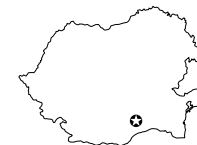


# Bucharest



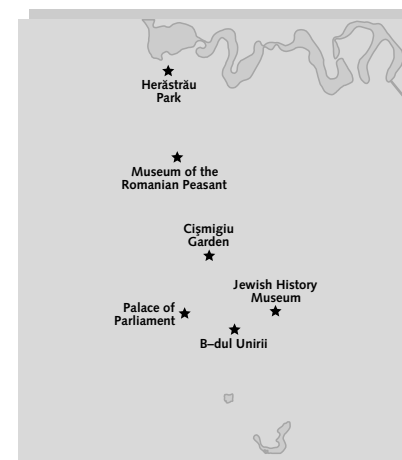
Much of Romania slugs it and Europe in general doesn't always speak favourably of Romania's capital. They're all wrong. Its perplexing mismatch of eras – grey housing blocks from Ceaușescu's brutal rebuilding phase, deliberately French palaces with baroque clam-shaped canopies, (limited) remains of medieval churches and courts, 21st-century office buildings – means that even a short walk around blurs time. Bucharest is home to Romania's best museums – lots of them – some of which defy limited budgets by illustrating the rural side of Romanian life. Others, like the communist bon voyage Palace of Parliament (the world's second-biggest building), show off another era.

More importantly, like any great city, Bucharest believes in itself: a lively student base takes over the historic centre's open-air bar scene, all-age couples attend theatre or opera or foreign-language films kept in their original tongue, and families seeking weekend quiet lounge all day in Bucharest's (often) well-kept parks. Not what one might expect, considering revolution tore the city apart less than two decades ago.

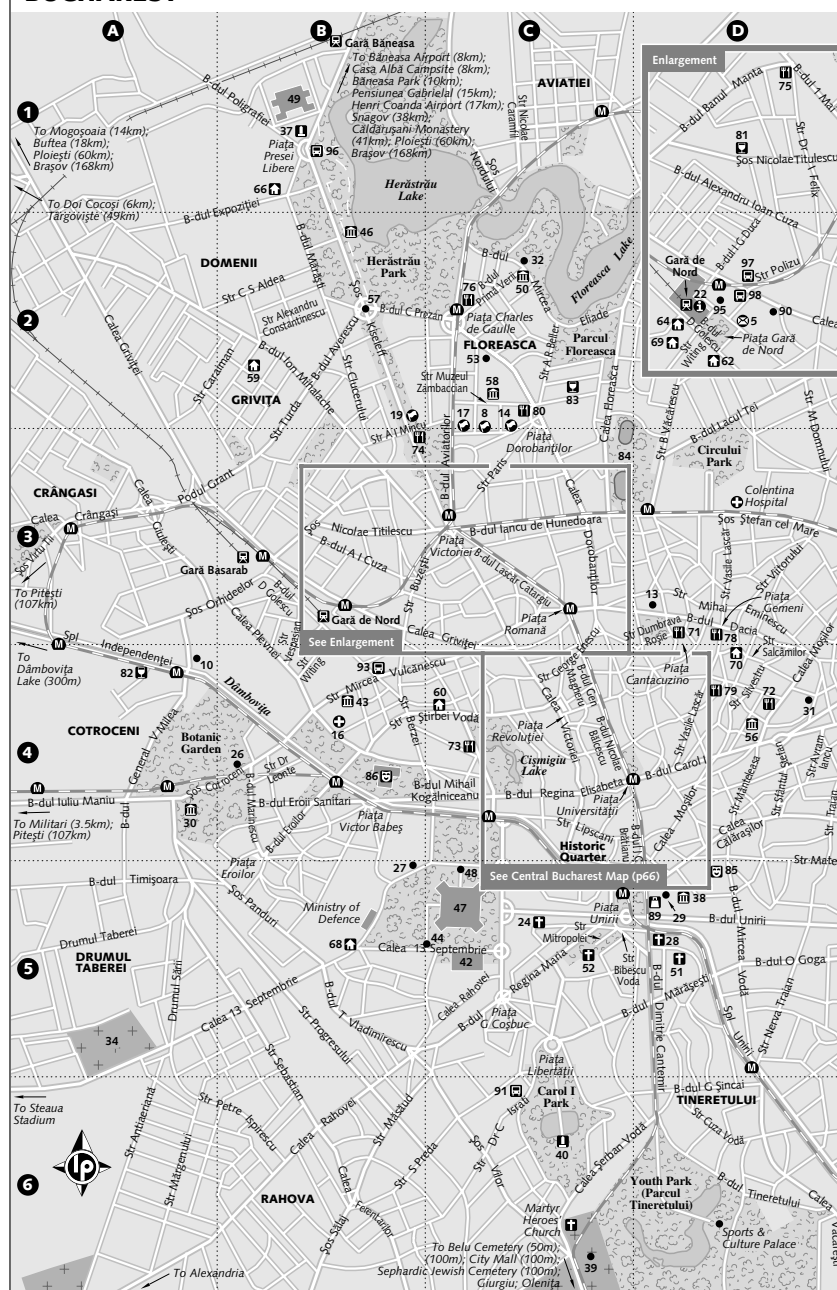
Alas, Bucharest has its problems – taxi scams, glue-sniffing beggars, packs of stray dogs, loud traffic – but it has a heart too. Stick around more than a day – as some visitors flee at first sight – and you start to get it. Bucharest has something going on.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Learn why you don't appreciate granny enough at the heartbreakingly sweet **Museum of the Romanian Peasant** (p75)
- Visit Ceaușescu's madhouse, the **Palace of Parliament** (p68), on a 40-minute tour that ends at the National Museum of Contemporary Art's rooftop cafe
- Pay tribute to Holocaust victims and Romania's diminished Jewish population at the **Jewish History Museum** (p75)
- Kick back in one of Bucharest's two most beloved parks: **Cișmigiu Garden** (p76) and **Herăstrău Park** (p76)
- Explore the eerie backlots off **B-dul Unirii** (p70), where Ceaușescu had churches and monasteries demolished and hemmed in by towering, grey housing blocks



## BUCHAREST



## HISTORY

Legend has it that Bucharest was founded by a shepherd named Bucur (*bucurie*; literally 'joy') who built a church on the right bank of the Dâmboviţa River.

The city, which lies on the Wallachian plains between the Carpathian foothills and the Danube River, was settled by Geto-Dacians as early as 70 BC. By 1459 a princely residence and military citadel had been established under the chancellery of infamous Prince Vlad Ţepeş. By the end of the 17th century, the city was the capital of Wallachia and ranked among southeastern Europe's wealthiest cities. Bucharest became the national capital in 1862, as it lay on the main trade route between east and west.

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, Bucharest was known throughout Europe as 'Little Paris'.

Bombing by the Allies during WWII, coupled with a 1940 earthquake measuring 7.4 on the Richter scale, destroyed much of Bucharest's prewar beauty. In March 1977 a second major earthquake claimed 1391 lives and flattened countless buildings. Ceauşescu's criminal redevelopment of the city marked the final death knell of Romania's elegant past.

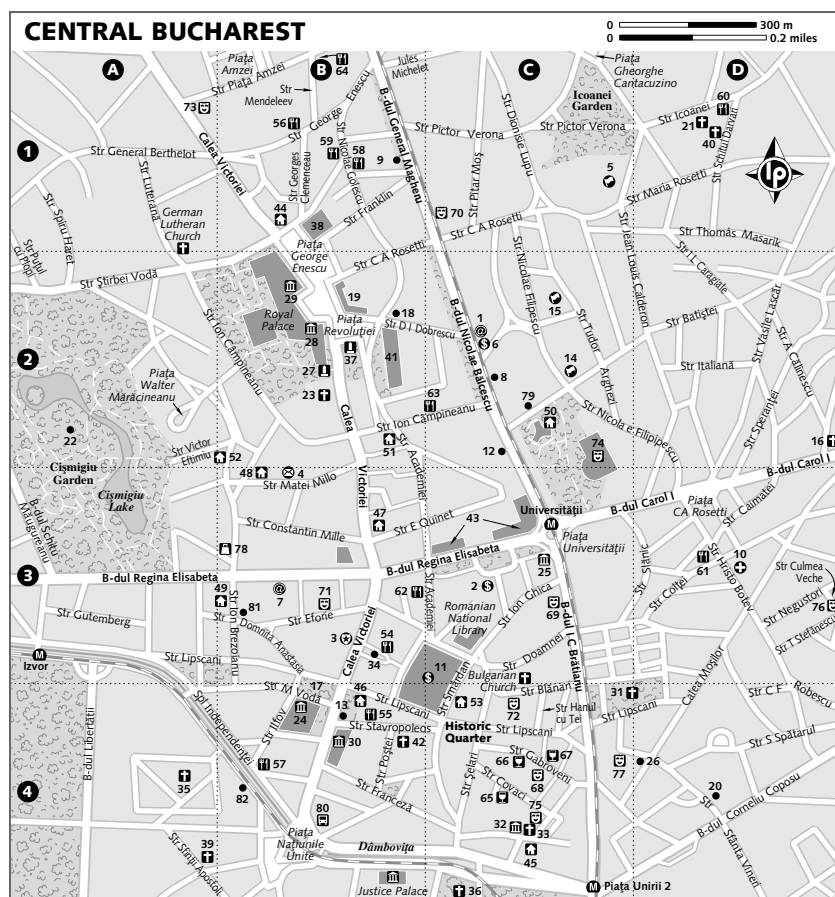
The revolution of 1989 ripped the city to shreds. Although still haunted by its bloody history, Bucharest is recovering from its painful rebirth with contemporary building projects, the cull of snarling street dogs, care of street children who once roamed the city, crime prevention measures and an optimism born of hard-won freedom. Yet there's still much to do and Bucharest's future is as uncertain as it is exciting.

These days, as Bucharest finally assumes its status as a new EU capital, abandoned cranes remain next to abandoned projects from Ceauşescu buildings, while new ones tower over glittering new hotels or office buildings. A lot of people bump elbows in the tight space – Bucharest is Europe's most crowded capital, with over 8000 people per sq kilometre, about 10 times more packed than Paris.

## ORIENTATION

Bucharest's international airport, Henri Coandă, is 17km north of the centre. Şoseaua





**Şapte Seri** (www.sapteseri.ro) Widespread, complimentary entertainment listings in Romanian only; the useful website is also in English.

**Vivid** (www.vivid.ro) Colourful, free English-language magazine published nine times a year. Articles cover Romanian politics and business, tapping into expat life here. Found at stationers in the Athenée Palace Hilton and Marriott Grand Hotel.

**24-Fun** Another Romanian-language weekly with entertainment listings.

## Medical Services

**Emergency Clinic Hospital** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 230 0106; Calea Floreasca 8; ☎ 24hr) Bucharest's best state hospital.

**Medicover** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 310 4410, emergency ☎ 310 4040; www.medicover.ro; Calea Plevnei 96;

☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Good private clinic.

**Pro-Dental Care** (Map p66; ☎ 313 4781; Str Hristo Botev 7; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat)

**Puls** (☎ 224 0187; ☎ 7.30am-7.30pm, to 1.30pm Sun) Private ambulance company with English-speaking medics. Not for emergencies.

**Sensi-Blu** (www.sensiblu.com) B-dul Nicolae Bălcescu (Map p66; ☎ 305 7314; B-dul Nicolae Bălcescu 7; ☎ 24hr); Calea Victoriei (☎ 315 3160; Calea Victoriei 12A; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-9pm Sat & Sun) Excellent pharmacy chain with 18 locations in Bucharest.

## Money

Currency exchanges are everywhere. Don't use the exchanges in the baggage claim hall of Henri Coanda airport as they offer the

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worst rates in the city. There is an ATM in the arrivals hall.

