



EUROPEAN REGION OF GASTRONOMY
HARGHITA CANDIDATE 2027

HARGHITA





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Content

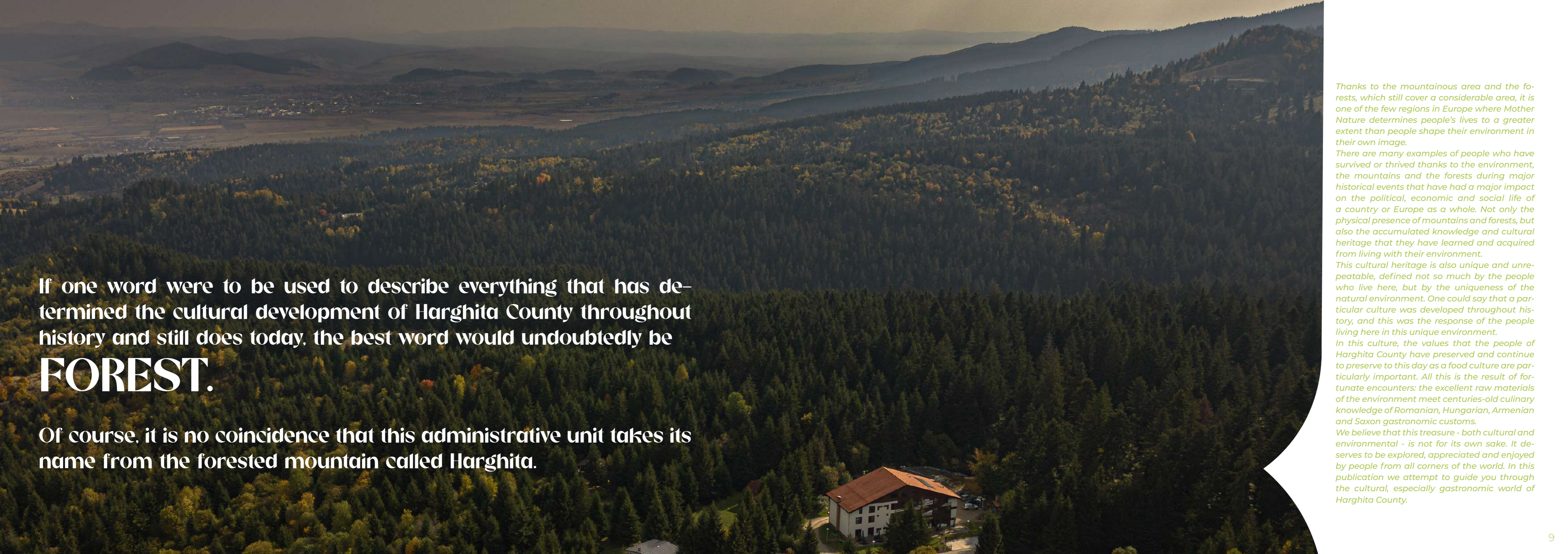
1	A cavalcade of tastes and experiences in Harghita county	10
	Elevating Tourism in Harghita County	11
	AMBASSADOR Albert László Barabási	13
	Harghita County: Blessed by Nature	14
	Food culture and traditions	15
	Pastures and hay meadows	16
	Our daily bread	18
	The revolution of milk: matured cheese	21
	Green chef Viola Dakó makes the forest edible	22
	Trademarks for superior quality	24

2	Gastronomy and values kept at home	29
	Featured gastronomic events	31
	Taste of Transylvania	32
	Easter Food Consecration	37
	Stuffed cabbage festival	38
	Ákovita	38
	Young Chefs	39
	Cooking Competition	39
	Harghita's events calendar	40
	Hospitality and tourism in practice	43
	2022 - Year of Gastronomy	46
	Culinary influence: historical footprint on gastronomy	51
	Gastro literature	55
	Education	61
	The Courses	62
	PanGastRo	62
	Course Academy	62
	Food Science Department	63
	EU-level partnerships	64

3	Candidacy	72
	Harghita County: a catalyst for IGCAT's vision Consortium	75
	Goals	79
	Marketing and communication	80
	Budget 2024-2030	82
		84

Harghita County





If one word were to be used to describe everything that has determined the cultural development of Harghita County throughout history and still does today, the best word would undoubtedly be

FOREST.

Of course, it is no coincidence that this administrative unit takes its name from the forested mountain called Harghita.

Thanks to the mountainous area and the forests, which still cover a considerable area, it is one of the few regions in Europe where Mother Nature determines people's lives to a greater extent than people shape their environment in their own image.

There are many examples of people who have survived or thrived thanks to the environment, the mountains and the forests during major historical events that have had a major impact on the political, economic and social life of a country or Europe as a whole. Not only the physical presence of mountains and forests, but also the accumulated knowledge and cultural heritage that they have learned and acquired from living with their environment.

This cultural heritage is also unique and unrepeatable, defined not so much by the people who live here, but by the uniqueness of the natural environment. One could say that a particular culture was developed throughout history, and this was the response of the people living here in this unique environment.

In this culture, the values that the people of Harghita County have preserved and continue to preserve to this day as a food culture are particularly important. All this is the result of fortunate encounters: the excellent raw materials of the environment meet centuries-old culinary knowledge of Romanian, Hungarian, Armenian and Saxon gastronomic customs.

We believe that this treasure - both cultural and environmental - is not for its own sake. It deserves to be explored, appreciated and enjoyed by people from all corners of the world. In this publication we attempt to guide you through the cultural, especially gastronomic world of Harghita County.



A cavalcade of tastes and experiences in Harghita County

In Harghita county we are taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the landscape and we are building family-friendly, active, sustainable tourism that is close to nature. The Harghita County Council, together with its sub-institutions, supports developments that create the conditions for slow and green tourism.

Our goal is to create four-season programs that help the visitor explore our wonderful landscapes with the designated pedestrian and bicycle paths. For winter sports lovers the most attractive is the county's ski track system. More and more accommodations are awarded the Family-friendly certification. New Local Gastronomic Points are opening and they offer local, traditional dishes to tourists, ensuring an unforgettable experience.

Nature trails, salt mine, mountain tourism, Via Ferrata attract foreigners. Religious tourism is also important in our region. We will continue to develop these in the future on behalf of the Harghita County Council, in cooperation with our sub-institutions.

We are waiting for you in Harghita county to wander through our wonderful landscapes, taste excellent food and to clink glasses with a good brandy.

Don't miss the experience!

Csaba Borboly,
president of Harghita County Council



Elevating Tourism in Harghita County

As the vice-president of the County Council, it has been an honour to develop and support tourism in Harghita County, coordinating various initiatives. With a dedicated team of experts, we have ensured that the sector not only survived recent crises, but emerged stronger. Our proactive measures, such as launching a tourism app in 2019, introducing a Family-Friendly rating system in 2020, and collaborating with nationally recognized tourism influencers, have bolstered our efforts. Since

2021, we've been actively involved in projects with our European partners, enhancing our regional profile. The hard work of recent years was recognized in 2024 when we won the Best Promotion Award in Romania, affirming our progress. Tourism is a dynamic field, requiring constant adaptation to changing trends and we are committed to this continuous evolution.

In 2023 we ambitiously started to pursue the title of European Region of Gastronomy, dedicating nearly a year to this endeavour. Our extensive consultations with stakeholders have reinforced our belief in its potential.

Proud of our rich natural and cultural heritage, we confidently invite the European community to experience our hospitality. We are preparing the local hospitality industry to welcome guests with a beautifully laid table and the famous Szekler warmth and hospitality.

Taste Harghita!

Barna-Botond Bíró
vice-president of Harghita County Council,
president of ADI Harghita (Visit Harghita)



AMBASSADOR

Albert László Barabási

network scientist

Albert-László Barabási, world-famous physicist and network researcher, was born in Cârța village, completed his secondary school education in Miercurea Ciuc, then studied in Bucharest and Budapest, from where he eventually made his way to Boston. He is currently a fellow of several universities in the United States and a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Academia Europaea and the American Physical Society. BarabásiLab (Northeastern University's Center for Complex Networks) is dedicated to discovering how networks look, evolve and influence our understanding of complex systems.

Where do we draw the line between experiential gastronomy and food design? How can sustainability, health, gastronomy and economic considerations be reconciled when it comes to food? And how do cultures, people, restaurants and catering establishments interact in the field of gastronomy? What does it mean to eat well? The network researcher Albert-László Barabási sheds light on these questions and has already presented them to the public, for example in his exhibition Hidden Patterns, organised in Miercurea Ciuc.

"I started cooking with the aim of finally understanding what's in the food," says Albert-László Barabási, explaining why it was important for him to understand not only the molecular, network-theoretical background, but also the practice of what he is researching, i.e. what healthy eating is and how it is created in the kitchen.

Part of that research was on flavour, based on the theory that raw materials which have similar chemicals in them taste good together. While he believes that in much of European cuisine we create a taste experience from flavours that naturally go together, many Asian cuisines, by contrast, are built on variances (which he personally loves). There are also blends, like in Vietnam, which was a French colony and as a legacy of this, many dishes were later created from the fusion of the two culinary cultures. But we can also see how the concept of chicken stew, which is considered a traditional Hungarian dish ("this is chicken cooked in a juicy, thick, spicy sauce"), is echoed in so many different versions around the world. You can find it in India, Mexico or Taiwan.

But what determines health is not the taste, but what the food is made of. A third of Barabási's lab is devoted to understanding what molecules enter our bodies through food. And once they've mapped that, they'll use the network's medical tools to try to understand how it affects our health.

Barabási's scientific achievements and his work, which is known and respected around the world, make him a source of pride for the people of the region from which he comes and where he often - to our great delight - returns home. On behalf of all the inhabitants of Harghita County, we are proud that as ambassador he helps to promote our distinctive food culture, gastronomic and cultural diversity.





Harghita County: Blessed by Nature

Harghita County has an immense natural heritage, closely linked to its cultural heritage. Most of the specificities can be explained by the two large tectonic mountain basins - Ciuc and Gheorgheni - created as a result of past volcanic activity in the inner arch of the Carpathians. Parallel with the eruption and accumulation of volcanoes, neighbouring areas sank and gave birth to flatlands, lakes and marshes. The result of millions of years of Nature's work is a highly varied landscape that contains features from the plains to the mountains, with the accompanying wildlife.

Some of the gifts of past volcanoes are their craters. One of them hides the only crater lake in South-eastern Europe, Lake St. Anna. Another gift is natural sparkling mineral water springs that come to the surface at hundreds of places, each having a unique mineral composition - and taste.

Volcanic craters, as well as the wetlands of the mountain basins have hosted some cold spots that offered refuge for the flora of the Ice Age that disappeared from almost everywhere at this latitude in the past millennia.

The gentle landscape created optimal conditions for large mammals and particularly large carnivores. This landscape hosts the largest brown bear population of Europe and one of the highest densities of brown bears worldwide. Nowadays, Eastern Transylvania is a source for the recolonization of Europe by this iconic predator.

