

## VIA TRANSILVANICA IN THE MEHEDIŢI COUNTY

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**Abstract:** Via Transilvanica is a cultural pedestrian road that connects three historical regions of Romania: Moldova, Transylvania and Banat. Kilometer zero of this road is in the municipality of Drobeta Turnu Severin, where the history of the Romanian people began, consisting of the symbiosis of Dacians and Romanians. The road, initiated and built during last 4 years, by the Uşeriu brothers, is marked, from kilometer to kilometer, with andesite markers that were carved by volunteer artists with symbols representing the main tourist attractions on each route. The Via Transilvanica includes 7 segments, depending on the historical areas: Bucovina, Tinutul de Sus, Terra Siculorum, Terra Saxonum, Terra Dacica, Terra Banatica and Terra Romana. Travelers have to follow a number of 67 routes walking or cycling. In the Mehedinţi county, this road includes 5 of the 7 routes of Terra Romana. Tourists cross the Mehedinţi Plateau towards the Mehedinţi Mountains, passing through one of the main karst areas in Romania, across the Mesozoic limestone bar Cireşu-Baia De Aramă. The Via Transilvanica project aims to culturalize the masses and to develop the local economy in particular. In the Mehedinţi county, one of the risks is related to protected natural areas and carrying capacity.

**Keywords:** Via Transilvanica, cultural road, tourism, Mehedinti County, carrying capacity.

### INTRODUCTION

Via Transilvanica was fully inaugurated in October 2022, with the installation, in the Alba County, of the last kilometer markers of the route. The course is about 1400 km, through Banat and Transylvania, to Moldova, to the Putna Monastery, founded by the famous ruler Stephen the Great<sup>1</sup>. The initiative to establish and build the Via Transilvanica road belongs to Alin Uşeriu, founder of the Tăşuleasa Social Association, and to his brother, Tiberiu<sup>2</sup>, the famous ultramarathonist<sup>3</sup> who won the Arctic Ultra 6633 international competition three times in a row. For over 4 years,

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C8%98tefan\\_cel\\_Mare](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C8%98tefan_cel_Mare)

<sup>2</sup> See [https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiberiu\\_U%C8%99eriu](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiberiu_U%C8%99eriu)

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.digisport.ro/alte-sporturi/tibi-useriu-tot-mai-aproape-de-a-castiga-pentru-a-treia-oara-consecutiv-ultramaratonul-de-la-cercul-polar-409422>

the two brothers, born in Bistrița-Năsăud county, managed to train volunteers, resources and local authorities to be able to define, draw, map and arrange the road<sup>4</sup>.

### VIA TRANSILVANICA VERSUS CAMINO DE SANTIAGO

Via Transilvanica is a marked route that crosses the country from Putna to Drobeta Turnu Severin and has like organizational model the famous Camino de Santiago, which has the final destination to the Roman Catholic cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, at the tomb of the Holy Apostle Jacob, the patron saint of Spain<sup>5</sup>. The Camino is 825 km long, has several routes, marked with landmarks, a traveler's guide<sup>6</sup>, a passport for stamps obtained at various stopping points, involve numerous international tourists, especially Catholic believers. The Camino also has external routes, departing from France and Portugal<sup>7</sup>. However, there are two big differences in the conception of the two roads: the Via Transilvanica does not currently have external routes and, although it can be called a road of self-discovery, as is the Camino, this road, nicknamed the "Road that unites"<sup>8</sup>, has no motivation a single religious destination for the veneration of a single saint, the explanation being the multiculturalism that characterizes Romania: 18 religions are official, the largest share being Orthodox (approx. 90%) and Catholics. At the northern end of Via Transilvanica, in Putna, there is the tomb of Ștefan the Great, one of the most glorious and beloved leaders of the Moldavian region. Stephen the Great, ruler of Moldova between 1457 and 1504, was also called a saint because he founded or helped build numerous places of worship in Moldova. How many battles won, so many monasteries he built. He led the army in more than 40 battles, then founded a large number of monasteries and churches both in Moldova and in Wallachia, Transylvania or Mount Athos. Romanians worship at his tomb, as a sign of respect and in memory of the glorious history in which Stephen, nicknamed the Great even though he was small in stature, won numerous wars fought especially against the invading Ottoman Empire. However, the initiators of the Via Transilvanica road did not make the tomb at the Putna Monastery the main key destination. On the contrary, they let travelers choose to start their journey either at the Putna Monastery, in Moldova, or in Drobeta, in another place with an even stronger historical imprint related to the formation of the Romanian people, through the symbiosis of Dacians and Romanians. A part of the bridge of Trajan's Bridge, built by Apollodorus of Damascus to facilitate the passage of Roman troops across the Danube to conquer Dacia, is located in Drobeta (the other, in Serbia) and is one of the most important

