

# Possibilities of Utilizing Historical Heritage for Tourism in Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár and Its Surroundings Nowadays

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## Abstract

Our present study focuses on Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár and its surroundings located in the southwestern part of historical Transylvania. In recent decades, many historical, cultural sites have been restored in this area. The studied area has favorable natural and socio-geographic features and a varied history. Its historical and cultural center is Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár and the Castle of Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár. The secular and ecclesiastical buildings and monuments of the castle are the cultural achievements of the Roman era, the Kingdom of Hungary, the Principality of Transylvania, the Habsburg Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Romania after World War I. Before 1990, it was mostly possible to visit memorial sites and monuments related to Romanian history. The university, founded in 1991 to commemorate the historic event in Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár on December 1<sup>st</sup> 1918, uses some parts of the buildings on the castle grounds. The cultural sites restored between 2013–2015 with the support of the European Union were integrated in the tourist offer. The Habsburg period of the city's history is described illustratively. The cathedral of the Roman Catholic Bishopric of Transylvania, founded in 1009, preserves the ecclesiastical, historical and architectural values of several centuries.

Nowadays it is not possible to visit the building of the Reformed Academy located in the castle, the priceless Batthyaneum library, as well as the remains of the 10<sup>th</sup>-century church. Making them accessible to visitors would significantly increase the tourist facilities and possibilities of the city and the region.

**Keywords:** historical heritage, the Castle of Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár, accessibility

## Introduction

The new opportunities of tourism, which began to develop spectacularly at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and then reached a crisis during the Covid epidemic, may put tourism in Romania, including Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár and its region, back into a development phase. In the last two decades, many artistic and architectural values and historical monuments related to different historical eras have been renovated in Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár and its region. The most significant renovations took place in the Castle of Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár. The vast majority of the historical, architectural and cultural tourism values of the studied area can be visited today and operate as tourist destinations. In this study, we primarily describe the tourist attractions of the Castle of Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár and the historical and architectural heritage renovated and made accessible in the area of the city after 1990.

## Methods and Used Sources

Nowadays, we have at our disposal a wide range of specialized literature related to the formation, development, sectors and research methods of tourism. The works of De Beer (1952), Towner (2000), Buzzard (2002), Michalkó (2007), Gyuricza (2008), Nedelcu (2011), Lukács (2012), Gherghilas (2014), Mason (2017) enriched various branches of tourism and tourism geography literature.

The majority of publications presenting the historical and touristic values of the research area of this study were published after 1990. During the decades of socialism, Romanian-language travel guides (Cioculescu, 1967; Murgu, 1967) were distributed, presenting Romania, the Romanian counties, cities, and mountains. Among the contemporary publications describing Romania and Transylvania in Hungarian, the most significant are the Hungarian-language guidebooks published in the Hungarian Panoráma publishing house (Ádám et al., 1979), which have gone through several editions, presenting Romania in the widest and most comprehensive way, as well as the several published "Travels in Transylvania" (Mátyás, 1986). In the sophisticated works written at the scientific level of the time, an important aspect was the presentation of the ideology of the time, the *achievements of the time* (Elekes, 2020).

In the changed political, social and economic environment after 1989–1990, a huge variety of Romanian, Hungarian, German, English and French-language publications and scientific works were published describing the tourism and attractions of Romania. Without claiming to be exhaustive, we mention Heltmann–Servatius (1993), Koszta Nagy (1998), Elekes (2004, 2019), Deák–László (2004), Sós–Farkas (2005), Pascaru–Andreescu (2007), Guide (2010), Juler (2010), Szilágyi (2011) books. Gudor's books published in 2012 and 2018 contributed to a deeper understanding of the historical heritage of the region.

The most significant sources used in this study, which present attractions in Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár and its region, are the books by Tileagda et al. (2011), Gudor (2020) and Elekes (2019). In addition to studying and summarizing the professional and methodological source works, we identified and updated the historical monuments that can be visited during the field trip.