Not much surprisingly, the area is densely populated by people, and throughout the centuries, people created the so-called cultural steppe, the main crop being an extraordinary diversity of herbs and herb-rich hay for the winter, to supply the domestic food chain. People in this area were hardworking and stubborn, so that nowadays Harghita County hosts the largest extent of hay meadow landscapes in Romania. The diversity of herbs

reaches stunning values of more than fifty vascular plants per square metre, which is a delight not only for the human eye but also for insect pollinators, wild and tame (as much as domestic bees can be called 'tame'). There is a butterfly called the Danube Clouded Yellow that disappeared from almost all of Central and Eastern Europe but still survives in large populations in the Gheorgheni and Ciuc areas.

It is difficult to make a halt in enumerating the spectacular plant rarities that in many cases form entire meadows in this landscape: wild daffodil, narcissus-flowered anemone, burnet, lady-slipper, ligularia, irises, wild orchids, gentians, brook thistle, rose daphne are just a few.

These meadows attract not only people, herbivores and pollinators, but are especially valuable habitats for birds like the White Stork. The mountain basins host the densest and growing white stork populations in Romania, and some of the largest in Europe, forming entire colonies.

Have to mention the truest wildlife engineer, the European beaver, that once became extinct, but thrives now after a reintroduction program at the turn of the millenium due to the ideal landscape and protection measures, recreating the so-much important wetlands.

Forests are the original natural habitat of this land. Many of them fell in the hard process of creating grasslands, but many of them remained, and a special form of common ownership survived, adding to the nature-related cultural heritage.

Managing this diverse landscape, with its immense wildlife, has generated huge traditional ecological knowledge, a large number of human-nature interactions and continues to be a source of inspiration.

Demeter László, biologist
National Agency for Protected Areas
Head of Harghita County Department



Food culture and traditions

In our region, mountain livestock farming, forestry and weather conditions determine what can be grown and what raw materials are available. At the same time, modern ethnographic research is looking at food as a cultural phenomenon. The concept of culture includes all the knowledge that is shared by the members of a community. What is culturally determined, therefore is not only the biological and economic determinants, but the food choice of a person: what is considered and accepted as food, how and when it is processed, how it is consumed, how is organised the diet and how is coordinated with the lifestyle.

The Szeklerland food culture has preserved many traditional elements. The Szekler people live in the Eastern Carpathians and some typical, old-fashioned features can be found in their diet in a west-east direction.

For example, in the east, the consumption of porridge (puliszka, málé) is increasing. Porridge is an ancient food, dating from the same period as cereal production. Cereals unsuitable for bread, millet, barley, even oats, were used in porridge dishes, followed by buckwheat, which became established in the 15th century, and maize, which appeared in the 17th century. The displacement of the legumes is attributed to the shift to intensive cereal production, which after 1848 led to the predominance of flour-based dishes and cooked and kneaded pasta. Today, bread is replacing porridge more and more, however it is still on the table every week in Szeklerland, especially among the elderly.

In terms of soups, more sweet soups are consumed in the west, and more sour soups in the east. There is also the tradition of family pig slaughtering and processing. In the Catholic countryside, fasting plays a very important role, and many fasting dishes have been preserved in the memories and eating habits of the elderly.

In recent years, in our region, we have seen an increasing number of initiatives to organise cultural events based on traditional dishes and products. These include festivals and competitions based around mush, dandelions, cabbage, sausages, onions, and many others. These events are very important in promoting the traditional values of the countryside and have a community-strengthening role. It is useful to incorporate the knowledge of the ancients into these events, bearing in mind that nutrition is linked to other aspects of life: work, lifestyle, festivals, customs, manners, beliefs, official (e.g. church) regulations.

Thanks to fast information flow, mobility, but also food processing, we can talk about the delocalisation of the food system, which means that the territorial and cultural links of food are loosened, we can eat food grown elsewhere, outside 'their ritual time'. Inevitably, the importance of rituals associated with meals is diminishing. We must therefore be very careful that our food does not lose its cultural meaning, for it is a wealth of knowledge and richness that can be valued in many ways.

Angéla Ferencz, antropologist,
manager of Cultural Center of Harghita County



Pastures and hay meadows, SMALL-SCALE FARMING

As anywhere in the world, agriculture is the most important link between the environment and food culture in Harghita County. The climate and the arable land surrounded by mountains and forests have determined what goes into the pantry and then onto the table of the people who live here.

The mountainous environment and climate, as well as the structure of society in Harghita County, fundamentally determined the way in which agriculture was practised. In the absence of large areas of arable land, agriculture is based mainly on livestock farming. The main sources of fodder for livestock are the pastures and hay meadows adjacent to forests, which dot and define the landscape of Harghita County over large areas. A few decades ago the hay meadows were almost entirely hand-cultivated. It is the most important guarantee that the unique biodiversity of Harghita County will be preserved and passed on to future generations. This biodiversity is also a guarantee that the food of animal origin produced in Harghita County is a high-quality raw material for local gastronomy.

At the same time, pastures occupy a particularly important place in the lives of the people of Harghita County, both economically and culturally. Pastoralism, a way of life that has become established in the mountains, is a valuable part of our cultural heritage and provides us with important gastronomic knowledge.

Another specific feature of the region's agriculture is the way in which the land is owned and cultivated. Because of the environmental and social characteristics mentioned above, the predominant type of farming in Harghita County is family farming, with small plots of land up to 1-2 hectares. Although it is a much less efficient form of agriculture than intensive monoculture farming, the raw materials produced are of much higher gastronomic value than the average. Family farm-based agriculture will become particularly important in a later chapter on gastronomic habits.



Our daily bread

Harghita County, and in a broader sense the whole of Szeklerland, owes its national fame to a special product: potato bread. Potato bread can be seen as an illustrative example of local food culture because it is a symbol of the farming and food functionality of small families, both in its production and in its consumption habits. Traditionally, a family maintaining a farm, even a family of several generations, baked bread once a week. It was therefore necessary for this bread to stay fresh and edible for seven days. The best way to achieve this is to

add boiled potatoes
to the flour
and home-made ferment,

which preserves the bread's moisture for several days. Although lifestyle habits have changed considerably, potato bread has remained a key element of the local diet and one of the most important tourist attractions, a symbol of Harghita County gastronomy.



The revolution of milk: matured cheese

Pastures produce large quantities of high quality milk and this is one of the region's most important food commodities. In contrast to the bread described previously, there is no significant tradition of matured cheese production in the area.

Over the last two decades or so, cheese-making know-how has been brought in,

mainly from Western Europe, and came in contact with local raw materials and dairy production. Several small farms have decided to process and market the milk they produce themselves. Many dairy farms in Harghita County have artisanal cheese workshops, which bring high quality local cheese specialities to the tables of local people.

Green chef Viola Dakó makes the forest edible



The forests and pastures of Harghita County are full of edible plants, and foragers can even prepare a two-course dinner from the ingredients gathered from nature's table. Viola Dakó, the green chef of the Páva restaurant in Odorheiu Secuiesc, collects herbs, spices, edible flowers and small quantities of mushrooms. She also processes the ingredients by fermentation, drying or freezing. She makes a wide range of specialities, from fermented elderberry and rose juice to syrups and fruit wines, depending on what can be collected in a season.

One of the ingredients is wild thyme, which differs from cultivated thyme in that it contains more essential oils, as the plant is regularly exposed to harsh natural conditions. In fact, most wild herbs have a higher content of active ingredients than cultivated ones. The most basic unwritten laws dictate that it is important to respect nature, to leave a living place in the state in which it was found. Nor should the amount of harvesting be so great that it is a burden on nature. We should always try to strike a balance. Another example is the raw wild sage flower, which is full of vitamin C, and is a good immune booster, bacteria and it is virus killer, so regular consumption can even help avoid colds.



Trademarks for superior quality

Szekler Product

The Szekler Product trademark was established in 2009 by the Harghita County Council to protect and distinguish high-quality products made in Szeklerland (Harghita, Covasna and Mures Counties). It's based on the protection of origin and helps to identify and support producers and enterprises which create high quality traditional products. Since 2021, the Harghita County Development Agency, a subordinate institution of the Harghita County Council, has been coordinating the Szekler Product Movement, which has grown into a dynamically developing network, where special attention is paid to quality control, to the producers who were awarded the trademark and those who are new to it. Such a trademark ensures quality and healthy products.

In 15 years, the Szekler product has developed into a strong brand, and today the people of Szeklerland are aware that the trademark equals good quality, healthy food supply, which can provide a source of livelihood for young farmers and entrepreneurs. The trademark system is not just a symbol, but a complete support system that helps local producers and entrepreneurs to market and promote their products properly. The goal of the trademark is to create jobs, help small farms to earn a living and produce quality local food.



Mountain Product



The Mountain Product (officially Produs Montan) mark is a quality assurance scheme recognised at European level, certifying that processed or unprocessed food products originate from mountain areas and are produced using only quality ingredients. The trademark guarantees to consumers that certified products are of high quality, free of chemicals and come from areas with low levels of pollution. It also makes a significant contribution to the protection of the local gastronomic heritage of mountain areas. It encourages producers and farmers to create traditional products and to preserve natural resources and local gastronomic culture. The certificate ensures that products are more distinctive on the market, thus increasing their competitiveness

and demand. It allows local producers to market their products and thus maintain economic viability. Mountain Products have reduced VAT rates, free stands at fairs and exhibitions in Bucharest, as well as other grants and tendering opportunities. These further encourage local farmers and producers to make and sell quality products. In Harghita County, 76 products from 9 producers have been awarded the Mountain Product label, including cheeses, yoghurts, syrups, jams, forest fruit extracts, savoury vegetable jam (zacuscă), beekeeping products, etc. Except for alcoholic products, the certificate can be applied free of charge for all Romanian food products processed in mountain areas for human consumption. The National Agency of Mountain Areas (Agenția Națională a Zonei Montane) decides on the right to use the Mountain Product mark.





Fair of Local Products



With the introduction and continuous expansion of the Szekler Product trademark, there has been a growing need to bring traditional products to consumers through new sales channels. In addition to the fact that some of these products have entered the traditional retail network, it was essential to create other sales opportunities for small enterprises of a truly artisanal nature.

In the last decade, fairs of local products have been organised in the larger municipalities of Harghita County

on a monthly basis and during major festivals. Over time, these events have become known as a celebration of artisanal products and foodstuffs.



Gastronomy and values kept at home

The gastronomic culture of Harghita County is still in search of a new path. After the political and social changes of 1989, the region turned its attention to the West, which had been considered forbidden fruit in the previous decades. In essence, this was the general interest of society in the 1990s. At the same time, the previous rules of hospitality and culinary were steadily relaxed, the region's gastronomic sectors were reorganised according to the rules of market economy and its operators were positioned in the supply chain according to the dynamics of market competition. In fact, it was in those years that the search for a gastronomic identity for the region began.