ATMs are around every corner. If you're looking for an indoor ATM, **ING** (Map p66; B-dul Nicolae Bălcescu 20) has one.

Exchange booths, open 24 hours, along B-dul Nicolae Bălcescu are good places to change money. Be sure to count your lei notes before handing over US dollars, euro or British pounds.

For cash transfers, travellers cheques and banking services, try the following:

**Banca Comercială Română** B-dul Regina Elisabeta (Map p66; B-dul Regina Elisabeta 5; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat); Calea Victoriei (Map pp62-3; Calea Victoriei 155; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) Most services run weekdays only.

## Post

**Central post office** (Poșta Română Oficiul București 1; Map p66; ☎ 315 9030; www.post-romana.ro; Str Matei Millo 10; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) Collect poste restante mail here.

**Branch post office** Str Gării de Nord (Map pp62-3; Str Gării de Nord 6-8; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) See website for other locations.

## Telephone

A testimony of its times: Romania's telephone centres – where long-distance calls could be made – have pretty much all shut their services, and started selling mobile phones. RomTelecom cards (from €3), available from kiosks, can be used in neglected phone booths to make national and international calls.

If you're wanting a Romanian number on your mobile phone, SIM cards for Orange or Vodafone are available everywhere.

Access Internet (p65) can make calls as well.

## Tourist Information & Travel Agencies

Sometimes you have to wonder if the Bucharest government just doesn't care about itself, because the nation's capital is woefully unrepresented in the world of information.

And the many travel agencies seem focused on getting you *out* of the country.

Hostels tend to be excellent sources of info, helping with hire cars or day trips to Snagov or even Bran Castle.

The following agencies at least won't look confused if you ask for travel information for around Romania:

**Atlantic Tours** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 311 0235; www.atlantic.ro; Calea Victoriei 202; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Can arrange trips based on budget and hire cars, although it's more geared to digital visits than actual ones; email ahead via office@atlantic.ro.

**Marshal Turism** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 319 4457; www.marshal.ro; B-dul General Magheru 43; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Upstairs office can try to help with domestic travel; can hire cars or find apartments in Bucharest (€65 to €70).

**ONT Carpați** (Map p66; ☎ 314 1922; www.ont.ro; B-dul General Magheru 7; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Lots of outbound business, but helpful staff are happy to talk you through a Romania trip, arrange daily guides (€30) and offer city tours (from €40 with driver).

**RoCultours/CTI** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 650 8145; www.rotravel.com/cti; Str Sfinții Voievozi 49-51; ☎ 9am-7pm) Reliable agent with many cultural tours, and personalised itineraries listed on the website. It also has a couple of rooms for €45 for two people. It's best to contact them in advance.

**Wasteels** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 317 0370; www.wasteels.travel.ro; Gară de Nord; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Conveniently located on the left side of the exit hallway of the train station, Wasteels can hire cars, help with train reservations (it's €4 for a seat, €15 for a couchette – same as at station), and may be able to call you a reliable taxi.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Bucharest gets a bad rap sometimes and we think it's exaggerated. Still, like any big European city, there are risks to be aware of.

It's said that Bucharest's stray dogs (politically correct term of late: 'community dogs') number 100,000 – some say 200,000. Though it's rarely a problem, travellers are occasionally bitten, and in 2006 a Japanese businessman bled to death following a freak bite, which resulted in a severed artery. If bitten, go to a hospital for antirabic injections within 36 hours. Avoid any packs of dogs, who occasionally occupy empty lots behind buildings.

Another 'danger' is the taxi drivers who charge extortionately high prices. Worst are those outside Gară de Nord. Avoid using these

(we've heard of travellers paying US\$150 for a US\$5 ride!). Wasteels can usually call for a taxi from the train station, if you don't have a phone to call the reliable companies listed on p89.

In the past, the fake-taxi scam tricked some new arrivals. These English-speaking drivers approached travellers at the train station and claimed to be from a hostel, then charged skyscraper-high rates for the ride. Unless you have arranged transport from your accommodation, don't take a ride with someone claiming to be from there. Glue-sniffing homeless people sometimes approach new arrivals outside the train station, asking for handouts.

Pick-pocket incidents are most likely on the sometimes very packed public buses or metro. Groups of begging kids can get touchy-feely around Piața Revoluției. In our many weeks in Bucharest, we heard of no travellers getting robbed, but it can happen. Never produce your wallet to a stranger – we've heard of a friendly looking local asking to see a 100-lei note, then taking the whole wallet and running.

Watch for the fake 'tourist police,' where a man in an official-looking uniform demands to see your passport. Never hand one over on the street. If they persist, ask to go to the nearest police station. We've never had to show a passport to any real official other than at a random highway check for all cars and trucks.

## SIGHTS

Bucharest teems with museums and attractions, all relatively dirt cheap and many among the nation's best. The historic thoroughfare Calea Victoriei makes a nice walk, as it connects the two main squares of the city: Piața Victoriei in the north, and Piața Revoluției in the centre; then one could follow the river east to where it goes under the sprawling Piața Unirii, the heart of 'Ceaușescu's Bucharest' (p78).

### Palace of Parliament & Around

Facing B-dul Unirii is the impossible-to-miss **Palace of Parliament** (Palatul Parlamentului; Map pp62-3; ☎ 311 3611; B-dul Națiunile Unite; adult/student €6/3; ☎ 10am-4pm), the world's second-largest building (after the US Pentagon) and Ceaușescu's most infamous creation. Built in 1984 (and still 10% unfinished), the building's 12 storeys and 3100 rooms cover 330,000 sq m – an estimated €3.3 billion project. Rushed, but interesting, 45-minute tours go every half hour or so and

lead into a handful of marble rooms – still hired out for conferences – finishing at the balcony Nicolae didn't live long enough to speak from. The whopping €8.60 photography or video fee is widely ignored. Facing from B-dul Unirii, the entrance is around to the right (a 12-minute walk).

Back on the building's west side, walk back past B-dul Unirii to the building's south side, noting the half-finished **National Institute for Science & Technology** (Map pp62-3; cnr B-dul Libertății & Calea 13 Septembrie), of which Elena Ceaușescu was

president; half-done or abandoned buildings like this litter Bucharest.

In the back of the Palace of Parliament is the superb **National Museum of Contemporary Art** (Muzeul Național de Artă Contemporană; ☎ 318 9137; www.mnac.ro; Calea 13 Septembrie; adult/student €1.50/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun), which opened in 2004. A fully changing four-floor space, with double all-glass elevators built onto the outside of the building, features eclectic European artists' installation and video art, and is easily one of Eastern Europe's most provocative spaces.

### PALACE OF PARLIAMENT: FACTS & FICTION

Controversy still rages around this massive edifice. More than a symbol of Ceaușescu's communist vision, it stands today as a reminder of the price Romania paid to satisfy the egotistical whims of Nicolae and Elena. While people starved, hospitals suffered medicine shortages and industry ground to a halt, Ceaușescu embarked on building the world's second-largest building at an estimated cost of €3.3 billion. The monument has even attracted its own myths which, added to the facts, make this Bucharest's most fascinating architectural wonder.

#### FACTS:

- It was built in 1984 to house the Central Committee, presidential office and state ministries. Today it houses the chamber of deputies, constitutional court and an international conference centre.
- One sixth of Bucharest was bulldozed to accommodate the monstrous building and its surroundings. It stands 85m tall and has a surface area of 330,000 sq m.
- It is the world's second-largest building in surface area (after the US Pentagon) and the third-largest in volume.
- More than 700 architects and three shifts of 20,000 workers laboured on it 24 hours a day for five years.
- It has 12 storeys and 3100 furnished rooms. Two of its 60-plus galleries are 150m long and 18m wide. Forty of its 64 reception halls are 600 sq m. Union Hall is 3000 sq m in size.
- Beneath it is a vast nuclear bunker, plummeting 20m deep.
- In the 1980s, when lit, the building consumed a day's electricity supply for the whole of Bucharest in four hours.
- The carpet once covering the floor of Union Hall weighed 14 tonnes; it's rolled up today.
- The crystal chandelier in the Human Rights Hall weighs 2½ tonnes.
- It is still known locally by its former name, the House of the People (Casa Poporului).
- In 2000 the halls of the palace were plastered with religious icons during the making of the movie *Amen*.

#### FICTION:

- The glass ceiling of the ballroom can open to allow a helicopter to land!
- Michael Jackson stood on the balcony and said 'Hello Budapest, I'm so glad to be here' – he actually made the legendary error at the national stadium (though palace guides encourage the irresistible tale when leading groups to the balcony).
- The entire palace is decorated with pure gold.

Past exhibits included collapsed walls lined with large claustrophobic images of Ceaușescu and the communist era. There's a top-floor open-air cafe. The entry is from the south-western side of the building – a 20-minute walk from the palace-tour entry!

The best way to the palace is walking from Piața Unirii (and its metro station) along B-dul Unirii.

### Piața Unirii & Around

In the blocks around Piața Unirii – that commie-built wonder of cement – are a number of religious sites that miraculously survived the 1980s demolition. (Also see p78 for a walking tour that begins here.)

On the northeastern side of Piața Unirii – up from the metro station – is the **Unirea Department Store** (Map pp62–3), and the main **city market** is a long block behind it – shop here for fresh fruit and vegetables. Just behind the Unirea is the **Jewish History Museum** (p75). The **Dâmbovița River** snakes up to the northeastern corner before disappearing underground, beneath the square, on its journey to the southwest of the city. The natural twists and turns of the river were canalised between 1880 and 1883 and later enhanced with concrete.

**Romanian Patriarchal Cathedral** (Catedrala Patriarhală Română; Map pp62–3; Str Dealul Mitropoliei; admission free; ☎ 7am–8pm) sits south of Piața Unirii, atop Patriarchy Hill. It's the majestic centre of the Romanian Orthodox faith. During the 15th century a small wooden church surrounded by vineyards stood on the hill. The cathedral consecrated the metropolitan centre of Wallachia in 1868, and was built in 1656–8 by Wallachian prince Șerban Basarab. None of the original interior paintings or icons remains, bar a single icon (1665) depicting

Constantin and Helen, the cathedral's patron saints. The present-day frescoes were painted by Dimitrie Belizarie in 1923. To the west is a small **chapel**, linked by a balcony to the **Patriarchal Palace**, the south wings of which date to 1932. Three beautifully carved 16th- and 17th-century **stone crosses** flank the northern wall of the cathedral. Alongside is a belfry (1698) and a former parliament building dating from 1907.

Other surviving churches include the 16th-century **Prince Radu Monastery** (Mănăstirea Radu Vodă; Map pp62–3; Str Radu Vodă 24), southeast of Piața Unirii, and the nearby **Church of Bucur the Shepherd** (Biserica Bucur Ciobanul; Map pp62–3; Str Radu Vodă), dating from 1743 and dedicated to the city's legendary founder.

Tiny **St Apostles' Church** (Map p66; Biserica Sfintii Apostoli; Str Apostoli 33a), north of B-dul Unirii (west of the square), survived systemisation to a degree. The church, built in 1636, was not moved but the surrounding parkland was ripped up and replaced with blocks of flats. It's overgrown with trees and near abandoned buildings inhabited by squatters, with packs of stray dogs sometimes walking by. It's hard to believe it's only 100m from the 'Parliament of the People'!

Across B-dul Unirii is the surviving **Antim Monastery** (Mănăstirea Antim; Map pp62–3; Str Antim), a beautiful walled complex built in 1715 by the metropolitan bishop Antim Ivireanu.

Another impressive church that survives is the candy-striped **Princess Bălașa Church** (Map p66; Biserica Domnița Bălașa). The church, just northwest of Piața Unirii (behind the riverside Justice Palace), is named after Brâncoveanu's sixth daughter, who had a small wooden church built here in 1744. Widowed from 1745, the princess replaced the church with a stone

structure in 1751 and set up a school and asylum. Damaged by an earthquake, the second church was replaced by a third church in 1838–42, which was subsequently damaged by floods and replaced by a fourth church in 1881–5.