### **The Historical Heritage and Architectural Monuments of Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár and Its Wider Region**

The most important city is Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár county seat in the valley of the Mureş/Maros river. The area of the city is a hilly area gradually rising from the Mureş/Maros floodplain. Located in the *shadow of wind and rain*, the area with a pleasant climate is suitable for growing plants and fruit, as well as animal husbandry. The salt mined in the area, the gold, silver and non-ferrous metal ore mines of the Munţii Metaliferi/Transylvanian Ore Mountains as well as the extensive forests played an important role in the economic life of the easily accessible landscape along the Mureş/Maros river. Its dense population was inhabited for centuries by Romanian, Hungarian, German (Saxon), Jewish, and Gypsy population (Badea, 1987; Kocsis, 2018; 2021).

The historical events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century significantly changed the settlements of the region, primarily the economic, ethnic, denominational and age structure of the urban population, as well as the number of people. Similarly to other areas of Transylvania annexed to Romania after the First World War, Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár and its region is characterized by an increase in the number and proportion of Orthodox Romanians and a decrease in the number of people of other nationalities and denominations. The economic restructuring that began after December 1989, the political and existential uncertainty resulted in a significant population decline in Romania, which continues to this day.

The population of Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár municipality in 1910 was 17,100 (10,415 Romanians, 5,418 Hungarians, 839 Germans, 428 others; 5,492 Orthodox, 5,065 Greek Catholics, 3,084 Roman Catholics, 1,168 Reformed, 503 Evangelicals, 1,644 Israelites, 137 Unitarians),

in 1992 71,168, in 2011 63,536 (55,671 Romanians, 1,010 Hungarians, 1,119 Gypsies, 115 Germans, 130 other, 5,490 undeclared; 51,659 Orthodox, 1,226 Greek Catholics, 1,195 Roman Catholics, 582 Reformed, 93 Lutheran, 14 Israelite, 47 Unitarian, 3,100 other, 5,620 did not declare). Another important town in the region is Aiud/Nagyenyed. Its population in 1910 was 15,536 (7,923 Hungarians, 7,178 Romanians, 167 Germans, 268 others; 2,024 Orthodox, 5,792 Greek Catholics, 5,227 Reformed, 267 Evangelicals, 175 Unitarians, 476 Israelites, 3 other denominations), in 1992 31,894, in 2011 22,876 (16,955 Romanians, 3,364 Hungarians, 930 Gypsies, 15 Germans, 7 other, 1,598 undeclared; 16,487 Orthodox, 730 Greek Catholics, 2,759 Reformed, 4 Evangelicals, 225 Unitarians, 949 other, 1622 did not declare) (Elekes, 2005; 2008; Németh & Elekes, 2006; Szilágyi et al., 2021; Erdélystat Statisztikák, n.d.; Institutul Național de Statistică, n.d.).

Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár and its surroundings which has an advantageous geographical location and natural and economic features, preserves a rich cultural heritage. The ruins of a significant number of military and secular buildings survived in the period A.D. 106–271 on the territory of the province of Dacia, which was part of the Roman Empire. The cultural heritage of the Roman era can be visited in the form of well-organized tourist destinations primarily in Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár, in the Roman-era Apulum area. The migration period between 271–895 (Goths, Huns, Gepids, Avars, Danube Bulgarian Empire) left little archaeological and cultural value for posterity. After the Hungarian conquest (895/896), with the adoption of Latin-rite Christianity centered in Rome, the Kingdom of Hungary, which also included Transylvania, became part of the Western European cultural circle for centuries. This is confirmed by the buildings of Roman Catholic Bishopric (archdiocese since 1991) of Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár, founded in 1009 as the ecclesiastical center of Transylvania. At the same time, Orthodox and other cultural influences prevailed in Transylvania.

Western European streams of ideas, cultural trends, art styles (Romanesque style, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, classicism, Art Nouveau, etc.), Orthodox and other influences created diverse cultural geographical values in the territory of Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár and its regions. (Tileagda et al. 2011; Gudor, 2020).