Two basic trends defined this period. On the one hand, the model of countries with more developed catering traditions and, on the other, the increasing emphasis on reviving the region's own traditions. The increasing industrialisation of food and raw materials naturally shifted the focus of local catering towards local traditions and local ingredients. This process is still ongoing and is far from reaching the level that local operators in the sector desire. The body of knowledge, the know-how that drives the catering and gastronomy industry, is also in a constant state of flux. Public vocational training does not play nearly as important a role in the development of culinary knowledge as would be normal in a European country. The most important sources of culinary knowledge are Western knowledge and practices that informally flow into the profession, as well as the rediscovery and re-shaping of traditions.

In Harghita County, the customs and traditions of food and food preparation are not preserved on yellowed pages in libraries, but are part of everyday life.

They are kept alive by the families who live here, most of whom put home-cooked meals on the table every day.

However, it is important to note that the practice of home cooking is a natural limit to the growth of the catering market. This is true even if we take into consideration the fact that over the last decade more and more people, especially in urban areas, are replacing home-cooked meals with restaurant meals.

The practice and tradition of home cooking is seen as a value in Harghita County. It is one of the most important custodians of classical food preparation skills, the most important depository of general culinary and gastronomic literacy. The quality of home-cooked food in many aspects is also superior to that of professional restaurants. Most families, especially in rural areas, use ingredients from small-scale farms. In contrast, in professional restaurant practice, over-regulated food safety makes it difficult for locally produced ingredients to enter restaurant kitchens.

Harghita County hopes that by winning the title of European Region of Gastronomy 2027, it will succeed in drawing the attention of decision-makers to this problem and bring the professional catering sector closer to a significant increase in the proportion of ingredients from the short food supply chain.

Harghita County is proud to cultivate and promote its gastronomic traditions through events that are organised mainly by the professionals of the industry, as grass-roots initiatives and which are internationally recognised by the public. Some of these events are presented below.



**Featured
gastronomic events**



Taste of
TRANSYLVANIA



Taste of
TRANSYLVANIA
Food Festival | 2022



Transylvania is a region that is a melting pot of Hungarians, Saxons, Szeklers and Wallachians. It is a place where nature and its gifts are still important. Kövi Pál, world-famous for bringing about the golden era of New York's Four Seasons restaurant, knew this, and worked tirelessly to gather all the recipes and stories that are staples of Transylvanian values. Today we strive to follow in his footsteps, the goal being to keep and revive this heritage while staying true to our values and making use of all the land's gifts. That is how the idea came to organise a festival in Harghita county, which could serve as a tool for reaching this goal. Taste of Transylvania represents the culmination of a dream shared by committed chefs, restaurateurs and local producers. Together, they embarked on a journey of rediscovering culinary traditions, skills and disappearing heritage. The event wishes to put back this special, hidden region on the international culinary map as a new, yet timeless food destination. Perfectly matching the festival's concept, the event takes place in the breathtaking scene of the Gyimesi Skanzen open-air museum and guesthouse. A key theme of the festival is sustainability, as the organisers strive for an event which produces minimal amount of waste and relies on local ingredients, recipes and people. Taste of Transylvania is the place where traditions and ingredients meet modern techniques and renowned chefs from the country and around the world and offers guests many ways to experience this. Vendors each prepare their own menu using mostly local ingredients and strive to offer the best possible dishes. Chefs and culinary professionals take the stage to offer cooking shows, workshops for amateurs and professionals alike. All these, together with cultural, musical and professional programs, create the unique combination that is the Taste of Transylvania festival: a modern interpretation of the hundreds of years of Transylvanian culinary tradition.



Easter Food Consecration

On Easter Sunday, the largest traditional food consecration in the Carpathian Basin is held in Miercurea Ciuc. Catholic believers ask for blessings on Easter ham, scones, eggs and wine. Every year, thousands of people gather in the centre of Miercurea Ciuc, on Liberty Square, to take part in this intimate celebration. The consecration of food is part of the Easter holiday cycle and is an important tradition for the locals, strengthening cultural identity and cohesion. People gather in churches or public squares to ask for a blessing on their food together. It is an opportunity to meet, talk and strengthen community bonds. After some, this is also a very good example of our military history since these few thousand people organise themselves in rows without any outside help.





Stuffed cabbage festival

Started in the autumn of 1994, the Stuffed Cabbage Festival organised in Parajd has grown into one of the most prestigious gastronomic events in Transylvania. Held every year on the third weekend of September, the event attracts thousands of visitors, with a variety of exciting activities and daily changing themes, in addition to cabbage cooking and tasting. The festival includes concerts, quizzes and performances, but the main attraction is of course the cooking competition on Saturday. Organised with determination, cooperation and collaboration for more than 20 years, the festival proves that in the Salt Region not everything is about salt.

Ákovita

The fruits grown in Szeklerland can produce unique distillates that can stand their ground anywhere in the world. Ákovita is organised by the Association of Szekler Farmers and it aims to promote the responsible consumption of brandy and spirits in Transylvania and Szeklerland. It takes place in Miercurea Ciuc and is attended by participants from all over the Carpathian Basin. The jury is composed of experts with a high level of professional experience, who not only evaluate samples, but also review the products and provide advice to the producers. The point is to learn and improve through judging. Today, there are several brandy-making workshops and manufacturers in Szeklerland which produce high-quality spirits with a special taste value. The competition is a good opportunity for the general public to get to know them better. Over a thousand samples are entered each year in the International Competition of Spirits and Brandy.



Young Chefs Cooking Competition

Organised in Harghita County for high school students from all over Romania who are interested in gastronomy. The competition

aims to support and develop young people's personal initiatives, motivation, communication skills and multicultural competence.

The competition plays a number of important roles in Harghita County. It is an opportunity to showcase the county's gastronomic treasures and to introduce participants and visitors to local dishes, flavours and traditions. It encourages secondary school students to take an interest in gastronomy as a career. It gives young chefs the opportunity to showcase their talents and creativity and, most importantly, brings together young people, educators, professionals and interested visitors. All this contributes to the preservation and development of the gastronomic traditions of Harghita County.



HARGHITA'S EVENTS CALENDAR

ALL YEAR LONG

- **Traditional and Local Products Monthly Fair and Exhibition** – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda, Odorheiu Secuiesc/Székelyudvarhely
- **“Bizniszvitamin” (Business Vitamins)** – Odorheiu Secuiesc/Székelyudvarhely
- **TEDx** Odorheiu Secuiesc/Székelyudvarhely, **TEDx** Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda

January

- World Snow Day – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- Căliman/Kelemen Ski Touring Cup – Toplița/Maroshévíz
- MAFESZT - Theatre festival – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda

February

- The Carnival Send-Off of Harghita County – alternating locations
- Carnival Skiing – Harghita-Mădăraș/Madarasi Harghita
- **Sausage Festival of Nicoleşti/Csíkszentmiklós**
- **BaconFest** – Borsec/Borszék
- **“Ízig-vérig” Pig-slaughtering Festival** – Corund/Korond

March

- **“Bőjtű Csemege” - The Carpathian Basin Cheese Market** – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- **Young Chefs Competition** – Odorheiu Secuiesc/Székelyudvarhely
- Battle On Snow – Harghita-Mădăraș/Madarasi Harghita
- Wheeled Sled Dog Competition – Borsec/Borszék
- “Bagolykő” Cup – Harghita-Mădăraș/Madarasi Harghita
- March 15th - Solemn commemoration – various location

April

- Harghita Rally – Odorheiu Secuiesc/Székelyudvarhely
- International Dance Day – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- Horse Riding Day of Sândominic/Csíkszentdomokos
- Hungarian Poetry Day – various location

May

- **Harghita County Days** – various location
- **Borszereda** – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- **Tiltott Festival** – Sânsimion/Csíkszentsimon
- Cloud Youth Festival – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- Daffodil Festival – Dealu/Oroszhegy
- UNSCENE - Festival of Universities of Arts – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- Tusnad Marathon – Băile Tușnad/Tusnádfürdő
- Transylvanian Dance Musicians' Meeting – Valea Boros/Borospataka
- Folk Houses Week – various location
- Book Fair of Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- “Csüdüngölő” Children and Youth Folk Dance Assembly – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- **Pentecost Exhibition and Market of Traditional and Local Products** – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- Pentecost Pilgrimage – Șumuleu Ciuc/Csíksomlyó
- Run for IT! Ciuc/Csík – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda

June

- Children's Day – various location
- NyárON Szereda Festival – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- **Tusnad Gastro Blues Fest** – Băile Tușnad/Tusnádfürdő
- Open days at Lavanda Montana Transylvania – Cechești/Csekefalva
- Open days at Lavanda Nela – Gălăuțaș/Galócás
- Filmszereda – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- Harghita Hill Climb Challenge – Harghita-Băi/Harghitafürdő
- Night of the Museums – various location
- FIT - “Feltöltő” Youth Gathering – Gheorgheni/Szergyószentmiklós
- Day of the Szekler Traditional Costume

July

- **“ÁKOVITA” International Distillate and Brandy Competition**
- The Day of the Thousand Szekler Girls – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- The Day of Szekler Folk Costume
- Tusványos – Băile Tușnad/Tusnádfürdő
- SMARt Fest – Borsec/Borszék
- Ceal Borsec Festival – Borsec/Borszék
- SZMÖ Biker Festival – Vlăhița/Szentegyháza
- “Cseperedők” Family Festival – Sânmartin/Csíkszentmárton
- Early Music Festival – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- “Szent Gellért” Cross – Ditrău/Gyergyóditró
- Csíki Jazz - International Jazz Festival – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- MES - Festival of Folk Arts – Odorheiu Secuiesc/Székelyudvarhely
- Straw Hat Festival – Crișeni/Kőrispatak
- Salt Region Car Meet – Praid/Parajd
- Cros Montan Borsec/Borszék
- Aquatlon National Championships – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda

August

- **Csángó Festival of Polenta with cheese** – Lunca de Jos/Gyimesközéplak
- **Potato Festival** – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- Siculus Festival – Odorheiu Secuiesc/Székelyudvarhely
- Dob-Ban International Rhythm Festival – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- EgyFeszt – Gheorgheni/Gyergyó Basin
- Equestrian Festival of Szeklerland – Gheorgheni/Gyergyószentmiklós
- Saint Stephen's Day – various location
- Harghita Trail Running
- Sacral Marathon
- Tour of Szeklerland

September

- **Taste of Transylvania** – Valea Boros/Borospataka
- **Stuffed Cabbage Festival** – Praid/Parajd
- **“Nektária” Szeklerland Honey Competition** – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- **Fruit Festival** – Odorheiu Secuiesc/Székelyudvarhely
- Autumn Fair of Odorheiu Secuiesc/Székelyudvarhely
- “Tatros Forrásánál” Csángó Festival
- **Onion Festival** – Siculeni/Madéfalva
- Running Festival Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- Farmers' Days – Sânsimion/Csíkszentsimon
- Harghita Performance Tour
- Lonely Rock 60 Performance Hike
- Coal days of Lupeni/Farkaslaka
- **Plum Days in Dealu/Oroszhegy**

October

- **The Famous Cabbage Fair and Festival of Lăzarea/Szárhegy**
- Run for IT! Odorhei – Odorheiu Secuiesc/Székelyudvarhely
- TusnadEcoBearConf – Băile Tușnad/Tusnádfürdő
- Digital Szeklerland Conference – alternating locations
- Szeklerland Days – various location
- Opera Week in Szeklerland – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- Graphic Art Biennial of Szeklerland – various location
- “FilmteftFeszt” Transylvanian Hungarian Film Week – Miercurea Ciuc/ Csíkszereda, Odorheiu Secuiesc/Székelyudvarhely, Gheorgheni/Gyergyószentmiklós

November

- **St. Martin's Day** – various location
- Regional Tourism Conference – alternating locations
- The Assembly of Transylvanian Folk Violinists – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda

December

- **Christmas Fair** – Odorheiu Secuiesc/Székelyudvarhely
- **Christmas Exhibition and Fair of traditional and local products** – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda
- Saint Nicholas Days – Gheorgheni/Gyergyószentmiklós
- Christmas Craft Fair – Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda



Hospitality and tourism in practice

Harghita County is a treasure trove of historical and ethnographic gems, with wonderful natural background in the valleys of the Eastern Carpathians, rivers, streams and gentle slopes. We guarantee that once you visit us, you will always want to return to the heart of Szeklerland.

