

# A motorhomer's Guide To

# Bucharest

*City Break*



**A MOTORHOMER'S GUIDE  
TO  
BUCHAREST**

Paul Kingston-Ford  
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Please note that all the information contained in this guide, was gained From days and days of research before and hours of walking the occasional tarmac pavements during out 2017 visit to the country.

It is not and I don't feel it's ever possible to be. Complete guide, as what we look for In a city differ from what you are looking for, but hopefully this highlights some of the attractions and wets your appetite.

We believe that at the time of publishing that the information contained was correct, although we except no liability for errors or omissions.

For a more personal view of our travels please check out out :

[www.ourleapoffaith.co.uk](http://www.ourleapoffaith.co.uk)

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## INTRODUCTION

Romania's capital normally gets a pretty bad wrap , but in fact it's super dynamic and seriously crazy fun.

It's where the communism dream now meets unbridled capitalism, think horse and cart next to shiny Audi Q7, derelict tower block versus the only building on the planet visible from space !

A real hot potato of city !

Many motorhomer's give the city a complete miss heading only to Transylvania, or just using the country as a transit on the way to sunnier climes , but that is a complete injustice.

Allow at least a few days to take in the museums, stroll the parks and hang out at cool cafes and bars.

While much of the centre is modern, rebuilt in 1980, if you hunt around a bit you'll find splendid 17th- and 18th-century churches, villas and spacious green parks hiding away around the next corner.

Communism may have changed the face of the city forever, and nowhere is this more evident than at the Palace of Parliament, possibly the greatest tribute to dictatorial megalomania madness you'll probably ever see on this planet.

love it !

# THE BASIC STUFF

## **Currency**

Romania Leu (pronounced 'lew' singular and 'lei' plural) also known as the RON.

100 bani = one Leu.

When we visited 5.16 lei were worth around £1  
so we doubled the price then divided by ten to get a rough comparison  
when shopping.

## **Language**

Romanian is the only official language, although many younger people  
speak some English and older people German,  
And everybody understands mime....

## **Money**

Cash is king !

ATMs are widely available. Credit cards are accepted in Petrol stations  
and restaurants, but corruption has been reported widespread.

## **Visas**

Passport holders of EU member states can stay indefinitely.

## **Borders**

Not part of Schengen zone so passports and vehicle documents are checked at the borders.

### **Telephone country code**

++40

### **Emergency numbers**

112 (EU wide helpline) for Police, Fire and Ambulance

### **Time zone**

Romania is two hours ahead of the UK.

### **Mobile Phones**

Thanks to recent EU roaming changes, your mobile phone should work as normal

## MOTORHOME TRAVEL (ROMANIA IN GENERAL)

We use the term Motorhome very loosely we have seen everything from camper vans, American RV converted fire truck to the humble white van. For this guide they are all motorhomes.

What ever you use to travel just enjoy !

### **Fuel**

Unleaded and diesel were widely available with many fuel stations. Most stations had signs stating they take Visa and MasterCard cards, but we always paid in cash.

### **Tolls / Vignette**

You will require a vignette for light commercial.

A vignette is required for the majority of the roads, they are marked with a sign at the side of them and we couldn't see a way across the country without using them.

It can be bought from small booths positioned just after the border or petrol stations, or as we did online ([www.tolls.eu](http://www.tolls.eu)) , remember to keep a copy of it for 12 months after your visit

It cost us €17 for a month (you can pay in Euro or Lei) and costs went up lots if your vehicle was over 3.5t.

The vignette is electronic so on it, so when buying check carefully that everything is correct.

## **Road regulations.**

Always check the internet for the most up to date (we use the AA website, [www.theaa.com](http://www.theaa.com))

Traffic drives on the right and overtakes on the left, so you need to ensure your headlights are deflected with stick on adapters

You must carry a high visibility jacket for each person, a first aid kit, warning triangle and a fire extinguisher.

The use of dipped headlights during daylight hours in compulsory outside of built up areas and the use of your horn in built-up areas it is prohibited between 10pm and 6am – unless it is to prevent an accident.

Winter tyres must be used between 1 November and 31 March if there is snow or ice, check your for the M+S markings.

