



MIHAI
EMINESCU
TRUST

Exploring Alma Vii

STAY, DO, VISIT





WELCOME TO ALMA VII

If Transylvania has a well kept secret, it has to be the Saxon village of Alma Vii. The village is tucked in the green landscapes and discrete hills of Transylvania, in Sibiu county. Close to Medias and the medieval town of Sighișoara, Alma Vii has yet escaped heavy traffic and its heritage succeeded to remain untouched. People living traditional lives here are ready to share with their guests home cooked food. They tell ancient stories next to the stove in cold seasons or surrounded by cricket sounds in summertime. Wildlife thrives here and these forests burst with life. Alma Vii is a quiet place, where life is made simple. The 14th century fortified church stands boldly right in the middle of the village.

Enjoy your stay in Alma Vii!



ALMA VII: JUST TO GET YOU STARTED

It was in 1298 when Alma Vii was first mentioned in an official document of the time. The Saxons who settled in Alma Vii had been sent here by a Hungarian King on a strategic mission to secure financial and military resources. The beautiful evangelic church up the hill was built sometimes in the 14th century, but the fortified wall which kept

the inhabitants of Alma Vii safe and protected their ethnic vitality followed only two centuries later. The Saxons have developed a typical, efficient lifestyle and their heritage was time proof and is still in place today.

Their way of doing things is still a benchmark here, even if most of

them had left Transylvania in the 1990's. Alma Vii is today home to a mix of cultures: Romanian, Hungarian, Saxon and Roma. They live together peacefully, tending their crops and raising domestic animals, in harmony with nature and its seasons.

Watching them work around their houses, crafting wood or shaping metal objects, one might appreciate basic life again and crave for spending some time here, lost in this patri-

archal landscapes. The spontaneous hospitality of these people offers any tourist a reality check. Travellers will fall in love with more tangible things, like excellent traditional food, cosy rooms to spend the night and unique handmade objects and embroideries to take home. But there's more.

WHAT TO DO & SEE IN ALMA VII

Experience the village

To arrive here, one must be a nature enthusiast and a tradition seeker. If sensing aspects of everyday life unfold in front of you in an old Saxon village makes your heart sing, then let your journey begin. Alma Vii is probably one of the best places to come when you want to take time to think, observe and actively rest.

Go bird watching. This is the home to more than 100 species of birds, some of which are endemic. Birds are spoiled in this countryside, nesting and singing at ease. The village and its surrounding are now part of the Natura 2000 network and therefore protected.

Follow the trails of the shepherds and their herds. All you need is a pair of good walking shoes, an outdoor mood and curiosity. Be there when traditional cheese is being made and ask the shepherds to help in. Then don't leave until you become an expert and you can then bring the

story and the recipe to those back home.

Look into how coal is traditionally made. In the Roma community, this precious yet difficult craft had been passed on from one generation to the next. Find out how. Violeta and Tibi welcome visitors into their home, explaining the secrets of this ancient practice.

If you're into how it's made, **check out the blacksmith's workshop** and also the carpenter's one. Tourists have the privilege to see local creative people at work, while crafting



useful objects like horse shoes and accessories for floors and windows using traditional materials and motifs.

Taste local delicacies like the Transylvanian bread with homemade butter and the special cabbage pie called "lichiu cu varză". Hosts in Alma Vii warmly agree to share the preparation process with their guests.

Ask one local to join you in **discovering secret getaways** in the neighbourhood. Learn about the rich plant population and what they can do for your health. One can also rent a bike and discover other Saxon villages nearby, like Biertan and Richiş.

→ For a guided visit and local demonstrations, you have to book a demonstration with minimum ten days in advance. For booking, please e-mail booking@almavii.ro.