Harghita County, in the eastern part of Transylvania, is one of the most picturesque and authentic regions of Romania, where a unique combination of hospitality and tourism awaits visitors. The mountainous and rural character of the county boasts unparalleled natural beauty and traditional villages, offering tourists numerous opportunities to immerse themselves in the local culture and natural treasures.

The types of accommodation in Harghita County are varied, ranging from rustic village guesthouses to modern hotels and hidden houses, from traditional restaurants to revolutionary cuisines and Local Gastronomic Points. The vast majority of guesthouses and B&Bs are family-run, where guests can get a closer look at the local lifestyle and cuisine. They are particularly popular as they are often set in picturesque places, surrounded by mountains and forests.

One of the main attractions of Harghita County lies in its rich natural resources. Clean mountain air, healing nature and unique mofetas await those who wish to relax. The region offers numerous hiking trails, excursions, horse riding and year-round sporting activities, while the unique natural attractions attract tourists in every period of the year. Harghita County has the largest bobsleigh track in the country, the only volcanic lake in Central and Eastern Europe, the tallest statue of Jesus Christ in Eastern Europe, the largest salt deposit in Europe, the only multicultural

model park in Romania, the first straw hat museum in Romania, the first permanent butterfly house in Romania etc. Local gastronomy also plays an important role in tourism as transylvanian cuisine is characterised by a combination of local ingredients. Hungarian, Romanian, Armenian, Saxon and Jewish traditional recipes are combined with modern culinary trends. In the restaurants, visitors can sample fresh and tasty products from local producers, reflecting the region's culinary heritage. Tourists can also enjoy a variety of culinary tourism packages. They can learn how to bake chimney cakes, churn butter and make spicy sauces. They can visit chocolate workshops, breweries, chips factory, cheese factories, brandy distilleries and sheepfolds. They can take part in a picnic with local products or a wine tasting tour. Last, but not least, the region boasts countless gastronomic festivals and events, from stuffed cabbage and onion festivals to sausage and cottage cheese festivals.

Tourism entrepreneurs, local municipalities and tourism associations are actively working to increase the tourist attractiveness of Harghita County and to develop sustainable, slow tourism. The long-term goal of the community is

to introduce
Harghita County into the
European public consciousness
as a family-friendly, green and
safe tourist destination
offering natural
and gastronomic adventures.

Family-friendly Destination

The crisis situation caused by the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic posed new challenges to the tourism stakeholders, and emergency regulations have made it almost impossible to carry out tourism activities. 2020 has been a “survival” year for tourism professionals. A different kind of tourism was emerging: from crowded accommodation to solid, quiet hospitality units, and from large groups to family groups. For this reason, and taking into account the health regulations, the Harghita County Council and the Harghita Community Development Association (Visit Harghita/ADI Harghita), among others, started working on a long-term initiative in April 2020, which was a lifeline for the revival of tourism in Harghita County.

The idea of the Visit Harghita - Family-friendly campaign was born by listening to the changing trends, rules and opinions of experts and local entrepreneurs. Harghita County has always been visited by a large number of families, who have the opportunity to relax in a healthy environment, away from the crowds, and experience the closeness of nature.

The aim of the Family-friendly certification scheme is to attract guests who want to spend quality time with their families in an environment that takes into account the needs of travellers with children (accommodation, dining facilities) and who are looking for meaningful recreational opportunities that offer interesting and safe activities for all members of the family (tourist activities and attractions).



Who can get a Family-Friendly certificate?

From 2020: In order to obtain the certificate, accommodation and restaurants must have a certification licence issued by the Romanian Ministry of Tourism and comply with the Visit Harghita - Family-friendly criteria.

From 2021: Operators who have offers for families with children and the offers comply with the Visit Harghita - Family-friendly criteria. Also, tourist attractions that the Visit Harghita team, after an on-site inspection, considers suitable for Family-friendly certification.

From 2024: Annual events suggested by the Visit Harghita team that are deemed suitable for Family-friendly certification.

Visit Harghita - Family-friendly certification can be applied for by tourism service providers at any time. The certificate awarding ceremony takes place once a year, to which the organisers invite influencers and members of the press.

The certified tourism operators receive a diploma and a distinctive sticker, are listed in a special section on the Visit Harghita website and app, are given priority as programme items when organising promotional infotrips for influencers and various media, and are the subject of an annual publication, which is presented at national and international travel fairs, among others.



Family-Friendly certification scheme in numbers between 2020-2023

65 accommodation facilities

29 restaurants

51 tourism programmes

12 tourist attractions

Total: 157 tourist services

Local Gastronomic Points

The protection and promotion of our rich and varied culinary values, rural environment, sustainable farming and healthy lifestyle have always been important aspects in the development strategies of Romania and Harghita County. According to local experts, a healthy diet starts with the use of raw materials found within a 50-kilometre radius. This idea sums up the idea behind the Local Gastronomy Points programme, which was launched in 2017 on the basis of an idea by a famous Romanian canoe racing coach and sprint canoeist Ivan Patzaichin. He won seven Olympic and 22 world championship medals.

Local Gastronomy Points are units in private kitchens in rural houses, where culinary products are prepared and served to guests according to recipes specific to the area for up to 12 people at a time. Two-thirds of the food served must be made from local ingredients. The culinary products are traditionally prepared using ingredients from local farms. Preserved ingredients from local producers or from registered veterinary and food safety establishments may be used: jams, preserves, syrups, zakouska, meat products etc. The food may only be prepared by the owner or members of his family, whose health status must be regularly monitored. Gastronomic points must be separated from the accommodation and must be set up in a rural environment. They must meet a number of conditions and requirements, such as: equipment, food waste, personal hygiene, food traceability etc. The certification is issued by the provincial sub-inspectorate of the National Veterinary and Food Safety Authority.



In addition to the above, Local Gastronomic Points also differ from restaurants in the menu they offer. Their offer is much more limited than that of mass catering: they may serve a maximum of two soups, two main courses and two desserts to a group, on the day of preparation.

In Harghita County, there are currently ten Local Gastronomic Points in the following municipalities: Bilbor, Sântimbru-Băi, Șoimușu Mic, Vârșag, Corbu, Sânmartin, Sântimbru, Cetățuia, Ciceu, Ocna de Sus. We anticipate that their number will grow significantly in the upcoming years.





2022 – Year of Gastronomy

The Szekler Product movement started in Harghita County, more and more local producers can claim the Mountain Product trademark, more and more people are interested in establishing Local Gastronomy Points and numerous gastronomic events are organised by municipalities, associations and NGOs. Despite this, local producers, valuable artisanal products and flavours typical of the region are often overshadowed. The traditional dishes prepared in grandmother's kitchens and the ingredients used are slowly becoming a speciality. But these values should not be lost if we think globally. We can innovate while preserving what is part of our identity, what distinguishes our region from others. With these ideas in mind, the Harghita Community Development Association dedicated 2022 as the Year of Gastronomy. Local entrepreneurs, municipalities, professional partners and opinion leaders

joined forces to provide an insight into the culinary side of Harghita County.

The restaurants associated with the thematic year selected a dish from their offer that included local ingredients. The dishes submitted included both more traditional and reimagined uses of ingredients (e.g. cabbage pizza). The list of the gastronomic year's offerings was available on the Visit Harghita app and on the visitharghita.com website. In terms of events, gastronomic events were the main focus, with locals and tourists learning more about the culinary programmes organised in the county every year. There were 101 gastronomic events, 4 competitions, monthly product fairs and 1 multi-day conference. The thematic year was promoted by 30 opinion leaders on online platforms and in the national media. Almost 500 people attended training courses on the founding of Local Gastronomy Points. The Visit Harghita team organised three important competitions for catering establishments within the framework of the thematic year. They were looking for the best hand-made chocolate and praline bars, the best hand-made cakes and the best three-course menu in Harghita County.

The best handmade chocolate bar in Harghita County

1. Milk chocolate with blackcurrant honey spread - Choco Project
2. Dark chocolate with salt from Praid and mixed-seed brittle - Choco Project
3. Milk chocolate with hazelnut - Berri Chocolate



The best handmade praline in Harghita County

1. Szekler piquancy - Septimia Resort
2. Milk chocolate with sour-cherry brandy ganache and peanut brittle - Choco Project
3. Blueberry jelly and yogurt bonbon - Premium Pralines

The best mono-portion cake in Harghita County

1. Hengergő (blackcurrant mousse, blackcurrant jelly, caramel) - Cukorvilág Tortaműhely
2. Madarasi szelet (pumpkin seeds, raspberries, cottage cheese) - Gelateria Serafino
3. Esztenás dessert (polenta, walnuts, rosehip jam) - Gelateria Serafino



Harghita County's Menu

Septimia Resort

APPETISER:

Pig's brain with egg served on traditional "lángos", with pickled chanterelles from local gardens and creamy dill-garlic sauce

SOUP:

Tarragon potato cream soup with roasted ham chips and smoked cheese from Cristuru Secuiesc/ Székelykeresztúr

MAIN COURSE:

Braised calf from Chibed/Kibéd with cabbage strudel from Lázarea/Cyergyószárhegy on a bed of plums from Dealu/Oroszhegy, with crunchy garden vegetables





Culinary influence: historical footprint **on gastronomy**

When it comes to gastronomic traditions, it is definitely important to remember that Harghita County, as an administrative unit, is a modern establishment. Szeklerland, the eastern part of Transylvania, has an organically formed, more or less independent cultural history and gastronomic traditions. So when we talk about the gastronomic roots of Harghita County, we actually mean the peculiarities of Szeklerland. Although in terms of its ethnic composition, Szeklerland is mostly inhabited by Hungarians, its gastronomic past has been influenced by so many external influences and internal transformations that its cuisine differs significantly from actual Hungarian cuisine in several fundamental details.

