



EUROPEAN UNION
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GOVERNMENT OF ROMANIA



GOVERNMENT OF BULGARIA

Route 3 "Tourism and Culture for Connoisseurs"

*The unforgettable places that are hidden in the forgotten Eastern European territories –
when and where to feel the authenticity of the region*

SOUTH OF DANUBE - WHAT WOULD THE VRATSA REGION TELL US

CUSTOMS AND CULTURE

- 1. Community centre “Razvitie” (Development), Vratsa** (Vratsa town centre;
GPS: 43°12'09.90"N 23°32'56.89"E, tel.: +359 92/ 62-47-40; + 359 92/62-15-73)

Community centre "Razvitie" is one of the oldest of its kind in the country. It was founded in 1869 at the discretion of the teacher Simeon Podbalkansky. Originally called "Bulgarian Cultural Centre squib in Vratsa", it went through different names over the years, when in 1884 the name "Razvitie" appeared. The community centre has gradually expanded its activities and from a place for learning and literacy, it has become a cultural centre, where a theatre, cinema, music society, archaeological society, museum collection, children's art school, etc. have been functioning. The building, which houses the organization today is a monument of culture and was built between 1939 and 1941 with donations of patriotic citizens. Elena and Todor Balabanovi donated the courtyard in the centre of the town, in which the building was constructed.

- 2. Ethnographic-Revival Complex "St. Sofronii Vrachanski ", Vratsa**

(GPS: 43°12'05.40"N 23°33'02.95"E; tel.: +359 92 627 097; www.vratsamuseum.com;
vratsamuseum@mail.bg)

Working hours: Monday-Friday 9.00 ч. – 17.30 ч.; weekend and holidays 9.00 ч. – 12.00 ч.;
13.00 ч. – 17.30 ч.; with prior request between 12.00 и 13.00; Free day: Monday

The complex presents the traditional lifestyle, culture and crafts practised in the Northwestern region of Bulgaria from the end of the 19th to the middle of the 20th century. Three Renaissance houses, built in the typical for the region style, a church and a school host the expositions - the house



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of the Hadjitoshevi family, the house of Ivan Zambin, the house of Grigoria Naidenov, the church "St. Ascension" and Ascension School.

The exposition in the building of the Ascension School shows ethnographic processes and phenomena, organized thematically and arranged in seasonal cycles like the life of the population on these lands was organized. It also shows traditional winter clothes, tools related to home crafts - weaving, knitting, tailoring, etc. and exhibits related to the most important folk festivals in the winter - Christmas, St. Vasil's day, maiden rowing. There are tools of work associated with the cultivation of the earth - ploughing and sowing, as well as objects related to the variety of spring holidays - Baba Marta, St. Lazarus' day, Easter, St. George's day. There are exhibits showing the active work on harvesting, processing and preservation of the crop, but also the preparation for the autumn fairs - pottery, wheat, beef. The topic of "Vratsa traditional folk wedding" is also unfolded. The traditional folk clothing shown in the exhibition is arranged in an ethnic and local way. The guests can also see musical instruments, pictures, exhibits presenting the festive life of the Vratsa population and the development of the brass music, which is so much in the lifestyle of the people that it changes the appearance of its festive life. Special attention is paid to the urban lifestyle and the everyday life of the urban population.

The exposition in the Ascension Church should not be omitted. The church is the oldest temple in Vratsa and there are valuable icons painted by famous Bulgarian artists. The iconostasis is a remarkable monument of art. The royal icons are made by Dimitar Zograf (brother of Zachary Zograf) and the oldest icons written by Zograf Jovan are dated from the 17th century. The techniques which are used, the details of the iconography and some features give reason to speak not only of jewellery and a literary school in Vratsa but also for Vratsa style in iconography.

3. Regional Historical Museum - Vratsa (2 "Hristo Botev" sq., Vratsa, tel.: +359 92 620220; www.vratsamuseum.com)

Working hours: Monday-Friday 9.00 ч. – 17.30 ч.; weekend and holidays 9.00 ч. – 12.00 ч.; 13.00 ч. – 17.30 ч.; with prior request between 12.00 и 13.00; Free day: Monday



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The Regional Museum, which is part of the Palace of Culture in Vratsa, is one of the few buildings in the country that is specifically designed and constructed for the needs of a museum. Regional Museum Vratsa has many expositions among which Archaeology and Thracian Treasures, including a separate hall for the Rogozen Treasure, which is the largest Thracian treasure found in Bulgaria. Separate exhibitions present important samples and exhibits from “Bulgarian history in the 15th-19th century period” and “New History”. An interesting part is the "Zn Art - Museum of Paper” exhibition, which shows multi-layered reconstructions of selected exhibits from Bulgarian museums, artefacts from the prehistoric and antique epochs, contemporary monuments of culture and author's works. One of the latest expositions is the museum’s "Lapidarium" – it is built outdoors and shows the four-colour mosaic from the village of Galatin, architectural details, tombstones and epigraphic monuments from the Roman epoch, the late antiquity and the Bulgarian Middle Ages.