A block northwest is the nearly lost former symbol of the city: the 16th-century **Prince Mihai Monastery** (Mănăstirea Mihai Vodă; Map p66; Str Sapienței), built in 1589–91 under the orders of Mihai Viteazul (r 1593–1601). Ceaușescu moved it 279m east in 1985 to this patch of wasteland between apartment blocks.

### Piața Universității

Some of the fiercest fighting during the 1989 revolution took place here. Journalists watched tanks roll over Romanian freedom fighters and soldiers shoot into crowds of protestors from their viewpoint inside Hotel Inter-Continental. Scour the area and you'll find bullet marks in buildings and 10 stone crosses commemorating those killed. A black **memorial cross** (Map p66; B-dul Nicolae Bălescu 18), a couple of blocks north of the square, marks the spot where the first protestor, Mihai Gătan, died at 5.30pm on 21 December 1989.

**Piața Universității** (sometimes called 'Piața Tiananmen') is the hub of Bucharest's intellectual and political life. The main **university building** (Map p66) built in 1856–68 and inaugurated in 1869 is on the northwestern corner.

Housed in a neo-Gothic palace built in the 1830s to host fancy balls, the **History & Art Museum** (Map p66; ☎ 315 6858; B-dul IC Brătianu 2; admission €0.60; ☎ 10am–6pm Wed–Sun), facing the square, is a lovely spot with an interesting collection of old artefacts, photos and costumes. A few pieces pre-date the Bronze Era, and some documents hail from the days when Romanians wrote in Cyrillic. Designed by two Austrian architects, the neo-Gothic palace was built in 1832–4 for the Șuțu family, notorious for their high-society parties. One document upstairs is the first known chronicle of the city (1459), and was issued by the moustached Vlad Țepeș. A giant Venetian mirror on the stairway reflects a mirrored clock (eternally reading 2.15 these days). Changing art exhibitions are held downstairs.

A few blocks south of the square is the 1699 **New St George's Church** (Map p66; Biserica Sfântul Gheorghe-Nou; cnr Str Lipsicani & B-dul Brătianu), the burial place of Wallachian prince Constan-

### DIY WALKING TOURS

If you had time to walk only four streets, these highlight different sides of Bucharest – all equally fascinating.

- **Calea Victoriei** Bucharest's historic road goes by many *belle époque* buildings; designed to connect the centre with Mogoșoia (p91).
- **Soș Kiseleff** This is a tree-lined boulevard leading from Piața Victoriei to the Triumphal Arch and the Stalinescu Press House.
- **Calea Griviței** From glue-sniffers outside scrappy Gară de Nord, past quiet blocks and French-style buildings (some abandoned) to Calea Victoriei.
- **B-dul Unirii** It's not inspiring, but Ceaușescu's B-dul Unirii is a 3.5km statement – in concrete.

tin Brâncoveanu (r 1688–1714). Brâncoveanu was captured by the Turks in 1714, following his refusal to take part in the Russo-Turkish War (1711). He and his four sons were taken to Istanbul where they were tortured, then decapitated. His wife smuggled his mutilated body back to Romania.

### Historic Centre

Bucharest's historic heart – on and off historic Calea Victoriei – sprang up around the **Old Princely Court** (Curtea Veche; Map p66; ☎ 314 0375; Str Franceza 21–23; admission €0.60; ☎ 10am–5pm) in the 15th century. The battered remains of this court reveal little; you can peer through the fence to the statues of Vlad Țepeș. Artisans and traders whose occupations are still reflected in street names like Str Covaci (trough-makers street) and Str Șelari (saddle-makers street) settled in this area in the 14th century, but it was not until the reigning prince of Wallachia, Vlad Țepeș, fortified the settlement and built a **Prince's Palace** (Palatul Voievodal) that it flourished as a commercial centre. At the end of the 18th century, heavily damaged by earthquakes, it was auctioned off to local merchants.

The **Old Princely Court Church** (Biserica Curtea Veche; Map p66; Str Franceza), built in 1546–59 during the reign of Mircea Ciobanul (Mircea the Shepherd), is Bucharest's oldest church. The faded 16th-century frescoes next to the altar

### PROPS TO THE STINKY D

All great cities have their rivers, and Bucharest slips in its quest for greatness thanks to the way it's treated the miserly Dâmbovița River. Centuries ago, when Bucharest first took its steps, the river rushed through woods on this relatively hilly part of the plain. Mosquitoes loved the river though, and brought malaria to a growing population; sewage seemed drawn to it too, and the flood-prone river grew more and more contaminated.

In the 1970s, Ceaușescu's destructive gaze fell on the river – perhaps the USSR's canal-building history steered it – and he displaced villages west of the centre to build the Dâmbovița Lake (aka Lake Morii), a concrete-floored lake that accumulates a healthy collection of trash on its eastern rim (though some locals dare to swim in or wind-board on it).

All in all, it's not pretty. In fact, it's trashy and murky and stinky. But – don't slag it – the Dâmbovița just won't quit. Got to respect that in a river.

are originals. The carved stone portal was added in 1715. Southeast of the church stands **Hanul lui Manuc** (see p81), built to shelter travelling merchants.

A couple of short cobbled blocks north, **Str Lipsani** is the centre of bohemian nightlife with small streets crowded with bars and clubs. The area particularly comes alive in summer.

At its western end, Str Lipsani crosses **Calea Victoriei**, Bucharest's most historic street. It was built under Brâncoveanu's orders in 1692 to link his summer palace in Mogoșoaia, 14km north-west of Bucharest, with the heart of his capital city.

On the road, the **National History Museum** (Map p66; ☎ 311 3356; Calea Victoriei 12; adult/student €0.90/0.45; ☹ 9am-5pm), housed in the neoclassical ex-Post Office Palace (1894), is smaller than it looks, thank to a long-running renovation ('maybe finished by 2010', we heard from an employee) that has closed all but a couple of exhibits. Still it's worth it to see a dismantled replica of the 2nd-century AD Trajan's Column; its 2500 characters retell the Dacian Wars against Rome (the location of the original column). Go to panel 18 to see decapitated heads, panel 35 to see Dacian women torture Romans, or panel 116 for Dacian King Decebal's suicide. There's also a gold-crammed treasury with a gold-studded helmet from the 4th century BC.

A block east of the museum, the **Stavropoleos Church** (Map p66; Str Stavropoleos), on a street meaning 'town of the cross', dates from 1724 and is Bucharest's nicest church, with a court-

yard filled with old tombstones and an ornate wooden interior. Prominent Romanian architect Ion Mincu designed the courtyard and restored this little gem in 1899.

Bucharest's financial houses moved to the historic heart in the 19th century after the princely residence was moved to the north of the city. Just north of the museum is the **Economic Consortium Palace** (Casa de Economii și Consenmațiuni, CEC; Map p66), designed by French architect Paul Gottereau in 1894-1900. Next door stands the **Bucharest Financial Plaza** (Map p66), a mirrored building.

A couple of blocks north is the **Pasajul Vilacrosse** (Map p66), a U-shaped lane under sepia-toned skylights, with cafes and bars spilling onto the sidewalks. East of the passageway is the **Romanian National Bank**, which dates from 1880.

Just across B-dul Regina Elisabeta, **Hotel Capșa** (p81), at Calea Victoriei 36, once housed **Casa Capșa**, an historic cafe dating from 1852 that was the meeting place of Romania's eminent artists, literary figures and politicians of the 1930s. It's now a swanky hotel - far removed from its bohemian roots.

### Piața Revoluției

The scene of Ceaușescu's infamous last speech was on the balcony of the former **Central Committee of the Communist Party** (Map p66) building on 21 December 1989. Amid cries of 'Down with Ceaușescu!' he escaped (briefly) by helicopter from the roof. Meanwhile, the crowds were riddled with bullets, and many died.

### 'PARIS OF THE EAST' OR 'BALKAN MOSCOW'?

From Saigon to Prague, it seems that every second city wants to be Paris. But Bucharest's architecture has drawn inspiration from the East too. In the early 20th century, a French accent got you society points, while half a century later everything leaned towards the Stalinesque. Going around the city, it's easy to spot one building from the 'Paris of the East' days rubbing shoulders with a building from the 'Balkan Moscow' era. Here are some stand-outs:

#### Paris of the East

George Enescu Museum  
Pasajul Vilacrosse  
Triumphal Arch (c'mon!)  
Economic Consortium  
Romanian Athenaeum  
Hotel Capșa & Around

#### Balkan Moscow

Press House  
Palace of the Parliament  
National Theatre  
Romanian TV Headquarters  
Carol I Park & Unknown Soldier Mausoleum  
Government Building, Piața Victoriei

On the front façade next to the entrance is a plaque dedicated to the 'young and courageous people' who 'drove out the dictator', thus 'giving the Romanian people back their freedom and dignity'. A statue of a man, broken but put back together again, dominates the small green area in front. The building now houses the Senate. In an island in Calea Victoriei is a new, controversial (due to its ugliness and lack of symbolism) **Rebirth Memorial** (Memorialul Renașterii; Map p66) - a white obelisk piercing a basket-like crown (some have called it the 'potato of the revolution' because of its crown shape).

**Crețulescu Church** (Map p66) stands just south of the square. The 1722 red-brick structure was damaged in the 1989 Revolution. To the side stands a **memorial bust of Corneliu Coposu**, who spent 17 years in prison for his anticommunist activities and, prior to his death in 1995, was awarded the Légion d'Honneur by the French government. Behind the church is a statue of a headless torso, a memorial to fallen revolutionaries.

The 1895 **Central University Library** (Map p66) houses the European Union Information Centre, HVB bank and the university library. The **building shell** (Map p66), on the corner of Str Dobrescu and Str Boteanu, housed the hated Securitate and was destroyed by protestors. In 2003 the Romanian Architecture Union built a contemporary glass structure inside it to house their headquarters.

### NATIONAL ART MUSEUM

Housed in the **Royal Palace**, this massive, three-part **museum** (Muzeul Național de Artă; Map p66; ☎ 313 3030; <http://art.museum.ro>; Calea Victoriei 49-53; combined ticket adult/student €3.40/1.70, Romanian & European collections €2.30/1.15, free 1st Wed of month; ☹ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun) - all signed in English - could take, along with Piața Revoluției and lunch, the bulk of a day. Start at the north door with the **Gallery of Romanian Art** (adult/student €2/0.70), a three-floor survey of Romania's art with several hundred icons and jaw-dropping carved wood altars saved from communist-destroyed churches - all laid out on funky purple and crimson walls. The country's oil masters - from the impasto strokes of Gheorghe Petrascu to Nicolae Grigorescu's arrestingly frank portraits of Roma and peasant folk - are on the top floor. Walking through the chronological collection, note the phase out/in of 'Eastern' Turk-style/'Western' French-style dress on

the painting subjects by the mid-19th century. Also in the building is the small **Treasures of Roman Art** (€1.40/0.60), which is less impressive than the collection at the Grigore Antipa National History Museum (p75).

Save time and energy for the absorbing **Gallery of European Art** (€1.20/0.60), a 12,000-piece collection, largely assembled from Tsar Carol I's collection and laid out according to nationality. The Italian collection includes the earliest-known painting by Bartolomeo (c 1430). The Dutch collection includes a few Rembrandts and Rubens, but we like the dramatic hand gesturing of Van Hemessen's *The Calling of St Matthew* (1556) the most. Naturally France gets the final spot - and the nicest part of the palace, with marble stairways and wood-carved ceilings - to house a few works by Rodin and Monet. Guides (€6) must be booked in advance; call ☎ 314 8119.

