

Journey across Romania / 14 days

Exploring cultural and ethnic diversity without crossing borders.



Bucur's Bleating Say:

There are tours and then there are transhumance journeys hopping over the mountains and hills, taking in the different cultures and traditions on either side, as well as life as a whole in all its colourful facets. And then, this journey below does it so many times that the 'been there, done that' is naturally out of the question. Therefore, shall we?

"A people that saw the Roman empire come and go and saw all sorts of barbarians invade their country, and still survived, does not believe that there is a definite end to anything. Such people are instinctively wise in the strange ways of history, which invariably seems to run into compromise, and so they are less afraid than many great nations of the West. [...] They fall artfully, soft and loose in every joint and muscle as only those trained in falling can be. Long experience in survival has taught them that each fall may result in unforeseen opportunities and that somehow they always get on their feet again."

So wrote Rosie Goldschmidt Waldeck in 1942 following her staying in Bucharest between June 1940 and January 1941 as a correspondent for Newsweek. And her words probably follow many visitors to Romania, as well as many people simply reading or watching the news about Romania. Because it is here that controversies, apparently incoherent decisions and reactions or contrasts come together with the mouth watering dishes, extraordinarily well preserved rural scenery, great craftsmanship and culturally diverse background. For it is here that the Balkans meet Central Europe, where Saxon, Schwabian and Székely villages complete with their fortified churches and houses quite often share the same region with farming and shepherd Romanian communities, where Tartar dancers still draw one's attention with their moves, where Poles talk of an age when the mining industry had them settle in Bukovina, where Russian Old Believers or staroveries fled Patriarch Nikon's reforms and settled in the Danube Delta and parts of Moldavia, still preserving their traditions and lifestyle, where Jews had and still have an important say in the local culture and economy, where Turkish music and cuisine is omnipresent in great swaths of the country, where Roma communities come together with great crafts and music, where Armenians left behind solid traces of their once famous traditions, skills



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or architecture, where the Hutsul still live up the remote highlands in Bukovina with their wonderful egg painting and wood carving traditions. And, this incomplete list aside, we can go on a long way while talking about those having lived or living in Romania. But we prefer to invite you to come over for more, and we have chosen to put together a longer tour instead of the typical 7 or 8 day ones skipping many regions out of the Carpathian arc...

DAY 1 / not recommended on Friday afternoon

Bucharest - Sinaia (or, according to the landing time, accommodation can be set in Bucharest / at a hotel near the Bucharest OTP Airport; no price change).

Straight from the airport in Bucharest, we shall head up North, to the mountains. The Carpathians create an almost uninterrupted arc around the Transylvanian rolling hills, with Wallachia to the South, Moldavia to the East and parts of Banat and Crişana to the West. Tonight we shall stop in Sinaia, a mountain resort developed close to the royal castle completed in 1914 and the historic monastery going back to 1690.

- Arrival at Bucharest OTP Airport (the tour works for an arrival that is not later than 04:00 PM, otherwise we recommend accommodation in Bucharest proper or at Bucharest OTP Airport).
- Transfer to Sinaia (ca. 2 hours).
- Accommodation in Sinaia, 3* hotel in the resort centre or historic lodge close to Peleş Castle.

DAY 2 / not possible on a Monday and Tuesday

Sinaia - Buşteni - Bran - Braşov

After visiting the royal family-built Peleş Castle completed in 1914, with its extraordinarily rich interiors and innovations for the time of its construction, we shall move on up river to Buşteni, home to a castle completed in 1911 in an entirely different style while employing the local, Brâncoveanu architecture and affording a wonderful view over Bucegi Mountains. Then, after hopping over the mountain pass in Pârâul Rece, we shall go down in the Saxon Land in Transylvania. Also known as Siebenbürgen, the region saw Hungarian King Géza II's inviting the Saxons to settle in the 12th century; two reasons stood behind this invitation that came together with certain benefits (among which tax exemption), namely a need to protect the kingdom borders against invaders and to develop the then very weak local economy. One such measure of protecting the borders and of controlling the trade coming and going included the construction of Bran Castle, perched on a cliff overlooking the road linking Transylvania and Wallachia; it was built by the Saxons in 1377 on the site of a former wooden fortification set by the Teutonic Knights in 1212. Its appearance, the various local legends involving it, a certain quite famous novel, as well as a rather combative visitor (namely Vlad the Impaler), all led to its being nicknamed Dracula's Castle. Back to them, apart from strategically located fortifications, the Saxons built churches and later fortified them, planned their houses like small fortresses and organized the region based on 7 major burgs or fortified towns. We shall commence with Braşov, known to them as Kronstadt, complete with its scenic location at the foot of Tâmpa Hill and home to a massive Gothic church.

