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ON THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ROMANIA'S NATURAL TOURIST RESOURCES

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Romania is one of the most naturally diverse countries in Europe, attracting thousands of tourists each year with its unique landscapes and ecosystems. This article explores Romania's key natural tourism resources, focusing on four major regions: the Carpathian Mountains, the Danube Delta, the Black Sea coast, and salt caves. The Carpathians offer opportunities for mountain tourism, including skiing, trekking, and wildlife observation, with notable locations such as the Retezat National Park and the Bucegi Mountains. The Danube Delta, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a haven for birdwatchers and ecotourists, boasting rich biodiversity and traditional fishing communities. The Black Sea coast features popular seaside resorts like Mamaia, as well as balneological tourism destinations such as Techirghiol, known for its therapeutic mud. Additionally, Romania's salt mines, including the impressive Turda Salt Mine, serve as both tourist attractions and health retreats. Despite its rich natural assets, Romania's ecotourism infrastructure remains underdeveloped compared to leading European destinations like Austria or Switzerland. The article highlights the country's potential for sustainable tourism development and the need for improved infrastructure to fully leverage its natural heritage.

Keywords: Romania, natural tourism resources, ecotourism, Carpathians, Danube Delta, Black Sea coast, salt caves.

Romania is one of the most naturally rich countries in Europe, and its natural resources attract thousands of tourists every year. The four most outstanding natural locations – the Carpathians, the Danube Delta, the Black Sea coast, and salt caves – offer unique ecosystems and numerous opportunities for active and wellness tourism [1].

The Carpathians: Mountain Ranges, Wild Forests, and Adventure Tourism. The Romanian Carpathians cover more than a third of the country's territory, forming a natural barrier that divides it into several regions. This part of the Carpathians is characterized by extraordinary biodiversity, dense forests, and breathtaking alpine landscapes. The highest peak is Moldoveanu Mountain (2,544 m) in the Făgăraș Massif. The mountainous regions provide numerous opportunities for active tourism. In winter, the Carpathians turn into a skiing hotspot, with Poiana Brașov being the most developed ski resort, offering modern lifts, well-maintained slopes, and facilities for both family-friendly and extreme skiing. Other popular ski resorts include Sinaia, Bușteni, Vatra Dornei, and Straja (Fig. 1).

During the warmer months, the Carpathians attract visitors with trekking, climbing, mountain biking, and wildlife watching. In Retezat National Park, famous for its glacial lakes and alpine meadows, visitors may encounter

biodiversity. Visitors can explore its canals and lakes by traditional wooden boats or motorboats, enjoying the serene, untouched nature.

The best time to visit the Danube Delta is spring and autumn, when bird migration is at its peak. Rare species such as the Dalmatian pelican, great white egret, black-headed gull, and white-tailed eagle can be seen here. In addition to its rich wildlife, Letea Forest in the Delta is home to semi-wild horses, which have become another natural symbol of the region.

The Black Sea Coast: Beach Tourism and Balneology. Romania has 245 km of Black Sea coastline, stretching from the Bulgarian border to the Danube Delta. The most famous resort is Mamaia, offering a wide range of hotels, nightclubs, and entertainment options. Its sandy beaches stretch for over 8 km and feature soft golden sand and shallow waters, making it an ideal destination for families.

However, the coastline is not limited to Mamaia. Resorts like Neptun, Venus, Costinești, and Vama Veche each have their unique appeal. For example: Costinești is a favorite among young people due to its summer festivals and lively atmosphere, Vama Veche attracts alternative travelers, backpackers, and campers, maintaining a hippie and bohemian vibe. Beyond beach tourism, Romania's Black Sea coast is known for balneological resorts such as Techirghiol and Eforie Nord. Techirghiol Lake contains therapeutic mud rich in minerals, which is used to treat musculoskeletal conditions.

Salt Caves and Thermal Resorts: Unique Wellness Resources. Romania has significant salt deposits, and former mining sites have been transformed into spectacular underground tourist attractions. The most famous is Turda Salt Mine, an impressive complex where visitors can play bowling, row on an underground lake, or even attend concerts.

Another major wellness attraction is Romania's thermal spa resorts, such as Băile Felix, Sovata, and Băile Tușnad. These resorts offer natural hot springs rich in minerals, which are used to treat skin conditions, joint problems, and nervous system disorders. Lake Ursu in Sovata is particularly famous for its "heliothermic" properties, creating a unique natural healing effect.

Romania's natural tourist resources combine stunning landscapes, rich biodiversity, and wellness attractions, making the country an appealing destination for all types of travelers – from adventure seekers to those looking for relaxation. Despite Romania's enormous potential for ecotourism, infrastructure development remains a challenge, and the country does not yet capitalize on its natural assets as effectively as Austria or Switzerland.

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