
BALKAN SAINT'S RELICS DRAW HUGE CROWDS IN ROMANIA

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Tens of thousands of Orthodox Christian believers are expected to arrive starting on Thursday in the eastern Romanian city of Iasi for the countrys largest and most well-known pilgrimage dedicated to St Parascheva, deemed the protector of Moldova and Bukovina.

Many Romanian Orthodox Christians believe that the relics hosted by the cathedral in Iasi have miraculous healing powers.

Known as St Parascheva of the Balkans, she was born in the 11th century in Epivates, close to Constantinople, nowadays Istanbul.

Despite coming from a wealthy family, she chose an ascetic life and died at the age of 27. Her relics were transferred to several capitals of the region, including Veliko Tarnovo, Belgrade and Constantinople. They were brought to Iasi in 1641, during the reign of Vasile Lupu.

The first procession took place in 1946-1947, during a drought that devastated the region after World War II.

After 1989, the tradition restarted, and every year on the second weekend of October, pilgrims wait in lines often stretching several kilometres to pray to the saints relics, which are exhibited in a glass casket in the courtyard of the cathedral.

This year, the Romanian Orthodox Church announced that pilgrims will also be able to pray to the Holy Great Martyr Catherine, whose relics will be flown to Romania from Katerini in Greece, on Thursday night.

Ahead of the event, some transport companies announced more buses on the Bucharest-Iasi route, a six-hour ride. Romanian state railway company also announced more trains.

Buses carrying some 7,000 pilgrims already left Voluntari, a town on the outskirts of Bucharest, on Wednesday night to attend the ceremonies in Iasi. Thousands of others have already arrived days before the pilgrimage starts.

The local administration also announced that several streets in the city centre will be closed and hundreds of police and riot police deployed to ensure the safety of the pilgrims.

The festivities are scheduled to end on Monday, October 15.

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