THE SYMBOLS OF VRATSA

4. Meshchii Tower (Town centre of Vratsa)

One of the famous landmarks and symbols of Vratsa, the Meshchii Tower, was built as a residential defence facility in the 16th century and was converted into a clock tower at the end of the 19th century. The tower cannot be accessed; it can be viewed from the outside all year round.

5. Kurtpashova Tower (Town centre of Vratsa)

The tower was built in the 17th century, but its architecture was borrowed from the late Bulgarian Middle Ages. It is open for visitors, there is a museum boutique for souvenirs and copies of the museum exhibits on the first floor.

6. Rock paintings near the village of Tsarevets (Rock wreath near Tsarevets village; GPS: 43°08'13"N; 23°47'06"E)

Unique and rarely known medieval inscriptions are hidden on the southern slopes of the Middle Stone and Govedarnika hills, near the village of Tsarevets. Scientists dated them from the 16th to the 19th century, making them the only ones in Bulgaria gathered in such a long time. The drawings can be seen in most niches and caves, both in the low parts near the river and in the higher parts of the area.



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Images of animals, hunting deer, roe deer and horses are drawn on the walls of the caves. The human figures are highly generalized and in some places, they are painted with a typical "martial arts" - a bow and a spear. Swastika-like images are often discovered. They are believed to be symbols of the sun, related to the beliefs before the appearance of Christianity.

Some experts believe that the place is related to "romantic encounters" and the old custom of collecting "lichen" in the spring. This is evidenced by the inscriptions, most of which are made in the spring seasons.

7. Medieval church "St. Nikola "in the village of Tsarevets (the centre of Tsarevets village; GPS: 43°0'41"N; 23°48'06"E)

The Church "St. Nikolas" houses the only one of its kind and the only one preserved in its initial look mason iconostasis in Bulgaria. The icons are drawn directly onto the templon. Legends tell that it was built more than 800 years ago. In fact, its architectural style and the way of construction speak for the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century. It was declared a monument of culture of national importance in 1965.

8. Underground church "St. Nikolai", Vratsa (Centre of Vratsa, "Hristo Botev" sq., in the yard of "St. Nikolai Mirikliiski" church; tel: +359 92/620303; working hours: Monday – Sunday: 08:00-18:00)

The church "St. Nikolai" is one of the few underground churches in the country. It was built in the 16th century by the boyar George. The legend says that he had built it at the request of his daughter who married a wealthy merchant in Tsarigrad. She asked her father to finance the construction in order to be forgiven for the change of religion.

The church was constructed according to all the requirements of the Ottoman empire for the Christian temples – they could not be higher than a Turk on a horse. "St. Nikolai" is dug 6 m under the ground and is 7 m long and almost 4 m wide.

NORTH OF DANUBE - WHAT WOULD PIATRA-OLT REGION TELL US

ROMANIAN CUSTOMS AND CULTURE IN THE AGES

1. The Olt County Museum (Slatina, Olt County, 1 Ana Iaptesku str., tel: +40 249 415 279)



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With its four expositions and more than 25,000 artefacts, the museum reveals the customs, culture and civilization that developed in the county. The famous sheepskin of Vadastra, Olt carpets, a collection of ceramics from Boga, Corbeni and Roman and a collection of written eggs from Oboga are shown. There is a collection of over 260 covers - carpets, tablecloths, quilts, decorated in a variety of colours. Guests can see more objects from the time of Ghetto-Dacia, the Roman Empire, and those showing a connection with the Byzantine Empire, as well as tracing the life of the rulers of Olt County during the Middle Ages. An interesting fact is that the museum operates a restoration laboratory where ceramic and metal objects are handled.

2. Church „St. St. Nicholas and Gregorius“ (Ostrov, Osica se Sus, Romania;
www.biserici.org)

The look of the church built by boyar Nicholas Grecanu in 1787, with red bricks and a tiled roof is very interesting. Initially, there was a bell tower, which was later demolished. Over the years the church has been destroyed under the influence of weather and earthquakes but has been restored by the families living in the village.

3. Medieval town Romula (Reșca, Dobrosloveni, Olt County, Romania)

Romula is an ancient Roman city and capital of Roman Dacia (Dacia Trayana), one of the Roman provinces on the Balkans. Its ruins can be seen in today's village of Reșca. Romula was built on the remains of an earlier Dacian settlement called Malva. The town had two rows of fortifications and two quarters where soldiers were temporarily housed.

4. Romanati Museum (26 Iancu Jianu str., Caracal, Olt County, Romania)

Working time: Monday-Thursday: 8:00-16:00; weekend: 09:00 – 13:00; Friday – closed

The museum has four expositions - Archaeology and History; Iancu Jianu Memorial; Fine Arts; Ethnology. There is a Lapidarium at the entrance of the museum, where visitors can see sarcophagi, tombs and vessels. The most remarkable exhibit is Julius Julian's sarcophagus, covered with beautiful ornaments. The special collection of precious stones is especially attractive to visitors. The Roman bronze statues also deserve attention, including those of the goddesses Diana and Fortuna, god Jupiter and others.