Fines issued for driving offences must be paid at a post office and if paid within 48 hours they may be halved.

As you drive along you'll see yellow diamond-shaped signs, these mean that you are on the priority road and others must give way to you. If you see one with a black line through it, you no longer have priority, traffic from the right does – this is usually on approaches to roundabouts.

If we're not entirely sure who has priority we just take our time and give way to anyone who looks like they aren't stopping.

Distances are all in kilometres, and so are speed limited. As you enter a town the urban speed limit of 50kph applies, unless otherwise stated, until you are out of the town. Locals will probably choose to ignore this, but as we didn't wish to be stopped we stuck closely to the limits.

Seat belts must be worn by driver and all passengers in front and rear seats, children under 12 are not allowed in the front seats.

## **Road conditions**

The roads in Romania are generally in a poor condition. There are quite a few miles of smooth EU funded tarmac, but even some of those now have pot-holes in them.

Motorways swap between smooth tarmac and a bumpy patchwork without any warning, especially when you encounter a bridge.

Smaller roads (some of them still on the main route) can be very badly pot-holed.

Keep your speed down as pot-holes can appear anywhere, and also watch the car in front of you – if it's local it will undoubtedly swerve to avoid them and give you a fighting chance of missing it.

## **Standard of driving**

The standard of driving was OK.

People were generally courteous and would thank us when we indicated that it was safe for them to overtake us. Most of the time We went slowly due to the random pot holes, so we were overtaken a lot. On

some of the dual carriageway roads people would sometimes drive in the centre lane as it was often the smoothest.

Do not be surprised if drivers overtake on corners as this seems the norm.

Traffic on the roads once outside the main city was not limited to cars and lorries, there were also a good few horse and carriages. These tended to stick to the edge of the road, leaving as much space as possible for people to pass, do remember horses scare easily.

## **Driving in the centre.**

Driving around the centre of Bucharest is sheer **lunacy** and you won't want to do it for more than a few seconds before you lose the motorhome and use public transport.

In theory, hourly parking rates apply in the centre, off Piața Victoriei and Piața Universității, look for the wardens in yellow-and-blue uniforms or check for paid metered parking.

Although the locals just pull on the pavements, so watch your toes !

At time of writing Fuel (Derv) was around 4.89 Lei a litre.

We recommend staying either at the listed campsite, or secure parking and not attempting the six lane wide road network.

## **Supermarkets**

You will find all of the Western European supermarkets present in Romania, and in the city the choice was endless, however some such as

Carrefour are expensive even by western standards. Lidl's are a safe bet with its European wide standard fare, but penny market stock a good selection of Romanian food .

Do not dismiss the roadside stalls selling fresh produce and kiosks selling bread, some of the fruit and vegetables purchased were excellent.

**The prices are very low in comparison with the uk**

## PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Bucharest's public transport system is the metro, buses and trams operated by the transport authority RATB ([www.ratb.ro](http://www.ratb.ro) for maps etc) The system runs daily from about 4.30am to about 11.30pm.

The ticketing situation differs for street transport (buses and trams ) and for the metro system.

To use buses or trams you must first purchase an 'Activ' card (3.70 lei) from any RATB street kiosk, (Sometime available from your campsite) which you then load with credit that is then used as you enter the vehicles.

Trips cost 1.30 lei each, and the minimum amount of credit you can buy is 5 lei.

To activate your Activ card as you enter the tram or bus, you scan it at the machine and you should receive a green light, the red light indicates that you either do not have enough credit or it did not read.

To use one card for two people scan the card press the number 2 button , to check the remaining credit on your card press the number 1 button.

Travelling without a validated Activ card risks a 50 lei on-the-spot fine.

Activ cards can be topped up as needed at any RATB kiosk.

You will see many locals just getting on and not scanning the card, but if stopped you run the risk of fines.

Metro stations are identified by a large letter 'M'. To use the metro, buy a magnetic-strip ticket available at ticketing machines or cashiers inside station entrances

Tickets valid for two journeys cost 5 lei. A 10-trip ticket costs 20 lei.

The metro is a quick way to cross the out laying areas.

## **Hop on Hop Off Bus**

Normal these companies operate as very much as a tourist attraction, but here in Bucharest, they offer a real alternative, low cost way of seeing all the major attractions.