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The beginnings are shrouded in oblivion, but it is certain that the food culture of Szeklerland, going back to the earliest times, was primarily determined by religion and natural features. Pilgrimages played a very important role in the predominantly Western Christian and Catholic society, which was also the most important channel of interaction and cultural interaction with distant regions. Historical sources prove that, along this route, countless contemporary kitchen technologies, herbs or plant cultivation knowledge enriched the culture of the time.

We must not forget the goods and knowledge coming from the East either. The gastrocultural influence of both the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan people can be seen in the development of the culinary and gastronomic traditions of Szeklerland. One of the most striking examples of this is the appearance and use of ginger in the culinary practice of Transylvania and Szeklerland. Under such circumstances, neither in the neighbouring Romanian-inhabited regions, nor in Hungary, did it settle to the same extent as in this region.

In Szeklerland, including Harghita County, the cuisines of several ethnic groups define the culinary traditions. The most significant influence is the tradition of Romanian, Armenian and Saxon cuisines. The techniques of meat processing and storage were mainly introduced from the Saxons. Romanian cuisine was essentially a gateway to the influx of Balkan and Turkish eating habits. The Armenians who settled in the 17th century in two settlements in Harghita County, Gheorgheni and Frumoasa, created significant cultural values, contributing to the development of the eating habits of the area.

The top to bottom flow of knowledge and culture within a society also plays an important role in the development of eating habits. Centuries ago, especially among the Szeklers, it was customary for young members of simple peasant families to join noble and later bourgeois families as servants. The "noble origin" can be demonstrated in several dishes that still exist today. Szekler maids learned a dish that was regularly cooked in a bourgeois kitchen, and after returning home they interpreted it according to their own needs and abilities, in most cases they simplified it. This effect can be discovered primarily in the range of desserts and cakes that are now considered traditional.

Starting in the 1950s, the communist regime in Romania standardised knowledge about food and tried to regulate every detail. Gastronomy, public catering and food supply became a political issue. The Soviet-style socialist economic system eliminated competition, and as a consequence of planned-economy, the food industry was characterised by deficit-economy. Thanks to state vocational training, catering workers in Harghita County also learned and followed the standardised Romanian diet. Despite this, the traditional Szekler gastronomic traditions have been preserved by the region, while it also received a significant amount of expertise. This is mainly felt in the introduction of sour soups and ragout soup.

Franciscan cooking - our oldest cookbook

This book is the cornerstone of Szeklerland's gastronomy. It was published in 2022 under the title Franciscan cooking (Ferencesek főztje). The book is considered to be the first cookbook in Hungarian language. It contains recipes selected from the 'Cooking crafts booklet' (Szakáts mesterségnek könyvetskéje) by Kiss Miklós Misztótfalusi; the source material was preserved in the form of a manuscript. The book enjoyed great popularity in Hungarian-speaking countries in the past centuries. It was published in many editions, but the origin of its content was unclear up until recently. In a university library in Budapest a Hungarian manuscript was discovered, dated in the monastery of Şumuleu Ciuc. It is almost word-for-word the same as the volume published by the Protestant printer in Cluj, except for a few expressions in the preface: the famous printer changed the original text which referred to the Catholic church order to 'Honorable Public Order'.

Historian Zsolt Gyarmati said that when he found out about the existence of the manuscript, he thought about publishing the source publication and shared his idea with László Mihály. He, in turn, urged Zsolt to publish an illustrated book not for historians, but

for today's average person, containing recipes which are practically feasible and the result is pleasing to the eye.

The idea was followed by a fast-paced implementation process: the first meal was cooked on 20 September 2022 by chef Előd Szőcs and photographed by László Mihály. Előd spoke about the simplicity and rich taste of the recipes. He also expressed his hope that dishes prepared based on the recipes included in the book will be on the menu of restaurants in Szeklerland.





Gastro literature

There has always been an intimate relationship between literature and gastronomy - not only because writers and poets like to eat well, but because in the kitchen, the soul of a home, secret stories are born that we can relive by cooking old recipes and enjoying the flavours of our memories. Tímea Gáll, Mária Kozma or Pál Kövi also wrote from this motivation - to save the values of an era and store memories. In the past few years, more and more attention has been paid to the local gastronomy in Szeklerland, and more and more publications are being published on the subject.

A good cookbook is much more than a collection of recipes. Tímea Gáll's book entitled **'Kölcsönként kovász' (Borrowed leaven)** is exactly that: an initiation full of love, interwoven with small delicacies into an old world that many of us long for. This more than 220-page book, bound with Gyula Ádám's sumptuous photos, is a marriage of a collection of lovely family stories and an old cookbook.

Tímea's grandparents both played an important role in the birth of the recipe book. The book's sonorous title was inspired by a personal story. In the past, everyone inherited leaven, and so did Tímea too. But when it came time for her to bake with it, the leaven died, and she was forced to borrow a piece from the neighbour. The writer believes that there are still a few grains of flour left which were ground by her grandfather and given to the neighbour, so she consoles herself by saying that some of it hopefully returned. Due to the personal presence of the author, the volume seems special among cookbooks. It comes to life just like a novel. Tímea also wants to pass on the knowledge inherited from her grandparents to her readers through specific stories that complement the authentic recipes.





Pál Kövi's book **'Transylvanian Feast'** shares with readers the rich flavours and recipes of traditional Transylvanian cuisine. Also, it presents the gastronomic traditions and cultural aspects of Transylvania. Pál Kövi, a famous restaurateur from New York, returned to the place of his youth in Transylvania in the 1970s to collect old Hungarian, Szekler, Romanian, Saxon, Jewish, Armenian, Sabbatarian etc. recipes. He then filled the cookbook with literary-gastronomical essays, and asked Transylvanian writers of the time to be authors. Taste of Transylvania from Odorheiu Secuiesc undertook to republish the volume which was originally published in 1980 in order to revive the traditions and food of a by-gone era.

All of this in such a way that the heritage left to us is preserved in its basics, but adapted to the needs of today.

Authors of the volume: Iván Bächer, András Cserna-Szabó, Benedek Darida, Péter Demény, Dósa Andrei, Péter Esterházy, Kali Kinga, Júlia Kinga Király, Krisztián Nyáry, Zsigmond Sándor Papp, Frank J. Prial, Noémi Saly, Olga Szederkényi, Zoltán Tatár, Imre Tompa, Zsolna Ugron, István Váncsa. Amongst the new writings one can find polenta, stews, Transylvanian Jewish and Armenian cuisine, cabbage from Cluj Napoca, noodle cake from Târgu Mureş, printed cookbooks and grandmothers' handwritten recipe booklets, roadside bakeries and legendary restaurants, ancient dishes and fake dishes, ragout soup and mititei, zakouskas and cheeses, Saxons and Romanians - and this list is just a small taste!

Mária Kozma's **'Boot on the kitchen table'** portfolio series is, at first glance, an adventure in the history of gastronomy, but it is much more than that: a collection of curiosities and specialities from all over the world, especially from Szeklerland, from ancient times to present days. In the history of kitchen ingredients, supplemented by numerous scientific and literary additions, we can marvel at the many aspects of Szeklerland and Hungary. For example, it talks about the Szekler people's right to cut salt freely, the salt roads, and why the soldiers of Roman legions were paid in salt. Why was Jerusalem artichoke, which today can be ordered at a hefty price in upscale restaurants, once the food of the poor, and how did Fridvalszky, the famous Transylvanian naturalist, want to solve hunger with it in the 18th century? Why did the sturgeon disappear from the rivers of Transylvania? We can also get to know chickpea, which is so fashionable today, and many people think we only borrowed from the Middle East, even though it used to be commonly known in our region; it was simply called owl peas and was also considered the food of the poor.

It is clear that the etiquette of eating and the science of cooking are connected not only to food recipes. If they were, they would rarely be published by an author. They are also connected to folk traditions, folk and noble culture, rites, feasts, behavioural psychology and healing. In addition to the researched data, the author also indicates the source materials, so the reader can gain real lexical knowledge on the subject. In the meantime, under the pretext of "eating" you can get a glimpse into the diverse reality of culture, from the inherited science of Szekler herbalists to medieval apothecaries and today's people who often get lost in the labyrinths of modern life. This is a giant world-travelling "boot" on Mária Kozma's "kitchen table", and it fits a lot of things that can not only be fun to read, but also enrich our knowledge. Everyday Hungarian-Szekler lifestyle, depicting human destinies, ideas and events, drawing behaviour models, always requiring to live, positive thinking, sustainability and the community-building force of humanity.





Boro Info Group, a local company from Odorheiu Secuiesc, known for over 23 years of experience in serving bakeries, confectioneries and hospitality industry in Romania by publishing specialised magazines 'Gastromedia' and 'Baker-Confectioner' (Brutarul-Cofetarul). Gastromedia is a B2B publication dedicated to the food industry, addressed exclusively to businessmen and hospitality industry specialists (hotels, restaurants, guesthouses, catering companies, bars, cafes, ice cream shops, etc.). Baker-Confectioner is a publication specialised in the bakery, pastry, confectionery, milling sector. Both magazines are distributed printed and digital format.

Szekler Kitchen and Garden (Székely Konyha és Kert) is the food culture publication of Transylvania and Szeklerland. The paper takes an innovative approach on the gastronomic traditions and eating habits of the Szeklers, giving priority to natural features and local ingredients. Its goal is to map local values and capture them, while at the same time trying to keep up with new trends in terms of technology and raw material use. Szekler Kitchen and Garden is broadcasted every two weeks on all Transylvanian and 20 TV channels from Hungary. It has its own YouTube page, where a direct-voiced host invites viewers on high-quality gastronomic journeys. The broadcast presents the natural treasures of Szeklerland and the local culinary arts in addition to the most important gastronomic events.





Education

The actors of the hospitality industry in Harghita County realised in the last decade that the future stands or falls on the sectoral human resources policy. State vocational education only partially meets this challenge, so it is no coincidence that the private sector itself takes initiatives to ensure its own workforce needs in the future.

In recent years, there have been several initiatives in the field of gastronomic education in the private sector. Long-term training courses and workshops of a few days duration with the participation of foreign experts have helped caterers, chefs and confectioners in Harghita County to develop their professional skills by setting up professionally equipped kitchens and laboratories.

Taste of Transylvania Culinary Academy

The Academy is a gastronomic education centre, which aims to train professionals, offering fully comprehensive and instantly usable knowledge. At the Academy they provide training for chefs, restaurateurs, bakers, confectioners and they are planning to organise training for receptionists, maids and other related professionals. Besides their long-term courses they have an ever-changing offer of short-term workshops that cater both for professionals working in hospitality and for amateurs who love to be in the kitchen. The Academy offers a lot more beyond courses, as the well-equipped kitchen can be the perfect location for team-building events or even for recording promotional videos or organising photoshoots. The Academy's kitchen has professional video cameras, thanks to which, after the events, the participants can get the recording - that is how they provide a complete package of culinary experiences.

Modern equipment

The Academy is equipped with cutting-edge technology, industrial-grade appliances and sets the new standard for professional kitchens. They aim to provide an impeccable location for courses, team buildings and all kinds of promotional opportunities.