- Breakfast.
- Visit to Peleş Castle in Sinaia (closed on Mondays and Tuesdays).
- Visit to the Cantacuzino Castle in Buşteni (interior and gardens).
- Visit to Bran Castle.
 - Optional (only for groups and subject to availability): visit to the fortified church in Vulcan, joined by a short organ concert and possibly dinner in the parish house.
- Accommodation in a 3* or 4* hotel in Braşov.



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DAY 3

Braşov - Cobor - Sibiu

Braşov is one of the Seven Fortress Towns on which the Saxon administration relied from the 12th century until the 19th century: Hermannstadt (Ro. Sibiu), Kronstadt (Ro. Braşov), Mediasch (Ro. Mediaş), Schäßburg (Ro. Sighişoara), Mühlbach (Ro. Sebeş), Klausenburg (Ro. Cluj), respectively Bistritz (Ro. Bistriţa). The walking tour here will therefore prove highly evocative for the historical significance of the town. It will then be straight into bucolic countryside and its riches, well out of trodden trails and speedroads. Out there, in Cobor, we shall visit the ecological farm; run by Carpathia, a trust also running an extensive nature reserve up Făgăraş Mountains, the farm has been created based on a minimal environment impact principle while nonetheless remaining faithful to the local traditional farming approach. It will then be on to Sibiu, another of the Saxon Siebenbürgen and arguably the best preserved, most atmospheric of the 7 Saxon medieval towns in Transylvania. The three main squares in the old town, the iconic Council Tower or the imposing Evangelical Church, all are equally attractive and so are the local curiosities among which the Liars' Bridge and the Sibiu Eyes, the stories behind which are best kept until one reaches Sibiu.

- Breakfast.
- Walk across the old town of Braşov including exterior views of the Council Tower and the Black Church.
- Visit to the local farm in Cobor.
- Walk across the old town in Sibiu, including the three main squares there, as well as exterior views of the Council Tower, of the City Hall, Brukenthal Palace and the Evangelical Church.
- Accommodation in Sibiu, 3 or 4* hotel set out of the old town centre.

DAY 4 / Not possible on Mondays

Sibiu - Alma Vii - Biertan - Sighişoara

Heading off the main, beaten track today we shall head straight into Saxon countryside for a better image of the way these communities developed and still live. Therefore, on the way to Sighişoara two different villages will come together with their stories and the differences in their fortified churches, some of the once around 300 fortified churches in Transylvania, of which around 150 still remain: the 14th century church in Alma Vii complete with its imposing steeples, as well as the curiosities (do not miss the intricate door lock and the 'no divorce' room, among others!) at the 15th century church in Biertan, as well as the whole villages they are set in will definitely make the ride into Sighişoara enjoyable. There will then follow this captivating, highly atmospheric fortress-town going back to 1280, complete with its guild-built and managed bastions, Wooden Stairway, Church on the Hill and cobblestone-paved streets bordered by colourful houses.

- Breakfast.
- Short walks through the village in Alma Vii and view of the local fortified church.
- Visit to Biertan Fortified Church.
- Walk across the old town in Sighişoara excluding visits.
- Visit to Teo's Cellar, a local producer of fruit brandy, and brandy tasting.
- Accommodation in Sighişoara, 3* hotel set in one of the old houses in the fortified town or in a 3 or 4* hotel out of it.

