

Eastern Europe's Legends Live

Located on the Black Sea, Romania is an ancient country. The legend of Bran Castle draws tourists from all over the world. They come to see the castle in Brasov, situated in the center of the country about a hundred miles north of Bucharest. It is purportedly Dracula's castle, which was described by Bram Stoker in his novel about Dracula, the vampire. Vlad III, also known as Dracula and Vlad the Impaler, ruled from this castle in the Fifteenth Century. Vlad was notoriously cruel and, as his name suggests, impaled his unfortunate victims. Vlad died at the age of forty-five at his court in Bucharest, Romania's capital city and the country's center of art and culture. Now open to the public as a museum, Dracula's Castle displays artifacts collected by Queen Marie of Romania.



Brasov is a medieval city with the largest gothic church in Southeastern Europe. The Fifteenth Century Black Church is three hundred feet long and a hundred and twenty-five feet wide. Its six-ton bell and four thousand pipe organ is played during concerts and the church has an elegant collection of Persian carpets that date to the Middle Ages.

Brasov's city center square is surrounded by medieval structures. There is still a pillory in its middle where witches were punished. Also in the middle of the city is Tampa, a little mountain rising thirty-three hundred feet above it. Rope Street is one of the narrowest streets in Europe. Brasov is a good spot to begin a journey to see the rest of the country, especially Bucharest, which has an artificial lake in its center surrounded by lovely gardens. A very prosperous city, Bucharest has many landmark buildings, monuments and art institutions.



Bratislava Castle in Slovakia has its own legend. It is said that when commoners moved into the castle they were extremely tired each morning and upon waking saw that everything was out of place. A witch looked into his crystal ball and saw a giant who lived in the western mountains but worked in the eastern

mountains. On his way to his job each morning he turned the castle over to use as a table. The witch said they should make a map to show the giant how to get to work a shorter way. Artists drew the map but it was too small for the giant to see. So, they made the map with rocks in the castle's courtyard. When they awoke the next morning everything was still in place.

The massive Bratislava Castle looks down on the capital of Slovakia. Dating back to the Ninth Century, the castle was restored in the Sixties and is now a museum. From the grounds there is a panoramic view of Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia and the heart of its art and culture.



In the historic west of the Czech Republic, visitors can see the interior of Rabi Castle, right down to its deepest cellar. The Otava River, once famous for its gold, runs alongside it. It has been said that the castle was built there in order to guard the vein of gold in the river. An alchemist attempted to turn lead into gold in the castle. When he failed, he was imprisoned in the tower. Eighty miles from Prague, Rabi Castle is the biggest of all castles in the Czech Republic.

Prague boasts many cultural attractions including its ancient city center which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. There are ten important museums, with numerous theaters and art galleries, which is the reason it is one of Europe's most visited cities.

The legend of the werewolf is still alive and well in Bulgaria where it is known as a varkolak. The Bulgarian legend tells of a god who ate human flesh and was transformed into a wolf. The werewolf can transform from man to wolf, usually involuntarily during a full moon. They can also be created if a human is scratched or bitten by one. Bulgarians believed that the devil turned people into werewolves.

Bulgaria sits alongside the Black Sea, with a diverse topography of plains, mountains and forests. It is easy to imagine a werewolf's howl from the Central Balkan National Park in the heart of Bulgaria. The park has an eight thousand foot peak with forests, meadows, canyons and waterfalls.

Sofia, Bulgaria's capital, is in the middle of the Balkan Peninsula. Here can be found Bulgaria's symbol, the neo-Byzantine Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, which contains Europe's largest collection of Orthodox icons. The exterior of this basilica is beautifully decorated with mosaics. The city is full of cultural institutions like their National Art Gallery and National Gallery for Foreign Art. Visitors will love Vitosha Boulevard, the main commercial street of Sofia, with many upscale boutiques and fine places to dine.



The legend of the dragon of Krakow began in Poland. A sleeping dragon lived in a cave. One day a group of children woke the dragon, which made it angry. He began killing sheep. The people tried but could not kill the dragon. A man called Krakus smeared the sheep with sulfur paste. The dragon ate the sheep, which gave him a terrible thirst. He went to the river and drank until he burst. Krakus was made head of the village. When he died, a mound was built over his grave, which exists to this day.....so does the two hundred foot long cave. Today it is called the monster's den on Wawel Hill and is visited by thousands of people every year.

The ancient city of Krakow on the Vistula River is the center of Poland's economic, cultural, artistic and academic life. With many museums and national art galleries, this second most important city in Poland is home to the Czartoryski Museum and Library that houses works by Da Vinci and Rembrandt. With many famous theaters and major museums, it is no wonder that Krakow attracts at least seven million visitors each year.

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