The Courses

The Academy offers intensive, long-term courses, organised for those who are planning to build a new career or would like to become professionals in their field. The workshops are recommended for the public, hobbyists, amateurs and foodies alike: these last two days in general and are addressed to beginners or to those who are interested in gastronomy. They also organise masterclasses for professionals, which are shorter courses led by the most famous chefs of the region, each class having a specific theme and being a deep dive into some more advanced topics. Thus, the Taste of Transylvania Culinary Academy is an all-encompassing centre for knowledge, experiences, and promotional opportunities, where anyone can find something of value.

PanGastRo Course Academy

Advanced courses organised by the PanGastRo Course Academy - practical courses for the gastronomy, bakery-pastry, confectionery sector with internationally recognized trainers from the country and abroad. The courses are aimed at the improvement and professional development of specialists in the field who want to know and learn the latest techniques and innovations in the fields. The trainers are internationally recognized, as Chef Kiss Florin, winner of the silver medal in Luxembourg, Lady Chef of Romania, Cornelia Ghișoi and master pastry chef, Anita Nardai or Kálmán Horváth. They are proud of their trainers who have the desire to teach other specialists to evolve, some of the course topics being event menus, a la carte menus, finger food, cold and hot dishes, entrees, different cakes etc.

Food Science Department

Sapientia University of Transylvania (EMTE) is a quality-oriented, determined and internationally competitive university. It aims to train professionals who, after obtaining their degree, will be able to find their place in the region or in any country in the European Community. The University has been present among the higher education institutions in Romania since 2001. Sapientia EMTE operates in four locations.

The Food Science Department of the Faculty of Miercurea Ciuc is mainly responsible for the training of food engineers and the postgraduate master's degree in sustainable biotechnologies. The emphasis is on practical education in the undergraduate courses, which is served by laboratories for teaching or research. The aim is to transfer practical, usable knowledge, keeping up with the latest challenges as technology in the food industry is rapidly evolving and expectations of food products and healthy eating are increasing. Graduates can find employment in a variety of fields in the food industry.

The department's scientific research focuses on the production and testing of functional and innovative foods, the study of food-borne pathogenic microorganisms, the use of natural antimicrobial agents in food preservation and the development of the food industry's use of local raw materials. Students are also involved in scientific work, with significant achievements in scientific student conferences, national and international professional food science competitions.

The Food Science Department cooperates closely with regional food companies (e.g. dairy, meat or baking industry, fermentation technologies, mineral water bottling, etc.) and professional associations. It participates in ensuring professionalism in food-related competitions and exhibitions.





EU-level partnerships

Collaboration projects at the EU level are crucial for fostering innovation, economic growth, and social cohesion among member states. By pooling resources and expertise, these initiatives enhance the EU's global competitiveness and address transnational challenges more effectively. In recent years Harghita County had significant projects that were aiming at some parts of the gastro industry, we would like to highlight a few of them.

Culinary and Proximity Tourism in Rural Areas

The European Network for the Promotion of Culinary and Proximity Tourism in Rural Areas project aimed to provide small and medium-sized enterprises active in rural tourism with a flexible toolkit of training opportunities tailored to their needs, to enhance their capacity in the field of culinary and proximity tourism, in line with the rules and guidelines of the European Green Deal.

The project had the goals of favouring culinary and proximity tourism through a set of flexible and digital results, translated in 7 languages (EN, IT, RO, BG, FR, TR, GR):

1. Qualitative Needs Analysis for SMEs and NGOs involved in the promotion of the local territory through culinary and proximity tourism.
2. The Digital Course for the empowerment of culinary and proximity tourism.
3. International Open Network for Culinary and proximity Tourism.

The project was co-funded by the Erasmus+ program.
Project Start Date: 01.11.2021
Project End Date: 31.10.2023

Coordinator: Pole Metropolitain Pour L'entrepreneuriat, Le Carburateur (France)
Project partners:
ADI Harghita (Romania)
Association for the Education and Development of Disabled People (Greece)
Balkan International Academy (Bulgaria)
EUROASIA Innovative Society Association (Turkey)
Igor Vitale International Srl (Italy)
Rivensco Consulting Ltd (Cyprus)
University of Gastronomic Sciences (Italy)

SKILLS

The main objective of the project is to contribute towards up-to-date skills development of the target beneficiaries (students, potential students, agricultural producers) by introducing and promoting the concepts of Circular agriculture and Green Growth, as well as to boost the modernization of the curricula at the faculties of agriculture by making them more attractive for the future students. Additionally, SKILLS puts to opening employment opportunities and widening the perspectives of jobs in the green skills and CA by boosting the skills of the target group. Eventually, SKILLS project promotes the concept of Circular Agriculture as a sustainable, resilient branch. SKILLS consortium aims at enhancing and speeding up the awareness for Circular Agriculture through elaborating a Baseline study in typology and training material composed of practical know-how and a well structured set of tools, modules and digital courses that agricultural practitioners can go through and change their mindset and rethink their activities.

The following results have been produced in the framework of the project:

1. Baseline study on employment challenges and potential for circular agriculture
2. Digital course in green skills
3. Agrilingua Practicum
4. Tool in agri-food production (deadline: 27.08.2024)
5. Digital course in circular agriculture (deadline: 27.08.2024)

The project was co-funded by the Erasmus+ program.
Project Start Date: 28.02.2022
Project End Date: 27.08.2024

Coordinator: University of the Aegean (Greece)
Project partners:
ADI Harghita (Romania)
Association for Internationalisation of Education and Science (North Macedonia)
Distretto Agroalimentare Regionale (Italy)
Vytauto Didziojo Universitetas (Lithuania)



CAPacity building

The general objective of the 'CAPacity building in rural areas for sustainable agriculture development' project was to inform farmers and other rural actors about the CAP, to raise public awareness of its content, objectives and future challenges, and to promote and accept the European agricultural model in order to ensure sustainable agricultural development in rural areas.

The aims of the project were to:

1. present the common agricultural model and help its adoption.
2. present alternative sources of income in rural areas.

The project objectives were to:

1. raise public awareness of the challenges posed by climate change, renewable energy sources and biodiversity conservation.
2. help the public understand sustainable land management that benefits both people and nature.

3. promoting healthy lifestyle among the population, emphasising the consumption of local products.

The project was funded by the Agriculture and Rural Development - European Commission.

Project start date: 2016

Project end date: 2017

Coordinator: Harghita County Council (Romania)

Project partner: Dâmbovița County Council (Romania)

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is one of the EU's most important policies. It is a partnership between agriculture and society and between Europe and its farmers. It is a common policy for all the countries and citizens of the EU and benefits them in various ways.

It supports farmers and improves agricultural production, maintains rural areas and landscapes, keeps the rural economy alive and helps tackle climate change and the sustainable management of natural resources.

The aim of the CAPactivities project, in which the Development Agency of Harghita County and Harghita County Council were participating together, was to make CAP information more accessible and understandable to the general public.

The main target groups of the project were: the general public, in particular farmers; small producers; consumers; producers of traditional products.

Program: Information Measures for the Common Agricultural Policy (IMCAP)

Project start date: 01.08.2022

Project end date: 31.06.2023

Coordinator: Development Agency of Harghita County (Romania)

Project partner: Harghita County Council (Romania)

CAPactivities 2022

CAPTION

The Harghita County Council together with the Harghita County Development Agency successfully applied to the European Union in 2017, as a result of which the CAPTION project was created. The county council contributed 40% to the tender with a budget of nearly 232,000 euros.

Results of the project:

1. In order to promote the project and the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, Szekler Productive paper bags, wrapping paper, a map of local producers, posters, flyers and labelled wooden signs for use in fairs were created.

2. The methodology for inspecting food products labelled as Szekler Product has been prepared in order to ensure the food safety and environmental conditions of traditional products.

3. The design manual of Szekler Products has been prepared: it summarises and describes the guidelines and methods of use that must be followed when using the design elements.

4. In order to support local producers, the website szeklytermek.ro was completed, with the possibility of selling products online.

5. Development of e-learning teaching materials: the main goal is to teach local producers about marketing and the information needed to sell their products.

6. Harghita County Council participated as co-organizer in the event entitled 'Village in the City' which took place in September of 2018.

7. The EU's agricultural program opportunities were presented and the future of small and medium-sized farming was discussed at a workshop organised in March 2019, in Brussels Here Szekler Products were also presented as part of the project.

8. Information seminars were held in three settlements of the county: Cristuru Secuiesc, Remetea and Miercurea Ciuc. The farmers participating in the events (483 in total) were able to learn about the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, future ideas for Szekler Products, online sale of products, useful information about area-based agricultural subsidies and the Hungarian government's economic revitalization program for Szeklerland.

9. An 'Open day on the farm' event took place in the village of Ineu on 13 June 2019, where the participating young people could get to know successful examples. The cattle farm was visited by 46 students from 3 agricultural profile schools.

10. The final conference of the project was held in Miercurea Ciuc in June 2019, and it had the title 'Our value is healthy food'. 94 participants listened to informative lectures on the Common Agricultural Policy, the results of the CAPTION project, organic certification, the importance of product inspection, the natural values of Harghita County, and healthy nutrition.

The project was funded by the Agriculture and Rural Development Department of the European Commission.

Project start date: 26.06.2018

Project end date: 25.06.2019

Coordinator: Harghita County Council (Romania)

Project partner: Development Agency of Harghita County (Romania)

FRIDGE

In June 2018, the Tolna County Development Agency (TMFÜ) submitted the 'FRIDGE – Development of food industry SME competitiveness for better potentials in growth project in the framework of Interreg Europe Program, priority axis 2.1. The objective of the project was to improve the competitiveness of SMEs operating in the food industry through international exchanges and the improvement of professional policies.

The project was built on three thematic pillars:

1. Development of production capacity by purchasing machines and tools.
2. Bringing local products to domestic and foreign markets, reaching new markets through product development.
3. Increasing productivity.

The project was co-funded by the Interreg Europe program.

Project start date: 01.08.2018
Project end date: 31.07.2023

Coordinator: Tolna County Development Agency (Hungary)

Project partners:

Harghita County Council (Romania)

Technical Educational Institute of Western Macedonia (Greece)

Economic Council of East Flanders (Belgium)

Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia (Finland)

Competence Center for Nutrition (Germany)

FoodSavers

The Food Savers project is designed to address the issue of food waste on consumer level within urban areas of Harghita county. The primary focus is on reducing the amount of consumer food waste generated in households and restaurants through targeted prevention efforts.

The project has four main objectives:

1. Increasing Consumer Awareness: the first objective aims to educate and empower urban consumers in Harghita county about food waste prevention. This involves reaching out to approximately 30,000 consumers through an extensive awareness campaign. Utilising social media platforms and video materials, the campaign will highlight key aspects of food waste, including its environmental impact, associated costs and potential solutions. Additionally, a culinary publication will be developed, both in print and online, offering practical tips and recipes for utilising commonly wasted food items, such as less desirable cuts of meat and surplus bakery products.