DAY 5

Sighişoara - Corund - the Red Lake - Bicz Gorges - Piatra Neamţ - Iaşi



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A longer day on the road will start with a closer look at Székely traditions. An old branch of the Hungarians preserving exquisite traditions especially as far as horse breeding (you might see some horses or horse-pulled carts up in the hills today!), wood carving (do not miss the wonderful carved wood gates often complete with the sun and moon symbolic that is also present on the Székely flag), pottery (about that, not much later) and embroidery (with red stripes often sewn on a black and white background), the Székely still preserve the old, runic alphabet, the rovásírás (you may see the name of villages displayed in Romanian and Hungarian using the Latin alphabet, joined by the old, rovási version). A break in Corund (locally known as Korond), a potters' village where we shall have a closer look at this craft and its wonderful products, mostly decorated with blue depictions of flora (the tulip being the flower of choice) on a white background, while at times we might get distracted by a specific fragrance in the air, that of kürtőskalács, a pipe-like dough cake with various toppings among which sugar and cinnamon, sugar and walnuts, honey, cocoa... A drive across the Carpathians and into yet a different cultural region will follow, as we shall be passing by the scenic Red Lake, a natural dam lake with evergreen tree trunks still ghostly jutting out of the water, respectively along the dramatic Bicz Gorges. Time allowing, we may have an optional break in Piatra Neamţ, home to fine Middle Age vestiges among which an imposing tower and church, as well as to the fascinating Cucuteni Eneolithic pottery exhibition, respectively the oldest synagogue in Romania, the timber Baal Shem Tov going back to 1766. Then, the evening will see us in Iaşi, the cultural (and not only) capital of Moldavia.

- Breakfast.
- Earlier start.
- Visit to a potter's workshop in Corund and presentation of the craft.
- Break by the Red Lake.
- Drive along the Bicz Gorges.
- Optional (time allowing) break in Piatra Neamţ and walk around Stephen the Great's 1499 Tower, the Princely Church and with exterior views of the Baal Shem Tov Synagogue.
- Accommodation in Iaşi, period 4* hotel in or close to the city centre or modern 3 / 4* hotel.

DAY 6 / Not possible on Mondays and Tuesdays (unless the Palace of Culture is opted out)

Iaşi - Tâmpa - Târgu Neamţ - Dolheşti Mici - Gura Humorului / Suceava or around

The 1925 Neogothic Palace of Culture set on the site of the old Princely Court is unmistakable while in Iaşi, but the city hosts many more riches including the fine Trei Ierarhi Church, the National Theatre or a hotel designed by a certain Gustave Eiffel. After a walk in town, we shall carry on back Westwards, with a break to see the eye opening collection of traditional, ritual masks set in a typical local house in Tâmpa. Then, after a view of the most dramatically located (80 meters above the river bed), still standing fortress in Moldavia just off Târgu Neamţ set towards the end of the 14th century, we shall dive in Moldavian countryside. A handful of local people in a small village without any fortification, monastery or mansion got involved in preserving and promoting their ancestors' traditions, from fur coat making to music playing and from the blacksmith's anvil to the poale-n brâu (local, sweet cheese pastry) table. Therefore, let us join them while exploring traditions in this secluded village lost among the rolling hills covered with pastures and woods... And then, it will be straight into Bukovina (En. 'Beech land'), another region of great cultural and ethnic richness, as it was here that Romanians, Jews (most of which came in from or via Galicia, a historical region in SW Ukraine), Germans, Poles, Ukrainian-speaking Ruthenians and Hutsul (highlanders), all and several others had their say.

- Breakfast.
- Tour of Iaşi with exterior views of the Palace of Culture, National Palace, Trei Ierarhi Church.



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- Optional (either this or the Neamț Fortress can be included) visit to the Ethnographic Collection inside the Palace of Culture in Iași.
- Visit to Neculai Popa's collection of ritual and artistic masks in Târpești.
- Optional (either this or the Palace of Culture in Iași can be included): view of and visit of Târgu Neamț Fortress.
- Traditional lunch and live local music in Dolhești Mici (2 course meal, mineral water and coffee / tea included).
- Traditional craft presentation in Dolhești Mici: blacksmith and fur coat maker.
- Visit to Voroneț Monastery (time-allowing, otherwise it will be visited the following day).
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- Accommodation in Gura Humorului / Suceava or in the region, 3* or 4* hotel.

