

# BUNĂ ROMÂNIA ProjectsAbroad

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*H*ello and nice to see you again. Except for some cold weather forecasts Romania has something else to offer this month, so, leaving the cold behind, I'll start describing what's in this edition of our newsletter.

First comes Isabelle with some alternative options to modern medicine and cosmetics, useful if you ask me since you can't be sure what you might find in a bar a soap or a bottle of shampoo these days. Cooking our way through the newsletter we find a very interesting recipe for some of my favourite cookies, brownies, mmm-mm, this time they're Romanian style. It's been a while since we had a chocolate dessert in the newsletter so I thought now was a good time.

After cooking and enjoying those lovely brownies we make our way through the newsletter where volunteers Kirsten, Signe and Chris share their experience in Romania with us. Speaking of which, there is a lot to be told; some hiked, some drove, some enjoyed the benefits of having a flat tyre on top of the mountain, right Chris?

Either way, adventure is spelled in the Volunteer Stories section followed by some adventurous pictures at Volunteers' Moments.

And so, I wish you happy reading, successful cooking, a warm winter since it's coming anyway and until next time, all the best for everyone.

*Alex Parasca*  
*Desk Officer for Projects Abroad Romania*

## Grandma's Advice – Pharmaceuticals at home

by Isabelle de Cure-Ryan - Former Archaeology and Journalism Volunteer

In village life, family treatments are passed down like recipes, connecting generations through home-grown methods of treating hair and textiles and curing minor illnesses. Products found around the house, or local produce – from onions or chamomile to fat - can be practically utilized in the home. Gelu and Nuți Ciucaș and Rodica Ichim, in the commune of Bod, Brasov, shared the methods they have been using since childhood.



### Curing illness

Many of their remedies for minor ailments involve placing a piece of fabric on the affected area – for example, the stomach or the chest. For stomach pains, the fabric would be soaked in water and rachieu de drojdie (yeast brandy). Similarly, chest and lung problems could be treated with fabric soaked in warmed sheep fat, or by eating polenta cooked in very salty water. For indigestion, an onion would be sliced very thinly, cooked on a hot plate, and placed on the fabric with wood ashes and a few drops of vinegar. For sinus problems, a very strong tea can be made with boiling water and vinegar, chamomile or mint. A few drops of cooking oil can treat ear ache, and olive oil can be applied to baby rash. Gelu and Nuți describe these treatments as extremely effective, with overnight results.

### Hair treatments

Homemade hair treatments are easy, cheap and chemical-free, and simple hair dyes can be made with household products. A rinse, similar to a very strong tea, can be made by boiling water with chamomile –to enhance the colour and shine of blonde hair – or chestnut leaves for auburn and red hair.



This should be rinsed through the hair after shampooing and washed out thoroughly. Similarly, adding several drops of the chemist substance pioctanina to water and following the same process will dye hair a mauve colour.

For improving the texture of hair, washing it with plain white vinegar is “good for everything” – it removes residue and closes the cuticle to give hair a shiny, smooth appearance and texture.

## *Dying textiles*

Dying textiles in the home is as simple as soaking the woven fabric in water, with various natural substances added to create different colours: onion leaves for light brown, sugar cane for red, saffron for yellow, and boiled green chestnut leaves for dark brown.

Many food products have a surprising number of practical uses, and for every treatment detailed here there are many more alternatives. These are just a few of the methods that, despite having been somewhat replaced by store-bought medicines and dyes in recent years, have played- and continue to play- a significant role in many Romanian households, which are just as easy and effective now as they have been for generations.