Look out for the red signs, you can join the bus at any of these point, payment is made on board. The ticket is valid for 24 hours and a complete circuit lasts around 1 hour.

We used it to give us our bearing as to the layout of the city.

Audio guides are available, but due to the traffic conditions in the city, they do not tend to keep time with the sites.

A far better approach is the downloadable App, (QR. Code onboard) which if used in conjunction with a smart phone will provide relevant information based on GPS location.

At time of writing it cost 25 lei per person for the 24 Hour ticket.

## PLACES TO STAY

### **Camping Casa Alba**

GPS N 44.516450 E26.091720

Only campsite in the area, basic but very safe, out dated sanitary area, but perfectly clean. no bar or restaurant within walking distant.

Price includes water, waste, Electricity and WIFI

### **Un Secure parking**

GPS N44.417 E26.1705

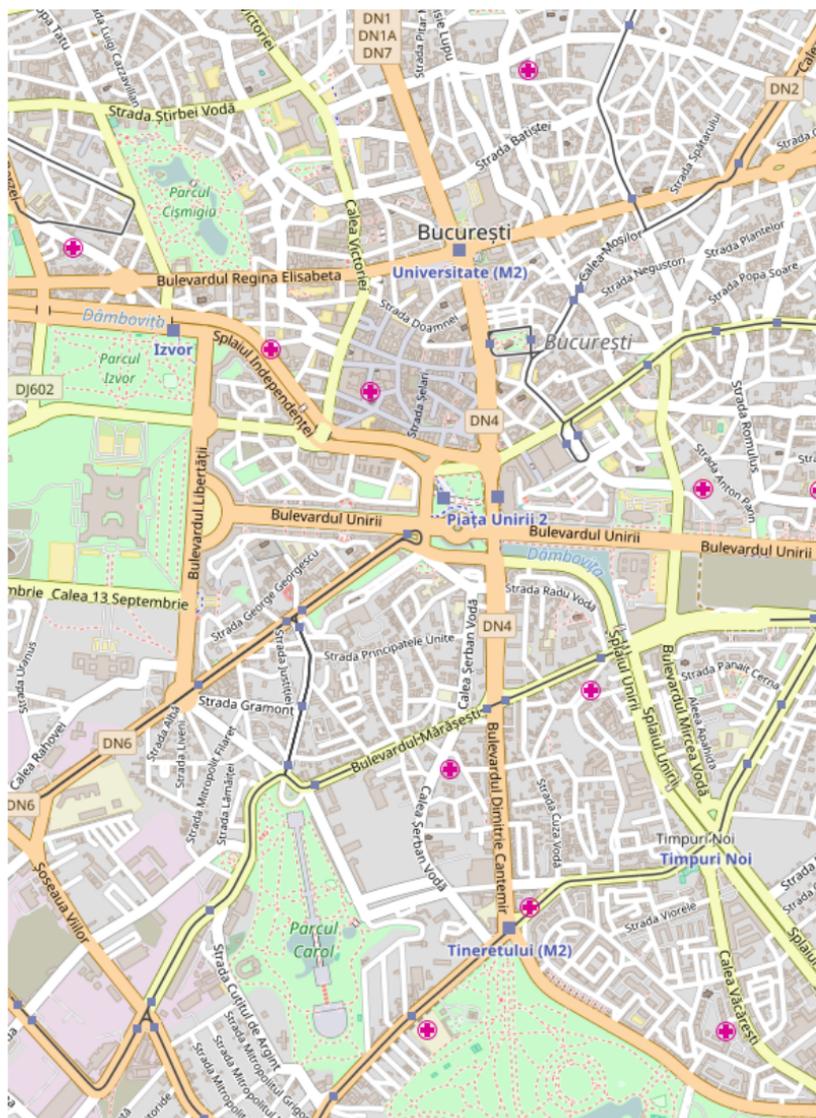
Daytime parking, which is ok for trips into the city, but have been known to leave notes on motorhomes staying overnight. Unsure on safety ?

### **Secure parking**

GPS N44.4279 E26.0999

Which is described as guarded parking near the centre of the old town, but near a building site, english spoken - No services.