DAY 7

Gura Humorului / Suceava or around - Marginea - Sucevița - Moldovița - Voroneț - Gura Humorului / Suceava or around

A great Bukovina day will commence with a look at the unglazed, unpainted, black pottery at Marginea, with its blend of religious and floral patterns. It will then be on to the painted monasteries of Sucevița (completed in 1601, with its fortress-like surrounding walls and wonderful setting at the foot of a pasture-covered hill), Moldovița (set in 1532, appearing jewel-like in its smaller yard) and Voroneț (built in 1488 and featuring the most captivating, very well preserved, blue-intensive frescoes among which the evocative Last Judgement is breath-taking). The manner in which the scenes in the Bible were transposed in vivid frescoes so that local people, quite frequently illiterate back then, could understand the holy texts, still captivates, while the quality of the craft has long amazed scholars. In between these visits, we shall have a close look at yet another local tradition, that of egg painting, with explanations of the two techniques employed in the region, the melted wax technique and the relief painting technique. And then, a wonderful day up in Bukovina cannot be complete without the great rural and natural background, from the extensive evergreen woods to the mountains all around, from the villages down the valley to the pastures dotted with cattle and summer huts or haystacks on the slopes above.

- Breakfast.
- Visit to the black pottery workshop in Marginea.
- Visit to Sucevița, Moldovița and Voroneț monasteries.
- Visit to an egg painting workshop and explanations (in Moldovița, Vama or Brodina).
- Accommodation in Gura Humorului / Suceava or in the region, 3* or 4* hotel.

DAY 8

Gura Humorului / Suceava or around - Ciocănești - Ieud - Poienile Izei - Bârsana - Sighetu Marmăției

We shall not leave Bukovina before crossing the mountains twice and definitely not before heading up Bistrița River. First, the tumultuous river, especially in spring, is evocative for the times when there was no road or railroad plying the valley. A time when the logging relied on the river itself, with logs being joined together in great palm or fan-like groups and driven downstream by highly skilled sailors. While the 'plutărit' diminished and then vanished once lorries started to ferry down logs, the region is still strongly bound to its plutărit past and, with little agricultural land, it highly relies on logging, cattle and sheep breeding. In this particular, remote region up the Bistrița we shall make a break in Ciocănești, a village where local people ornate their house walls with plaster decorations



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inspired by the local embroideries. The resulting houses (candidly called 'pui' which also translates as 'chicken') are great to walk among while identifying the specifics each of them is about. Then, once over Prislop Pass and past the bustling Borșa, we shall reach the land of timber, as Maramureș is also known due to the great skill locals have when it comes down to carpentry or wood carving. It is no wonder that old churches (including some extraordinarily tall steeples), houses, and barns are all made of wood. As best examples for this, we shall visit the 17th century Church on the Hill in Ieud and the Poienile Izei church built in the same century. And then, we shall make yet another halt at the monastery off Bârsana; while rather new, the monastery best shows the local craftsmanship and artistic view with its relaxedly disposed wooden buildings set around a generous green area. The evening will see us in Sighetu Marmăției, right on the Ukrainian border (border marked by Tisa River), the home town of Elie Wiesel, the one that coined the word 'Holocaust', but also to the infamous prison where many of the political and intellectual elite of pre-Communist Romania were jailed and died in the 1950s.

- Breakfast.
- Walk in the village of Ciocănești so as to see the exterior of local houses.
- Visit to the Hill Church in Ieud and to Poienile Izei Church.
- Visit to Bârsana Monastery.
-
- Accommodation in a 3* or 4* hotel in or just off Sighetu Marmăției.