2. Developing a Food Waste App: complementing the awareness campaign, the second objective focuses on providing consumers with practical tools to implement waste reduction strategies. A dedicated food waste app will be created to assist users in managing their food inventory, creating shopping lists, finding recipes based on existing ingredients, receiving notifications about expiring food items and monitoring the amounts of food waste generated. By facilitating better food management practices, the app aims to engage at least 1,000 consumers in actively reducing their food waste.

3. Quantifying Household Food Waste: this involves conducting surveys in the three major cities of Harghita county to assess the current amount and composition of household food waste. These surveys, conducted at the beginning and end of the project, will provide valuable insights into consumer attitudes and behaviours regarding food waste prevention. The goal is to achieve a minimum

20% reduction in household food waste following the implementation of project activities and campaigns.

4. Training Restaurant Representatives: the final objective targets restaurant representatives and gastronomy students, aiming to increase their awareness of food waste issues and equip them with practical solutions. Specialised training programs will be developed, focusing on best practices for food waste prevention in restaurant settings. This will include initial assessments of food waste practices, implementation of training courses, development of prevention guidelines and final assessments to measure the impact of the training. Additionally, restaurant owners/managers, municipality representatives, decision makers and project staff members will have the opportunity to learn from successful food waste management practices during a field trip to the region of South Tyrol. Overall, the Food Savers project seeks to address food waste from multiple angles, engaging both consumers and food service providers to foster a culture of waste reduction and resource optimization within urban communities in Harghita county.

The project is currently in the process of contracting and will be co-funded by the EU through the Single Market Programme (SMP) - Food Waste for Stakeholders.
Potential Project Start Date: 01.06.2024
Potential Project End Date: 30.05.2026
Coordinator: Harghita County Council (Romania)
Project partners:
ADI Harghita (Romania)
Rural Development Association of Harghita County Council (Romania)



A scenic landscape featuring a large tree on the left, three people working in a field, and a horse-drawn cart in the foreground. The background shows rolling hills and mountains under a bright sky. The text "European Region of Gastronomy 2027" is overlaid in white on the right side of the image.

European Region of Gastronomy 2027

Candidacy

Harghita County humbly presents its candidacy for the esteemed title of European Region of Gastronomy in 2027. Situated in the heart of Transylvania, our region is a treasure trove of culinary delights, where tradition, innovation and sustainability converge to create a truly unique gastronomic experience.

As we embark on this journey, we are guided by our deep-rooted commitment to preserving and promoting our rich culinary heritage. Our cuisine is a reflection of our cultural diversity, shaped by centuries of Hungarian, Romanian, Armenian and Szekler traditions. From hearty stews simmered over open flames to delicate brandy crafted with care, every dish tells a story of our land, people and shared history. In our bid to become a European Region of Gastronomy, we recognize the importance of collaboration, innovation and inclusivity. Through partnerships with local producers, chefs and community stakeholders, we are committed to fostering a sustainable food ecosystem that celebrates diversity, supports local economies and nourishes both body and soul. Our candidacy is not just about culinary excellence; it's about inviting the whole of Europe to dinner. We envision a culinary journey that transcends borders, where flavours

mingle, cultures collide and friendships are forged over shared meals. From cosy village taverns to bustling local markets, Harghita County offers a warm welcome to all who seek to explore, indulge and connect through food.

As we prepare to embark on this exciting adventure, we invite you to join us at our table. Let us break bread together, exchange stories and celebrate the rich tapestry of European gastronomy.

Whether you're a seasoned epicurean or a curious traveller, there's a place for you in Harghita County, where every meal is an invitation to discover the flavours of our region and the warmth of our hospitality. Together, let us savour the essence of Harghita County and toast to a future filled with culinary delights, cultural exchange and unforgettable experiences.

Bon appétit! Guten Appetit!
¡Buen provecho! Buon appetito!
Bom apetite! Eet smakelijk!
Smaklig måltid! Smacznego!
Poftă bună! Jó étvágyat!





Harghita County: a catalyst for IGCAT's vision

Receiving the European Region of Gastronomy award in 2027 would not only be a huge achievement for Harghita County but also a significant benefit for IGCAT. Our county is prepared to actively support and amplify IGCAT's mission through various initiatives and collaborations. Here's how Harghita County can contribute to IGCAT's goals and further its vision for culinary and cultural excellence.

1. Promotion of IGCAT's brand and mission

Visibility: Harghita County would prominently feature the IGCAT logo and name in all promotional materials, online platforms, events, and media, significantly increasing the organization's visibility.

Recognition: by associating with Harghita County's diverse and rich culinary and cultural heritage, including the traditions of its minority communities, IGCAT's recognition and prestige would be enhanced.

Dissemination: the Harghita County Council and ADI Harghita have partners in more than 30 European countries, thanks to projects funded by the European Commission. Such projects are an excellent possibility to promote IGCAT e.g. on project events, meetings and activities.

2. Engagement in IGCAT programmes

Ongoing participation: Harghita County would commit to actively participate in other IGCAT programmes such as the Food Film Menu, World Food Gift Challenge, European Young Chef Award, and Top Websites for Foodie Travelers.

Capacity building: local companies and enterprises will be prepared and supported to engage in these programmes, showcasing the region's talents and innovations.

3. Long-term vision for IGCAT's World Region of Gastronomy award

Future aspirations: winning the European Region of Gastronomy award would set the stage for Harghita County to aim for the World Region of Gastronomy award, demonstrating IGCAT's role in fostering long-term regional development and excellence.

4. Learning and best practices

Capacity building: the application process itself will enhance the county's knowledge and skills in tourism and gastronomy, setting an example of best practices.

Standard raising: through collaboration with IGCAT, Harghita County aims to elevate its standards to match top tourist destinations, benefiting the broader IGCAT community by sharing insights and methodologies.

5. Knowledge sharing and innovation

Sustainable development: Harghita County can contribute to IGCAT's knowledge base by sharing innovative approaches to sustainable development and campaign implementation.

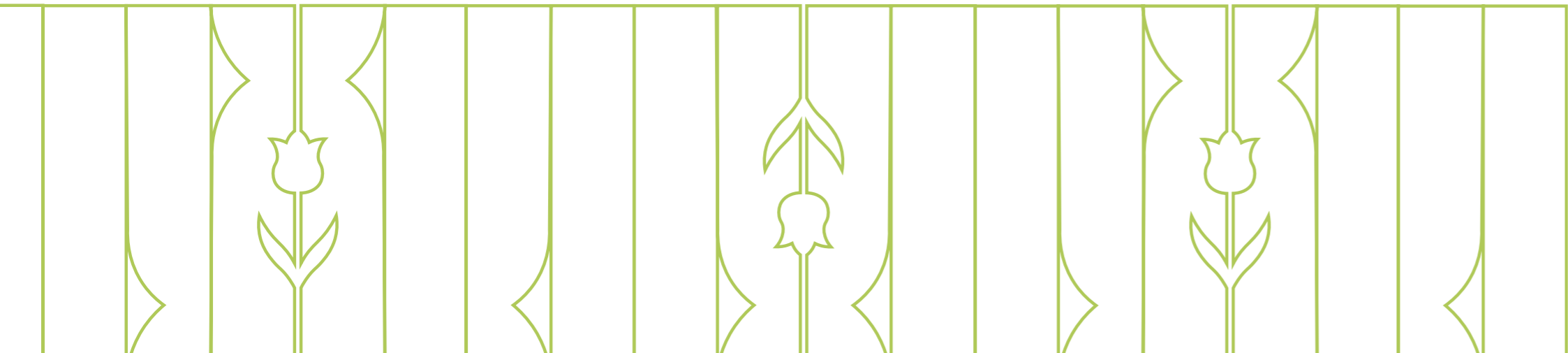
Experience sharing: by exchanging experiences with other regions in Romania and Europe, Harghita County can help future applicants and contribute to the collective growth and success of the IGCAT network.

6. Support for Young Chefs

European integration: the ongoing young chef competition in Harghita County could be elevated to a European level, aligning with IGCAT's Young Chef Award. Hosting events in Harghita would provide a platform for emerging talents and foster cross-cultural culinary exchange.

7. Contribution to IGCAT's Global Experts Network

One of IGCAT's key strengths is its Global Experts Network, where experts collaborate to foster local pride, build alliances across communities and sectors, and encourage entrepreneurial thinking, creativity, and innovation rooted in traditions and heritage. These efforts are crucial for empowering and preserving cultural expressions in local communities. Additionally, IGCAT's initiatives raise awareness about sustainable food systems and promote responsible consumerism. Harghita County, with its own wealth of experts and specialists, can contribute significantly to this network. By winning the award, our local experts can join forces with IGCAT's network, creating a synergistic effect that amplifies both our efforts and those of IGCAT, leading to shared growth and enriched cultural exchanges.





Consortium

ADI Harghita - Since 2009 our goal is to create and maintain long-term cooperation with the county's local administrations and organisations working in the field of tourism, carrying out national and international projects, the purpose of which is to improve tourism, as well as maintain culture and the environment. Our main activity is: development and popularisation of tourism, development of programs and projects in the field of sustainable tourism.

Harghita County Council pays special attention to tourism among the many fields of activity within its jurisdiction. They are building a green and safe, family-friendly county for the hundreds of thousands of tourists who visit the region every year. The county is renowned for its gastronomy and culture and is a proud owner of its natural assets. They are a committed partner of the European Region of Gastronomy initiative.

Honline Media - a major media player in the region, the only printed daily newspaper in the county. It produces content and information, and with its publication 'The Szekler Kitchen and Garden' it makes a significant contribution to the re-discovery of the values of local gastronomy and to the strengthening of the profession. Over the years, they have accumulated considerable knowledge, which is now being made available to the public for obtaining the European Region of Gastronomy in 2027.

Development Agency of Harghita County - the main objective of the Agency is to contribute, through its activities and programs, to the development of the county, and, if required, to the professional background-work

related to the activities of the County Council. The Agency is an open institution which, through its promoter and mediator role, helps local initiatives to materialise. It collaborates with relevant actors for the balanced development of the county.

Caterer's Association of Ciuc region - one of the newly founded legal entities that gathers businesses with similar interests. They aim to address emerging professional challenges and to find common answers to changing challenges. They meet regularly and hold meetings on changing legislation, seek to have greater bargaining power with suppliers through joint procurement etc.

Páva KulinarIQum Association - the dreamers and creators of the Taste of Transylvania food festival. It is a dream shared by a few determined chefs, restaurateurs and local producers. Together they aim to open a new chapter in the gastronomic culture of Transylvania. They embark on a journey to rediscover our gastronomic traditions and skills, and to rescue our vanishing heritage - they want to put Transylvania, a unique and somewhat remote landscape, back on the international gastronomic map as a new yet timeless destination.

University of Sapientia - The Faculty of Economics, Socio-Human Sciences and Engineering wishes to be part of the institutional system of higher education conforming to the demands of the region, corresponding to future standards and transmitting the values of the European Union. Amongst others they have a department of Food Science and they have a good work relation with several companies in the area where they do research and innovation.

