

About Sighisoara Citadel

Founded by Transylvanian Saxons during the 12th century, [Sighisoara City](#) (Schassburg in German) still stands as one of the most beautiful and best-preserved medieval towns in Europe. Designated as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, this perfectly intact 16th century gem with nine towers, cobbled streets, burgher houses and ornate churches rivals the historic streets of Old Prague or Vienna for atmospheric magic. It is also the birthplace of Vlad Dracula, also known as Vlad Tepes (Vlad the Impaler), ruler of the province of Walachia from 1456 to 1462. It was he who inspired Bram Stoker's fictional creation, Count Dracula.



His house is just one of the many attractions here. Others include the Church on the Hill with its 500-year-old frescoes, the 13th century Venetian House and the Church of the Dominican Monastery, known for its Transylvanian renaissance carved altarpiece, baroque pulpit, Oriental carpets and 17th century organ.

Sighisoara's citadel was built in the 12th century, when it was known as Castrum Sex (Fort Six), and was further strengthened and extended in the 15th century. The name must have existed long before, as the Saxons built their walled town on the ruins of a former Roman fortress. In 1298, the town was mentioned as Schespurch, while in 1367 it was called Civitas de Seguswar. The name of Sighisoara was first noted in a written document issued by Vlad Dracul, Vlad the Impaler's father, in 1431.

In the 14th and 15th centuries, the economic growth recorded by Sighisoara's industrious craftsmen and tradesmen ensured financial means for the construction of a strong defense system provided with 14 towers and several bastions provided with gunnery directed to all four cardinal points. Each tower was built, maintained and defended by a craft guild. Among the most striking is the 14th century Clock Tower. This tower controlled the main gate of the half-mile-long defensive wall and stored the city's treasures.

Sighisoara was not the biggest or richest of the seven Saxon walled citadels in Transylvania, but it has become one of the most popular. A walk through the town's hilly streets with their original medieval architecture, magical mix of winding cobbled alleys, steep stairways, secluded squares, towers, turrets and enchantingly preserved citadel, is like stepping back in time.

- City Landmarks

For several centuries, Sighisoara was a military and political stronghold. During the 14th - 16th centuries, the Saxon and Hungarian craft guilds erected towers around the citadel walls to protect the town from Turkish raids. Laid out on two to four levels, the towers stored ammunition and food supplies and were provided with firing windows for cannons, shells and arrows. Of the original fourteen towers and five artillery bastions, nine towers and two bastions have survived the test of time.

The Citadel Square

Only goldsmiths, tailors, carpenters and tinsmiths were allowed to have their guilds and workshops inside the citadel. Guilds were active until 1875.

This quaint small square lies at the heart of the citadel. In the old days, street markets, craft fairs, public executions and witch trials were held here. From this square, you can easily access the main attractions of Sighisoara.

The Clock Tower

Sighisoara's main point of attraction is the Clock Tower, also known as the Council Tower, built in the second half of the 14th century and expanded in the 16th century. The four small corner turrets on top of the tower symbolized the judicial autonomy of the Town Council, which could apply, if necessary, the death penalty.

After a fire in 1676 when the town's gunpowder deposits located in the Tailors' Tower exploded, Austrian artists rebuilt the roof of the tower in its present baroque style and in 1894, colorful tiles were added.

In the 17th century, a two-plate clock, with figurines carved from linden wood, was set at the top of the tower, with one dial looking over the Lower Town (Orasul de Jos), and the other facing the citadel (*cetate* in Romanian, *burg* in German). The figurines, moved by the clock's mechanism, each represent a different character.

On the citadel side we see Peace holding an olive branch, accompanied by a drummer who is beating the hours on his bronze drum; above them are Justice, with a set of scales, and Law, wielding a sword, accompanied by two angels representing Day and Night. At 6 am, the angel symbolizing the day appears marking the beginning of the working day and at 6 pm, the angel symbolizing the night comes out carrying two burning candles, marking the end of the working day.





The dial overlooking the Lower City features a set of seven figurines, each representing the pagan gods who personified the days of the week: Diane (Monday), Mars (Tuesday), Mercury (Wednesday), Jupiter (Thursday), Venus (Friday), Saturn (Saturday) and the Sun (Sunday).

The spire of the tower ends in a small golden sphere. At the top, there is a meteorological cock, which, turned around by air currents, forecasts the weather.