Centuries of construction were destroyed by rebellions and wars. Architectural and cultural values were destroyed in 1848–1849, during the two world wars, border changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and during the period of extreme political systems. Ideological *revaluation*, cultural values, and a change in function of buildings took place in the last century, more strongly during the decades of communism. In the two decades between the two world wars and after 1990, the rise of Orthodox culture prevailed in Transylvania, Partium and Banat. Economic development, artistic values, renovation, improvement, establishment

of historical monuments, *strengthening* their former function characterized the first two decades of the *political détente* of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Cultural values have been learned and presented in several languages, with the help of scientific publications and guidebooks.

In the books of Gudor (2020), Tileagda et al., (2011) we find a whole series of attractions operating as tourist destinations, as well as renovated cultural, artistic and architectural values *suitable for touristic use* in the studied area. The following are among the most valuable, which are listed below. In the village of Geoagiu/Algyógy, which was settled near Orăștie/Szászváros, north of the Mureș/Maros river, known in Roman times for its thermal waters and called Thermae Dodonae, there is the oldest standing circular church in Transylvania, dated to 1077. Șibot/Alkenyér was settled nearby, along the driveway and railway following the Mureș/Maros valley. The statue of Pál Kinizsi, renovated a few years ago, stands in the area of the railway station. It commemorates the battle of October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1479, when the combined army of the Transylvanian voivode István Báthory and Pál Kinizsi defeated the Ottomans invading Transylvania.

Even a one-day program can be organized between Sebeș/Szászsebes and Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár to get to know the renovated cultural heritage of Vințu de Jos/Alvinc, which is located along the Mureș/Maros river and has rich tourist attractions and adequate infrastructure. The Reformed church, built in the 13–15<sup>th</sup> century, was opened to the public after renovations in 2013 and 2020. The Habans, who belonged to the historical legacy of the former market town, settled here during the time of Gábor Bethlen. They knew more than 30 crafts, were excellent craftsmen, and played a significant role in the economic life of Transylvania. A whole series of historical and cultural figures are connected to the settlement: the 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> Baron Alvinci-Borberek family, who played a significant role in the military and civil life of Transylvania, György Martinuzzi (1482–1551) Governor of Transylvania, István Pongrácz (1582–1619) canonized Hungarian Jesuit monk, martyr, Gábor Bethlen (1580–1629) Prince of Transylvania, Zsigmond Kemény (1814–1875) writer, publicist, politician, László Pataki (1856–1912) painter, István Szőts (1912–1998) film director. Their presence in Vințu de Jos/Alvinc is reminded of a mansion, a memorial house, a cemetery, and a ruined castle. Visitors to the settlement are welcomed in the guest house of the Roman Catholic Franciscan monastery, the Bethlen hostel operating in the Reformed parish, and the Horváth-Inczédy castle operating as a Martinuzzi hotel. The Roman Catholic church of Bărabanț/Borbánd, belonging to Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár, which is still standing today, was rebuilt after the destruction in 1277. Its original Romanesque style, Gothic reconstruction, was later enriched by Baroque elements. The reformed church of Sântimbru/Marosszentimre, renovated for 2022, preserves similar values.

The 12<sup>th</sup>-century building was remodeled in Gothic style after 1442, by order of Ioan de Hunedoara/János Hunyadi, to commemorate the victory over the Turks. Its stone-framed door is a unique monument of Hungarian architectural history, it contains rosette motifs known from folk art woodcarvings. Perhaps the most beautiful baroque church in Transylvania can be visited in Ighiu/Magyarigen. For centuries, grapes have been grown in the area of Alba/Fehér county with an average annual temperature above 9°C, *shaded by wind and precipitation*. Ţelna/Celna's cellar, excavated by the Teleki family in 1784, is now being used again according to its original function. It is an important center of the county's wine industry and plays a significant role in tourism. In the last two decades, the 13<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> century Reformed church of Petrisat/Magyarpéterfalva, which belongs to Blaj/Balázsfalva, the Reformed church of Ciumbrud/Csombord near Aiud/Nagyenyed, built in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the Romanian Greek Catholic church of Rădeşti/Tompaháza, built in baroque style at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have been renovated. The Bánffy castle in Sâncrai/Enyedszentkirály was built in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its current owner, the Alba County Council, renovated it a few years ago and is planning a tourism function for the castle (Gudor, 2020; Tileagda et al. 2011; Elekes, 2019).