DAY 9

Sighetu Marmăției - Săpânța - Huta Certeze - Satu Mare - Oradea

A border region now and throughout a good share of its history (for instance the Romans stopped just South of it, even though their influence penetrated), Maramureș remains a land of highly independent, tenacious and proud people, a fact that is visible in their past and present dwellings or communities. This tenacious, relentless spirit is also present in their seeing life and death as part of a greater, natural process, to the point where death is considered a natural occurrence, a necessary stage one has to go through, so that one can welcome it with a cheer and not with grief. This morning we shall take the time to explore the Merry Cemetery in Săpânța, where a local craftsman, Stan Ioan Pătraș, took this belief as the starting point when he commenced adorning the wooden crosses on his neighbours' graves with vividly coloured depictions, as well as with funny epitaphs inspired by their lives. Then, after crossing the hills and turning Southwards, we shall be able to experience yet another, more recent tradition that emerged from a similar ancestral desire to be tenacious, to be successful and perceived as such at the social level. The expensive, large and modern villas in Huta Certeze, while they have no shortage of counterparts throughout the Maramureș we have just left and the whole country (from Buzescu in Southern Romania to Huedin in Western Romania to name but two communities where they abound), generally remain uninhabited for most of the year, as their owners left Romania, living and working abroad, but, once they got the money for that, they had them built in order to show the communities they were born in that they are doing well; then, the principle saying that 'if my neighbour has a two storey villa, I shall have a three storey one' sufficed to create an opulent, if ghostly, lineup of properties that could hardly come in a starker contrast with the natural background, respectively with the traditional region they were set in. Back on the road, we shall carry on and reach Satu Mare, in the central square of which we shall meet the Secession architecture (part of a greater process taking part mainly between 1890 and 1910, that saw its various approaches throughout Europe, whether this was about the Stile Liberty in Italy, the Art Nouveau in France, the Glasgow Style in Scotland, the Jugendstil in Germany or the Sezessionstil in the then



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Austro-Hungarian Empire). It will then be on South to Oradea, the Secession style city that was revived several years ago when most of its downtown monuments were restored; the Vulturul Negru Passage and adjacent palace will definitely charm us at the end of a long day!

- Breakfast.
- Visit to the Merry Cemetery in Săpânța.
- Optional break in Huta-Certeze.
- Break in Liberty Square in Satu Mare and introduction to the Secession architecture.
- Walking tour in Oradea taking in the Vulturul Negru Passage, Republicii St., the Moon Church.
- Accommodation in Oradea, 3* hotel set in a historical property or modern 4* hotel.

DAY 10 / Not possible on a Sunday (Recaș Vineyards), Monday or Tuesday (the Baroque Palace) Oradea - Timișoara

After crossing more of the duly named 'Western Plains', we shall have a break in the area known as Recaş Hills, where vineyards have been developed ever since the 15th century. The estate we are going to visit owns some 1150 Hectares of vineyards and produces different grape varieties including local and foreign ones, from the Negru de Drăgășani, Novac, Cadarcă and Fetească Regală to the Merlot, Pinot Noir, Zweigelt, Viognier and Rhein Riesling. After this break for a different image of the country, a total change of scenery will await in multiethnic Timișoara, with its grand architecture, as well as with its history that included the Hungarians, Tartars and Ottomans, that saw the city come to an extraordinary development under Austrian, then Austro-Hungarian rule. Today, we shall definitely enjoy a walk taking in some of its iconic sights such as the Orthodox Cathedral inspired by the monasteries in Bukovina, the Baroque Palace, the Catholic Dome and the Bastion, part of the once extensive fortification around the city proper; less imposing places such as the Iron Tree will spice up our experience here with their stories.

- Breakfast.
- Visit to Recaş Vineyards.
- Wine tasting and lunch (2 course meal, water and coffee / tea included) at Recaş Vineyards.
- Walk in Timișoara taking in the Orthodox Cathedral, the Opera House Square, Liberty Square, Union Square and its adjacent streets, the Bastion and the Iron Tree.
- Visit to the Baroque Palace, hosting a fine art gallery including Romanian masters such as Craiova-born Corneliu Baba notable especially for his evocative portraits.
- Accommodation in Timișoara, 3* or 4* modern hotel or heritage property aparthotel.

