

## The touristic potential of Valea Jiului area

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### Abstract

Tourism represents, through its content and role, a phenomenon which is characteristic to the present civilization. It is one of the major components of economic and social life that polarizes the interest of an ever increasing number of countries. The tourist's role in the national economy of various countries is extremely important, due to the complexity of this phenomenon, of the scale of the activities necessary for its emergence, maintenance and development. Tourism showcases and economically exploits the unique treasure made out the richness of nature and climate, or left by history, folklore and civilization. Without the touristic movement, a country's natural, cultural, and historic treasures will never be the object of an economical activity capable of attracting income. The micro region Valea Jiului (the Jiu Valley) has a rich touristic background up to the present day. However, it is insufficiently exploited. Favoured by the relief of the Transylvanian Carpathians, the Valea Jiului offers a unique natural setting. Although traditionally this region is not regarded as a touristic destination, there are many arguments that can sustain the opposite.

**Key words:** *tourism, ski, Valea Jiului.*

### Rezumat

Turismul reprezintă prin conținutul și rolul său un fenomen caracteristic civilizației actuale, una din componentele majore ale vieții economice și sociale ce polarizează interesul unui număr tot mai mare de țări. Rolul turismului în economia națională a diverselor țări este deosebit de important, datorită complexității acestui fenomen, a anvergurii activităților necesitate de apariția, menținerea și dezvoltarea lui. Turismul pune în valoare și exploatează economic acel tezaur unic format din bogățiile create de natură și climat, sau lăsate de istorie, folclor și civilizație. Fără mișcarea turistică, bogățiile naturale, culturale și istorice ale unei țări nu vor putea să facă niciodată obiectul unei activități economice capabile să creeze venituri. Microregiunea Valea Jiului are un bogat fond turistic până în prezent nu îndeajuns exploatat. Favorizată de relieful Carpaților Transilvăneni, Valea Jiului oferă un cadru natural unic. Deși, în mod tradițional, această regiune nu este considerată o destinație turistică, există mai multe argumente care susțin contrariul.

**Cuvinte cheie:** *turism, schi, Valea Jiului.*

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## Relief

The Valea Jiului Depression is situated in the south of the Hunedoara county, and in south-western Transylvania. The average altitude of this depression is around 600 meters, from where it rises to the mountain peaks, at an altitude of over 2000 meters. The depression is crossed by 2 streams of water, the Eastern Jiu and the Western Jiu. These two rivers subsequently form the Jiu river, that crosses the whole region of Oltenia and then flows into the Danube. The depression is surrounded by four mountain ranges: the Retezat Mountains (natural reserve) situated on the north and north-western sides, the Șureanu Mountains to the east and northeast and the Valcan Mountains to the south.

The Jiu Valley encompasses a number of towns, laid along the two Jiu rivers. The towns from the Valea Jiului contain in their territory over 165.000 people. These towns are: Petrosani, Petrila, Aninoasa, Vulcan, Lupeni, Uricani.

The Petroșani Depression, besides its typical industrial landscape, offers a variety of rarely encountered beauties. Places of wild beauty can be found in all the surrounding areas of the Petrosani Depression [1].

Besides the greatness of the Retezat and Parang ridges, with their moraines and glacial lakes, in any direction you may wander, you will surely be charmed by the beauty of the landscape that you will come across. Grottoes such as the Devil's Cave or Rosia near Petrila, those from the Western Jiu's springs, the Buta Cave, where cave pearls have been found, transparent stalagmites and coloured stalactites offer beauties that remind the viewer of the work of genius sculptors.

The Petroșani Depression has a system of tourist resorts that enables one to visit all these beauties. In the Sebes mountains one can find the hunting lodges Auselul, Jiet, Voievodul and Lunca Florii,

which can be reached via the forest train. In the Parang Mountains, a lodge welcomes its visitors at an altitude of 1680 meters, but 500 meters down, in a broad clearing, one can find the Rusu lodge, that can be reached by road vehicles. Other lodges can be found in appropriate resting spots near the Valcan, Straja and Buta peaks. If one shall wander off the beaten path, one can find shelter in the forest houses scattered on the slopes of the surrounding mountains. From the Parang Peak, in days with maximum visibility, the panorama of the Petrosani Depression gives the onlooker the impression of one town which has grown up out of an abundance of green spaces [2].