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.viatransilvanica.com/contribuie>

<sup>5</sup> See [https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drumul\\_Sf%C3%A2ntului\\_Iacob](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drumul_Sf%C3%A2ntului_Iacob)

<sup>6</sup> See <https://stingynomads.com/camino-de-santiago-walking-guide/>

<sup>7</sup> See <https://santiagoways.com/es/que-ver-en-la-catedral-de-santiago/>

<sup>8</sup> See <https://viatransilvanica.com/concept>

Romanian historical vestiges<sup>9</sup>. Another historical landmark, also in Drobeta, is marked by the commemorative slab on the place where Carol I set foot, for the first time, on Romanian soil in 1866<sup>10</sup>. Then he said “By setting foot on this sacred land, I became Romanian”, according to the former director of the Mehedinți National Archives, Tudor Rățoi<sup>11</sup>. Alin Ușeriu states that Via Transilvanica is “the road to the identity of Transylvania”, inspired by similar famous roads from several continents.

“We were inspired by the pilgrimage trails in Spain and the endurance trails in the United States or India, we saw that such roads influenced cultures, formed communities and contributed to the development of the areas they crossed. Via Transilvanica is a brave road because it makes us rediscover landmarks and talk about who we really are, from the blade of grass on the banks of the Danube to the mountain peaks. Via Transilvanica is identity. Because it gives us the chance to know our history better and thus understand ourselves better – as a nation”,

he said<sup>12</sup>.

#### FOUR YEARS FOR THE BIG ROAD

The road was built in several stages: the first 100 km were built in Bistrița-Năsăud county. By 2020, 800 km have been laid out, adding Suceava, Mureș, Harghita, Brașov, Sibiu and Mehedinți counties, in 2021 – another 254 km in Caraș-Severin county. In 2022, all 1,400 km were ready, adding Hunedoara and Alba counties. In the Alba Iulia city, the road was officially inaugurated in its entirety, at the beginning of October 2022. The Mehedinți section was inaugurated in September 2019, in the port of Drobeta Turnu Severin, by the Prince Nicolae and his wife. The bollard installed here represents the steel crown of the Romanian king Carol I, a sculpture made by the artist Andrii Doru-Emil. From the place where, in 1866, King Carol I stepped on the Romanian territory for the first time, the last kilometer was walked to the foot of Trajan's Bridge, to the last marker located in the yard of the Museum of the Iron Gates I Region<sup>13</sup>. This last marker is the work of an artist from Bistrita-Năsăud, Maxim Dumitraș. The County Council and the Mehedinți Plateau Geopark then precisely established the route on the territory of Mehedinți county<sup>14</sup>, the arrangements making it possible to cross on foot or

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<sup>9</sup> E. Catrina, V. Cucu, G. Erdeli et al., *Județele patriei – Mehedinți*, Bucharest, Sport-Turism Publishing, 1981.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://audiotravelguide.ro/monument-carol-i-drobeta-turnu-severin/>

<sup>11</sup> See <https://historia.ro/sectiune/actualitate/147-de-ani-de-la-momentul-in-care-regele-carol-i-a-581512.html>

<sup>12</sup> For more details, see <https://ziare.com/via-transilvanica/via-transilvanica-drumetie-traseu-putna-severin-istorie-camino-1723235>

<sup>13</sup> Albulețu Ion, *Zona turistică Porțile de Fier*, Bucharest, Sport-turism Publishing, 1982.

