

Turda Underground Salt Mine: A Major Tourist Attraction in Romania



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Ir. Chin Mee Poon is a retired civil engineer who derives a great deal of joy and satisfaction from travelling to different parts of the globe, capturing fascinating insights of the places and people he encounters and sharing his experiences with others through his photographs and writing.



When my wife and I went backpacking in Romania and Bulgaria with a friend in 2017, we visited the Turda underground salt mine. Turda is a town with about 58,000 people and is located in Transylvania, Romania. This is the second underground salt mine I have visited, the first being Khewra Salt Mine in northern Pakistan which I visited in August 2001. Khewra is the oldest and second largest salt mine in the world.

Salt is now plentiful, but until the industrial revolution which began in mid-18th century, it was a rare commodity. In ancient Rome, salt was a symbol of prosperity and guests who sat near the host during a feast were said to be "above the salt" while those less favoured were "below the salt". In the Roman Empire, soldiers were

given salarium (sal is the Latin word for salt) for the purchase of salt, and the word "salary" was derived therefrom. The English idiom "worth one's salt" simply means "deserving of one's pay" and to take a statement with "a grain (or pinch) of salt" means to accept it while maintaining a degree of scepticism about its truth. This phrase stems from the fact that food is more easily swallowed if taken with a small amount of salt.

Turda was an important salt-mining town from the 13th century to 1932, when the main mine was shut down. In 1992, the underground salt mine was turned into a tourist attraction. Access to the mine is by way of a 917m-long horizontal tunnel known as Franz Joseph Transportation Gallery. The tunnel was used to transport salt

from the mine to the warehouses in Turda Noua. After the mine was shut down in 1932, the tunnel and mine chambers were used as a place of refuge by the people of Turda during WWII. From 1948 to 1992, these were used to store telemea, a Romanian specialty cheese.

Walking along the Franz Joseph Transportation Gallery, one will come across 6 individual mine chambers and a trolley room. The largest chamber, Rudolf Mine, is in the shape of a parallelepiped, with a rectangular base measuring 85m long and 50m wide. It now houses an amusement park. Access to the park from the Gallery some 40m above is by two stairways constructed during the operation of the mine and a lift that was erected in 2009.

The adjoining bell-shaped Terezia Mine has a 75m-diameter base and is 10m lower than Rudolf Mine. Once used for the disposal of rejected and unusable salt blocks, the base is now covered by a lake formed by the build-up of infiltration water, with a salt island in the centre. The lake has a maximum depth of 8m and is used for boating. The salt island is connected to the main amusement park level by a wooden footbridge.

Another chamber, Ghizela Mine near the Turda Noua end of the tunnel, has been adapted for balneal treatment since 2008.

Since its opening in 1992, Turda Underground Salt Mine has attracted millions of Romanian and foreign tourists. ■