**The Retezat Mountains** are part of the Carpathian Mountains, the Retezat-Godeanu mountain group. They rise up between two important depressions, Petroșani and Hațeg and between two important rivers, Raul Mare, that delimits them towards the north and east and the Western Jiu that delimits them to the south. They are surrounded by the Țarcu Mountains to the west, the Godeanu Mountains to the south-west and the Valcan Mountains to the south. It is one of the highest mountain ranges in the country. Within its limits there are 25 important peaks over 2000 meters, seven of which (Peleaga, Papusa, Retezat, Custura, Varful Mare, Bucura and Judele) have an altitude of over 2400 meters.

The most varied and spectacular relief has been created by glacial and periglacial modelling: one can observe immense glacial cirques, valleys that show the presence of long glaciers, large masses of detritus. Most of the glacial lakes in Romania can be found here i.e. about 82. The biggest glacial lake in Romania can also be found here – Bucura (8,5 hectares) and the deepest glacial lake in Romania is also found here - Zănoaga (29 meters deep).

This relief contributes to a significant extent to the ragged aspect of the landscape, with glacial cirques on levels, jagged ridges and rocky slopes.

**The Șureanu Mountains**, situated between Sebeș, the Transylvanian Jiu and Strei, belong to the Meridional Carpathians, being situated on their Transylvanian branch. On a latitude they spread from 45° 53' 15" N and longitudinally between 22° 59' 03" and 23° 39' 10" W, thus having a central to south-west position. This position, correlated with the fact that it is situated in the second front of mountains that stands in the way of western air masses, makes the area one with sufficient precipitation for the optimal development of the forest areas. Hypsometrically, the Șureanu Mountains spread between 350 meters (in the Sebeș river valley and 2130, 2 meters (Vârful lui Pătru – Pătru's Peak). The main feature is a 49 km long ridge, spread between 759 meters (pasul Bănița – the Bănița Pass) and pasul Tărtăraș (the Tărtăraș Pass – 1665 meters), passing over the four peaks of over 2000 meters: Vârful lui Pătru – 2130, 2 meters, Șurianu – 2059 meters, Aușel – 2009 meters, Carpa – 2012 meters. This ridge presents itself as a sequence of levelling surfaces, sometimes marked by slopes. The morph graphical and morph metric structure has imposed the layering of all the environment's components, of the vegetation as a factor that exploits these components.

The most important feature of these mountains is the existence of smoothing surfaces, layered between 1900-2000 meters to 600-700 m, according to the massif's evolution. Strongly deepened valleys sometimes give the appearance of suspended bridges, a feature that fades with the increase in altitude. Emm de Martonne (1923), Valer Trușă (1971), Lucian Badea (1981, 1993), Ioan

Conea and M. Kandel (1950) studied these surfaces.

The micro region Valea Jiului has a strong touristic background that has not been sufficiently exploited up to the present. Favoured by the relief of the Transylvanian Carpathians, Valea Jiului offers a unique natural setting. Although traditionally this region is not regarded as a touristic destination, there are at least three arguments that can support the opposite:

- Valea Jiului is the main gateway to the Retezat National Park and to
- The Parâng, Retezat and Vîlcan Mountains;
- Valea Jiului is a touristic region for all types of budget;
- The Valea Jiului tourist area is a region relatively undiscovered. Due to the geographic location and to the socio-economic context, the mountainous regions and the forest fund have not suffered from anthropic changes to the same extent as other European touristic resorts. By contrast, here one can still discover caves, can still stroll around paths undisturbed the mechanized convoys populated by picnic amateurs, can still explore virgin mountain trails and can still discover cliffs yet "unconquered" by man. When it comes to the richness of the fauna: the whole area is ennobled by the presence of the brown bear, the black goat, the wild boar and the wolf [3-5].

#### **Accommodation possibilities**

In table I we can see an image of the accommodation capacity in the Valea Jiului area. The Straja resort leads by far when it comes to the number of available places in the accommodation structures, with approximately 3700 accommodation places.

**Table I.** Accommodation units – Valea Jiului area

Town	Accommodation units	Places in the accommodation units	Hotels and motels	Lodges	Tourist villas	Others
Petroșani	144	1011	5 hotels	3	1	1 Didactic complex ANEFS 1 Didactic complex CSȘ 132 holiday homes
Lupeni	176	3696	0	0	0	0
Vulcan	59	380	1 motel	55	3	0
Uricani	9	187	1 motel	5	2	1 touristic complex
Petrila	2	44	0	2	0	0
Aninoasa	3	160	2 hotels	1	0	0
<b>Valea Jiului</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>5480</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>135</b>

(Hunedoara County Statistics Department, 2005)

The main touristic objectives of the micro region are: the Parang Massif with the touristic areas Parang and Cheile Tăii, the Vilcan Massif with the touristic resort of local interest Straja – Lupeni and the touristic area Cheile Buții [6-8].