### **The Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár Castle**

Extraordinary historical and cultural values can be found in the Castle of Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár. It was built on the site of castles of earlier historical times during the time of Charles VI (III) of Habsburg, between 1714 and 1738. It is an Austrian Baroque fortification covering 70 hectares. It was called Alba Carolina (Karlsburg, Károlyfehérvár) after its builder. The largest castle in East-Central Europe preserves the memory of historical eras. Its ecclesiastical and secular buildings and monuments are the cultural achievements of the Roman era, the Kingdom of Hungary, the Principality of Transylvania, the Habsburg Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Romania after World War I. It preserves Romanian, Hungarian, Saxon and Austrian historical and cultural values. Between 2013–2015 the castle was renovated with the support of the European Union.

Before 1990, it was mostly possible to visit memorial sites and monuments related to Romanian history. Behind the Roman Catholic cathedral, in front of the princely (bishop's) palace, the equestrian statue of Mihai Viteazul, the first unifier of Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania, was unveiled in 1968. The prince was the resident of the princely palace for a few months from November 1599. Until 2022, he was the only Transylvanian prince to be remembered by a statue in the castle. The Horea monument was erected in 1937 on the square between the second and third gates of the fortress. The monument commemorates the Romanian peasant uprising that was suppressed by the Austrian army in 1784.

From the point of view of Romanian history, the neo-Byzantine Orthodox cathedral built in 1921–1922 is of outstanding importance. The church built after World War I in the princely center of Transylvania, has been the coronation church of King Ferdinand of Romania and Queen Mary.

The function of the two former military buildings built in the castle during the Habsburg era has changed. Today, they function as a Romanian historical monument and museum. The former Officer casino is the Unification Museum. It commemorates the Romanian assembly in Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918, which announced the unification of Transylvania with Romania. During the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the “Building of Babylon” housed officers’ apartments. Nowadays, it is a museum presenting the history of Alba/Fehér County. It describes the history of the region from prehistoric times to the present day, with a significant emphasis on the events of December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918. This historic event is commemorated by the bronze bell or unification monument made in the early 2000s. In 2018, for the centenary of the general assembly, the centenary monument of the unification was completed.

In 1991, the 1918 December 1<sup>st</sup> University was founded in Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár in honor of the same historical event. Several renovated buildings on the castle grounds are used by the University. The rector’s office operates in the baroque Bethlen-Apor manor palace, built between 1670–1690 and restored after 1990. The former Jesuit College and the former main building of the former Count Majláth Gusztáv Károly Catholic Gymnasium, erected between 1903 and 1906, retained their centuries-old educational function. Both are the educational buildings of the university (Gudor, 2020).

The scientific research of the Roman-era monuments of Alba Iulia/ Gyulafehérvár was started in 1889 by Béla Cserni, a teacher at the local Roman Catholic Gymnasium, known as the father of Transylvanian urban archaeology. The Roman relics he collected were exhibited in the museum of the city. The renovation of the later Roman monuments discovered over the course of more than a century and their operation as a modern tourist destination was realized at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the former Castrum and its gates, the main roads (Via principalis), the site of the military camp, the Roman headquarters, the Principia Museum. (Tileagda et al. 2011; Gudor, 2020).

Between 2013–2015 with the financial support of the European Union, the castle and the historical monuments of the Habsburg times were renovated: the castle gates, walls and bastions, as well as the military monuments of the time. At that time, the obelisk erected in honor of the Austrian general Losenau in Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár was renewed.

On February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1849, the general was injured in a losing battle with Bem's troops at the Simeria/Piski Bridge and died a few days later. The monument to the officers of the 50<sup>th</sup> Austrian infantry regiment, who stationed in the castle and fell near Custozza in 1866 and Transylvanian soldiers, was renovated. The restored cultural values are integrated into the tourist offer illustratively describing the Habsburg period of the city's history (Gudor, 2020).