Family soap recipe:

1. Boil pork fat with water in a very large pot.
2. Add pelin (wormwood) for scent.
3. Leave for one day, occasionally adding cold water. Gradually the mixture separates and hardens, creating a solid soap.
4. The following day, the soap can be sliced and removed with a long spoon. The remaining liquid is like a gel which burns skin - so the soap should not be removed by hand – although it can



## *Brownies – Romanian Style!!*

### **Ingredients:**

- \* 2 1/4 cups white sugar
- \* 2/3 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- \* 1/2 cup chopped nuts
- \* 1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- \* 1 teaspoon baking powder
- \* 1 teaspoon salt
- \* 3/4 cup of butter or margarine
- \* 4 slightly beaten eggs
- \* 2 spoons milk (optional)



### **Preparation:**

Pour sugar into a clean and dry jar. Press down firmly. Add cocoa powder and press down firmly. Pour in chopped nuts, making sure nuts are evenly layered in the jar. Combine flour, baking powder and salt. Pour into jar and seal.

Attach the following directions to the jar: Empty mix into large bowl. Use your hands to mix thoroughly. Add 3/4 cup of butter or margarine and 4 slightly beaten eggs.

Mix until completely blended. Spread batter into a lightly greased pan. Bake at 180 degrees Celcius for 30 minutes or until done. Cool in pan. Cut into 4 cm squares.

**(The Romanian name of the dish: Negrese)**

## Romania

By Kirsten Mariën - Former Drama Volunteer

Romania, Romania, Romania. Before I arrived, I knew almost nothing about Romania. It was “the country of the gypsy’s with very cold winters”. Now I have been here for over a week and every day is still full of surprises. It’s hard to catch the Romanian life, because there are so many contrasts. After a week, I have a lot of impressions that are hard to put into words. But I’ll try!

One of the first conclusions I can make is that Romanian people are very nice. If you feel kind of lonely you just have to walk around. After half an hour you’ll have found someone to talk to, someone who wants to help you, someone who wants to show you the secrets of the city. You must never be afraid to ask something, because people want to help you.

Another conclusion is that Romania is more beautiful than I thought. Of course you have the poor people and the communistic apartments, but on the other hand, you have the beautiful old centre of Brasov. And when you walk in there, it feels like vacation. The beautiful old buildings, the wonderful view over the city when you sit on the hill or at the towers of the old wall... Just sit in the sun and smile, because it’s so beautiful.

But I’m not here as a tourist, I’m here to work and to live. This is, I guess, the hardest thing, ‘cause you’re really thrown into Romanian life and habits.



When I arrived, I was brought immediately to my host mom, a nice 70-year old lady who doesn’t speak any English. All of a sudden I realised that I was here for 3 months and I had to find a way of living here.

It was kind of a shock: all the new habits, the impossibility to communicate clearly, a new country, nobody I know...But on the other hand: it’s the best way to get to know a country and because of that, I started meeting people so easily and rolled from one experience to another.

And then my work started. On one hand it's very nice and on the other hand it's kind of difficult. I give drama workshops to children.

It is really beautiful to see how thankful they are, how happy they are you do things with them. However it is hard to see how poor the schools are and how little material they have. When you walk in the little villages, you see the real Romanian life. Sometimes difficult, when you see a man searching in trash to find some food, but when you feel you can do something for the children and they are happy with it, you feel a bit better.

In the following weeks I will direct 3 groups of children so they can perform on a big show in December. When I told that to the kids, they were very excited. It's a challenge to direct the different ages, but I think with the enthusiasm of the children, it can only be a nice experience. Performing is their big goal, so I'm glad I can help them with that!

After a week, I'm still trying to get to grips with Romania. So many impressions, so many experiences, but every day is getting nicer. The longer I'm here, the more I understand the way of living and the beauty of it. No stress. Be kind. Enjoy what you get. Or like a Romanian street musician told me: Don't worry, be happy.



## Seize the moment and make every day a YES-day

By Signe Guldager Petersen - Former Veterinary Volunteer



15 hours after leaving my home in Denmark, I landed in Romania, and what a pleasant surprise. I didn't really know what to expect before I got here, but when I was met by Projects Abroad staff members Daniela and Mark in the airport, both with big smiles on their faces, I immediately felt safe and ready to see my new country. After two and a half hours of driving, I met my host mom, had supper and then I went to bed, thinking "why on earth did I come to Romania? I'm not even able to speak the language – I want to go home!" Those thoughts

only lasted one night, because the next day I was picked up by Daniela and Mark, and they showed me around Brasov, and there's no doubt at all: I love it here! After 8 weeks I feel well-established, and I no longer have problems with the language barrier. I'm taking Romanian classes twice a week at the university, just to learn the basics, but mainly we all speak English no matter where we're from.