The Royal Palace itself is a treat to see. Built in 1812-15 by Prince Dinicu Golescu, the Palace became the official royal residence in 1834 during the reign of Prince Alexandru Ghica (r 1834-42). The current facade dates from the 1930s. Until 1989 it was the seat of the State Council and was called the Palace of the Republic.

### ROMANIAN ATHENAEUM

This exquisite circular building is the majestic heart of Romania's classical music tradition. The **Romanian Athenaeum** (Ateneul Român; Map p66; ☎ 315 6875; admission €1.40; visits ☹ noon-6pm, box office ☹ noon-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) hosts prestigious concerts and should not be missed. Scenes from Romanian history are featured on the interior fresco inside the Big Hall on the first floor and the dome is 41m high. A huge appeal dubbed 'Give a Penny for the Athenaeum' saved it from disaster after the original patron's funds dried up. The peristyle is adorned with mosaics of five Romanian rulers, including Moldavian prince Vasile Lupu (r 1512-21), Wallachian Matei Basarab (r 1632-54) and King Carol I (r 1881-1914). Built in 1888, George Enescu made his debut here in 1898, followed five years later by the first performance of his masterpiece *Romanian Rhapsody*. Today it's home to the George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra.

### ATHÉNÉE PALACE HILTON

Now home to the Hilton hotel (p81), the **Athénée Palace** (Map p66) is the grand dame

## REVOLUTION: WITNESSING HISTORY

Ceaușescu stepped onto the balcony. He started talking about Timișoara, about stamping down the first wave of protest against him. He told us it would get better; 10,000 lei more for studying; crazy lies. First people were murmuring; the voices from the crowd around me started saying 'Down with Ceaușescu!' Then the voices got louder. I heard myself shout. The sounds of bullets shattered the air. We heard shooting and I ran, I didn't know where to. They had killed people. Troops were loading bodies into trucks. I escaped but later heard that they'd barricaded people into University Square. Students sat down in front of the tanks but the tanks just rolled over them. They were hemmed in like animals, with no escape and gunned down. One thousand people perished in that square that night. It was our darkest hour.

*Cornelui, eyewitness on the night of 21 December 1989*

On the outskirts of Bucharest the tanks rolled towards the city centre, the crunch of their tracks and the heavy labouring of heavy outdated machinery adding to the menace that had filled the grey skies for days. When the gun turrets lay still, the soldiers who defected over to their people stood out of the tanks and smiled. People threw flowers at the tanks and gave crews meagre offerings of food. The elation at having overthrown decades of oppression was hitting home – it was a humbling experience. People walked around wearing Romanian flags draped over their heads, the centre circle which bore an Imperial crest cut out. Over the next few days I struck out from the journalists' enclave of the Hotel Inter-Continental to see the Paris of the East. But fear took a long time to subside. The TV station – perhaps unprepared for the first moments of liberty – played Charlie Chaplin's film *The Great Dictator*, followed by a Lisa Stansfield concert. It only added to the surreal feel of Bucharest.

*Journalist Danny Buckland, who covered the revolution in Romania for London's Daily Star*

of Bucharest, holding a particular place in the city's history. Built by French architect Théophile Bradeau in 1914, it's had a bumpy life. Sitting on the northern side of Piața Revoluției, it hosted political intrigue, scandals and high living when German and Allied officers used it as their base during the WWII. Under communism it became notorious for being a den of iniquity, with high-class prostitutes (most of who worked, along with the hotel staff, for the KGB-like Securitate). Its façade got pockmarked by bullets and fire during the 1989 Revolution but has since been cleaned up, and its patio bar is now quite the expat hang-out in good weather.

### Piața Victoriei & Around

The huge plaza in northern Bucharest, dominated by the 1938 **Government Building** (Map pp62–3), has little to detain you, but its metro station is a good access point for walks north along Șoseaua Kiseleff or south into the centre.

Walk southeast down B-dul Lascăr Catargiu to Piața Romană, where you can see the **Romulus and Remus statue** (Map pp62–3), which depicts Lupoica Romei (the wolf of Rome)

and the abandoned children Romulus and Remus, whom the wolf fed and cared for, enabling them to found the city of Rome. The statue was a gift from Italy.

Calea Victoriei leads south of Piața Victoriei, where you can visit a couple of interesting museums that most visitors miss.

National composer George Enescu (1881–1955) lived for a short time in the former Cantacuzino Palace, a few blocks south of Piața Victoriei. The lovely building, built in the early 1900s in a seriously French baroque style, features a fantastic clam-shaped portico above the main entrance. Now called the **George Enescu Museum** (Muzeul George Enescu; Map pp62–3; ☎ 318 1450; Calea Victoriei 141; adult/student €0.60/0.30; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun), the palace is home to various manuscripts and belongings from George (Romanian-language only); be sure to see George's little home-studio, with original furnishings, behind the palace.

The grab-bag of 15 private collections at the well-named **Art Collection Museum** (Muzeul Colecțiilor de Artă; Map pp62–3; ☎ 211 1749; Calea Victoriei 111; adult/student €2/0.85; ☎ 10am–6pm Sat–Wed Oct–Apr, 11am–7pm Sat–Wed May–Sep), a couple more blocks south, is now part of the National Art Museum. A

lot of the late 19th- to mid-20th century Romanian works take on French landscapes or styles. But there are also paintings of Balchik before it went to Bulgaria, a re-creation of a 19th-century Arab room on the 2nd floor, plenty of Ottoman weaponry, and fine Japanese woodblock prints.

### Șoseaua Kiseleff

Home to some of Bucharest's finest villas, Șoseaua Kiseleff stretches from Piața Victoriei to Herăstrău Park in northern Bucharest; tree-lined sidewalks lead from communist monuments to French-inspired ones and past a couple of must-see museums. During the communist era Șoseaua Kiseleff was the most prestigious residential area in the city, reserved strictly for Communist Party officials (*nomenklatura*).

### GRIGORE ANTIPA NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

At the start of the boulevard, on the north-western side of Piața Victoriei, is this interesting **natural history museum** (Muzeul de Istorie Naturală

Grigore Antipa; Map pp62–3; ☎ 312 8826; Sos Kiseleff 1; adult/child €1.70/0.85; ☎ 10am–6pm Wed–Sun). Children get a kick out of it, despite the dated exhibits. In one room, a display of crude earth suddenly clanks when you walk by and 'lava' flows out. There are lots of ethnographic displays, including eerie decapitated mummy heads and Sioux head-dresses, plus test tubes of various invertebrates and stuffed (smiling) pythons.

### MUSEUM OF THE ROMANIAN PEASANT

About 200m north, this **museum** (Muzeul Tăranului Român; Map pp62–3; ☎ 212 9661; Șos Kiseleff 3; adult/student €1.80/0.60; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun) is so good you may want to hug it. Chosen as Europe's best museum in 1996, the museum makes the best of little money. Hand-made cards (in English) personalise exhibits, such as a full 19th-century home upstairs, a heartbreakingly sweet room devoted to grandmas, and 'hidden' rooms that you're ushered to via hand-scrawled directions. Don't miss the (rare) communism exhibit downstairs, with Lenin busts, portraits of Romanian leader Gheorghiu-Dej, and

### JEWISH BUCHAREST

Once a thriving part of Romania, the Jewish community in the capital dates from the 16th century, when merchants and traders settled here. In 1941 800,000 Jews lived in Romania; today the number is less than 10,000. In Lucian Boia's book *Romania* he lamented the Jewish exodus from Romania after WWII as losing 'part of the Romanian soul'. There was reason to leave – as many as 400,000 Jews were killed in Romania during the war.

Several sites keep this part of Romanian history in the public memory.

Housed in the beautiful former Tailor's synagogue, the well-arranged **Jewish History Museum** (Muzeul de Istorie al Comunităților Evreiești din România; Map pp62–3; ☎ 311 0870; Str Mămulari 3; admission by donation; ☎ 9am–1pm Mon–Sat) bears testimony to the city's once-thriving Jewish life. Exhibits – in English and Romanian – highlight Jewish contributions to Romania (culturally, politically and militarily), while the Holocaust Room shows horrific photographs and a sculpture of a shrouded man, in memory of the 150,000 Jews who were deported to hard-labour camps in Transnistria, Moldova, and the 200,000 from Transylvania who died at Auschwitz, Poland. The synagogue dates from 1850 and is one of three pre-WWII synagogues to survive in the city. You must bring your passport to visit. It's on a small lane behind the Unirea Shopping Centre.

Little remains of the old **Jewish quarter** of Văcărești, northeast of Piața Unirii in Bucharest's historic heart; nearly all of what wasn't destroyed during the Iron Guard's fascist pogrom in 1941 was levelled by Ceaușescu in the mid-1980s.

The **Choral Temple** (Map p66; ☎ 315 5090; Str Vineri 9; ☎ 9am–2pm Mon–Fri), built in 1857, is the city's main working synagogue and is visually stunning inside. You'll need your passport to enter. A **memorial** to the victims of the Holocaust (including 400,000 Romanian Jews), erected in 1991, fronts the temple.

The **Sephardic Jewish Cemetery** (Cimitirul Evreiesc de rit Sefard; Calea Șerban Vodă) lies opposite Belu Cemetery in the south of the city (metro Eroii Revoluției). Two rows of graves dated 21–23 January 1941 mark the Iron Guard's pogrom against the Jewish community in Bucharest, during which at least 170 Jews were murdered. From the metro walk 100m towards the modern City Hall; it's to the right.



heart-rending accounts of those who objected to collectivisation (in Romanian only). An 18th-century Transylvanian church is in the backlot, as is its gift shop.

Across the street is the **National Museum of Geology** (Muzeul Național de Geologie; Map pp62-3; ☎ 212 8952; Șos Kiseleff; adult/child €0.85/0.60; ☎ 10am-4pm), where you can while away an hour or two among Romania's finest rocks.

### TRIUMPHAL ARCH

About half way up Șos Kiseleff, the 11m **Triumphal Arch** (Arcul de Triumf; Map pp62-3), based on Paris' namesake monument, was built in 1935 to commemorate the reunification of Romania in 1918. Sites of WWI battles are inscribed inside the arch, while King Ferdinand and Queen Marie feature on its southern façade. Previously a shoddy makeshift monument had been made in 1922 (just before King Ferdinand's triumphant entry into the city). The arch was so ludicrous that composer George Enescu wrote to the city mayor, demanding to know when a 'real' triumphal arch would be erected. Its viewing platform is now closed to the public.

### NATIONAL VILLAGE MUSEUM

On the shores of Herăstră Lake, this **museum** (Muzeul Național al Satului; Map pp62-3; ☎ 317 9110; Șos Kiseleff 28-30; adult/student €1.50/0.60; ☎ 9am-7pm Tue-Sun, to 4pm Mon May-Sept, to 5pm Tue-Fri, to 4pm Mon Oct-Apr) is a terrific open-air collection of several dozen homesteads, churches, mills and windmills relocated from rural Romania. At times in July and August artisans in traditional garb show off various rural trades. Built in 1936 by Royal Decree, it is one of Europe's oldest open-air museums and a must for children. Get here from the centre by taking bus 131

or 331 from B-dul General Magheru or Piața Romană to the 'Muzel Satului' stop.

### PRESS HOUSE

At its northern end, Șos Kiseleff splays out into Piața Presei Libere, which is dominated by the giant **Press House** (Casa Presei Libere; Map pp62-3), a 1956 Stalinist wedding-cake of a structure. It gave a clear message to the citizens of Bucharest – Big Brother is watching you! A potent symbol of the powerful communist regime, until 1990 the house was called the 'House of the Sparks' (Casa Scânteii); behind closed doors it was known as the 'House of Lies'. It's still home to the city's hacks.