<sup>14</sup> See <https://viatransilvanica.com/noutati/lansare-la-drobeta-turnu-severin>

by bicycle. The path was marked with kilometer markers and involved artists and volunteers here as well. The entire route, from Drobeta to Putna or vice versa, can be covered partially, in a few days, or completely, in a few weeks, depending on the will and training of the travelers. Via Transilvanica infrastructure provides data on accommodation and meal possibilities, but also historical and cultural information of different geographical areas. In this sense, a guide was developed with maps and information about natural and anthropic tourist attractions, accommodation units (hotels, guesthouses, cabins, inns) and private places where locals can host hikers, water and food supply points, SOS resources, communications and information services. The Via Transilvanica guide contains the description of all the routes included in the 7 roads that segment the Via Transilvanica. This guide is one of the instruments used for the analysis of Via Transilvanica routes features in the Mehedinți county.



**Fig. 1.** The Putna monastery where is the tomb of Stefan the Great

**Source:** <https://infoturism.net/manastirea-putna/>



**Fig. 2.** Carol I monument, Drobeta Turnu Severin

**Source:** <https://audiotravelguide.ro/monument-carol-i-drobeta-turnu-severin/>

## TERRA ROMANA

Terra Romana is a part of Via Transilvanica that connects Mehedinți and Caraș Severin counties.

### THE 5 ROUTES IN THE MEHEDINȚI COUNTY

The 5 routes from Mehedinți County are included in Terra Romana, which has 7 routes – 2 on the territory of Caraș-Severin County (See Table no. 1). The routes from Mehedinți have a total length of 98 km, which, theoretically, can be covered in two days (37.5 h).

*Table no. 1*  
Terra Romana road included in Via Transilvanica

Nr. Crt.	Routes	County	Distance	Estimated time	Max. Altit.
1.	Drobeta-Turnu-Severin-Balotești	MH	18km	5,5 h	95 m
2.	Balotești-Cireșu	MH	20km	9,5h	633m
3.	Cireșu-Isverna	MH	25 km	9,5 h	668m
4.	Isverna-Obârșia Cloșani	MH	11 km	4,5 h	456m
5.	Obârșia Cloșani-Valea Cernei	MH	24km	8,5 h	1356m
6.	Valea Cernei-Prisăcina	CS	12km	3h	1351m
7.	Prisăcina-Crușovăț	CS	22 km	2h	722m

**Source:** Personal processing according to The traveler's guide on the Via Transilvanica, 2022.

### MEHEDINTI ROUTE – SHORT DESCRIPTION<sup>15</sup>

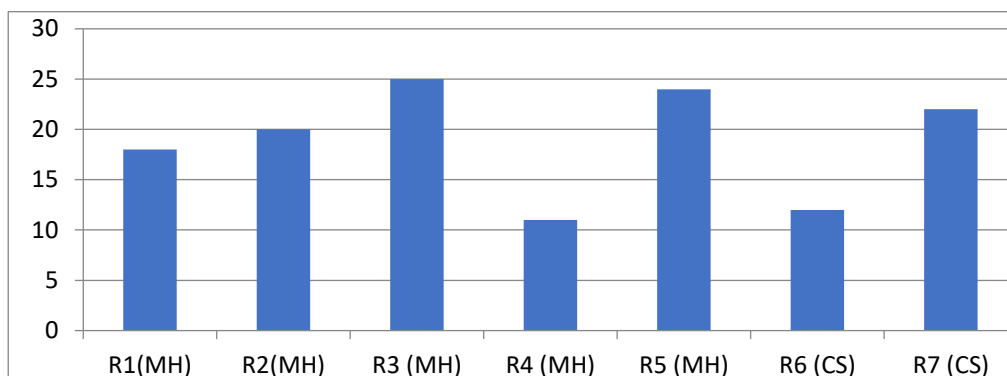
The route starts from Drobeta Turnu Severin, follows the course of the Topolnița river through Halânga and Balotești, climbs past the Grădețului Citadel, passes through Godeanu and past the entrance to the Topolnița Cave. It continues through Cireșu, Balta, Isverna and Obârșia Cloșani and climbs until it reaches the Cerna river. Then it leaves

<sup>15</sup> According to Anna Székely, *The traveler's guide on the Via Transilvanica*, Tășuleasa social Foundation, 2022.

Mehedinți county. It goes down Valea Cernei to Ineț, where it continues its way through Caraș-Severin, to Oțelul Roșu, and then through Hunedoara to Hațeg.