This intricate two-plate clock has been working continuously since the middle Ages.

The Clock Tower served as the gathering place for the City Council until 1556. Since 1899, it is a history Museum ([see museum details](#)). From the top of the Clock Tower, visitors can look down on the red-tiled roofs of the Old Town and see intact 16th century Saxon houses lining the narrow cobblestone streets. Today, merchants and craftsmen still go about their business, as they did centuries ago.

The Church of the Dominican Monastery

Not far from the Clock Tower stands the Church of the Dominican Monastery. First attested in a document in 1298 as part of a Dominican monastic settlement, the church became the Saxons' main Lutheran church in 1556. The monastic complex demolished in 1888 and its place was taken by the present town hall. Only the church has remained from the original structure.

Built in late-gothic style typical of the hall-churches, with two naves and two rows of pillars, the church was restored in the 15th century and then again in the 16th century after the big fire of 1676. The last repairs were done in 1894 and 1929, when the church acquired its present-day look.

Inside the church, you can admire some valuable artistic objects, such as the bronze font dating back to 1440, the stone doorframe carved in 1570 in Transylvanian renaissance style and built into the northern wall of the church, the collection of 16th and 17th century

Oriental carpets, a baroque organ and a fine altarpiece from 1680. Classical and baroque concerts are often held here.

The Church on the Hill

To the north of the Clock Tower stands one of the most representative gothic-style structures in Transylvania, the Church on the Hill - so called because of its location on the School Hill (1,373 ft high). First mentioned in a document in 1345 and superposed on a former Roman basilica, its construction lasted almost 200 years. Initially a Catholic church, it became the main church of the Saxon inhabitants of Sighisoara, who had shifted from Roman Catholicism to Lutheranism after the 1547 Reform.



The church was completely painted on the inside but in 1776, the majority of the old murals were destroyed, provided that exact copies would be made on parchment and reproduced later. Unfortunately, the copies were lost and the murals never reproduced. A recent restoration brought back fragments of some of the original late 15th century frescoes.

Inside the beautifully restored interior, you can admire fragments of murals from 1483-1488, the period prior to Martin Luther's Reformation, and renaissance-style furniture. The gothic altarpiece dedicated to St Martin dates from 1520 and was painted by Johann Stoss, the son of the renowned sculptor, Veit Stoss from Nürnberg. The three wood-carved coats of arms, found in the anterooms of the side naves, belonged to Mathias Corvin and his wife, Beatrix, the Transylvanian prince Stephen Bathory of Nyir (1479-1493) and the king of Poland and Hungary, Wladislav the 3rd. The church is reached by a covered wooden staircase known as the Scholars' Stairs. Opposite the church is the main entrance to a serene Saxon cemetery (open daily 8:00am - 8:00pm).

The Scholars' Stairs

Located at the end of School Street and connecting the Citadel Square with the Church on the Hill, the Scholars' Stairs, or Schoolboys' Stairs, as it was also known, makes for an interesting piece of medieval architecture.

Built in 1642, the covered stair-passage was meant to facilitate and protect schoolchildren and churchgoers on their climb to the school and church during wintertime. Originally, the stairs had 300 steps, but after 1849, their number was reduced to 175.

Vlad Dracul's House

The Vlad Dracul House is located in the Citadel Square, close to the Clock Tower. This ochre-colored house is the place where Vlad Tepes, the inspiration for Bram Stoker's famous Dracula, was born in 1431 and lived with his father, Vlad Dracul, until 1435 when they moved to Targoviste. A wrought-iron dragon hangs above the entrance. The ground floor of the house serves as



a restaurant, while the first floor is home to the Museum of Weapons ([see museum details](#)). Benefiting from the friendship of the Hungarian king, Sigismund I of Luxembourg, Vlad II Dracul, the father of Vlad Tepes, spent his youth at the royal court and later distinguished himself as a brave knight in the fight against the Ottoman Empire.

Dracula, the title of Vlad Tepes, translates as *Son of Dracul*.

For his deeds, the Order of the Dragon was bestowed upon him, hence the title *Dracul* (the Latin word for dragon is *draco*). While in medieval lore dragons served as symbols of independence, leadership, strength and wisdom, the biblical association of the devil with the serpent that tempted Adam and Eve, gave the snake-like dragon connotations of evil. Thus, the Romanian word *Dracul* stands in English for both dragon and devil.