You can see the imprint on the tower where the hammer and sickle once were. In front of the building is an artful **Intersection of Europe sculpture** (Intersecție cu Europe), showing two rods entering a cone from different directions – something for the pedestal's previous resident, a **statue of Lenin**, to ponder at his new resting place in the weeds at Mogoșoaia (p91).

### Herăstrău Park & Around

A couple of blocks east of the Triumphal Arch in northern Bucharest, **Piața Charles de Gaulle** (metro Piața Aviatorilor) is in the heart of some of Bucharest's most well-to-do areas.

Facing the square from the north is the 200-hectare **Herăstrău Park**, which stretches along the wide namesake lake. It's Bucharest's nicest park, with plenty of shaded strolls and open-air cafés, plus boats to hire.

Just east of the square is the **former main residence of Ceaușescu** (Map pp62-3; B-dul Primăverii 50), also known as the Primăverii Palace. It's heavily guarded now, and off-limits to everyone but state guests, but it is easy to look over the

wall at the lush and leafy pad. Just across is the **former residence of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej**, Romania's communist ruler until 1965.

A block south of Piața Charles de Gaulle is the long aqua-blue **Romanian TV Headquarters** (Calea Dorobanților; Map pp62-3), which was reduced to two hours' air-time a day in the late 1980s, one devoted to presidential activities. On 22 December 1989 revolutionaries broke into the television building and announced on air the collapse of the government. At the northern gate of the building is a small **memorial** to those killed here.

Tricky to find, the little **Zambaccian Museum** (Muzeul Zambaccian; Map pp62-3; ☎ 230 1920; Str Muzeul Zambaccian 21a; adult/student €0.85/0.30; ☎ 11am-7pm Wed-Sun May-Sep, 10am-6pm Wed-Sun Oct-Apr) is in a nicely restored villa between B-dul Aviatorilor and Calea Dorobanților (just north of Piața Dorobanților). The small collection boasts mostly Romanian works from the early 20th century, plus a Matisse, a Cezanne and a couple of Renoirs – all collected by Armenian businessman Krikor Zambaccian (1889-1962).

### East Bucharest

The 'historic centre' gets the fabled glory, but many of the cobbled blocks east of Piața Romană and Piața Universității are some of Bucharest's most evocative.

East of Piața Romană, via Str Pictor Verona or Str Jules Michelet, past the slightly scrappy **Icoanei Garden** (Map p66), are a couple of religious sites. The **Church of the Icon** (Biserica Icoanei; Map p66; Str Icoanei 12) was built by monk and former privy secretary Mihail Băbeanu in 1745-50. Around the corner at Str Schitul Darvari 3 is pretty **St Slujbă's Monastery** (Mănăstirea Sfânta Slujbă; Map p66; Str Schitul Darvari 3), surrounded by a lush walled garden.

Along B-dul Carol I, east of Piața Universității, is the alabaster **Armenian Church** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 313 9070; B-dul Carol I 43; ☎ 9am-6pm, 8am-1pm Sun), which originally dates from 1781 (though this church was built in 1915).

Two blocks east, and north on Str Latina, you reach the **Theodor Pallady Museum** (Muzeul Theodor Pallady; Map pp62-3; ☎ 211 4979; Str Spătarului 22; adult/student €0.60/0.15; ☎ 11am-7pm Wed-Sun May-Sep, 10am-6pm Wed-Sun Oct-Apr), housed inside the exquisite early 18th-century Casa Melik, a former merchant's house. It contains the private art collection of the Raut family (part of the National Art Museum today).

### West Bucharest

Only ten minutes by foot from the train station, the interesting pinky-peach **National Military Museum** (Muzeul Militar Național; Map pp62-3; ☎ 319 6015; Str Mircea Vulcănescu 125-7; adult/student €1.40/0.70; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) doubles nicely as a Romanian history museum, with its chronological run-down of how the country defended itself. Out front are heroic busts (including Vlad Țepeș), while in the museum entry note the 1988 communist mural that eerily celebrates the Palace of Parliament (a year before the revolution). In back is a superb hangar with Aurel Vlaicu's historic 1911 plane and cosmonaut uniforms. The army's backlash in the 1989 revolution (unsurprisingly) gets little play.

About 10 minutes south is the rather let-it-be **Botanic Garden** (Map pp62-3; Str Kogălniceanu 36-46; adult/student & child €0.60/0.40; ☎ 9am-dusk), on the former grounds of the nearby **Cotroceni Palace** (which can be visited by prior arrangement; call ☎ 430 6171). The 17-hectare garden is home to some 20,000 plant species from around Romania.

Farther west, **Dâmbovița Lake** (aka Morii Lake; off Map pp62-3) is a murky, mossy concrete-bedded lake created from a dam built to control the Dâmbovița River (see p70). Couples stroll down the wind-swept sidewalk facing a fairly edgy neighbourhood of towering housing blocks. Some dare to swim; others cross to Șoseaua Virtuții, where there's a water park. To reach it walk 300m through the park to the elevated rim from the Crângași metro station.

### Southern Bucharest

About 1km southwest from Piața Unirii, **Carol I Park** (Map pp62-3) may have been inaugurated in 1906, but the eternal flame burning for an unknown soldier, and 20m black-granite **mausoleum** – and a heavy military presence who ask you not to photograph it – make it feel more of the communist era. The mausoleum, topped with five arches made of red Swedish granite, was put up in memory of the 'Heroes for the Struggle for the People's and the Homeland's Liberty for Socialism'. That's pretty communist. Enter the park from the north at Piața Libertății or from the south along Calea Șerban Vodă.

A couple of blocks east along Calea Șerban Vodă (near metro Tineretului) is the bigger **Youth Park** (Parcul Tineretului; Map pp62-3), where various sporting events and open-air

### BUCHAREST PARKS

Escape the heat or honks at some of Bucharest's urban oases. They tend to be best during the week when fewer people are enjoying the outdoors. All have nice areas to sit and drink beer or espresso, and many have swings or small rides for children.

- **Băneasa Park** (Parcul Băneasa) Nice respite from the city. 10km north of Piața Romană – take bus 301
- **Carol I Park** (opposite)
- **Cișmigiu Garden** (Grădina Cișmigiu; Map p66) Central and peaceful; open-air cafés look over the pond and plenty of benches (and flirts – it's known as 'lovers' park' locally)
- **Herăstrău Park** (above) 2 sq km and lots of water
- **Youth Park** (opposite) Scrapper park with lots of events

## PAUPERS' GRAVES

About 3km west of the Palace of Parliament, **Ghencea Civil Cemetery** (Cimitirul Civil Ghencea; Map pp62-3; ☎ 413 8590; Calea 13 Septembrie; 🕒 8am-8pm) has two infamous inhabitants: Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena (dubbed the 'Romanian Eva Perón').

The pair were secretly buried here – and notably not at Belu Cemetery, the city's most reputable resting place – on 30 December 1989, in hastily prepared graves. Both lie before the small chapel that faces the entry.

Nicolae lies in row I-35, to the left of the path. No stone tomb adorns his earth grave, dug into a pathway, but two crosses mark it. One is a stone cross with a red star; the other is a black steel cross which is inscribed with his name, date of birth and death (26 January 1918–24 December 1989). Surprisingly, there's no graffiti here, just a lit candle and a motley collection of fresh flowers.

Hated Elena was buried separately from him, in row H-25, directly across the cemetery to the right (just behind the modern marble tomb). They weren't buried together, as it was said they did too many bad things together and should stay apart. Her name is daubed with white paint across a black metal cross. The body of their playboy son Nicu, who died from liver cirrhosis in 1996, lies nearby.

Get there on bus 385 from Piața Unirii or outside the Palace of Parliament's northern entrance, from which it's a dusty 40-minute walk here.

concerts take place in the Sports & Culture Palace.

Going west from the southern end of Carol I Park (near metro Eroii Revoluției), the road curves past the **Martyr-Heroes of the December 1989 Revolution Cemetery** (Cimitirul Eroii Martiri ai Revoluției din Decembrie 1989; Map pp62-3; Calea Șerban Vodă), where many of the 1033 victims are buried.

Just south is **Belu Cemetery** (Cimitirul Belu; off Map pp62-3; Calea Șerban Vodă; 🕒 9am-7pm), the city's most prestigious cemetery, which houses the tombs of many notable Romanian writers. Space has become so tight, people are recycling spots from past family members; in other areas, sidewalks are filling with new grave sites! A map inside the gate points out locations. Many Romanians pay respects to national poet Mihai Eminescu (1850–89) and comic playwright and humorist Ion Luca Caragiale (1852–1912), who only have a bloke named Traian Savulescu between them; go to Figura 9 (to the right after you enter).

The **Sephardic Jewish Cemetery** is across the street (p75).

## ACTIVITIES

**Row boats** (€1.50-1.70 per hour) are available for hire at Cișmigiu Garden's lake, Carol I Park's pond, or in Herăstrău Lake's western bank. Also on the western shores of Herăstrău Lake, there's a fairly frequent **ferry service** (adult/child €1.20/0.60; 🕒 noon-8pm Mon, roughly 10am-8pm Tue-Sun May-Oct) to the other side of the lake.

In winter there's often **ice skating** on Cișmigiu Garden's frozen lake.

You can hire bikes at **Magellan Bikes** (Map p66; ☎ 0724-296 487; Calea Moșilor 46; 🕒 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat). It's about €12 per day, cheaper if hiring for long term.

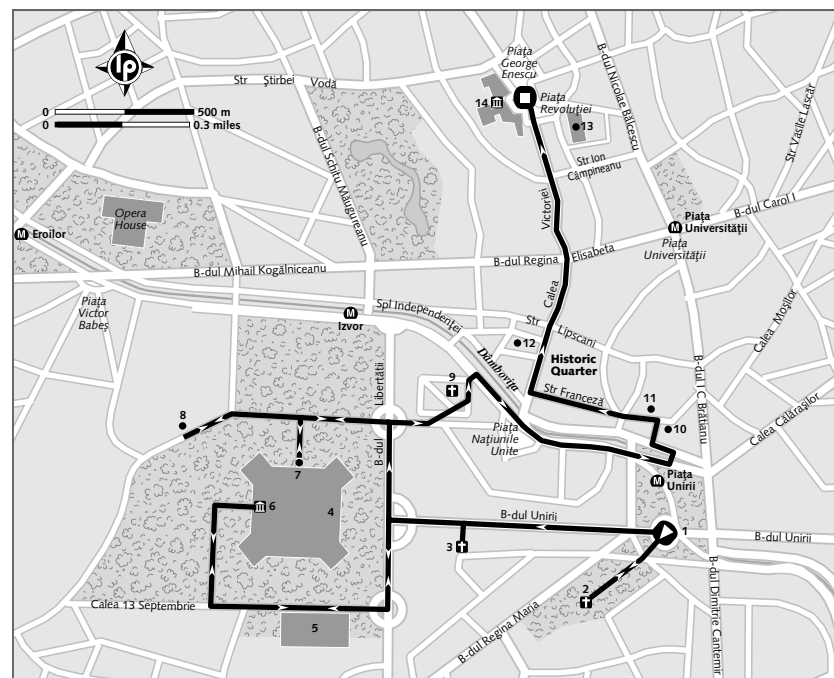
High-end hotels, like the Hotel Inter-Continental, Marriott Grand Hotel and Crowne Plaza Bucharest will let you use their **fitness centres or pools** for €15 or so a day.

If you're looking for mountains, Sinaia is two hours' north (p118).

## WALKING TOUR Ceaușescu's Bucharest

Locals roll their eyes, or get outright angry about it (or call something like the following as the 'walk to hell'), but an unmistakable draw for the city is the fascinatingly gruesome and ill-conceived changes Ceaușescu's threw upon it. Following a 1977 earthquake that damaged many city buildings, and a fateful visit to Pyongyang that inspired him, Ceaușescu finished the Bucharest wreck-job in the early 1980s, levelling neighbourhoods with priceless ancient buildings. All done to make room for a grandiose world of housing blocks and government buildings that all but dominate the lowly pedestrian in a mostly car-free city (at the time). If you have only one day in Bucharest, you'll want to see this.