**The Parâng area** with a view towards the Retezat, Vilcan and Sebeș mountains, has a transversal crest with peaks climbing up to 2073,6 meters - Parangul Mic; 2460 m - Carja and 2518 m – Parangul Mare, the Bobea peak -1850 m. The Rusu peak (1168 meters) is located at the foothills of the Parang Mountains.

In the Parang touristic area there are 7 functional ski slopes, one unusable and a sledge slope; out of these, 5 have ski lift facilities and two have night time facilities:

- the SPRE SAIVANE slope, 600 meters long, with a ski lift ;
- the POIANA slope, 800 meters long, with an extension possibility to 900 meters, with ski lift and night time facilities;
- the PILON 17 slope, 400 meters long, with a ski

lift and night time facilities;

- the TELESCHI slope, 400 meters long, with a ski lift;
- the B slope, 1200 meters long, with a ski lift;
- the TELESKAUN slope, 2200 meters long, with a ski lift;
- the EUROPARANG slope, 500 meters long.

Access is made via a chairlift on the 2232 meters long Maleia - Releu TV line. In the resort there are 140 constructions for tourism, out of which five are grand lodges and the rest are holiday homes. There are also buildings with a public function: a relay station of the national television network, a weather station, electric stations etc. The vast majority of the buildings have been constructed in the last 8 years.

**The main forms of tourism** practised are: **recreational tourism (of weekend) and rest**, including hiking and trips; **sportive tourism** – with the practice of winter sports (speleology, alpine skiing, snowboarding, sledge riding, alpinism etc.); **practising of some extreme sports**: paragliding, mountain bike.

The Parang area is nominated in the list of identified areas for the development of ski areas and areas of practising other winter sports, included in the *National tourism development program **Schi în România (Ski in Romania)***, approved through Law nr. 418/2006 regarding the amendment and addition of Law nr. 526/2003.

In the Parang touristic area a number of competitions and sportive manifestations are organized. Some of them are: The County Phase for secondary schools and high schools at alpine skiing, The County phase for secondary schools and high schools at sledge, the Parang Cup, the Telescaun Cup, the Memorial Bacu Cup etc; furthermore, there are schools for alpine skiing and sledge (didactic complex -Clubul Sportiv Școlar Petroșani – School Sports Club Petroșani, didactic complex-ANEFS).

In the southern part of the city of **Petrila** there is a chain of glacial lakes, accessible through Valea Jiețului, from DN 7 A, some 11 km from the village de Jieț, passing through a scenic area, through the Jiețului gorges, a 4<sup>th</sup> degree nature reserve, an area where the lodge Groapa Seacă is situated, on the road DN 7A at an altitude of 1598 meters, in a picturesque setting, surrounded by deep coniferous and deciduous forests, with accommodation possibilities of 33 places. It represents the last point of entrance into the Parang mountains. Following the course of the road by car, one can reach Obarșia Lotrului, the accumulation lake Vidraru and Voineasa and then the road goes further on Râmnicu Vâlcea and Sibiu.

Moreover, there is a series of other accommodation structures in this area, the Lunca Florii lodge, the Aușelul hunting lodge, the Dalja lodge, the Șureanu lodge, the main touristic facility in the massif and a starting point for Sebeș, Oașa and Cugir, Obarșia

Lotrului and the system of Dacian fortresses that once protected Sarmisegetuza Regia.

**The Straja area** is part of the structure and value of the touristic potential with its complexity and attractive landscapes. It sums up all the qualities of an excellent winter resort. It is situated in the heart of the Vulcan Massif, at circa 20 km away from Petroșani. A number of 176 lodges and hostels can offer accommodation to almost 3700 people. The touristic complex is situated at an altitude of 1380 meters. The Straja peak is 1445 meters high. The skiable area is around 40 hectares. Access to the resort is assured by the *Straja chairlift* that has a length of 2536 meters, a level difference of 593 meters, a transportation time = 24 min, a transport capacity = 2 persons, a transport capacity per hour = 410 people, serves the Telescaun slope. A number of facilities operate in the resort: a mountain gendarmerie post, the “Mountain Rescue” service that uses 4 mountain rescuers during winter time daily and ensures medical care during skiing seasons.

