

Romanian Culture

Here are a few tid-bits on Romanian culture to help you prepare for the trip. We recommend doing some more research into Romania before the trip.

Overview

- Romanians tend to be very polite and hospitable,
- They are generally direct about what they feel, but can be very indirect when talking about ideas and plans.

Meeting/Greeting

- Usually shake hands when meet, unless family/friend, then possible kiss on both cheeks
- Personal Space and Touching – Romanians tend to be comfortable with less than an arm's length of personal space during conversations. The closer the relationship, the less personal space is needed.
- Eye Contact – direct eye contact is preferred
- Conversation – keep eye contact with the person you are talking to
 - Do not: interrupt, keep hands in pockets, scratch yourself, blow nose or smack tongue
- Take shoes off when entering someone's home
- Public Transportation
 - young people give up seats for elderly, disabled and pregnant people

Meals

- Food:
 - Breakfast – cup of tea or coffee, bread or roll with ham, salami, cheese or jam.
○ Cereal is starting to get popular
 - Lunch – biggest meal of day - always starts with some sort of soup, followed by potatoes, rice, or pasta with a garnish.
 - Dinner – usually at home – bread or rolls, cold sausage meats, fish or cheese
- Polite to eat a lot to show you like it
- Compliment the host during the meal
- Appropriate to eat with fork in left hand and knife in right
- Restaurants:
 - Slower service
 - Drink refills are NOT free
 - Must request bill or the server will not bring it

Patriotism

The people you meet may hate the government and deplore the economic situation, but most of them love their country. Try to avoid comparing your country with theirs. Comparison can be interpreted as being negative and critical of their culture. Keep a positive, constructive attitude, even in difficult situations.

Many young people, dissatisfied with life, long to emigrate to the West. Some Westerners who like to convey the impression that their own country is wonderful do not help this dissatisfaction! Be careful of the “West is best” syndrome. You should look objectively at your own culture’s problems and not try to make excuses for them. We have social and economic problems in the West that would surprise many people in Central and Eastern Europe who see Westerners as infinitely wealthy, with the opportunity to buy and do anything they want. Share openly and honestly about your nation’s problems. It helps give some perspective.

Religion and beliefs

Romania has a predominately Eastern Orthodox population. Roughly 78% of the Romanian people consider themselves Eastern Orthodox. 10% are Greek Catholic. 5% Roman Catholic, with only 5% identifying themselves as Protestant.

Continually Romania has been spiritually strained, receiving constant persecution from the authorities. The moral vacuum since Ceausescu’s communists has resulted in the increase of social evils, including substance abuse, prostitution and violent crime. Romania has one of the highest abortion rates in the world. Accompanying freedom was wealth for a few, but grinding poverty for the majority, with many spending most of their income on food.

Many Romanians have grown up as ‘Christian’ but with a nominal faith – only 2-4% of Orthodox believers take their faith very seriously. After the collapse of Communism, there was an influx of short term aid. However, this did not translate into long term facilitation of the church to minister. Now, the Romanian church is realizing its responsibilities in the Great Commission and to the surrounding social needs. In 2000, a national interdenominational sending agency was founded, as Romanians can easily access fields which Westerners cannot, such as in neighboring Moldova. Since 2007 when Romania achieved its full EU membership, more rapid changes can come for Romania, particularly spiritually as relationships can develop with stronger EU church movements. Romania is a popular choice for mission trips, and long term missionaries are settling there, resulting in Christianity becoming more recognized.

Communicating the Gospel

Speak to the heart and not just the mind. As well as communicating a clear statement of the Gospel, tell people what knowing the Lord means to you personally and how it has affected you. If you get into a religious argument, go on to your personal testimony. Nobody can argue against that and it communicates at a personal level.

The communist system has created a lot of distrust among people. They may be a little distant and suspicious at first until they have time to assess you. Be patient because once they get to know and trust you, they are very warm people. Be cautious whenever people say “yes” to things immediately. Even in sharing the gospel, you may get a “yes” answer, which is said in order to get something from you. Out of politeness people may say “yes” to save you from “losing face”!