Alma Vii, The Fortified Church

This Evangelical church was first built in the 14th century on this small hill North of the village by the Saxon inhabitants of Alma Vii. Some centuries later it stands out in the exact same place, looking over the village, only that it has been enlarged and fortified in the 16th century. Its four towers were built for defence reasons, to protect the local people against the Turkish and Tartar nomadic tribes. Although passion for unique design was not a priority in medieval times, each one of them has its own architectural personality.

Today they rise calmly and patronize Alma Vii peacefully. During troubled times, villagers might have used them to throw pitch and stones and launch fire arrows at their invaders. We know for a fact the people inside these thick walls used to gather around a fire in three of the towers. Also, villagers were using the space of the Gate Tower to store their smoked pork meat. Since the 16th century it went under several restoration processes and different structures were either modified or

added. In 1721 the Baroque organ was inaugurated and fine, educated music had started to accompany each of the Sunday sermons. In 1852 the classical style sanctuary was placed in the church. In the 19th century, the church went through some new adjustments and this happened again in 1966, under the communist regime, when the fortified monument was restored by the Institute of Historic Monuments, following closely the original plans. Although times had been tough and



many things changed, the fortified church of Alma Vii resisted almost unharmed until today.

The fortified wall that helped the Saxon community of Alma Vii resist invasions and preserve its ethnic identity is has been again restored in 2015-2016 with a team including qualified people from the village. During these reconstruction works, important traces of all the building stages of the fortified church in Alma Vii have been discovered, and also a medieval graveyard. A team of Romanian and Norwegian archaeologists

worked together to unveil and document its ruins; around 70 graves that tell the ancient story of the people inhabiting these places were identified. The four nationalities living in Alma Vii today share the community's cultural background and local heritage. Nowadays, no sermons are held on Sundays here. Since the last Saxon population has left Alma Vii, the fortified church remained without its parishioners. Nevertheless, the fortress-church stands still right in the middle of things and remained the benchmark of the village. Even if the four ethnic groups



are not sharing the same religion, a local research conducted by Mihai Eminescu Trust discovered that the people of Alma Vii love their well preserved monument and consider it to be a priority in their lives.

Once recent construction and renovation works were ready, the

fortified church of Alma Vii started hosting a variety of community events and local creations. Travellers will find here art exhibitions of children who are thus encouraged to express themselves and also objects created by villagers who master a special, traditional craft. The church is now the home of every special event in

Alma Vii and other friend villages around. Here the inhabitants present tourists with their handmade traditional object and homemade local delights. Last but not least, the church welcomes tourists from Romania and all around the world and helps explain more about the Saxon local history and way of life. In order for this to happen, MET Foundation puts effort into integrating the church in a network of cultural oriented tourism activities. Thus, more and more people interested in medieval sites and monuments and archaeology can see the treasure to be found within these Transylvanian relaxing landscapes.

NOT TO MISS

Walking along these fortified walls. It will give you the sensation of traveling back in time, when life in this village was not easy. You will have the same view people who would protect the church had several hundreds years ago. One can easily imagine how they were patrolling up and down while discussing defence strategies under the pressure of constant Tartar and Turkish invasions.

Best view. To see the surroundings, one should go to the Clock Tower, where the bells are also to be found. The middle bell is the most valuable, as it was built in the 15th century.

Speckturm story. It is the place where local people were storing their meat. This precious food was locked and guarded by the church's keeper and every family in the village kept it in a particular place and had their name engraved on it. When you look closer, you can still notice the numbers of the houses on the wooden ceiling. Once a week, generally on a Sunday, they would come and take a small portion, enough for one week.

The keeper's house. The last local man

WHERE TO STAY IN ALMA VII

Alma Vii guest houses

In Alma Vii you can choose to stay in one of the four guest houses that are now available in the village. All of them have been renovated with the help provided by local people and under the supervision of the MET Foundation. For completing the works, they have used traditional techniques that have been passed on from one generation to the next. Also the materials used are traditional and most of them can be found around the village: stones, wood and sand.