## TOP HIGHLIGHTS



- **Palace of Parliament Taking in the sheer enormity of former dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu's dream.**
- **Statue of Emperor Trajan Getting that must have Instagram pic of the city's most talked about statue – a naked Roman Emperor Trajan holding a wolf.**
- **Marvel at the derelict monument to the 1989 revolution**
- **Museum of the Romanian Village life why you might not appreciate granny's wisdom enough at this quirky but cool museum.**
- **Former Ceaușescu Residence Touring the luxe villa the Ceaușescus called home for more than two decades.**
- **The old town, Spending some down time eating and drinking in the open air at one of the city's most up and coming district.**
- **Romanian Athenaeum Experiencing the serenity of classical music harmonising with classical architecture.**

## HISTORY

Lying on the plains between the Carpathian Mountains and the Danube River, Bucharest was settled by Geto-Dacians as early as 70 BC. By 1459 a royal residence and military citadel had been established under the chancellorship of infamous Wallachian Vlad Țepeș, ( aka Dracula).

By the end of the 17th century, the city was the capital of Wallachia and one of eastern Europe's wealthiest centres. It became the national capital in 1862, as it lay on a main trade route between east and west.

In 1881, the Kingdom of Romania officially proclaimed.

The early 20th century was Bucharest's golden age.

Large neoclassical buildings sprang up, fashionable parks were laid out and landscaped on Parisian models and, by the end of the 1930s, the city was known throughout Europe as 'Little Paris'.

Air raids during WWII, coupled with a a major earthquake, destroyed much of Bucharest's prewar past.

In 1974, Romania was the first country of the Soviet Bloc to have official relations with the European Community.

Then the 1977 earthquake claimed over 1300 lives and flattened countless buildings.

At this point, Former dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu's started his massive redevelopment of the city which lasted through the 1980s, culminating in his grandiose Palace of parliament, his striving for perfection drove a stake through the heart of Bucharest's elegant past, ripping up everything that stood in the way of progress.

The violent revolution of 1989 inflicted serious wounds, both physically and psychologically. Many buildings still bear bullet holes as testament to those chaotic days when the anticommunist uprising resembled a civil war.

Less than a year later, in June 1990, miners poured into the centre to support a government crackdown on protesting students in a shocking wave of violence that reopened scars that had barely healed.

1991 Constitution re-established Romania as a republic with a multiparty system, market economy and individual rights of free speech, religion and private ownership.

Although it's still very much haunted by its recent bloody past more than a quarter century later, Bucharest is clearly recovering and becoming a true European powerhouse, joining first NATO in 2004 and then the EU 2007.

## ATTRACTIONS

Please note many museums are closed on Mondays so plan your visits around this..



## **Palace of Parliament**

[www.cic.cdep.ro](http://www.cic.cdep.ro)

adult complete tours 55 lei, standard tours 35 lei, photography 30 lei;  
9am-5pm Mar-Oct, 9am-4pm Nov-Feb.

The Palace of Parliament or the people's palace is the world's second-largest administrative building (after the Pentagon) and former dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu's most infamous creation,

At the centre of all his grandeur and possible mad plan for the redevelopment of the city was and still is "The peoples Palace". Ceausescu conceived the idea after a visit to North Korea's Kim II-sung. The palace would be the largest, most lavish palace in the world and would hold all the functions of his socialist state, as well as serve as a handsome residence for him and his wife.

Started in 1984 (and still unfinished), the building has more than 3000 rooms and covers 330,000 sq metres. Local guides tell that no one really knows the full size, as the underground levels and tunnels extend throughout the city.

Entry is by guided-tour only (book in advance). Entry to the palace is from B-dul Națiunii on the building's northern side (to find it, face the front of the palace from B-dul Unirii and walk around the building to the right). Bring your passport, as it is a strict no entry without !

Several types of tours are available, including a 'standard' tour of the main rooms and hallways, and 'complete' tours that combine the

standard tour with views of the terrace and basement. The standard tour takes around 1 hour and the complete a little more.

## **National Museum of Contemporary art**

[www.mnac.ro](http://www.mnac.ro)

adult 10 lei; 10am-6pm Wed-Sun.

