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Stepping onto New Soil for the First Time

Written by Brianna Shawhan, Journalism Volunteer

I had never been outside of America until coming to Brasov. I didn't know what to expect, so butterflies crept their way into my belly as my plane neared landing. I thought – How different is Brasov from America? Will I be able to survive? Am I going to get homesick? Should I have even done this?

But the first step I took inside Brasov at four in the morning confirmed that I made the perfect decision. Even at night with sleepy eyes and jet lag, Brasov is beautiful. The street I called home for six weeks has cobblestoned sidewalks and is lined with colorful medieval homes. When I walked down the street, I noticed that many roads were like this. Everywhere was colorful, cobblestoned, and medieval.



Because of the medieval architecture, my first impression was that Brasov is very different from America. It is in many ways, but after spending a few days there you'll find that it has become very modern after communism's fall. Clothing, souvenir, and even tattoo shops line the main streets. Food choices differ from authentic Romanian restaurants to McDonald's, KFC, and a slew of pizza places. Dance clubs and bars offer places for young people to go to at night. In my Illinois hometown, everyone drives everywhere because stores are spaced farther apart. But in Brasov, people are out and walking around in the center, offering many opportunities to meet new people.

I thought living in Romania for six weeks would be scary, but the atmosphere is exciting and so far everyone has been kind even though I don't speak Romanian. On my first day, as I stared at a cashier lady in confusion, I knew that the language barrier was going to be difficult, but there are many people who know some English. And after a few days, you start to pick up on some Romanian.

But all of this is just Brasov. On my first day of doing the Care Project, I saw a very different side of Romania. I worked at an orphanage in Budila, a very poor and small village. The architecture has its colorful charms that contrast poor towns in America, but instead of cars, most people in Budila get around on horse and buggy.

Working in care, especially in these very poor towns, is probably the most rewarding work you can do here. The kids are wonderful and happy to meet people who want to play with them. It's difficult to understand them because of the language barrier, but the kids never got frustrated at me for it. It became a game to teach each other how to count in our languages. In the end, the language barrier wasn't even a problem because the kids simply enjoyed playing with me.

I'm sad that I won't be working with the kids anymore, but excited to start learning about how journalism works in a different country.

Care Updates

by Andrea Mason

When I first arrived in Romania I remember feeling both very excited and apprehensive at the same time. I had already done a voluntary placement a few years ago so I kind of knew what to expect, but it was still unknown territory and I had never lived with a host family before. My host was very pleasant and she made me feel very welcome in her home. The facilities are relatively basic but comparable.

Brasov itself is a wonderful place to be based. Having visited a few other places around Romania, I can honestly say that it is the most picturesque, friendly and one of the most interesting places to be. My only word of warning would concern money. Although everything is much cheaper than at home, it is very easy to spend money and the estimation given in the guide material is rather conservative if you want to eat out a few times a week, have a few drinks and visit the recommended places.

My main placement is at an orphanage in a nearby village. The kids range in age from two to 11 and they are lovely. We usually plan craft activities and games the day before and sort materials to take the next day. The kids enjoy drawing, coloring and making things they can keep. Although there is no one at the placement that can translate, communicating with the children is not a problem and things get easier the more time you get to know them.

I also attend a placement in another town twice a week in the afternoon. The purpose of this placement is to provide support to a project that gives children from state run homes the chance to do craft-based activities after school. I work as an assistant alongside the lady who runs the project (she is Romanian, so this helps where communication is concerned).

I am finding the placements challenging, but in a good way. If you are considering a Care Project, you must be prepared to work hard, but it is very rewarding. I have another six weeks at my placements and I love every minute of it. I will be really upset when it comes my time to leave.



Events Updates

Transhumanta 2013

Crystal of Great Nature and Culture

(Written by Kazuki Shimada, journalism volunteer))

Imagine a scene with no high buildings, a wide sight, a green hill, a calm lake and mountains looking down on you. The event was held in that place. It is called Transhumanta, and every year starts in Rotavab, Brasov County. This is a project of traditional movement of the professional shepherds with 300 sheep through the Carpathians, which is organised to celebrate historical transhumance of the Vlach shepherds, which in the past led to the settlement of the mountain area and the creation of a common pastoral culture in the Carpathians. The shepherds cross 1400 km of mountain areas through: Romania - Ukraine - Poland - Slovakia - Czech Republic, from 11th of May to 14th of September.

When I arrived, soft music welcomed me. The place was filled with sheep and shepherds. Somebody was putting on a Romanian traditional costume and I enjoyed witnessing all these traditions. At the same time, the smell of grilled meat combined with fresh air tickled my nose. The sheep were gathered together in an enclosure and their voices became a part of the music. The view from top of the hill caught my eyes: a green and blue world spread out in front of my eyes.

At that time, the opening ceremony just started. A presenter declared the opening of the festival and the audience clapped in delight. After the opening ceremony, various performances were shown: mainly people playing traditional musical instruments, singing and dancing with traditional music. Visitors were having a good time hearing beautiful music while enjoying a pleasant cool breeze under the sun and the blue sky.



Then, I noticed, a girl wearing traditional clothes distributing cheese. She was adorable, she made all visitors smile. Her family was selling various cheese types in the stand. According to them, the tradition of making cheese from sheep's milk was kept intact for hundreds of years. By the stand, a man was cooking 'Polenta' (mămăligă - corn meal) with cheese and many visitors drawn by that good smell came to the stand. Also, in another stand, I saw an interesting man. He was putting on a shepherd's costume and a big cloak made from sheep's fur. His name is Muresanu. He is promoting Romanian food and culture to visitors. He is part of a nonprofit association from Romania, called Slow Food Convivium Brasov, member of Slow Food International network. They organise local events and markets to show quality products and help quality food producers connect. Through their actions they promote healthy eating, starting from the principles promoted by the International Slow food movement.

I asked the visitors their impressions about these types of events. A man said, "These events are beneficial for the community because they can see the traditions in detail. And I love the traditional culture." The man told me he was really enjoying the event. Also, I had seen people from other countries, which were enjoying the event and the Romanian traditions.

Surrounded by nature and watching people enjoying the culture and traditions, fascinated me. Fascination is, in a word, what "Transhumanta 2013" meant for me.





Telephoning in Romania

Having difficulty telephoning in – or to – Romania?

THIS GUIDE SHOULD HELP

When phoning a Brasov number from a Brasov number, use the prefix 0268/0368 followed by the six digit local number.

When phoning a Brasov number from out of county, dial 0268 before the six digit number

When dialling a mobile phone number from within Romania that begins with 07x always include 07x

When dialling Romania from overseas dial up your international connection (usually 00) then 40 (for Romania), followed by the area code without 0 (that's 268 for Brasov, and 7x for mobile phones) and local number.

Callers from overseas are reminded that the time in Romania is GMT + 2 hrs