Alma Vii 104

Alma Vii 104 is a traditional Transylvanian house built in the 19th century. When people talk about it they call it The Walter House, as this is the name of the last owner who had lived here before it was turned into a guest house. One can find it right in the middle of the

village, across the medieval church. The house has two bedrooms and a lovely courtyard covered with grape vine, offering shade during hot summer days. Breakfast is served with fresh, local products, and the typical Transylvanian bread is one of the good news here.



THE SPACE:

Property type: Guesthouse
Accommodates: 4
Bedrooms: 2
Beds: 4
Bed type: Single
Bathrooms: 2

FACILITIES:

Essentials
Smoking Allowed Outside
Family/Kid Friendly
Garden
Terrace
Hair Dryer

Coffee Maker
Kitchenette
Stove
Refrigerator
Pets allowed
Free Parking on Premises

PRICES:

Adult: 25€
Children: 12.5€
Infants: Free
Breakfast: 5€
Lunch: 11€
Dinner: 11€

CONTACT & BOOKING:

experiencetransylvania.ro/guesthouse/alma-vii-104/

SUMMER CAMP SLEEPING OPTION

The former school of Alma Vii is a good option especially if you are travelling with your family and want to sleep altogether, in the same room. It can accommodate 8 family members in two large rooms and it gives you the warm feeling of participating to a summer camp, with friends. It is also nice when you think about how many kids have learned new, exciting things in this space that you now use as your Transylvanian bedroom.

WALKS

Around the village of ALMA VII

WALK 1: Alma Vii – Richis – Biertan

1. The walk starts in the centre of the village of Alma Vii, at the crossroads by the bus shelter. Go eastwards, up along the old main street of the village, lined with colourful traditional Saxon houses.

2. On the left, cross a small bridge and up past the village shop along the pathway to the fortified Saxon church. Originally built in the 14th century, a much larger stone structure with several additions has emerged over the centuries. The Gothic vault was replaced in the 19th cen-

tury with a ribbed vault on cross-springers. There are four defence towers with firing holes. The large gate tower has gun loops and a space for a portcullis. Continuing up the main street, pass on the right hand side a sculpted gate and beautiful red façade building (No. 102), soon to become a traditional guesthouse, run by a local family.

At the top when the road divides, take the left fork, passing in front of the former village school. In 2009/10 the Mihai Eminescu Trust restored this recently abandoned and derelict

building. It is due to be an information and training centre for local villagers and students.

3. Carry on to the small Orthodox church at the top end of the village. Beyond it lies the common cows' pasture. Follow the cart track up the hill until you reach a fork. Keep right, climbing towards the edge of the forest. The path goes in a south-eastern direction, parallel with the small stream, which is lined with blackthorn and white willow. To the left are fruit trees and some cultivated patches. Buzzards often circle the skies above.

4. At the top end of the cultivated field the hill slope becomes steeper and rougher, with small eroded patches, exposed sandstone and an opening like a small cave. On a peak to your left is a topographic marker.

Follow the track ahead, with pasture on your left, bordered by forest at the top.

5. Around 50m north of the path are several small humps. Often believed to be man-made, these are natural formations caused by permeable sandstone and marl layers slipping over water-impervious clay. Much larger ones can be seen near Apold or Saschiz, where they form micro-landscapes with a complex mosaic of plant communities. Take the track north-east, along the edge of a beech forest dotted with hawthorn and old man's beard (*Clematis vitalba*). For a while the route follows a secondary ridge northward, then turns east along the edge of a young beech forest. Enter the basin of a tributary of the Calva valley, with shrubs on the left bank



and orchards to the right. **6.** A small area of pasture-land survives between the edge of the forest and the scrub "invasion" covered with daisies and clematis. **7.** Choose the path that climbs to the right, through a patch of beech and hornbeam forest, and on its edge you will also find oak trees. Walk eastwards along the edge of the forest or just inside it, on a forestry road. **8.** To the north of the path, descending down towards the valley, you see a small cluster of buildings and an artificial pond. Continue along

the track just below the ridge, through beech and oak woodland (with trees between 100 and 200 years old). **9.** You have reached the main road that follows the ridge towards the north-east, dividing the Hartibaci and Calva valleys. A hornbeam forest, dotted with wild cherry and beech, is cleaned and managed. Follow the road downwards, slightly to the north of the ridge, through a naturally growing deciduous forest, with a clump of planted mature pines on the right.