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5. **Sucidava fortress** (Celeiu village, 5 km away from Corabia, Olt County, Romania)

Sucidava is a Dacian and Roman-Dacian ancient city, located on the left bank of the Danube, near the present-day town of Corabia. It is believed that the first Christian basilica in Romania was built here. There are also foundations of a bridge that crossed the Danube, built by Constantine the Great, to connect Sucidava with Eskus (an ancient city on the right bank of the Danube near the present-day village of Gigen). The bridge known as the Constantine Bridge was over 2400 meters long - one of the longest for its time.

Particularly interesting is the "secret well" of the fortress, which was most likely built to ensure the water supply to the population during a siege.

WHEN TO VISIT THE REGION

THE PAST OF VRATSA REGION – A MESSAGE FOR THE FUTURE

Let's touch the identity of the Vratsa region – local historian walks, creative workshops, restorations. Annually, in March the Regional Library "Hristo Botev" organizes "Homeland - Tradition and modernity" event, which aims to encourage the population to touch the cultural and historical heritage. In **September**, the same library also hosts the "Day of the Local Historian", which is devoted to a different historian every year and shows an exhibition of his/her personal books and gifts donated to the library. The exhibits are arranged in a way that each guest can see and read any of them. In **November** every year, there is a Regional Historical Conference - "The Past of the Homeland - a Message to the Future". Traditionally researchers from nearby areas are taking part and present works by historians, librarians, teachers, journalists, students. The subject of the conference is different each year and relates to a different aspect of life, culture and social life of the people in this region.

THE PAST LIVES

National Folklore Council is held in **June** in the Ledenika Cave. It includes dance and singing groups for authentic and stylized folklore and individual performers. Craftsmen from all over the country present their hand-crafted works. The culmination is a traditional northern wedding, which



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hosts over 1,000 guests. The only condition for participation in the ritual is wearing a traditional folk costume or clothes with folk elements.

THE FESTIVALS IN PIATRA OLT

The "Tree of Life" is a one-day festival held annually in the town of Bals at several points - the "Petre Pandrea" Library, heroes' monument on the Oltet River, the popular harbour, and others. The main purpose of the festival is to popularize traditional Romanian folk and cultural dances, songs and crafts. It starts with a craft fair, continues paying tribute with wreaths and flowers in front of the monument of the heroes on the occasion of the National Heroes Day and ends with a performance of folk ensembles.

Scornicești Day is also known as the Feast of Bread when in **September** residents and guests of the city receive a bit of spiritual charge, returning to the roots of kneading bread and having fun with the artistic program proposed by the organizers. A special moment is the awarding of couples celebrating a golden wedding in that year. In Șerbănești a Feast of Harvest is held in **July** on the day of St. Elijah. Each year there is a magnificent exhibition of baked goods, which is devoted to rituals, customs, various holidays - bread for the bride, bread for the mother-in-law, kolaci, kozunaci, etc.

"From Draganesti to the Valley" is a folk festival for poems and songs and is organized by "Ileana Constantinescu" Cultural House and the Draganesti-Olt Municipality in **September**. Its aim is to rediscover the beautiful Romanian poems and ballads, as well as to enable the establishment of good vocal performers from all over the country.

WHERE TO STAY:

Vratsa region

Hemus hotel (centre of Vratsa); Olympic hopes (next to Hristo Botev sports centre in Vratsa); Tourist complex Ledenika – next to Ledenika cave; family hotel Kiparis (Teacher's colonies 14 km away from Vratsa); hotel complex Hashove (in a picturesque country next to Boteva alley); family hotel Flamingo (750 m away from Vratsa centre); family art-hotel Zora (next to Vratsa centre); family hotel Momina salsa (Zgorigrad village, 4 km away from Ledenika cave and 20 km away



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from Vratsa); hotel Chaika (on the way to Vratsata pass, 500m away from the town centre); Hotel Leva (5 min away from the town centre).

Piatra-Olt region

Boulevard Prestige 3* - Slatina centre; Parc hotel 3* (500 m away from Slatina centre, 50 m away from the town park); Zytto hotel 3* (1 km away from the centre of Slatina and 200 m from the railway station); Senator hotel 3* (1 km away from the centre of Slatina); City hotel 4* (500 m away from the centre of Slatina); Horse farm Epona, Bobicești.

ADDITIONAL PLACES

If you have time and desire for the spirit of the region, you can visit the Art Gallery "Ivan Funev" (part of the Regional History Museum with more than 2000 pieces of art - painting, sculpture, graphics and applied art), Chitalishte "Razvitie" (the oldest cultural home in the town of Vratsa) and the House-Museum of Baba Iliica (build specially in the memory of the courageous grandmother Iliica, near her home, in an authentic architectural style of the region. Guests can see one of the most remarkable exhibits in the museum – Baba Iliya's family tree). An interesting site in the centre of Vratsa is the Mogilanska mogila. There are three tombs found in it. One was robbed in the Middle Ages, but the second and third were well preserved, and in the second one a chariot with two harnessed horses, a self-mounted horse and probably a maid buried together with her master were found, and in the last tomb two bodies of a man and a woman whom scientists have reason to believe to belong to a Thracian princess and a warrior.



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