Traffic roaring by, ugly **Piața Unirii** (1; Union Square) was built as the communist dream. To



**Start/Finish** Piața Unirii/Piața Revoluției

**Distance** 3.5km

**Duration** about 3-6 hours

the northwest, the crippled Dâmbovița River gets sucked under the square's concrete – re-appearing on the other side of B-dul Unirii. This 3.5km boulevard – previously known as the 'Boulevard of the Victory of Socialism' – was intentionally built a half-metre wider than Paris' Champs-Élysées. Fountains dot the expanse of cars and grey buildings, one fountain for each of the counties in Romania. Looking southwest, and up a bit, you can spot the **Romanian Patriarchal Cathedral** (2; p70), a rare view of the action from a place of worship.

Heading east on B-dul Unirii, with the world's second-largest building looming, we can see some religious buildings not so lucky. Take the last left down the boulevard – lined with (half-abandoned) storefronts and towering housing – to reach the **Antim Monastery** (3; p70). In some alleys you'll find dilapidated homes, left for squatters to take over –

not exactly the 'Victory' Ceaușescu probably imagined.

Ahead is the monstrous **Palace of Parliament** (4; p68) – locally called still the Palace of the People. If not in a hurry, go around to the left (south) past the **National Institute for Science & Technology** (5; p69) to visit the surprisingly good **National Museum of Contemporary Art** (6; p69). Afterwards, it's a 20-minute walk to the north side, where you can take a **palace tour** (7).

If keen, you can take a bus outside to **Ghencea Cemetery** (8; opposite), the humble resting grounds for Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena. Otherwise, head north on B-dul Libertății a block, then veer right behind the blocks, to reach the **Prince Mihai Monastery** (9; p71) – the last surviving piece of the one-time symbol of the city (Ceaușescu moved it 279m behind the buildings).

To get some sense of what this grey civic centre replaced, cross the river into the scrappy heart of Bucharest's historic centre. Built in 1808 by an Armenian merchant, the **Hanul lui Manuc** (10; p81), a rare unrazed old-timer, is now a hotel with a courtyard

drinking area. Walk past the statue of **Vlad Tepeș (11)** on Str Franceza to Calea Victoriei, Bucharest's historic main thoroughfare. A couple of blocks north you can see **Economic Consortium Palace (12)**, built in a rah-rah Parisian fervour in 1900.

About eight blocks north is Piața Revoluției. To the right, past the statue of the pieced-together seated man, is the former **Central Committee of the Communist Party (13)**, where Ceaușescu made his last public appearance from the balcony. The crowd yelled 'Down with Ceaușescu!' and the 1989 Revolution was born.

If time allows, the National Gallery of Art's **Gallery of Romanian Art (14)**; p73) includes many religious icons saved from churches Ceaușescu had demolished.

## COURSES

**Echo** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 252 0115; www.theecho.ro; Str Dimitrie Onciul 33) offers private Romanian courses for €12 per hour.

## BUCHAREST FOR CHILDREN

Parks, particularly **Cismigiu Garden** (p76) and **Herăstrău Park** (p76), set up play areas for kids.

**Tândărică Puppet Theatre** (Teatrul de Marionete și Păpuși Tândărică; Map pp62-3; ☎ 315 2377; Str Eremia Grigorescu 24; box office ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) is a favourite but shows are mostly in Romanian.

**City Mall** and **București Mall** (see p86) have play areas and some kids events planned.

It's hard to beat the **Dracula show** at the Count Dracula Club (p83) held on Tuesday and Friday nights.

Many kids will get a kick out of the **plane hangar** at the National Military Museum (p77), with parachute displays, a host of planes and all sorts of tanks outside.

## TOURS

Most travel agents offer various forms of city tours.

**Jolly Tours** (Map p66; ☎ 303 3796; www.jollytours.ro; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun), at the Athénée Palace Hilton offers three-hour city tours from €60 for two people.

**Cultural Travel & Tours** (☎ 336 3163; www.cttours.ro) offers several half/full day city tours from €29/49 per person.

One local guide, **Corneliu Serban** (☎ 0723-356 096), offers personalised city tours for €100 for two people; he witnessed the 1989

Revolution and can give plenty of insider's observations.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Annual events worth the wait include:

**Bucharest Carnival** (late May-early Jun) Week-long carnival with street dancers, street theatre, folk dancers and live bands performing in Bucharest's historic heart.

**Dreher Beer Festival** (mid-Jun) Four-day beer festival with live bands and drinking contests in Herăstrău Park.

**Open Air Concerts** (mid-Jun) Showcase for young classical musicians held yearly in Izvorani Village (40km north of Bucharest).

**Fête de la Musique** (21 Jun) Annual French music festival organised by the French Institute.

**Hora Festival** (1 Aug) Three-day dance festival attracting traditional folk dance troupes from all over the country; held in the Village Museum.

**Craftsman's Fair** (15 Aug) Local craft fair hosted by the Village Museum with guest craftspeople from all over Romania.

**George Enescu Music Festival** (4-24 Sep) Held every odd-numbered year, attracting musicians from all over the world.

**National Theatre Festival** (Oct) Week-long theatre festival held in the National Theatre.

**St Dumitru Day** (late Oct) Two-day carnival celebrating Bucharest's patron saint, Dumitru.

## SLEEPING

Prices in Bucharest are higher than in most of Romania. Budget accommodation here is below €50 for a double, midrange goes up to €130 and top end soars above. All prices include breakfast unless otherwise noted.

## Central Bucharest

### BUDGET

**Hotel Muntenia** (Map p66; ☎ 314 6010; Str Academiei 19-21; s/d with shared bathroom €14/20, d with private bathroom €49) If you're looking to slumber like it's pre-1989, check out the Muntenia. It's pretty meagre: inside the grey chipped façade are yellowing walls, an antique glass elevator, a spent bulb or two, and red-and-black floral carpets. No breakfast.

**Our pick** **Hotel Carpați** (Map p66; ☎ 315 0140; carpati@compace.ro; Str Matei Millu 16; s/d €25/42, d with private bathroom €55-68) If you're looking to save and be central, it's hard to beat this place, which has 40 recently renovated rooms – some are tiny, with little light – and a fun, rather scary, two-door lift that clanks up to the floors. Breakfast comes with a little pomp in the Paris-style lobby lounge, and all rooms have TV and sink.

## MIDRANGE

**Hostel Miorița** (Map p66; ☎ 312 0361; www.hostel-miorita.ro; Str Lipsani 12; r €50; ☎ ☎) Reached from a nice block in the historic centre by a maze of doors and steps in a rather clinical building, this six-room inn (not a hostel) has pleasant if plain rooms, and has TV, free wi-fi and tiger (grrr!) beds/preads.

**Hanul lui Manuc** (Map p66; ☎ 313 1415; hmanuc@mc.ro; Str Franceza 62-64; s/d €35/56) Originally a 19th century merchants' inn (*caravanserai*), this hotel has a colourful guest list, including prostitutes, criminals, rogues, merchants and Lonely Planet authors. Sculpted wooden balconies overlook the courtyard (filled with some open-air seats for the wine cellar, plus a few Coke machines and parked cars). Considering its location it's a steal, but the 22 rooms (wood-beam ceilings, brown carpets, TV, old bathroom tile) could be better maintained.

**Rembrandt Hotel** (Map p66; ☎ 313 9315; www.rembrandt.ro; Str Smărdan 11; s €63, d weekday/weekend €91-113/81-93; ☎ ☎) This wonderful, relatively new 15-room, Dutch-owned hotel faces the landmark National Bank in the historic centre. Breakfast is tight, on the lobby's mezzanine, but rooms win serious points for polished wood floors, wall-size wooden headboards and DVD players. 'Business' rooms face the front, but the top-floor 'standard' gets the lone balcony. The lone single and 'tourist' double are quite small.

**Hotel Central** (Map p66; ☎ 315 5636; www.centralhotel.ro; Str Brezoianu 13; s/d €90/105; ☎ ☎) Above a McDonald's, half of the 61 rooms overlook busy B-dul Regina Elisabeta. Rooms are run by the book to the 'modern hotel' template.

## TOP END

**Hotel Capsa** (Map p66; ☎ 313 4038; www.capsa.ro; Calea Victoriei 36; s/d €135 & 170/200; ☎ ☎) Behind the charming 1852 façade, this central hotel served as a bohemian hang-out through the 1930s, and its cake shop (still running) is a lone survivor of the 'cake craze' of the times. Rooms benefit from old practices – high ceilings – and new touches like fleur-de-lys designs, dark-wood panelling, and a fitness centre.

**Hotel Opera** (Map p66; ☎ 312 4857; www.hotelopera.ro; Str Ion Brezoianu 37; s/d €120/140; ☎ ☎) Set on a back-street triangular corner, this 33-room, faintly Art Deco hotel goes for an all-out music theme inside (lobby nooks for violins, occasional hip-hop through the speakers). The rooms are small, but nicely arranged.

**Hotel Inter-Continental** (Map p66; ☎ 310 2020; www.intercontinental.com; B-dul Nicolae Bălcescu 4; s/d from €290/320; ☎ ☎ ☎) Its 283 rooms brag of a 21st-century makeover (cranberry carpets, padded walls, wi-fi), and the 1971 tower playfully shows its period at times (dig the bubbly skylights in the top-floor fitness centre – but there's no joking about the pool's panoramic views). During the 1989 Revolution, journals shot fighting footage from the balconies here. Nonguests can use the fitness centre for €15 to €25. Room rates often drop by half.

**Athénée Palace Hilton** (Map p66; ☎ 303 3777; hilton@hilton.ro; Str Episcopiei 1-3; s/d from €340/360; ☎ ☎ ☎) The queen of Bucharest's hotels is a testament to the century-past infatuation with Paris. These days, the 272 rooms' makeovers nearly live up to the glory you'd expect from the marble-pillar entry. Rooms in the older wing mix layouts – some with steps up from an entry to blue fleur-de-lys-patterned carpets. For €35 more, the 'king deluxe' rooms grant you an adjoining TV room. In summer the terrace serves as a hotspot for the cocktail crowd. There's an indoor pool in the fitness centre.

## Gară de Nord & Around

Those really not wanting to deal with the con-artist taxi drivers lingering at the train station can walk their bags to nearby choices.

**Vila 11** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 0722-495 900; vila11bb@hotmail.com; Str Institutul Medico Militair 11; dm/s/d €10/18/28) Run by a Canadian family, this homy *pensiune* is on a back street, and rates usually include breakfast. Call ahead; sometimes no one's around.

**Hotel Astoria** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 318 9989; B-dul Dinica Golescu 27; s/d €30/45) Your mother might not like it, but the nine-floor Astoria, run by the railroad, carries some yesteryear grace in its weathered halls, with stone-tile entries and wooden armoires in rooms.

**Hotel Elizeu** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 319 1734; rezervari@hotelereizeu.ro; Str Elizeu 11-13; s/d €46/57; ☎ ☎) A nice hotel, this 54-room option is rather standard, but it's in a quiet pocket of residential buildings a few blocks north of the station.

## Outside the Centre

Don't be put off that these choices aren't near the historic core of Bucharest. Many of the city's best options – including hostels – are just outside the centre, some (like Helios or Funky Chicken) just a few blocks' walk away.

**BUDGET**

**Casa Albă** (☎ 230 4525; Alea Privighetorilor 1-3; camp site €6, bungalows €21.50) If you insist, camping is possible at these fine grounds northeast of Băneasa airport in north Bucharest. Take bus 301 north from Piața Romană; get off a few stops past the airport and walk 500m east along Alea Privighetorilor. Bus 783 to the main airport also goes by here. There is a restaurant at the site. Breakfast is not included.