I have had two placements and for my first three weeks I worked at the dog shelter in Triaj. I walked 20-25 dogs each day and quickly bonded with lots of them. Even though their conditions are bad, they're always happy and wagging their tails!

The female vet taught me how to take blood samples, prepare vaccinations, she asked me to assist her in operations and to insert drops on puppies and much more, which gave me a chance to see what veterinary science is about. Even though I've finished my work at the shelter, I still come back in weekends and sometimes weekdays to spend time with the dogs, and from time to time I'll end up in the operation room helping the vet, because she knows I can keep my head high even working with dying puppies on the table (yes, reality is hard!).



.I work at the Kronvet Clinic now and I'm enjoying it. The vets and nurses are very friendly and they try their best to explain everything to me. They want me to learn as much as possible and I'm very grateful for everything they teach me!

We have lots of fun when we're waiting for clients to arrive and through my time here I've witnessed very unusual and fascinating cases e.g. amputating a cat's tail and removing a tumour.



Romania is a very friendly and beautiful country with fantastic individuals who try their best to make the country a better place. In the beginning I found it a bit hard to adjust, because the behaviour here is different from back home – what I might find rude in Denmark is very normal here and that has led to interesting and hilarious discussions between Romanians and other Europeans.

I still have four weeks left here in Romania. I plan to enjoy every single day and do lots of fun things with my new and amazing friends.

The most important thing is to seize the moment and make every day a “Yes-day”! Don't say no to anything, because you might not get a second chance. This has been the journey of my life and every person I've met here has a special place in my heart, and so does the country in itself.

This is also why I've decided to come back next year in June on holiday, where I'll meet up with other volunteers and friends from the university, whom I met during my time here.



## Romania with Chris

By Chris Robertson - Former Teaching Volunteer



Leaving in 2 days has given me such mixed feelings. On one hand I am looking forward to going home to Australia to be with my gorgeous fiancé, but on the other hand I am sad to leave such a lovely place. I have been volunteering in Brasov for the last 2 months with some of the schools here on a Teaching placement. It has been such a fun and exciting time in my life. I was able to visit schools and help the English teachers with their lessons, sometimes teaching the whole lesson solo when the teachers were comfortable with me.

My favourite classes were those in the village schools where, in some, almost half the students were gypsy. It made for some very fun times. Some of my most favourite moments come from a class in a school just outside of town

in the village of Prejmer. The class was absolutely crazy on every occasion we taught them, which mostly resulted in arm wrestles, push up competitions and games by the end of class. One particular day which I will always remember was when 2 of the boys had a kick boxing match in class, unplanned, which resulted in tears and black eyes. Apparently one boy was annoying another, and so the irritated boy decided to fix the problem himself, bad luck for the annoying boy!

This taught me a lot about the very different discipline tactics which are used in Romania to Australia. They didn't seem to have any way to discipline them but to give them a stern talking to. But the amazing thing about this class is the manner in which they had changed by the time I last saw them. In the very last lesson we had we were able to work through some exercises from their workbooks on the black board with some of the most disruptive boys in the class, and they loved it.

When it was time to play a game at the end of class they actually wanted to keep writing. A complete turnaround to the way I had started out in this class. It just goes to show how putting effort into individuals and spending time encouraging them really does help them a lot.

I am truly going to miss the boys in the grade 5 class, they are such a lively bunch of guys who truly loved having fun. I guess this is the reason I connected with them so much, the joy they had was contagious. I love that in every situation in life there can be found joy and laughter and a positive outcome.

*Volunteers' Moments*