Housed within The Palace of Parliament is an art gallery, which displays ever-changing exhibitions of modern art.

Check the website in advance to make sure something is on during your time in the city.

The museum is located on the southwestern side of the building (at the opposite end of the Palace of Parliament to the tour entrance); look for entry E4

## **Piața Unirii**

South of the Historic Centre, Piața Unirii stands at the centre of the new socialist city that Ceaușescu began building in earnest in the 1980's. Leading to the Palace would be Boulevard 'Victory of Socialism' (now called Boulevard Unirii), which was to be the Champs Elysees of Bucharest, but very deliberately designed to be 1 metre wider on each side and 6 metres longer than the Paris' thoroughfare to show how much better they were than the French nation never finished, but the sheer scale conveys something of his intent.

To create his dream, To build the Palace and Civic centre Ceausescu set about demolishing most of Bucharest's historic districts. This included Over 20 churches, 6 synagogues and Jewish temples. Approximately 30,000 homes were also raised to the ground.

In total, one-fifth of central Bucharest was demolished for his regeneration project, despite the mass destruction of parts of this then historic city, account has to be taken that larger parts of it lay in ruins from the effects of two world wars and a huge earthquake in 1977.

The main sights, ironically, are a few beautiful churches that miraculously survived the demolition project, an act of god maybe ?

The main thoroughfare, Calea Victoriei, makes a pleasant walk, as it connects the two main squares of the city, Piața Victoriei and Piața Revoluției before leading you to the Old Town Centre, home to endless cafes and bars.

## **Piața Revoluției**

To the north of Piața Universității, stands Piața Revoluției, a part of the city indelibly marked by the events surrounding the overthrow of the Ceaușescu regime in 1989.

Ceaușescu's infamous final speech was given here, from the balcony of the former Central Committee of the Communist

## **Party building**

[www.mai.gov.ro](http://www.mai.gov.ro)

The 21st December 1989. Will remain in this country history for ever Amid cries of 'Down with Ceaușescu!' The dictator somehow escaped by helicopter from the roof of this very building, Meanwhile, the crowds

were riddled with bullets, from the few soldiers who remained loyal . But this was the end for communism in Romania

Directly in front of the building stands the Rebirth Memorial a white obelisk piercing a world like crown .

## **Rebirth Memorial**

It was ridiculed when it was first erected in 2005, but the public has now grown accustomed to it. Amazingly this now lies in almost disrepair, with most of the tiles at ground level smashed.



In 2012 the monument was defaced with a splash of bright red paint that is just at the bottom of the monument's "pierced world ". This caused it to look as though it is bleeding. The paint is so inaccessible that it has remained in place since, it's just so hard to believe, in England there would be a public outcry, community groups would be formed to protect and repair such an important piece of history.

## **RomanianAthenaeum**

[www.fge.org.ro](http://www.fge.org.ro)

The exquisite Romanian Athenaeum is said to be the heart of Romania's classical music scene. Pages of Romanian history are featured on the interior fresco inside the Big Hall, The towering dome is 41m high.

A huge appeal dubbed 'Give a Penny for the Athenaeum' saved it from disaster after funds dried up.

Today it's home to the George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra and normally only open during concerts

But can normal get a look inside this somewhat epic place.

## **Old Town.**

Bucharest's Historic Centre is more commonly known as the 'Old Town' lies just south of Piața Universității. It's a fascinating area that marks both the city's historic heart, formed when Bucharest was emerging as the capital of Wallachia in the 15th and 16th centuries, and the centrepiece of efforts to transform the capital into a liveable urban centre. It's home to Bucharest's Old Princely Court, sadly to the general public. dating back to the 15th century, though the court was allowed to fall into disrepair over the centuries and is now undergoing long-term renovation.

The area around the court thrived from roughly the 16th to the 19th centuries as a merchant quarter for artisans and traders, whose occupations are still reflected in street names such as Str Covaci (street of the blacksmiths) and Str Șelari (street for saddle-makers).

During much of the 20th century, the area has become a slum, public housing for impoverished Roma community until the last couple of years when regeneration has started.

These days, the saddle-makers and black smiths are long gone to make way for the restaurants, bars and clubs.