### THE LONGEST ROUTES IN MEHEDIŢI COUNTY

The longest routes in Mehedinți county are R 3 – CIREȘU – ISVERNA and R5 – OBÂRȘIA CLOȘANI – VALEA CERNEI (see Fig. 3) R3 crosses the center of the Mehedinți Plateau, and the second one passes through the mountain area of this county (over The Mehedinți Mountains).



**Fig. 3.** Representation by distance of the routes on Terra Romana

**Source:** Personal processing according to The traveler's guide on the Via Transilvanica, 2022

### MEHEDINTI – DETAILED ROUTE

Leaving Drobeta, travelers can admire numerous natural and antropic tourist attractions both inside the city and in its surroundings, and then (see Table no. 2), starting from the exit of the city and following the course of the Topolnița river, they will cross one of the most beautiful karst areas of Romania. Here is the route step by step, through Mehedinți county<sup>16</sup>:

In Drobeta Turnu Severin, the route starts from the Iron Gates Region Museum, where it is the first stop and where, in addition to the museum, you can visit the Roman Fort, the Roman baths, the Church with counterfort, the ruins of Trajan's Bridge. It then continues on Carol street to Traian College, where it turns left on Smârdan street, next to the Severin Medieval Castle, to Drobeta Turnu Severin port. A milestone indicates the place related to the king's arrival in the country.

<sup>16</sup> The Source of the data: Geopark Mehedinți Plateau administration, 2022.

From the port, go up Portului str., past the former public bath - at present there are the headquarters of the Inspectorate for Emergency Situations Drobeta Turnu Severin, Rozelor Park, Continental Hotel, Teodor Costescu Palace of Culture, Cinetica Fountain, Tudor Vladimirescu Central Park, Administrative Palace, The Episcopal Cathedral, the Castle of the Arts (the former water castle) Hall R and Radu Negru and the Decebal Shopping Complex. Then continue on Crișan str., until the intersection with Bd. Revolutiei 16-22 Decembrie 1989, where you turn right, until the roundabout at the intersection with str. I.C. Brătianu, where you turn left until you exit the city. The route through the city is about 7 km.

After leaving Drobeta Turnu Severin city, the route continues through Izvoru Bârzii commune. In the village of Halânga, turn left onto DC10, immediately after the former thermal power plant. It goes towards Schintiești and then, still ahead, on a section of unpaved road, until Balotești. At the exit from Balotești, turn right towards Păunești. About 1 km away from the intersection, you can leave the route to visit the ruins of the Grădețului Citadel.

After passing through Păunești, you reach The big Cross from Godeanu, and then the route continues through the village of Marga in the commune of Godeanu. From there, you reach the top of the Topolnița Cave and the route continues to the village of Cireșu. It then continues to the village of Balta, passing near the Epuran and Balta Caves. From here, you go to Isverna, near Isverna Cave, then Seliște, and then to Obârsia Cloșani. From there, the route continues north through the Drăghiceanu Forest, until it reaches Valea Cernei, near the village of Cerna Sat. The route follows Valea Cernei up to the town of Scarișoara, where it leaves Mehedinți county.

#### MAIN NATURAL AND ANTROPIC TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

People can see numerous natural and antropic tourist attractions on the Terra Romana road, in the Mehedinți county. Drobeta Turnu Severin city and Topolnița and Isverna caves are the most beautiful attractions<sup>17</sup>. See Table no. 2 for routes, main natural and antropic tourist objectives but also potential dangers on this road.

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<sup>17</sup> Ioana Mihaela Iamandei, *Turismul cinegetic și turismul piscicol în județul Mehedinți*, Bucharest, Universitară Publishing, 2016.

Table no 2  
Main Natural and Antropic Tourist Attractions on the Terra Romana Road

