

## Doing Business in Romania | Romanian Social and Business Culture

### A Romanian Culture Overview

- **Official Name** - Romania
- **Population** - 22,215,421\*
- **Official Language** - Romanian
- **Currency** - RON
- **Capital city** - Bucharest
- **GDP** - purchasing power parity: \$271.2 billion\*
- **GDP per capita** - \$12,200\*



### Overview

Romania has often been labelled one of history's greatest survivors. A past of invasions and occupations, Romania has recently undergone dynamic social and economic changes and is on its way becoming an EU member in 2007. While the country attempts to leave behind its Communist past, present day attitudes and traditions still reflect this part of their turbulent history. Modest attitudes and behaviours coupled with Orthodox Christian beliefs reflect their simple-minded and down-to-earth mentality that has been shaped by years of hardship. Though they may appear abrupt or unreceptive at first, Romanians on the whole are considered among the friendliest and hospitable people in Europe with big hearts, a unique sense of humour and a strong cultural heritage. Understanding this is the first step towards successfully doing business in Romania.

### Romanian Culture - Key Concepts and Values

**Relationships** – As a family-focused society, Romanians depend heavily on relationships with others. Romania's history of invasions and occupation has created an environment where it takes time to get to know other people. Once a relationship is formed, however, it will be a long-term one based on loyalty and trust. This carries over into the business world, where outsiders are often treated very formally until there has been time to get to know them and establish a relationship.

**Religion** – The majority of Romanians are members of the Romanian Orthodox Church, in fact they make up the second largest population of Orthodox Christians anywhere in the world after Russia. Though their religion was suppressed under communism, it has always played an important role in shaping the way they live. Romanians are very family oriented and communal and place a lot of importance on births, deaths and marriages and their relevant Orthodox celebrations.

**Identity** – Romanians have experienced centuries of turbulent and difficult times but have made it through to become an emerging republic and presence in Europe. They are proud of their country, and particularly their national heritage. As a result, they tend to be sensitive about cultural and political matters that concern their country but are always thrilled for any opportunity to share Romania with others.

## **Doing Business with Romanians**

Romania was controlled by a communist government for decades before it had the chance in the late 80s to start making the transition to the republic it is today. It has since made many efforts to revamp its economy, tackle widespread corruption and implement social reforms in an attempt to prepare itself for its entry into the European Union at the beginning of 2007. The economy has improved as a result, paving the way for new business and investment opportunities. Doing business successfully in Romania, however, requires an understanding of Romanian business culture and etiquette. Otherwise, misunderstandings and miscommunication can often occur resulting in financial loss and/or detriment to the business relationship.

### **Romania Business Part 1 - Working in Romania (Pre-departure)**

- **Working practices in Romania**
  - Punctuality is valued, though not always honoured
  - Business appointments are necessary and should be planned two to three weeks in advance and not during the summer or other holiday periods
  - Traditional working hours are 9:00 am to 5.00 pm, Monday to Friday
  - Meetings tend to be formal and follow a strict routine of introductions, handshakes and an exchange of business cards
  
- **Structure and hierarchy in Romanian companies**
  - There is a strong hierarchical system in place, with delegation coming from the top down and decisions rarely questioned or challenged by those of a lower rank
  - Most business dealings are very formal and senior members of the group are given the most respect and privileges
  - Responsibility and position are clearly defined. Those with authority command a higher level of respect which is often reflected in the decision-making process and use of titles and formal greetings
  - A large gap between the wealthy and poor has further increased distance between Romanians, preventing many from improving their place in society
  
- **Working relationships in Romania**
  - Romania's communist controlled past has created a culture in which the group is more important than the individual. Relationships are therefore a vital part of Romanian business culture and must be developed in order to succeed
  - Romanians keep their distance from those they do not know and maintain high levels of formality. Developing relationships therefore takes time but once a Romanian feels comfortable with someone, that person is wholly accepted and trusted
  - Formal titles are extremely important. Romanian colleagues of equal status tend to drop the surname for the first name but the title is still used. First names are primarily used among close friends and family only

○ **Romanian Business Etiquette (Do's and Don'ts)**

- ✓ DO expect business dealings to take a long time. An extensive system of rules and regulations results in a very bureaucratic society. Patience and relationships are essential for successful business ventures in Romania
- ✓ DO enquire in advance about which language will be used. Romanian is the official language but business is often conducted in English, French or German
- ✓ DO provide background information and detailed facts and figures. Romanians tend to be very direct and explicit and like to have as much information as possible
- \* DON'T expect meetings to be a time for brainstorming and discussion. Meetings are a time where the senior most person can demonstrate his/her authority
- \* DON'T inquire too deeply into a Romanian's background or personal life until you get to know them well since Romanians are relatively private people
- \* DON'T underestimate Romanian tendency to take a direct approach. Despite their reserved reputation, communication in business situations is more direct and succinct.

**Romanian Culture Quiz – true or false**

1. When invited for dinner at a Romanian home, it is polite to bring an even number of flowers
2. Hospitality is an important part of Romanian culture. It is customary to be served a drink of tea, coffee or even brandy as a welcome
3. Romanians prefer to rely on emotions and feelings to guide them in their business dealings, rather than basing decisions on concrete facts and information
4. Maintaining eye contact shows honesty and interest
5. Humour is a common part of Romanian business culture

**Romanian Culture Quiz – Answers**

1. False. It is polite to bring flowers, but they should be given in odd numbers
2. True. Romanians pride themselves on their hospitable nature and always try to make people feel at home
3. False. Generally speaking, data and extensive facts are thought to be more reliable than feelings
4. True.
5. False. Humour is rarely used in formal business contexts, though common on more social occasions such as meals and festivities

\* Source: CIA World Factbook 2007

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