It's still very scruffy in parts, with shiny nightclubs standing next to derelict buildings, the contrast is a stunning visual feast, but if you're in the mood for that big night out, there's no better place in town to party it the small hours.

The edges of the old form an up and coming shopping district, with huge designer stores from the likes of Rolex and Mont Blanc.

## **Princely Court Church**

7am-8pm Free entry

The Princely Court Church, built from 1546 to 1559 during the reign of Mircea Ciobanul, it is considered to be Bucharest's oldest church. The faded 16th-century frescoes next to the altar are originals. The carved stone portal was added in 1715.”

## **National History Museum**

[www.mnir.ro](http://www.mnir.ro)

adult 27 lei

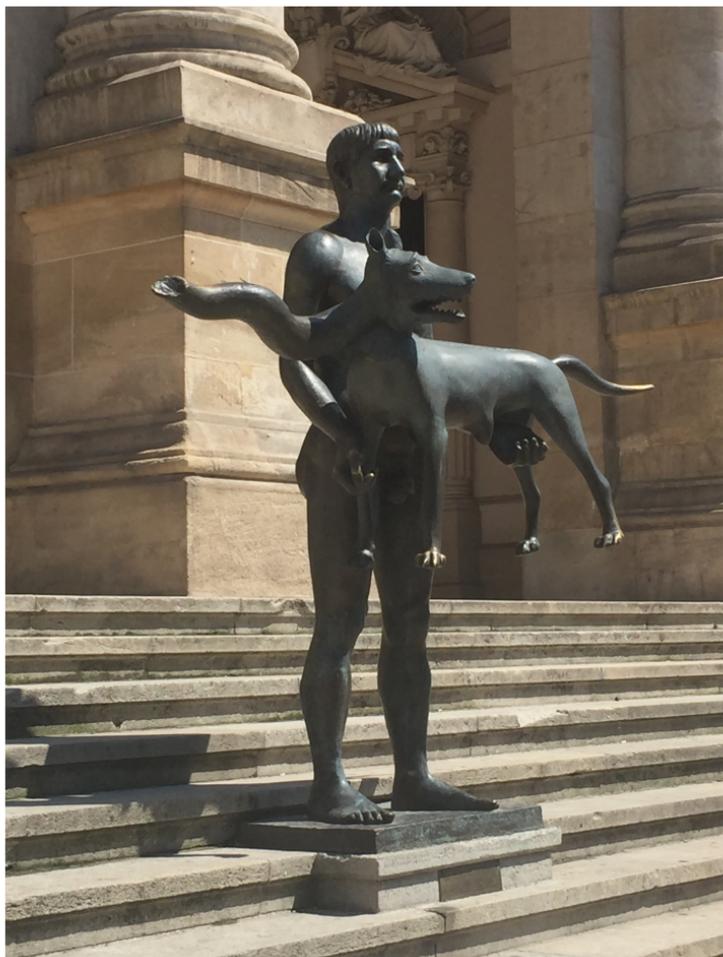
10am-6pm Wed-Sun

Houses a vast and interesting collection of maps, statues and ancient jewels, and in particular it highlights the country's links to Ancient Rome.

## **Statue of Emperor Trajan**

A local favourite, this statue is not inside the museum, but on the steps outside, a controversial, and funny, Statue of Emperor Trajan standing naked and holding a Dacian wolf.

It is said to have been so hated by locals that it even had its own Facebook page. I do wonder why he got no pants but the wolf thing gets a scarf? I also wonder what a search on Instagram would bring up?



# Herăstrău Park

[www.herastrauparc.ro](http://www.herastrauparc.ro)



Sprawling over a large area north of Piața Victoriei, this 200-hectare park surrounding a large lake is Bucharest's nicest park, with plenty of shaded strolls and open-air cafes, plus boats to hire. At night in summer, some of the city's best clubs decamp here and transform the park into an all-night party scene. One of the main entrances to the park is Michael Jackson avenue.



He will be forever linked to city following his blunder, In 1992, a few years after the fall of communism, Michael Jackson arrived in Bucharest, ready to perform to a crowd of 70,000 people.