**ourpick** **Butterfly Villa Hostel** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 0747-032 644; www.villa-butterfly.com; Str Dumitru Zosima 82; dm/s/d €9/14/26; ☎ ☑) Bucharest's best hostel, run by a German/Romanian couple, is not the best located. The clean, two-floor hostel has three dorms and three bathrooms, plus two private bathrooms. There's a small courtyard and terrace to kick back on, darts to throw, video games and DVDs to play with. Wi-fi is free throughout, as is laundry, and breakfast sprawls all day. Staff is quite helpful (if not 100% laid-back at times). Bus 282 leads from the train station, bus 300 from Piața Romana.

**Funky Chicken** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 312 1425; funkychickenhostel@hotmail.com; Str Gen Berthelot 63; dm €8) Just a couple of blocks from lovely Cișmigiu Gardens, this hostel occupies a historic home on a shaded street, with three dorm rooms that sleep 18. There's a kitchen to use and free cigs to smoke on courtyard benches, but no breakfast. It has less travel information than other hostels.

**Youth Hostel Villa Helga** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 610 2214; www.rotravel.com/hotels/helga; Str Salcâmilor 2; dm/s/d €11/16/28; ☑) A converted old villa in the evocative back lanes east of the centre, this place has nice, clean rooms, with a new kitchen to use, two private rooms, and patio seats under the vine shade. Stay six days and get an additional night free. The laundry will hopefully be repaired by the time you read this.

**Pensiunea Gabriela** (☎ 352 2053; Str Margaritarului 18, Vila A-104, Otopeni village; dm/s/d/tr €12/18/25/35) Run by lovely English- and French-speaking retirees in an unlikely village base 2km from the airport, this five-room, one-dorm home has welcoming rooms and a garden outside. Staff can offer rides to/from the airport, plus there's internet, restaurants and banks nearby. All but the triple have shared bathrooms. Take bus 783 towards the airport – get off at the first stop after the McDonald's, 15km from the centre.

**MIDRANGE**

**Hotel Helios** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 310 7083; www.hotelhelios.ro; Str Iulia Hașden 16; s/d €66/77; ☎ ☑) This 15-room hotel is only a few blocks from the train station, but feels far away – facing a quaint Orthodox church, with stylish rooms and floor-to-ceiling wardrobes. Prices drop 20% Saturday and Sunday.

**TOP END**

**Le Boutique Hotel Moxa** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 650 5555; www.hotelmoxa.com; Str Mihail Moxa 4; s/d €130/145 & 165; ☎ ☑) The 24 rooms are small but stylish at this new 24-room boutique hotel, a few steps from Calea Victoriei. Padded headboards face the flat-screen TVs and there's free wi-fi throughout, plus a small gym and sauna to use. Prices drop by €20 Friday to Sunday.

**Hotel Duke** (Map p66; ☎ 317 4186; www.hotelduke.ro; B-dul Dacia 33; s/d €130/150; ☎ ☑) At Piața Romana, the 38-room Duke is a pleasant business-style hotel with mint-and-caramel rooms, attentive staff, internet in the lobby, and a casual bar where suits chat.

**Golden Tulip** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 212 5558; www.goldentulipbucharest.com; Calea Victoriei 166; r €160 & 180; ☎ ☑) This very stylish 82-room hotel opened close to the centre of town in 2005, giving Bucharest a much-needed modern boost. Stark rooms feature plush red chairs set before full-wall glass windows, and the lobby bar goes curbside in good weather. Rates drop 20% Friday to Sunday.

**Hotel Sofitel** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 318 3000; www.sofitel.com; B-dul Expoziției 2; s/d from €230/245; ☎ ☑) Adjoining the World Trade Centre, the 12-floor Sofitel has 202 classy rooms – geometric shapes, purple carpets in the hallways – with incredible views over the city, four distinctive eating/drinking areas in the luxe lobby, plus a small fitness centre and use of a nearby pool.

**APARTMENTS**

- **IMOB-Shop** (☎ 335 7686; www.imobshop.ro) Apartments around Piața Victoriei in slightly dated buildings from €30 per night.
- **RomVision Travel** (☎ 322 6533; www.romvision.ro) A bit more stylish; apartments range from €60 to €80 per night.

**EATING**  
**European**

**Burebista** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 210 9704; Calea Moșilor 195; mains €1.50-4.50; ☎ ☎ noon-midnight) Dark-shaded patio seats outside, with tree-trunk tables and furs inside, rustic Burebista is a popular spot for excellent quality grilled meats. Salads start at €1.50.

**Casa Veche** (Map p66; ☎ 0724-232 631; Str Enescu 15; pizzas €4-6; ☎ ☎ noon-1am) Some of Bucharest's finest clay-oven pies – thin, crispy versions with fresh ingredients – are served in this nice trellised courtyard and upstairs woodbeam dining room. Make sure extras aren't added to your bill though.

**Red Lion** (Map p66; ☎ 315 1526; Str Academiei 1a; pizza €5; ☎ ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Fri, 3pm-midnight Sat & Sun) This popular pizza/pasta place near the university fills two rooms – one a dark-wood pub, the other a trellised Roman 'garden' of sorts – with locals looking for €0.60 draught beer, crispy pizza or pasta.

**ourpick** **Bistro Vilacrosse** (Map p66; ☎ 315 4562; Pasajul Macca/Vilacrosse; meal €3.30-8; ☎ ☎ lunch & dinner) This bistro borrows its style heavily from Parisian side-streets, with sepia photos of Bucharest's most Parisian-influenced buildings, wooden floors and gingham tablecloths. Settle into a seat and escape the city heat and/or crowds in this glass-domed passage while sipping fresh coffee and eating a wine-splattered Transylvania pork filet on a bed of (French!) fries and roasted cabbage. Of all things, the toilet entrance is a red (English!) telephone booth. It has a few vegetarian options and a bottle of wine costs €7.30.

**Trattoria Il Calcio** (Map p66; ☎ 0722-134 299; Str Mendeleev 14; mains €4-7; ☎ ☎ noon-midnight or 1am) Run by 'Romania's George Best' (football legend Gino Lorgulescu), this pasta/pizza place looks Tuscan, if not for the framed *Futbol* journals from the 1960s on the walls. The food's great, with hearty meals and good salads. It gets busy at lunch.

**Balthazar** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 212 1460; www.balthazar.ro; Str Dumbrava Rosie 2; mains €10-15; ☎ ☎ noon-12.30am) On a strip of embassies (US and Austrian included – so no Schwarzenegger jokes), Balthazar is among Bucharest's classiest restaurants, filling the ground floor and front courtyard of a superbly maintained old villa. Snazzy locals and business lunchers come for Thai/French fusion, lots of seafood and filet mignon.

**Casa Doina** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 222 6717; Șos Kiseleff 4; mains €7-20; ☎ ☎ noon-3am) Off the grand avenue, this casa was an ornate 1892 villa, with almost Raj-style rooms complementing its high-quality Romanian fare. The best option is to sit outside near the fountains in the inviting courtyard (too bad about the Carlsberg banners). Try the beef carpaccio with olive oil and lemon juice.

**Romanian**

**Caru Bere** (Map p66; Str Stavropoleos 3-5) Bucharest's oldest beer hall plays home to serious Gothic style and an irresistible atmosphere, although it was closed for renovation when we visited. Check to see its new state – it's likely they'll bring back the Roma bands, but revive the sour service.

**La Mama** (Map p66; ☎ 312 9797; Str Episcopiei 9; mains €3-4.80; ☎ ☎ 10am-2am Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat) Mama knows what she's doing. This converted villa, with a sprawling covered deck that's filled to all hours, dates from the late 19th century, and deserves its many fans, thanks to the very tasty, meat-heavy options. Sheep pastrami with polenta is a winner, but the roasted pork neck with country-style potatoes is unbeatable.

**G City Grill** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 233 9818; B-dul Primăverii; mains €3.50-10; ☎ ☎ 10am-2am) Outside tables at this appealing villa, just east of Piața Charles de Gaulle, draw a stylin' biz crowd seeking typical Romanian fare in a modern setting.

**Count Dracula Club** (Map p66; ☎ 312 1353; Splaiul Independenței 8a; mains €8; ☎ ☎ 3pm-1am Mon-Sat) Don't pretend you don't want this. A spooky home with blood-dripping walls and cosy rooms themed as hunting, medieval, Transylvanian style, plus a chapel/coffin room with impaled heads, hands reaching through walls and blood-red lights. In addition, Drac himself shows up 'for a show' at 9.30pm Tuesday and Friday. The food's fine – mostly bloody meats. ('Um, we have vegetarian soup', said a ghoulishly goated waiter, perplexed at the very thought of vegetarians.)

**Smart's** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 211 9035; Str Alex Donici 14; mains 15-30; ☎ ☎ 11am-late) On a shaded lane, this great pub serves (rather Romanian) pub fare, with a selection of salads (€3.25 to €4.15) and pastas (€4.45 to €5.90). It's popular, and a fine spot to sit over a bottle of Leffe.

**Other Cuisines**

**Paradis** (Map p66; ☎ 315 2601; Str. Hristo Botev 10; dishes €1.80; ☎ ☎ 8am-10.30pm) Come for a brilliant value

buffet lunch at this Lebanese joint, with spicy aubergine stew, spinach over rice, spinach stews, meatballs in tomato sauce and mounds of flat bread.

**Mediterraneo** (Map p66; ☎ 211 5308; Str Icoanei 20; €3.60-5.90; ☎ 10am-midnight or later) This great little corner restaurant on the cobbled back lanes draws expats and locals for Turkified Mediterranean fare. Sunday brunch (€10) is a big deal – with sausage, eggs, olives, French toast and fresh OJ. Fresh fish fillets join a posse of kebabs (€6) and pastas (€5.50).

**Don Taco** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 316 9452; cnr Str Dr Felix & B-dul Banal Manta; mains €3.75-5.90; ☎ 10am-1 or 2am) Romania's only 'Mexican' restaurant (um, half the menu sticks with Romanian fare) does an inventive, but pretty good take on burritos, enchiladas and *carnitas* (stewed pork).

## Cafés

**Café & Latte** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 314 3834; B-dul Schitu Măgureanu 35; ☎ 8am-10pm) Facing the Cișmigiu Garden, this spot offers pastries and coffees to a jovial crowd.

**10 Coffee Bar** (Map p66; ☎ 315 6098; Str Demetrie Dobrescu 5) On a chic spot looking from a blown-out ruin of the 1989 clash at nearby Piața Revoluției, this two-floor cafe has back-lit wall-length B&W prints of the 1989 scene and candles on the table.

## Quick Eats

**Snack Attack!** (www.snackattack.ro) Str Ion Câmpineanu (Map p66; ☎ 312 7664; Str Ion Câmpineanu 10; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Piața Dorobanților (Map pp62-3; Piața Dorobanților 28; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) You haven't been in Romania long enough if the idea of a cheap, fresh sandwich (€1.50) or salad (including hummus and tabouli with tortillas; €2) doesn't tempt you. Listed above are two of eight locations in Bucharest.

**Grand Cafe Galleron** (Map p66; ☎ 313 4565; Str Golescu 18a; sandwiches €3-4.50; ☎ 9am-midnight) A block east of Piața Revoluției, this stylish cafe has indoor nooks and outdoor seats for ice cream, sandwiches, drinks and all-day breakfast (€4).

## Self-Catering

**Piața Amzei** (Amzei Market; Map pp62-3; ☎ sunrise-sunset) Just off Calea Victoriei on Piața Amzei, this market opens daily from sunrise to sunset and has the juiciest selection of fresh fruit and veg in Bucharest. Another open-air market, Piața Gemeni (Map pp62-3) is off B-dul Dacia.