<i>Crt No</i>	<i>Routes</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Road type</i>	<i>Landscapes</i>	<i>Main Natural Tourist attractions</i>	<i>Main Antropic Tourist attractions<sup>18</sup></i>	<i>Potential dangers</i>
1.	Drobeta-Turnu-Severin-Balotești	MH	Urban roads, country roads	Urban area, Industrial area	Danube Topolnița River, Șimian island, Ada Kaleh island	Traian Bridge (The Bridges of Apolodor from Damascus) Carol I monument, The Iron gates History Museum, Iron Gates, Medieval fortress of Severin, Iron Gates II Hydropower and navigation system, The Castle of Arts	Car traffic, disused bridge over Topolnita river
2.	Balotești-Cireșu	MH	Paved road, Footpaths, forest roads, country roads	Forests, hills, mountains, karst area, caves, rivers, rural area, Rural architecture	Topolnița gorges	Topolnița hermitage Gradetului fortress The big Cross from Godeanu	Stormy weather phenomena
3.	Cireșu-Isverna	MH	Footpaths, forest roads, country roads	Forests, hills, mountains, karst area, caves, rivers, karst lake, Vernacular architecture, mills, mediterranean vegetation	Topolnița cave, Balta lake, Balta Cave Gornovita Lake Isverna Cave, Cerboanei Hill, Babelor Hill	Disused Mills on the rivers, Gornovița church, Isverna church	Vipera Ammodytes, Stormy weather phenomena, sheepfold dogs

<sup>18</sup> Vasile Cucu, Ana Popova-Cucu, *Județul Mehedinți*, Bucharest, Academiei RSR Publishing, 1980; I., Constantinescu, *România de la A la Z*, Bucharest, Stadion Publishing, 1970.



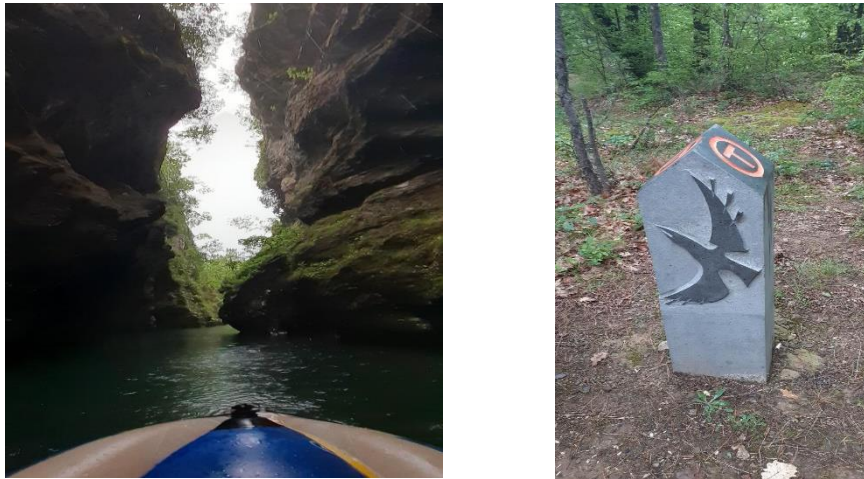
4.	Isverna-Obârșia Cloșani	MH	Footpaths, forest roads, country roads	Forests, hills, karst area, mountains, caves, rivers, vernacular architecture mediterranean vegetation	Isverna Cave, The mediterranean forests from Isverna, the sources of the Coșuștea river, Karst complex from Ponoare-Natural Bridge from Ponoare, Zăton Lake	Isverna Church, Ponoare Church	Vipera Ammodytes, Stormy weather phenomena  sheepfold dogs, foxes
5.	Obârșia Cloșani-Valea Cernei	MH	Footpaths, forest roads, country roads	Forests, hills, mountains, plateau, karst area, caves, rivers, vernacular architecture	Prisaca Lake, Caves from the Obârșia Cloșani area ( Cracul cu plopi cave, The cave from Cheia Comoriștii) Piatra Cloșani		Vipera Ammodytes, Stormy weather phenomena, sheepfold dogs, foxes, rock falls
6.	Valea Cernei-Prisăcina	CS	Footpaths, forest roads, country roads	Forests, hills, karst area, caves, rivers, glades in the forest, sheepfold, Pinus Nigra forests	Valea Cernei/Cerna valley	Ineleț and Scărișoara isolated villages,	Vipera Ammodytes, Stormy weather phenomena, rock falls
7.	Prisăcina - Crușovăț	CS	Footpaths, forest roads, country roads	Forests, hills, karst area, caves, rivers, Cerna basin, glades in the forest, sheepfold	Domogled Valea Cernei National Park, Prisăcinei Gorges, Vânturătoarea waterfall	Dobraia church Herculane Baths	Vipera Ammodytes, Stormy weather phenomena