City of Miercurea Ciuc - a very pleasant town, the administrative centre of the county. It has a rich historical and cultural heritage and an important pilgrimage location. It is visited by hundreds of thousands of tourists every year and hosts the famous Potato Festival.

City of Odorheiu Secuiesc - a town with county status in Harghita County. It is the economic and cultural centre of the Odorhei Basin. It is the second most populated town in the county. Furthermore, it is the historical, social and cultural centre of Szeklerland and the seat of Szeklerland with centuries-old traditions.

City of Gheorgheni - the third most populous town in Harghita County, the centre of the former Gheorgheni administrative area. According to written documents, the town was already standing in 1332. In 1637 a significant number of Armenians settled here, which had an impact on the local gastronomy and economy.

Pro Economica Foundation - its main objective is to improve the living standards of Romanian families by improving economic, social, cultural and religious living conditions, based on scientific and technical research. Has a very important role in the economic development in Transylvania. It also provides financial and moral support to families.

Boro Info - Boro Info Group, a local company from Odorheiu Secuiesc, known for over 23 years of experience in serving bakeries, confectioneries and hospitality industry in Romania by publishing the specialised magazines 'Gastromedia' and 'Baker-Confectioner'. They also organise the biggest bakery fair in Romania.

Goals

Over the past six years, Harghita County has undergone a remarkable transformation in tourism, marked by substantial improvements in both communication and physical infrastructure. These efforts have elevated us to one of the premier destinations in the country. Moving forward, we aim to further strengthen and expand our tourism industry by focusing on several key areas.

One of our primary objectives is the internationalisation of our gastronomy. Harghita County boasts culinary offerings that meet international standards, making this a natural focus for showcasing our unique values to a global audience. By promoting our exceptional cuisine, we aim to enhance the overall appeal of our destination.

Our specific goals include:

Strengthening the Destination:

We aim to solidify Harghita County's reputation as a top tourist spot, with gastronomy at the forefront. Good food is a universal attraction and we want to invite the European community to experience the culinary delights of Harghita County.

Raising Awareness and Prestige:

To achieve our goals, it is crucial to raise awareness among the local population about the value of our culinary heritage and elevate the prestige of the culinary profession. This involves educational initiatives and community engagement to foster pride and participation in our gastronomic culture.

Enhance and expand tourism education programs,

ensuring they equip students and the current workforce with the skills and knowledge necessary to excel in the dynamic and competitive global tourism industry.

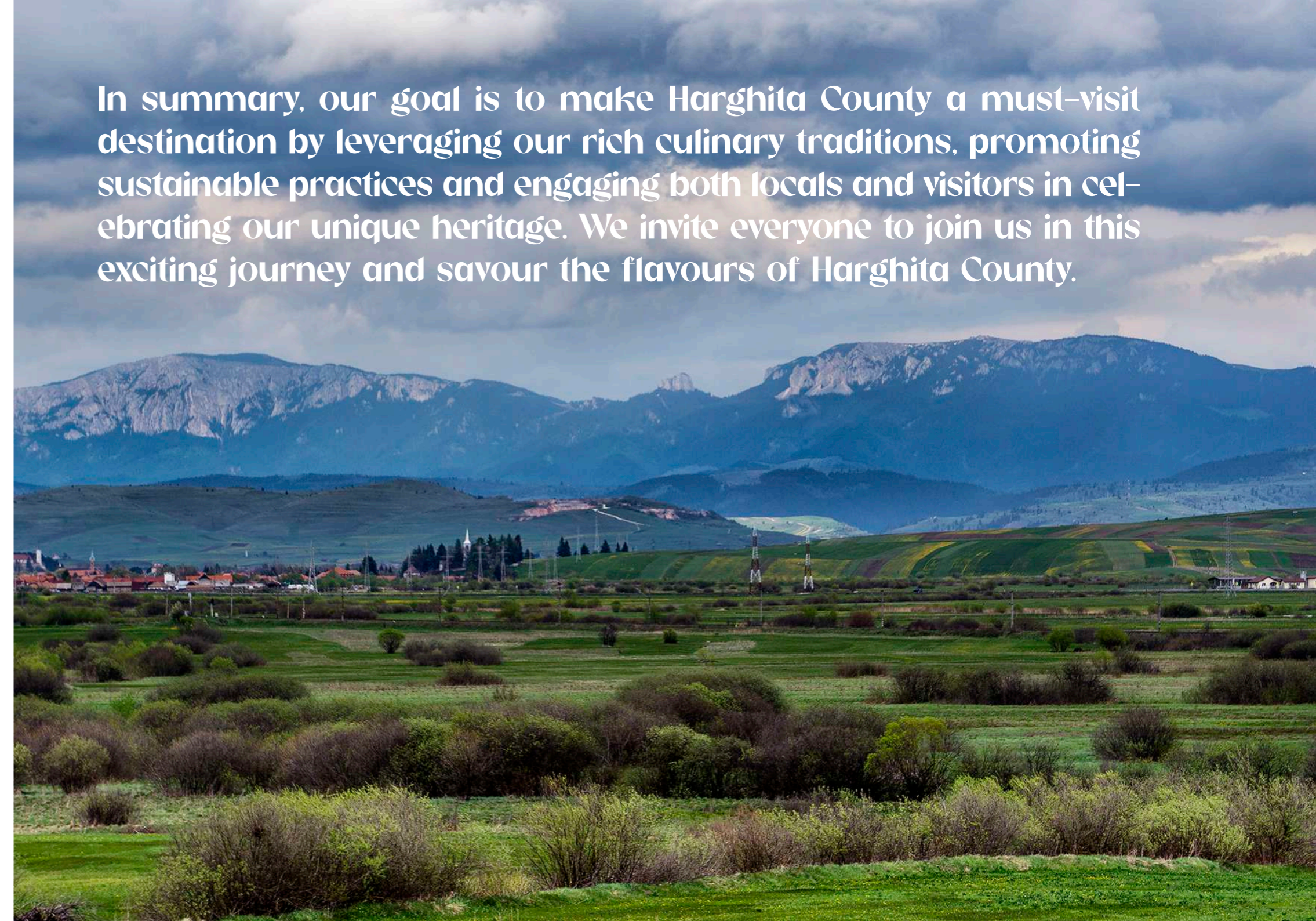
Enhancing Quality through Local Supply Chains:

We plan to shorten local supply chains, which will help improve the quality of our offerings. By sourcing ingredients locally, we can ensure freshness and sustainability, while also supporting local producers.

Sustainable Development:

All our efforts will be guided by a commitment to sustainability. We will rely on our natural resources responsibly, prioritising their preservation to ensure long-term benefits for both our community and the environment.

In summary, our goal is to make Harghita County a must-visit destination by leveraging our rich culinary traditions, promoting sustainable practices and engaging both locals and visitors in celebrating our unique heritage. We invite everyone to join us in this exciting journey and savour the flavours of Harghita County.



Marketing and communication

In 2024 Harghita County won the award for Best Promotion at the Destination of the Year (Destinația Anului) competition. This gave a significant boost to marketing efforts of the Visit Harghita team and the goal is to build on such successes.

The marketing and communication plan for the European Gastronomic Region award will be designed with the help of marketing and tourism experts. Our aim is to present Harghita County as a gastronomic and natural paradise. Special attention will be paid to families, nature lovers and culinary tourists. The communication plan will be implemented on several channels, involving different partners.

Communication about the European Region of Gastronomy 2027 programme will be carried out on two axes:

1. raising awareness and informing the inhabitants of the region about the values conveyed by the European Region of Gastronomy initiative, strengthening gastronomic identity and emphasising the importance of local products.

2. increasing the national and international recognition of the region, attracting more tourists by presenting gastronomy, culture and natural features, keeping in mind the principles of slow tourism and slow food.

Messages will include the following main elements:

- the meeting point of traditional and innovative gastronomy
- promoting quality local products
- sustainability
- promoting the region's diverse culture and rich natural resources

The European Region of Gastronomy 2027 campaign carried out for Harghita County will use a multichannel approach, including social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok), TV and radio, printed and online press, as well as various advertising media. The content will be produced in different formats and languages (English, Romanian, Hungarian) to reach the target audience.

The main message will be:

“TASTE HARGHITA COUNTY!”

Elements of the promotional campaign:

- The core element of the campaign will be a promotional video presenting Harghita County as candidate for the European Region of Gastronomy award in 2027. It will incorporate the natural and cultural heritage of the region, spiced up with the destination's family-friendly tourism services.
- At tourism exhibitions, the Visit Harghita stand will host an open kitchen where Harghita county chefs will prepare traditional and reimagined dishes for visitors to taste. In addition, the stand will offer the opportunity to present and taste Szekler products. In 2027, the programmes for opinion leaders will be built around gastronomy, so that their content will focus on culinary experiences, be it in restaurants, Local Gastronomy Points, visitor centres, festivals or local products.
- On the official tourism website and app of Harghita County - i.e. Visit Harghita - the European Region of Gastronomy 2027 campaign will be featured on a dedicated sub-page, with all the information related to it. A trackable QR code will be created for this sub-page, which can be used on printed promotional material.
- The gastronomic events organised in the county will also appear on this subpage, listed separately, alongside the current Visit Harghita events calendar. All information will be available in three languages (English, Romanian, Hungarian) and will be marked with the logo of Harghita County European Region of Gastronomy 2027.
- A gastronomy-themed printed publication will be produced, in line with Visit Harghita branding, complemented by the branding of the European Region of Gastronomy award. The brochure will be available free of charge in three languages (English, Romanian, Hungarian) at the Visit Harghita stand in Harghita County's catering establishments, tourist information offices and tourism fairs.
- As part of the campaign, social media advertisements promoting the programme will be created, search engine optimisation will be carried out with the help of Google partners, PR articles will be published and web banners will be placed at external partners. Participation in well-known national and international events, festivals and conferences to promote the programme.
- A gastronomic section will be included in the annual Regional Tourism Conference, organised jointly by Visit Harghita, Visit Mures and Visit Covasna.
- All activities published in the newsletters of Harghita County Council and the Harghita Community Development Association (Visit Harghita/ADI Harghita). The European Region of Gastronomy 2027 programme will be presented on all events attended by Visit Harghita representatives, including conferences, tourism-themed meetings and European Union project meetings (26 countries, 87 partner organisations).
- We will also hold presentations on important events at European level.

Budget 2024-2030

Marketing and Promotion:

2,000,000 EUR

Includes designing the bid book, expo presentations, social media campaigns, influencer campaigns etc.

Events – Tasting Harghita:

1,500,000 EUR

Covers various events at local and European levels, including presentations, conferences and more.

Management:

1,240,000 EUR

Encompasses staff costs for the team implementing the project from 2024 to 2030.

International Cooperation:

1,500,000 EUR

Funds future collaborations between stakeholders at the European level and projects aimed at developing local gastronomy.

Programme Implementation:

4,000,000 EUR

Includes training, educational programmes, raising awareness and prestige at the local level, strengthening our destination, focusing on sustainable development and shortening supply chains.

Total Budget: 10,240,000 EUR



EUROPEAN REGION OF GASTRONOMY
HARGHITA CANDIDATE 2027

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