

Museums and Collections in Romania

Introduction

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We offer you a new guide to public museums and collections in Romania. The last edition, from 2006, has almost sold out, and some of the information does not correspond with reality any more. The national database of museums and collections that we started at CIMEC about 30 years ago is constantly refreshing: new museums and collections emerge (over 70 in the last three years!), museums close down, addresses and contact data change, so it is necessary, from time to time, to make a new edition available to you.

We have included museums and museum departments - whether they have premises of their own or a separate permanent exhibition - village collections, ecclesiastical collections and private collections open to visitors, vivariums, botanical and zoological gardens, caves arranged for sightseeing, museums and outdoor museum departments, exhibitions space for permanent and temporary exhibitions, astronomical observatories, planetariums, aquariums. All this addresses the modern definition of the museum and the collection as formulated by the International Council of Museums (ICOM)¹ and taken over in the Museum and Collections Law 311/2003: *“museum - cultural institution, public or private, non-profit, in the service of the community, that collects, preserves, researches, restores, communicates and exhibits, for the purpose of knowledge, education and recreation, material and spiritual evidence of the existence and development of human communities and of the environment; collection - all the cultural and natural assets, set up in a systematic and coherent way by natural or legal persons of public law or private law.”*

This time we thought to offer you a guide ordered by the locations where there are museums and collections. We recorded no less than 819 museum institutions in 473 localities. You will easily find, in alphabetical order, the city that interests you, and you will know what to visit there. Only ten cities have more than ten museums each totalling 162 museums, namely one fifth of the total: Bucharest, Iași, Constanța, Sibiu, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, Bacău, Târgoviște, and Brașov. Moreover, in only one hundred localities there is more than one museum.

You will find well known museums and many small ones, some of them recently opened or refurbished that may offer pleasant surprises to visitors. A third of the museums (272) are located in listed buildings. 368 have an Internet presentation. And because a picture is worth a hundred words, we reduced the text to the essential, in favour of the pictures (over 1,530 images!). A part of them are made by de Irina Oberländer-Târnoveanu and Aurelia Duțu, while others were made available by museums and county directorates for culture, religious

¹ Evolution of the definition of museum in ICOM statute, at <http://icom.museum/hist> def eng.html

affairs and national cultural heritage or by colleagues and friends. We are grateful to all for this common effort to shape our museums and collections, both in this volume, and on the web, in the online guide that we are constantly updating (*ghidulmuzeelor.cimec.ro*).

Special thanks to the Director of the Museums, Collections and Visual Arts Directorate of the Ministry of Culture, Religious Affairs and National Heritage, Monica Dumitru, for her assistance in gathering the information on the village museums and county directorates (DJCCPCN) of Argeş, Bacău, Bihor, Bistriţa-Năsăud, Brăila, Caraş-Severin, Călăraşi, Covasna, Dâmboviţa, Galaţi, Gorj, Neamţ, Prahova, Satu-Mare, Suceava, Timiş, and Vâlcea; to the directors Gheorghe Dumitroaia (Neamţ County Museum Complex), Aurel Chiriac (Criş Land Museum, Oradea), Horia Dumitrescu (Vrancea Museum), Silvia Iacobescu ("Iulian Antonescu" Museum Complex, Bacău), to the colleagues Cristian Butuc, Rodica Bocoî, Katia Moldoveanu, Dorina Dan, Andreea Tacu, Coralia-Alexandra Costaş and others, who gave us pictures. We apologize for any omission of names and wish to express our gratitude to everyone.

The Romanian public is our main target, while the names of the museums and a short description translated into English secure the access to the guide for all those who do not know Romanian. But how many of you are going to enter a museum? Should we take into account the statistics, Romanians are rarely or hardly museum goers. The museums are last among the preferences for spending spare time, and our country has a bad situation in European statistics also in this domain. At best, they say that we visit museums three times in life: as pupils, on school visits, as parents, with our children, and as grandparents, with our grandchildren. Many fail to do even that.

In any country, there are several much visited famous museums that occupy top positions in statistics. Also in our country we have such very popular museums, highly publicized, located in Bucharest, in tourist areas or outdoors, in a beautiful natural environment (Peleş Castle, Bran Castle, "Dimitrie Gusti" National Village Museum in Bucharest, Brukenthal Museum, ASTRA Museum Complex in Sibiu, to name just a few). The museums cannot find their measure in the number of those who step inside their premises, but in the role they play in the community: that of cultural memory, learning, and entertainment.

What can a museum offer us?

- safe premises for visitors of all ages, a place fit for family and friends;
- an escape from everyday life: in another temporal dimension, in contact with unusual, rare, beautiful, strange objects that one can hardly meet in everyday life;
- psychological comfort and a place for all seasons: in summer it offers shade, in winter shelter from bad weather and possibly heat.

Things have changed for the better in the past few years, at least in large cities and places of tourist attraction: school groups began again to visit museums frequently. The Museum Night, which is held every year in May, has attracted record numbers of visitors, as well as some high-profile exhibitions, craftsmen fairs and music festivals. I have seen people waiting in line to enter museums also in Romania. However, most of our museums and collections are little visited. Are they not attractive enough? Not publicized enough? Should we

blame the low level of education of the potential public? Or museum people do not know how and do not strive sufficiently to attract the public?

For many of our fellow citizens, the museum is a building, sometimes beautiful, sometimes imposing - a former palace or mansion valuable as a historic monument - but too often intimidating. You know it is there, but you hesitate to step in, you delay, waiting for a more appropriate time. Many perceive a museum as closer to school, namely, it is regarded as a sober, slightly dull institution, where you cannot go dressed inappropriately and where you must be relaxed and resigned in anticipation of an intellectual torment. The museum is too rarely perceived as a nice, relaxing place for recreation and enjoyment. Therefore it is rarely chosen as a place of leisure. Even educated people with a taste for culture often come to a museum from various obligations, not for pleasure. An analysis of the situation of museums, conducted by the Centre for Cultural Studies and Research in 2007², on a sample of urban population in cities with over 100,000 inhabitants, confirms that we are on the antepenultimate place among European countries as regards the number of visitors to museums (485 per 100,000 inhabitants) and most think a museum means an ascetic experience, not one of relaxation and pleasure.

Still, the future belongs to the museums that will know how to provide quality services and a pleasant experience for visitors. Too many of our museums and collections are far from the 21st century standards, both in their display and networking with visitors, and in documentation, conservation and communication. Let us enjoy our museums and collections and make more and more of them live centres of culture and civilization.

² <http://culturadata.ro/PDF-uri/19%20Studiu%20muzee.pdf>