With an eye for trade and invasion routes, the Saxons sited their largest settlements close to the Carpathian passes. One of the best placed, **BRAŞOV** (Kronstadt to the Saxons and Brassó to the Hungarians) grew prosperous as a result, the economic power of its Saxon elite long outlasting its feudal privileges. During the 1960s, the communist regime drafted thousands of Moldavian villagers to Braşov’s new factories, making it Transylvania’s second-largest city. Economic collapse led to **riots** in November 1987 and December 1989; since then more factories have closed, and the city’s population has fallen by about sixty thousand, but tourism has become increasingly important.

Most visitors make a beeline for the largely Baroque **Old Town**, around **Piaţa Sfatului**, a strikingly handsome, quintessentially Germanic square dominated by the **Black Church**. Nearby, all coiled beneath Mount Tâmpa, are museums, medieval ramparts and the Schei quarter. The town’s proximity to a host of attractions – such as the **Piatra Craiului** mountain range, the alpine resort of **Poiana Braşov**, the fortified Saxon churches of **Hărman**and **Prejmer**, and “Dracula’s Castle” at **Bran**– makes it an excellent base.