DAY 11

Timișoara - Hunedoara - Târgu Jiu - Horezu / Măldărești

After spending the night in the capital of Banat region spanning between North-Eastern Serbia to South-Western Romania, we shall change course and head Eastwards into a particular corner of Transylvania with its share of impressive heritage. That is Hunedoara, home of the iconic Hunyadi Castle; the resemblance to the Vajdahunyad Castle in Budapest is due to the fact that the latter, built in 1896, was highly inspired by this one. The image of the fairy tale castle built in 1446, complete with its access bridge and vast Knights' Hall is definitely going to stay with us for a while... Then, following the mighty Jiu River along its wild gorges cut between Romania's second and third highest mountains, the Parâng and the Retezat, we shall reach the Gorj region in Wallachia and have a close look at the works of Constantin Brâncuși that redefined sculpture while reverting to simple, fluid lines and shapes; his works in Târgu Jiu will definitely impress us (the Column of Infinity, the Table of Silence



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and the Gate of the Kiss). Then, while following the Southern foothills of the Carpathians, we shall reach Horezu, an important pottery and religious hub we shall explore the riches of the following day.

- Breakfast.
- Note: this is a longer day on the road.
- Visit to the Hunyadi Castle in Hunedoara.
- Walk around the three monuments set by Constantin Brâncuși în Târgu Jiu.
- Accommodation near Horezu, 4* hotel set in traditional style or, for smaller groups, 4* mansion.

DAY 12 / Not possible on Mondays

Horezu / Măldărești - Curtea de Argeș - Bucharest

The morning will be dedicated to exploring the whereabouts of Horezu. First, completed in 1693, Hurezi Monastery stands as a major work of Brâncoveanu architecture. Ruler of Wallachia, Constantin Brâncoveanu created his own architectural style, by blending in Western Baroque and Oriental lines, all that on the background given by vernacular patterns. Then, we shall have a look at the local focus on colourful patterns while admiring the Horezu pottery in the workshop of one of the local craftsmen: the feather design, the Horezu rooster pattern, as well as the frequent solar motifs will further introduce us in the Wallachian art and life approach. And finally there will be the 'cula' houses. A particularity in a great share of the Balkan Peninsula, Medieval tower houses can be found from Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina to North Macedonia and Wallachia (more specifically Oltenia, the part of Wallachia we are in). Usually built of stone, later of brick, they had 2-4 storeys, and blended in the residential and military functions, as they acted as small fortresses meant to protect an extended family. Which reminds one the fact that their very name in Serbian (kula), Albanian (kulla) or Romanian (culă) is derived from Arabic (qal'a) via Turkish (kule) meaning a fortress or fort. The two such buildings we are going to see this morning, Greceanu's and Duca's, date from the 18th, respectively 19th centuries, and show a fine association of the original defensive features and art. The strong hardwood doors, high ceilings, narrow ground floor (or lack of) windows, the picturesque loggia and the overall massive looks are highly evocative for the time and situation they were built in. After this insight in Balkan culture, we shall carry on Eastwards to Curtea de Argeș, our last break before heading to Bucharest. The local monastery, completed by Prince Neagoe Basarab in 1517, features fine steppes with a spire pattern which can prove to be just as captivating as is the legend linked to its construction, while its popularity is also due to the fact that it doubles as a royal family necropolis. After this visit, we shall make our way downstream into Pitești, a city evoking the significant oil extracting and refining industry in Romania, eventually reaching Bucharest with its fast beat and contrasting architecture.

- Breakfast.
- Presentation of the Horezu pottery.
- Visit to Hurezi Monastery.
- Visit to the Măldărești 'cula' houses.
- Visit to Curtea de Argeș Monastery.
- Accommodation near Bucharest, 3 or 4* hotel located in the city centre.

DAY 13

Bucharest

The morning will be dedicated to exploring the whereabouts of Horezu. First, completed in 1693, After this visit we shall carry on to Bucharest, a city that will captivate us with its contrasts, whether they are about the architecture, cuisine, buzzing and peaceful quarters. Mentioned for the first time in