The Stag House

Built in the 17th century in Transylvanian renaissance style, the house draws its name from the stag skull set on one of the corners of its façade. Recent restorations revealed an external mural depicting the stag's body. Nowadays, the building houses a hotel, with a ground floor that doubles as a cellar bar.

The Venetian House

Built in the 16th century, the house was later restored in Venetian gothic style with the upper part of the windows forming a three-lobe arch.

The Citadel Towers

The half-mile defense wall was initially provided with 14 towers, of which nine have been preserved to this day. Among the most impressive are:

The Ropemakers' Tower



Dating from the 13th century and standing above the pre-Saxon citadel walls, the Ropemakers' Tower is one of the oldest buildings in Sighisoara. Its role was to defend - together with the Goldsmiths' Tower - the northwest corner of the hill. Nowadays, the tower is the home of the caretaker of the Saxon cemetery, located next to the Church on the Hill.

The Tailors' Tower

This imposing tower was raised in the 14th century by the richest guild in town. Initially as tall as the Clock Tower, its upper part was destroyed in the 1676 fire, when the town's gunpowder deposits, located here, exploded. The Tailors' Tower, with its two vaulted galleries which used to have huge oaken gates with an iron lattice, also serves as the second access road into the citadel. The tower was restored in 1935.

The Cobblers' Tower

The Cobblers' Tower, located in the northeastern part of the town, was first mentioned in documents dating from the mid-16th century but it was rebuilt from scratch in 1650. The tower bears the influence of baroque architecture, featuring a hexagonal base with sides of different lengths. Its roof, resembling a pointy helmet, houses a small observation tower.

The Lower Town

Hermann Oberth Square was named after Hermann Oberth (1894-1989), one of the forefathers of astronautics and rocketry. He was born in Sibiu and raised in Sighisoara.

Lack of water and supplies made life in the Citadel quite difficult at times. By comparison, living conditions in the Lower Town, which had started to develop at end of the 15th century, were much better. Today, the Lower Town, less picturesque than the Citadel area, centers around Hermann Oberth Square (Piata Herman Oberth) and Strada 1 Decembrie. Here, you can admire 17th century houses.

- Historic Churches

Lepers' Church

Located in the Lower Town on the Tarva River bank, this small 15th century gothic church served as the lepers' asylum chapel between 1647 and 1684. Since the lepers were not allowed to enter the church, an outer pulpit was installed from which the Gospel was preached to the sick.

Orthodox Cathedral

This cathedral, built in Byzantine style between 1934 and 1937 and beautifully painted in black and white, is located on the northern shore of Tarnava Mare and is accessible by a footbridge.

St. Joseph Roman-Catholic Church

Built in an eclectic style in 1894, the church underwent major restorations after a fire in 1983. The present organ, designed by Karl Einschenk in 1908, was brought from a Saxon church near Sighisoara.

Orthodox Church from Cornesti

Erected in neoclassical style between 1788 and 1797, this is the first Romanian Orthodox church made of stone in the region. The bell, a liturgical veil and a golden goblet from the 18th century have been preserved.

- Museums

The History Museum

Admission charge - one ticket allows entry into three museums: the History Museum, Torture Room and Weapons Collection. The museum presents the evolution of crafts in Transylvania and features a collection of Renaissance furniture, medical instruments, ethnographic artifacts, fine arts and a collection of clocks.

The Torture Room

This small but interesting museum is housed at the foot of the Clock Tower in the same room where prisoners were tortured and confessions were extorted during the Middle Ages. Some of the amazing torture instruments and methods are on display.

The Weapons Collection

Housed on the first floor of the Vlad Dracul house, the museum features an array of medieval weapons, showcasing the development of weapons used in and around the town throughout the ages. Also on display is an oil portrait of Michael Freiherr von Melas (1731-1806). Born in Sighisoara, he became a general of the Austrian mounted troops and fought against Napoleon Bonaparte's army at Marenga (June 14, 1880).

Nearby Attraction

- The Fortified Church at Saschiz
Where: 10 miles east of Sighisoara
Access: car, bus, train
www.RomaniaTourism.com/Castles-Fortresses.html#Saschiz
- The Fortified Church Biertan
Where: 18 miles west of Sighisoara
Access: car
www.RomaniaTourism.com/Castles-Fortresses.html#Biertan