The Roman Catholic cathedral preserves the historical and architectural values of several centuries. It was partially accessible even during the decades of anti-church communism. Today its role as a tourist destination is strengthened by its multiple cultural and historical importance. It was built in several stages at the seat of the Transylvanian Roman Catholic Bishopric, founded in 1009. To this day, it is the *symbolic building* of the church center. For centuries, the episcopate and, since 1991, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár has been of significant ecclesiastical and architectural value. The Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque elements confirm the "Western and Central-European cultural continuity." It has been the burial place of bishops and historical figures for centuries. Several members of the Hunyadi family, János Hunyadi/ Ioan de Hunedoara, János Korvin the Younger, László Hunyadi, György Fráter Martinuzzi, the governor of Transylvania and the Transylvanian princes Zsigmond János, István Bocskai, Gábor Bethlen and György I. Rákóczi were buried here (Gudor, 2020; Elekes, 2019).

The remains of the 10<sup>th</sup> century church excavated in 2011 in the square, in front of the Roman Catholic cathedral, are known but not open to visitors. The ruins of the Byzantine church of Gyulák in Transylvania were reburied shortly after the excavation. The building of the Reformed Academy (Collegium Academicum), founded by Gábor Bethlen in 1622, is used by the army and cannot be visited. The library, founded in 1780 by the Roman Catholic bishop Ignác Batthyány, is a cultural institution of outstanding importance. The first observatory in Transylvania was operated here. 607 ancient prints, 1,700 medieval manuscripts, 100,000 printed books from the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, rare codices and books (the Codex Aureus made in the 800s, the 12<sup>th</sup> century Psalm of David, the 13<sup>th</sup> century Bible, the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Bible Sacra, the Romanian New Testament of Gyulafehérvár in 1648, etc.), a collection of ecclesiastical art, minerals and medals are preserved in the Batthyaneum. In the Gyulafehérvár codex, the Hungarian language record known as the Gyulafehérvár glosses (1310–1320) survived. The library has been closed to visitors and researchers since its nationalization in 1948. To this day, it has not returned to the possession of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese (Gudor, 2020).

The full-figure statue of Gábor Bethlen was inaugurated on 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2022 near the building of the Reformed Collegium Academicum, which was founded by him. The statue strengthens the *representation* of the one and a half century of the Principality of Transylvania.

Making the remains of the Reformed Academy, the Batthyaneum, and the 10<sup>th</sup> century church open to the public, would make it more complete to learn about the extremely rich history of the city. The tourist attraction of the city would also be significantly increased by opening the priceless cultural values of the Batthyaneum to visitors and researchers.

## **Conclusions**

Today's Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár and its region, which has advantageous geographical features, preserves centuries of rich historical, cultural and artistic values. Cultural values are connected to historical eras, they represent currents of ideas and artistic styles. Before 1990, it was mostly possible to visit the Roman era and values related to Romanian history in the area of the Castle of Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár, which is considered the historical center of the region.

After 1990, the presentation of the historical event of December 1, 1918 became more powerful. A university was founded in its honor, and many renovated buildings of the castle are used by the higher education institution.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the renovations carried out with the support of the European Union made a number of values, primarily related to the period of the Habsburg Empire, open to visitors.

The cathedral of the Transylvanian Roman Catholic Bishopric, founded in 1009, preserves centuries of ecclesiastical, historical and architectural values and memories.

Nowadays, the *partially accessible* and non-accessible potential tourist destinations in the castle are mostly related to the period of the Principality of Transylvania. Renovating them, making them accessible to visitors, and *rediscovering* them would significantly increase the touristic importance and touristic attractiveness of Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár and its region.

The tourist attractiveness of the city and its surroundings could be increased by involving its natural features more significantly. The landscape potential is suitable for nature walks and adventure tourism. Conference tourism opportunities are available in Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár, Aiud/Nagyenyed and Sebeş/Szászsebes. A unified market representation of the three cities and their regions would help in selling the tourism potential. Another incentive could be the creation of a unified image and joint product development. The implementation of 1–2 day programmes instead of *transit tourism* would be a step forward.

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