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1459 by Vlad the Impaler and with the capital of Wallachia settled here after slowly making its way South of the mountains, Bucharest developed as a trading and craftsman post. A walk across the old town will reveal cobblestone streets bearing the names of the guilds that once flourished here or of the towns merchants with their ware came from (such as Gabroveni from Gabrovo or Lipscai from Lipsca or Leipzig), while at the same time revealing some of the still standing inns around which the town developed and the old churches with their fine architecture and evocative mural painting. With a diminishing Ottoman influence in the 19th century, the city started looking for light Westwards and the grand edifice we shall see while having a drive down or around the popular Calea Victoriei testify that. The Communist regime that followed WW2 complete with its great number of casualties would see major heritage across Romania torn down and replaced with insipid, ugly and dysfunctional residential or administrative projects. All that to a point where it amazes one to see that the same city can host at the same time thousands upon thousands of matchbox style apartment buildings, jewel-like churches and monasteries, outstanding museums of which some excellent artists' houses, serene, leafy turn-of-the-20th-century residential districts and impressive Neoclassical or Modernist architecture. Therefore, with as little time as one might have for it, Bucharest will definitely catch one's eye with all its contrasts and colour.

- Breakfast.
- Drive around the Palace of the Parliament and the Salvation Cathedral (exterior views only), then on Northwards.
- Visit to the open air Village Museum founded in 1936 by Sociologist Dimitrie Gusti and consisting of genuine, traditional houses from different parts of Romania brought to Bucharest and set village-like in the city's largest park, the Herăstrău.
- Drive down Calea Victoriei and / or other historical central avenues (note: especially during the week-end in summer, the Calea Victoriei might be closed to traffic and pedestrianized); break and presentation in Revoluției Square, with views of the Royal Palace, the Central University Library and the Athenaeum.
- Walk across the old town with its merchant and craftsmen streets, with views of the old churches (Stavropoleos, the Old Court) and inns (the Manuc, Gabroveni and Tei) there.
- Optional (not included): an outstanding, domed auditorium complete with its grand foyer and spiral stairways, the 1888 Athenaeum hosts classical music concerts which are highly recommended; furthermore, the grand, 72 m. long fresco decorating the main hall depicts scenes from the history of Romanians; if of interest, tickets need be purchased well in advance (concerts usually on Thursdays and Fridays starting at 7 PM taking 2-2.5 hours).
- Accommodation near Bucharest, 3 or 4* hotel located in the city centre.

DAY 14

Bucharest

Our journey will come to an end today. Without assuming we have covered all traditional or historical regions in this highly diverse country, we can only hope that you will take this as a taste of what there is to see and experience, choosing to return at a certain point for more of it. Until then, let we conclude with Maria Tănase's lyrics:

*"Ye green grain leaf,
Ye green grain leaf,
Long is the road to Gorj
But the road of man's longing is way longer,*



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*For, while man may go to Gorj and come back,
Man's longing never comes to an end."*

- Breakfast.
- Optional: in case of an afternoon or evening flight out (or more days to spend in Bucharest for that matter), we recommend further exploration of the city including, for instance:
 - A walk across the interwar districts of Cotroceni and Dorobanți, with their villas built in an appealing diversity of styles from the Neoclassical, Italianate, neo-Brâncoveanu or Neogothic to the Modernist.
 - A walk or drive and walk across the former Jewish District in a city that hosted a 95,000 strong Jewish community back in 1940. The streets of Romulus, Remus and the Calea Dudești, as well as the still functional Yeshua Tova Synagogue, Choral Temple and Jewish Theatre, or the museum - hosting Great Synagogue and Holy Union Synagogue are all evocative for the great role the Jewish community played in the history of the city and country.
 - A visit to the Romanian art wing at the National Art Museum hosted in the Royal Palace (open Wednesday - Sunday); the exhibition follows a chronological approach, hence emphasizing the style evolution and influence shift, and it includes some great local painters such as, among others, impressionists Nicolae Grigorescu and Ștefan Luchian, surrealist Victor Brauner and cubist Maxy, as well as fine sculptors among which Dimitrie Paciurea and Constantin Brâncuși.
 - A leisure walk across the Văcărești Delta (weather allowing), a vast area on the bottom of an abandoned reservoir that was taken over by nature, nowadays hosting a rich deltaic fauna and flora, all that within the city.
 - A visit to one of the two palaces built by Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu out of the city, the Potlogi or Mogoșoaia.
 - A visit to one of the monasteries around Bucharest, of which we particularly recommend St. Nicholas off Sitaru and Căldărușani located on a peninsula off the homonymous lake.
- Transfer to Bucharest OTP Airport for the outbound flight.
- End of services.



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