**Source:** Personal processing based on personal data both according to The traveler's guide on the Via Transilvanica, 2022



**Fig. 4. a, b** Landscapes from Mehedinti Plateau

**Source:** Personal Archive, 2020



**Fig. 5. a.** Topolnita cave, Gaura lui Ciocardie entrance; **b.** Via Transilvanica sign near Topolnita cave

**Source:** Personal Archive, 2022

#### ACCOMMODATION AND MEAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Via Transilvanica in Mehedinți county involves crossing the routes in segments. Routes can be up to 25 km (See Fig 3). In addition, the road is winding, in some areas with slopes of various degrees, so with ups and downs, on forest roads with gravel or dirt marked by ravines. Also, many of the objectives to visit determine the temporary leaving of Via Transilvanica for several hours. Accommodation places are limited, as there are very few guesthouses in the area. As a rule, accommodation is in Drobeta Turnu Severin or in Herculane, where there are hotels and guesthouses, restaurants and shops with various offers. Within the Mehedinti Plateau, the possibilities for accommodation and meals are limited – see Table no. 3.

*Table no. 3*  
The possibilities for accommodation and meals on the Terra Romana Route

<b>Crt. No.</b>	<b>Cities, villages</b>	<b>Type of accommodation unit</b>	<b>Type of food and water supply unit</b>
1	Drobeta Turnu Severin city	Hotels, hostels, Pensions	Shops, restaurants, bars
2	Cireșu	Camping, Mehedinți Plateau Geopark Center	Shop, bar
3	Isverna	Pensions	Shop, Restaurant, bar
4	Herculane city	Hotels, pensions camping	Shops, restaurants, bars

**Source:** Personal processing

### VIA TRANSILVANICA AND CARRYING CAPACITY

Mehedinți Plateau Geopark includes numerous protected natural areas, for which aggressive tourism can be a danger. The geopark is characterized by roads with limited road traffic and tourist routes traversed by extreme sports enthusiasts. Here nature surprises with the diversity of natural landscapes from Mediterranean vegetation, with Turkish hazel, fig, lilac forests, in the Mehedinți Plateau, to the vegetation specific to the mountain, with different levels of *pinus nigra* – Banat black pine, in the northwest of Mehedinți county. Most of the landscapes on Terra Romana are forests, and travelers traverse the Via Transilvanica on footpaths, forest roads and unpaved country roads, following the markers and carved markers of this route. The construction of this road through the Mehedinți Plateau did not include new paths and roads. Travelers are guided along roads and paths used so far only by locals, so very little beaten. Nature has preserved its integrity in general, being conserved both by measures specific to the geopark and by those who live within the Mehedinți Plateau. Via Transilvanica will increase the number of tourists in this area and this will come with some benefits for the communities. A problem specific to protected natural areas, however, is the control of the degree of supportability of the territory towards an ever-increasing number of tourists. In time, the authorities involved in the conservation of protected natural areas will be obliged to conduct an audit of the areas traveled by travelers on the Via Transilvanica. Their purpose will be to determine the degree of damage to the transited areas and establish the measures according to the results of the environmental audits.

### GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Via Transilvanica is a national marked route that crosses the country from Putna to Drobeta Turnu Severin and has like organizational model the famous Camino de Santiago.

This road has several routes, marked with landmarks, a traveler's guide, a passport for stamps obtained at various stopping points. Via Transilvanica does not currently have external routes. Via Transilvanica road did not make the tomb at the Putna Monastery the main key destination; travelers can choose to start their journey either at the Putna Monastery, in Moldova, or at Drobeta. The 5 routes from Mehedinți County are included in Terra Romana, which has 7 routes – 2 on the territory of Caraș-Severin County. The longest routes in Mehedinți county are R 3 – CIREȘU – ISVERNA and R5 – OBÂRȘIA CLOȘANI – VALEA CERNEI. People can see numerous natural and antropoc Tourist attractions on the Terra Romana road. Drobeta Turnu Severin and Topolnița and Isverna caves are the most beautiful attractions. The possibilities for accommodation and meals on the Terra Romana Route are limited. Via Transilvanica will increase the number of tourists in this area and this will come with some benefits for the communities. It needs to determine the degree of damage to the transited areas and establish the measures according to the results of the environmental audits.

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