#### **Leisure opportunities**

A number of *winter sports* can be practised here: alpine skiing, country skiing, lap skiing, extreme skiing, sledge riding etc. Winter sports are favoured by the ski area that offers 7 ski slopes, situated on town hall property, including those that are about to be landscaped (Table II). The 7 slopes are serviced by a system of ski lifts, homologated by ISCIR. The resort has ski schools (S.C. Vest Week-end S.R.L, Salvamont Lupeni, SC Comexim R SRL), mountain trails, various leisure activities. Moreover, the resort organizes big sportive events: the Veterinary Cup and the Power Station Workers Cup – manifestations of a national interest, competition – the

Vodafone Cup, the Minerul Cup, the Comexim Cup, the Bamby Cup, The Snow Celebrations and the Nedeia Sanzienelor. Declared in October 2002 to be

a touristic resort of local interest, Straja is included in the National Program for Developing Mountain Tourism ‘Superschi in Carpați’ in the second stage.

**Table II.** Homologated skiing slopes – the Valea Jiului area (source: Lupeni Town Hall Statistic Department)

#	Homologated slope	Length (m)	Difficulty	Level difference (m)	Night time facilities
1	Constantinescu	1741.5	Easy	364.0	Yes
2	Lupului	519.0	Difficult	163.0	No
3	Mutu	1269.0	Average	320.0	Yes
4	Sfântu Gheorghe	700.0	Easy	144.5	No
5	Soarelui Plateau	405.0	Easy	51.0	Yes
6	Canal	1240.0	Difficult	180.0	No
7	Telescaun	3200.0	average	593.0	no

80%  
difficult 20%

#### Tourist attractions in the Valea Jiului area

At the **Mining Museum** in Petroșani one can find, exhibited in a few galleries, information regarding the tumultuous history of the Valea Jiului. Personal objects from the whole history of the miners have been exhibited here, including tools and various equipment that have been used in the mines from this area. In the museum’s courtyard a number of large machines used for coal extraction are exhibited, objects that are admired by the visitors of this museum. Various exhibitions, both with a mining character but also with other themes, including art exhibits, also take place here. This is truly a place where the whole history of the Valea Jiului can be admired (figures 1 and 2) [9,10].



**Figure 1.** The Mining Museum (facade)



**Figure 2.** The Mining Museum Petroșani (interior)

▪ **Sarmizegetusa**

Built by order of Roman Emperor Trajan in 106-107 AD, this fortress has served as the capital of the Roman province Dacia until the year 271. The fortress is placed between two natural barriers against attacks (the Retezat Mountains on one side and the Poiana Rusca Mountains on the other side) and the intersection of two main roads of the Roman Empire. The ruins - the columns of the amphitheatre and of the Roman forum, the fortress' walls, the ruins of the temples - are all part of Romania's historic landscape today. Although it is regarded as a treasure from ancient times, the fortress is not being properly taken care of. Visitors can wander alone through the ruins as archaeologists are still excavating in places (figure 3)[9, 10].



**Figura 3.** Sarmizegetusa Regia

▪ **Densus Church**

The church was built in the fourth century AD, mainly using "loaned" stones from the Sarmizegetusa area. Its architecture is unique, including the column the Roman forum that sustain the church's thick walls. Remains of Roman tablets adorn the alley and the entrance to the church. Furthermore, the church has frescoes from the tenth century, the only ones of their kind in Romania, portraying saints and medieval knights. The church is rarely visited and

insufficiently protected, as is the case with Sarmizegetusa (figure 4) [9, 10].



**Figura 4.** Densus Church

▪ **The Hunedoara Castle**

Built in the late Middle Ages, the castle boasts an imposing structure. It is placed so that the river Cerna's gorges assure its natural protection against attacks from the Ottoman Empire and other enemies. The castle's construction started in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and continued up to the 17<sup>th</sup> century because the ownership of the castle was transferred from the D'Anjou family to the Corvin family and the Habsburg Empire. The building is a mixture between late gothic and renaissance styles. The castle has a few towers, an interior courtyard, a knights' hall, a torture chamber, a labyrinth of dark corridors, spiral staircases and hidden entrances. Try to find the centuries old Arabic graffiti. Although it is undergoing renovation, which will last a few years, the castle maintains a ghostly and mysterious spirit or the screeching sounds made by floors and doors (figure 5) [9, 10].



Figura 5. Castelul Hunedoara



Figura 6. Prislop Monastery

#### ▪ The Prislop Monastery

Situated at the end of the Silvasu river valley, behind two of the most bizarre villages in Romania, the monastery is the perfect place to retreat to and meditate. It has a seminars hall, rooms that can be rented by students, a 14<sup>th</sup> century church and a bell tower with only one bell, built between the slope of a hill and a stream that flows behind the church (figure 6). Moreover, a graveyard is located behind the church. A grotto is located in front of the church, sculpted into the slope of a hill, situated near a waterfall. A special wooden plate is tapped by the priest in a unique rhythm in order to summon people to church daily at 10:00 and 18:00.

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