<td>Goodbye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pa (informal)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multumesc (formal), Mersi (informal)</td>
<td>Thank you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Few (interesting) facts about Romania and Romanians

- In the history of flight, Traian Vuia built the first self-propelling heavier-than-air aircraft.
- Henri Coandă built the first aircraft powered by a jet engine.
- Victor Babes discovered more than 50 germs and a cure for a disease named after him, babesiosis.
- Biologist Nicolae Paulescu discovered insulin.
- Another biologist, Emil Palade, received the Nobel Prize for his contributions to cell biology.
- Gheorghe Marinescu (1863-1938), the professor of Neurology at the Faculty of Medicine in Bucharest, was the first to see living nervous cells with a microscope.
- Mathematician Ștefan Odobleja is considered to be the ideological father behind cybernetics.
- In the arts and culture, important figures were George Enescu (music composer), Constantin Brâncusi (sculptor), Eugène Ionesco (playwright), Mircea Eliade (historian of religion and novelist), Emil Cioran (essayist) and Angela Gheorghiu (soprano).
- Most Romanians are Orthodox (not only the Greeks are orthodox!)
- In Romania you’ll find the second biggest official building in the world after the Pentagon. It is 10% larger by volume than the Great Pyramid of Giza. Picture below.
• Romania has been one of the five fastest growing economies in Europe during the last five years (2000-2005)
• Romania is number four in the top of 10 countries with the highest growth rate in tourism development, with an estimated potential of 8 percent from 2007 – 2016 (The World Travel and Tourism Council).
• Constanta Port, located on the Romanian Black Sea Coast, is the 2nd largest port in Europe.
• Sibiu is Europe cultural capital for 2007
• Romania is one of the largest wine producers in Europe with a vineyard surface of 243,000 hectares and an annual production of 5 to 6 million hectoliters. Archaeological finds and historical documents place the beginnings of wine culture in the present territory of Romania some 4000 years ago.
• Romanian gymnast Nadia Comaneci was the first Olympic gymnast ever to score a perfect 10, at the Montreal Olympics in 1976.
• The people of Romania like to eat meatballs (mititei), porridge (mamaliga) and they like to drink wine and plum brandy.
• Romania's Danube Delta, a World Heritage site, is the second largest delta in Europe.
• In 2004, a sculpture by Brâncuși, arguably the biggest sculptor of the 20th century, named "Danaide" sold for $18.1 million, the highest price that a sculpture piece had ever been sold for at auction. In May 2005, a piece from the "Bird in Space" series broke that record, selling for $27.5 million.
The UNESCO world cultural heritage includes 7 types of monuments and cultural objectives in Romania, all of which are considered great tourist attractions.

- There are 8 churches and monasteries from Bukovina
- 8 wooden churches from Maramures,
- 5 Dacian citadels in the Orasitic Mountains,
- The Hurezi monastery in the southern region of Oltenia,
- Sighisoara- the mediaeval citadel,
- The Danube Delta - biosphere reserve
- The Saxon fortified villages and churches in Transylvania

**I am not making this up!**

The **Merry Cemetery** is a cemetery in the village of Săpânța. It is famous for its colourful tombstones with native paintings describing, in an original and poetic manner, the persons that are buried there as well as scenes from their lives.

Here is an example from the **Merry Cemetery**:

"Here lies my mother-in-law. Had she lived another year, I would have lied here."
Other pictures from Romania

Once the home of the Romanian royal family, this castle was seized by the Communists and is now managed by the Romanian government.

Iasi: The Palace of Culture
Bucaresti