*“The mob was ecstatic – times were changing and one of the greatest entertainers of the era was performing live in their city! The stadium was pulsating with energy, the revellers eagerly anticipating what was to come; Bucharest was ready to welcome Michael Jackson. That’s when the superstar hollered, “It’s great to be here in Budapest ...”*

Although I guess he has been forgiven ?

The park itself also contains the “ Island of roses” which is reached via arched bridges. There, among flowerbeds and walking alleys you can find the “Monument of the Founding Fathers of the European Union”, a collection of 12 sculpted heads arranged in a circle.

### **The former Ceaușescu Residence**

guided tours in English adult 46 lei

10am -6pm Wed-Sun

This restored villa is the former main residence of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, they lived here for around two decades up until the end in 1989. Everything has been returned to its former lustre, including the couple's bedroom and the private apartments of the three children.

Do make sure you see the cinema in the basement, Elena's opulent private chamber and the back garden with swimming pool.

Tours must be Reserve a tour in advance by phone or on the website.

The overall effect is fascinating, it do keep in mind how. Much poverty the normal population was suffering for long periods of his leadership.

Marvel at the finely crafted furnishings,all locally made reproductions antiques- it a love or hate place

## **National Village Museum**

[www.muzeul-satului.ro](http://www.muzeul-satului.ro);

adult 10 lei

9am-7pm Tue-Sun,

Located the banks of Herăstrău Lake, this museum is a terrific open-air collection of several homesteads, churches, mills and windmills relocated from rural Romania. Built in 1936 by royal decree, it is one of Europe's oldest open-air museums, what a great way to get a feel for village life.

## **Arcul de Triumf**

The original wooden version was erected in around 1922 to celebrate the Romanian army's victories in WWI and the Great Unification of 1918. As was built quick to allow the returning forces so where to parade it was as beaky as the 1936 replacement, which now stand in all it's glory for us to marvel at.



And finally for the slightly morbid people like myself.....

## **THE CEAUȘESCU - the last place.**

Around 3km west of the Palace of Parliament (take bus 385 from outside the Parliament ticket office) stands the Ghencea Civil Cemetery where you can morbidly seek out the final resting spots of Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena, who were both executed on Christmas Day in 1989 after a short military trial, which he refused to acknowledge.

The two were originally buried in obscurity in separate graves shortly after the anticommunist uprising. They were quietly reburied under a common marker in 2010 after the bodies were exhumed to perform identity tests.

The tests were conducted at the request of surviving family members as a way of quelling rumours that the executions had been faked and that the infamous couple had in fact survived the revolution.

The Ceaușescus remain largely ignored death, but a fair few Romanians do drop by to leave flowers or light candles.... Umm

## EATING AND DRINKING OUT

Bucharest has the country's most varied dining scene, with great restaurants featuring Romanian cuisine alongside very good Italian, Middle Eastern and contemporary international cuisine. The Old Town is packed with restaurants and bars to while a lazy lunch or a nighttime party.

Prices are significantly higher in the city than in the rest of Romania, at the time of writing we had been paying around 5 Lei for a local beer but in the city centre this was more commonly around 9- 12 Lei.

As an examples we had

1x burger and Fries  
1x Black Sea Mussels  
1x Rose wine  
2x Local beer

Total cost .....

Or

1x large Cesar salad with extra coleslaw  
1x local beer  
1x Rose Wine

Total cost .....

## FINAL THOUGHTS

In conclusion Bucharest is like no city I've ever been to, it is along way from immediately being striking, it doesn't grab you and hug you tight, but scratch the surface and you'll find the heart of Romania beating its own rhythm, in a city that has seen unimaginable change in the last 30 years a gem is starting to form.

Do take your time, in the time we visited we only just scratched the surface the amount of Museum is almost endless and enjoy an unforgettable visit to this legendary city.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Paul, Michele and Bentley set off traveling in their motorhome Paloma, in the spring of 2017.

With no set route, we have traveled Europe on ‘That looks good’ planning system which has led us:

From capital cities to Humble Villages.

From Historic frescos to modern street art.

From Churches to Budapest’s Ruin bars

Life an adventure, and we are living our own adventure within it !

Stay safe, stay Lucky, Enjoy the Freedom !