Continue on the road, through small trees and shrubs.

10. At a three-way junction at the bottom of the next upward slope, take the route north east to the top.

11. The road follows the ridge east and crosses another north-south track.

12. Turn left north-eastwards. Follow the forestry road through mixed deciduous woodland. Tractor tracks and tree stumps show the forest is being managed with

individual trees extracted. **13.** Leave the forest path and enter pasture land, going north-west. A small stream runs on the left, possibly the source of the Calva valley. The pasture is dotted with hawthorn and dog rose and cows grazing. Cross the pasture near its top end, about 200 m from the forest edge.

14. Now you are near the Agnita – Medias road, on a watershed between two tributaries, where the path crosses the last

right-hand tributary of the Calva valley, with its alluvial corridor of ash, willow and hedges. There are wild pear trees in the pasture and the humid flood area is covered in rushes and buttercups.

15. Cross under the high-voltage electricity lines. Keep along the side of the road and head north-east through meadows and up a terraced slope.

16. Follow the first terrace above the road. Visible in the valley below a cattle

farm on the Alma Vii road and an ancient oak tree near a small stream.

17. After the cobbled road, house and animal shelter, climb the cart track through the forest northwards.

18. At the top, the road divides. Choose the right fork eastwards, and descend to a sheepfold.

Cross over the right tributary of Mosna valley and walk past arable land on south-facing terraces affected by strong soil erosion.

19. The road descends north-east through a perfect picnic spot and joins an unpaved road beside a stream running towards the north. To the left the hills are terraced, where previously vines would have grown, and on the right the slope is covered with woodland and an old walnut tree. The invasion of common milkweed

is very apparent. Follow the road and the valley downwards.

20. Join the paved road that goes towards Richis from the main Agnita – Medias road, noting clumps of pine trees and terraces. Enter the village of Richis.

21. Houses on the left and right – many of them damaged and crumbling.

22. Pass by guesthouse, house No24.

23. Richis Saxon church is one of the most beautiful and ornate in Transylvania.

24. Pass the Orthodox church. As you leave Richis, a tributary on the left with alluvial vegetation joins the main valley. Follow the road towards Biertan.

25. Pass former vineyard terraces on the left.

26. Enter the UNESCO village of Biertan.

27. Pass one of the few

remaining active vineyards and wine cellars on the left.

28. You have reached the central square, with the World Heritage fortified church on the hill ahead, Unglerus restaurant on its right and the MET guesthouse on the left corner.

Biertan was an important ecclesiastic and trade centre, holding the Lutheran Episcopal seat from 1572 for almost three centuries. The impressive late Gothic church, with its spectacular altarpiece, was built 1500 – 1525, an earlier church built on this site, was first mentioned in 1402.

The Mihai Eminescu Trust is a non-profit organisation working since 1998, to preserve the cultural and natural heritage of the Saxon villages with fortified churches of Transylvania some of which were recognized by the UNESCO World Heritage.

The Mihai Eminescu Trust concentrates on the villages of Transylvania, a special case because of the age and richness of their culture and the emergency caused by the mass emigration of the Romanian Saxons inhabitants in 1990. The emigration has brought in these villages a new community, with other traditions and cultural background. This was the opportunity identified by MET, on which its work is based on, in order to preserve the inherited cultural values. Making locals responsible and proud of their heritage remained a challenge, which MET succeeded to achieve.

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