“I rubbed my eyes in amazement,” wrote Walter Starkie of **SIBIU** (Hermannstadt in German and Nagyszeben in Hungarian) in 1929. “The town where I found myself did not seem to be in Transylvania, for it had no Romanian or Hungarian characteristics: the narrow streets and old gabled houses made me think of Nuremberg.” Nowadays, the illusion is harder to sustain, in a city surrounded by high-rise suburbs and virtually abandoned by the Saxons themselves, but the Old Town’s brightly painted houses, with “eye” windows to ventilate their attic grain stores, are still startling. Sibiu has many fine old **churches** and some of Romania’s best museums, as well as the remains of the **bastions** and fortifications.

Founded by 1191, Sibiu was the Transylvanian Saxons’ chief city, dominating trade with Wallachia through the Olt gorge. In 1241 their citadel was destroyed by the Tatars, leaving only a hundred survivors; the townsfolk surrounded themselves by 1452, with four rings of walls, which repelled the Turks three times but were largely demolished in the nineteenth century. Now, the wheel has turned, and Sibiu has stronger trading links with Germany than any other Transylvanian town, and even elected a Saxon mayor – so successful that he was elected president in 2014. His greatest coup was Sibiu’s nomination as **European Capital of Culture**for 2007, which brought a million visitors to the city.