



## TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS OF MAJOR CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS THAT ATTRACT TOURISTS TO RURAL AREAS

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**Abstract:** *Rural Romania is a space with a strong spiritual and cultural imprint, where Christian traditions are sacredly preserved and transmitted from generation to generation. Major religious holidays such as the Nativity of the Lord and the Resurrection represent high points in the lives of rural communities, but also special occasions for attracting tourists. This paper explores the impact of religious traditions on rural tourism, analyzing the particularities of each major Christian denomination in Romania, with an emphasis on the authenticity factor.*

### • Introduction

Religious traditions represent a fundamental dimension of Romanian rural identity. They contribute to the preservation of local values and community cohesion, but also to attracting tourists interested in authentic experiences. In the context of sustainable rural tourism, Christian holidays (such as Easter, Christmas, Pentecost) are often valued as elements of cultural uniqueness. Religion has been a fundamental bond of rural communities in Romania. The three major Christian denominations studied – Orthodox, Catholic and Neo-Protestant – have contributed to shaping local identity, collective rituals and the relationship between man and sacred space.

### • Material and method

The purpose of this research is to be a comparative analysis of the doctrinal, liturgical and cultural features of these cults, with the aim of highlighting both significant differences and points of convergence relevant for interfaith dialogue and the development of sustainable religious tourism, but also how these religious traditions influence the perception of authenticity, contribute to the local economy and determine specific forms of rural tourism.

For the presented study, we used a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods specific to the interdisciplinary approach in the field of tourism, sociology, religion and rural development: secondary statistical analysis, content analysis, comparative case study, motivational typology. All these methods were used in a triangulated analysis framework, to ensure intersectional validation of the conclusions: numerical data were contextualized through qualitative observations; confessional differences were interpreted in parallel with real tourist behaviors; strategic recommendations were formulated based on local realities and confessional dynamics.

### • Results and discussions

#### Doctrinal foundations

| Size                 | Orthodoxy                              | Catholic   | Neoprotestant                                     |
|----------------------|--|--|---|
| origin               | Christian East (Byzantium)             | Christian Sunset (Rome)                          | Protestant Reformation (16th–20th centuries)      |
| Supreme authority    | Holy Tradition and Scripture           | Scripture and Tradition of the Papal Magisterium | Scripture alone (Sola Scriptura)                  |
| sacraments           | 7 Sacraments, including infant baptism | 7 Sacraments                                     | 2 symbolic: baptism (adult) and the Lord's Supper |
| Clergy and hierarchy | Patriarchs, bishops, priests           | Pope, bishops, priests                           | Pastor/Elder, democratic leadership               |

#### Liturgical practices and celebrations

| Religious practice | Orthodoxy   | Catholic  | Neoprotestant                                |
|--------------------|---|---|--|
| Mass               | Ritual, symbolic, in the old language (Slavic/Romanian) | Solemn, structured, with organ and songs in Latin and local languages | Simplified, focused on sermon and prayer     |
| posts              | 4 major positions, strict rules                         | 2 main, more moderate positions                                       | Voluntary, individual, without prescriptions |
| Christmas          | Carols, pig slaughter, night service                    | Processions, choirs, Nativity scenes                                  | Modern carols, family reunions               |
| Easter             | Denials, Midnight Resurrection, red eggs                | Solemn Mass, decorated eggs, blessings                                | Biblical messages, choirs, community meals   |

### • Conclusions

The contribution of religious denominations to the development of rural tourism is not uniform, but specific and complementary: Orthodoxy preserves national identity and promotes living traditions, Catholicism brings order, multiculturalism and spiritual aesthetics, Neo-Protestantism introduces contemporary values of ethics, simplicity and sustainability.

For a coherent development of rural religious tourism, the following are necessary:

- an integrative interfaith strategy that includes all branches of Christianity;
- joint heritage and education projects;
- promoting spiritual diversity as a tourist and identity resource.

This approach can transform rural religious tourism in the long term into a vector of social cohesion, sustainable economic development and cultural preservation.