## DRINKING

Bucharest's two liveliest scenes are around Lipsani in the historic centre (with pedestrianised roads and trendy pubs) and in the student dorms area near Grozăvești metro station. Fancier hotels have slicker drinking scenes.

**Amsterdam Grand Cafe** (Map p66; ☎ 313 7580; Str Covaci 6; ☎ 10am-2am) This rustic, two-floor bar with great seating areas has big windows to look onto the cobblestone lane. There's live jazz some afternoons. Food's available, but it's better for drinks.

**Dubliner** (Map pp62-3; Șos Titulescu 18; ☎ 9am-2am) This is a long-time expat hangout, with draught Guinness and football games attracting a grab-bag of fans. Locals tend to stick with the sidewalk tables, while jaded sports fans linger by the TVs or dartboard inside. The Dubliner's steak sandwich (€6.60) is super, but priced for foreign budgets.

**Fire Club** (Map p66; ☎ 0722-390 946; Str Gabroveni 12) A big red-brick room with student groups crouched on stools around small tables, bottles of Tuborg in hand. Rock and punk shows are staged in the basement.

**La Butoaie** (Map p66; B-dul Nicolae Bălcescu 2) Hype with uni students, this lively open-deck bar on the 5th floor of the Ion Luca Caragiale National Theatre fits hundreds, with benches and big pillows in the seating areas. It fills early on nice days.

**Mes Amis** (Map p66; Str Zarafi; ☎ 9pm-2am) More Marais than its glitz-job neighbours on Gabroveni, this alley bar has wood-beam ceilings, grapefruit-pink walls and alt rock coming through the speakers.

**White Horse** (Map pp62-3; Str George Călinescu 4; ☎ noon-3am) This British-style pub caters to a more professional, but still boozey, crowd in this smoky, busy two-floor place in northern Bucharest.

**our pick Piranha Club** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 315 9129; www.clubpiranha.ro; Spl Independenței 313; ☎ 10am-late) About 2.5km west of the town centre, this student-dorm area teems with Bucharest's merriest drinking/eating life. Action's found on either side of the Dâmbovița River. Best is this, a jungle-lodge-type place with piranhas in aquariums, low-lit gazebos decked out like country homes, cosy seating inside for when it's cold and pretty good food. There are frequent live shows too. It's south of the river, a couple of hundred metres west of the Grozăvești metro station.

## ENTERTAINMENT

Check **Șapte Seri** (www.sapteseri.ro, in English on website only) for entertainment listings. Posters advertising DJ events, live bands and new hot nightclubs plaster the city.

## Cinemas

Most films are shown in their original language. Check www.sapteseri.ro or www.cinema.ro for film information.

**Cinematica Eforie** (Map p66; ☎ 313 0483; Str Eforie 2; tickets €3) Plays Bergman and arthouse films, and some Romanian films.

**Cinema Pro** (☎ 824 1360; Str IC Brătianu 6; tickets €2.30-3)

**Cinema Scala** (Map p66; ☎ 316 6708; B-dul General Magheru 2-4; tickets €2, free Tue)

**Hollywood Multiplex** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 327 7020; București Mall, Calea Vitan 55-59; tickets €2.50-4.25) Multiscreen jobbie.

The French Institute (p65) also screens films (in French).

## Classical Music

It's a very good idea to dress up for a night out, at least once. For information on seeing the philharmonic at the **Romanian Athenaeum** see p73. Most shows are scheduled September through June (usually Thursday and Friday nights).

**Opera House** (Opera Română; Map pp62-3; ☎ 313 1857; B-dul Mihail Kogălniceanu 70) Enjoy a full-scale opera in a lovely building for €1 to €4.

## Gay & Lesbian Venues

**Accept** (www.accept-romania.ro) is a gay-, lesbian- and transgender-rights Romanian group that organises the annual six-day **GayFest** (ends 1st Sun in Jun), with events, films and disco nights around Bucharest.

The most popular gay venue in Bucharest is **Queen's** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 0722-988 541; Str Iuliu Barac 13; ☎ noon-3am).

## Nightclubs & Live Music

**Backstage** (Map p66; ☎ 312 3943; www.backstage.ro; Str Gabroveni 14; ☎ 9pm-5am) Behind the cursive neon sign is this ground-floor bar, with a basement disco (€1.50) that hosts Thursday rock concerts (€0.60).

**Club A** (Map p66; ☎ 315 6853; Str Blănari 14; ☎ 10am-5 or 6am Mon-Fri, 9pm-5 or 6am Sat & Sun) Run by students, this club is a classic and beloved by all who go there. Indie pop/rock tunes play until very late Friday and Saturday nights.

**Green Hours 22 Jazz Club** (Map p66; ☎ 314 5751; Calea Victoriei 120; ☎ 24hr) This cosy basement jazz hall has stools and artfully patched books in arched nooks. A gin-and-tonic is €3.70.

**Jukebox** (Map p66; ☎ 314 8314; Str Sepcari 22; ☎ noon-5am) Laid-back basement venue with lively karaoke on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday nights, plus live music Wednesday.

**Twice** (Map p66; ☎ 313 5593; Str Sfânta Vineri 4, Sect 3; ☎ 9pm-5am) DJs and amateur stripping are part of the hip-to-hip youth dancing to two beats in two rooms. Prepare to sweat.

## Sport

Of the four Bucharest football teams, Steaua București dominate local sports fans' imaginations. They play at **Steaua Stadium**. Red-gold-and-blue paraphernalia can be picked up at the **club shop** (Map p66; ☎ 094 299 037; cnr Str Jon Zalomit & Str Ion Brezoiu; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat).

One rival, **Dinamo București** (www.fc.dinamo.ro), plays at **Dinamo Stadium** (Map pp62-3; Șos Ștefan cel Mare 7-9).

## Theatre

Bucharest's many theatres offer a lively mix of comedy, farce, satire and straight contemporary plays in a variety of languages. Tickets cost no more than €3. Theatres close in July and August.

**Ion Luca Caragiale National Theatre** (Teatrul Național Ion Luca Caragiale; Map p66; ☎ 314 7171; B-dul Nicolae Bălcescu 2; box office ☎ 10am-7pm) Named after the 20th-century playwright who kicked off his career here as a prompter, this place was built in the 1970s. The box office is on the southern side of the building.

**Jewish State Theatre** (Teatrul Evreiesc de Stat; Map pp62-3; ☎ 323 4530; Str Iuliu Barac 15; box office ☎ 9am-2pm) Plays in Romanian and Yiddish are held here.

## SHOPPING

For beautifully made woven rugs, table runners, national Romanian costumes, ceramics and other local crafts, don't miss the excellent folk-art shop at the **Museum of the Romanian Peasant shop** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 317 9661; Șos Kiseleff 3; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun); access is from the back side of the museum.

**Librăria Noi** (p64) has a great collection of antique books and maps.

In the historic centre, wrought iron gates lead to cobblestoned pedestrian lane **Str Hanul**

**cu Tei** (Map p66), a well-kept passageway with galleries, art supplies and antiques.

A couple of shopping malls include **City Mall** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 311 4260; Șos Otlenței 2; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat) and **București Mall** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 327 6100; Calea Vitan 55-59; ☎ 10am-10pm), both with children's activities and movie theatres. You can purchase some souvenir shirts at **Unirea Department Store** (Map pp62-3; Piața Unirii 3; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, 11am-8pm Sun).

See Sport (p85) for the famed local football team Steaua's club shop.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

Most international flights use the **Henri Coanda Airport** (formerly Otopeni; ☎ 201 4788; Șos București-Ploiești), 16km north of Bucharest on the road to Brașov.

Arrivals and departures use marked side-by-side terminals (arrivals is to the north). The **information desks** (☎ 204 1220; www.otp-airport.ro; ☎ 24hr) are in both terminals.

Romania's national airline is **Tarom** (Transporturile Aeriene Române; www.tarom.ro) Airport (☎ 201 400) Centre (Map p66; ☎ 337 0400; Spl Independenței 17; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat). Daily service includes a couple of daily flights to Cluj-Napoca and Timișoara (about €55 one way including tax); one daily flight to Iași (€52); three weekly to Târgu Mureș (€45); four weekly to Suceava (€60); and a Friday flight to Oradea (€50) and Baia Mare (€50). Note that, enigmatically, a return flight booked online costs more than two one-way tickets – by as much as 30% extra!

**Air Moldova** (Map p66; ☎ 312 1258; www.airmoldova.md) also serves Henri Coanda.

**Băneasa Airport** (☎ 232 0020; Șos București-Ploiești 40), 8km north of the centre, is used for some internal flights, charter flights, and – as of January 2007 – irresistible discount flights from London via **Wizz Air** (www.wizzair.com).

### Bus

#### DOMESTIC DESTINATIONS

Bucharest's bus system is, frankly, a mess – scarred by ever-changing departure locations, companies and schedules. Try checking websites such as www.cdy.ro and www.autogara.ro, or asking your hotel to help with the latest before you show up in a dusty lot with your bags, bent on a ticket for Iași. The most popular routes are the maxitaxis to Brașov, which

stop in Sinaia, Bușteni and Predeal on the way. When in doubt, take the train.

Chief 'stations' – some are lots, or spaces by a curb – include the following:

**Autogară Diego** (Map p66; ☎ 311 1283; Spl Independenței 2K)

**Autogară Filaret** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 336 0692; Piața Gării Filaret 1) Three kilometres south of Piața Universității; take bus 7 and 232 from Piața Unirii.

**Autogară Militari** (☎ 434 1084; B-dul Iuliu Maniu 141) Eight kilometres west of the centre; metro station Păcii.

**Central Bus Station** (aka Autogară Gară de Nord; Map pp62-3) 350m east of the train station.

**C&I** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 256 8039; Str Ritmului 35) 3¼km east of Piața Romana; four blocks north of metro station Piața lanclului; bus 69 or 85 goes from Gară de Nord.

The following table gives a rough idea of how often and from where a bus, or microbus, or maxitaxi, goes to various destinations. Things will likely change.

Destination	Price	Duration	Frequency	Station
Arad	€14.70-15.90	6hr	5 daily	Alegro (4), Filaret (1)
Baia Mare	€15.90	12hr	1 daily	Filaret
Brașov	€5.10	2½hr	half-hourly	C&I
Calafat	€8.70	8hr	2 daily	Filaret, Rahova
Constanța	€6.60	3¼hr	hourly	Central
Craiova	€9	4½hr	half-hourly	C&I
Curtea de Argeș	€4.50	2½hr	4 daily	Militari
Giurgiu	€2.70-3.90	1¼hr	half-hourly	Filaret
Iași	€10-12	7½hr	7 daily	Alegro (5), Diego (2)
Pitești	€2.70-3	1½hr	hourly	Diego, Militari
Ploiești	€2.70	1½hr	hourly	C&I
Sibiu	€9.90	5½hr	5 daily	Militari
Sighișoara	€8.10	6hr	6 daily	C&I
Snagov	€1.50	1hr	every 45 min	Piața Presei Libre
Suceava	€12	9hr	2 daily	Filaret
Târgoviște	€3.30-3.90	1½hr	hourly	Filaret
Târgu Jiu	€10.50-11.10	5½hr	10 daily	Militari
Timișoara	€15.90	11½hr	4 daily	Militari (2), Alegro (2)

## INTERNATIONAL BUSES

### Bulgaria

Maxitaxi services depart three times daily from Autogară Diego for Ruse, Bulgaria (€12 one way, 3 to 4 hours) – the only bus service between Romania and its neighbour to the south.

### Moldova

A regular bus service leaves for Chișinău (€11, 12 hours) from Filaret bus station.

### Turkey

The Turkey-bound have several options around Gară de Nord, including **Ortadoğu Tur** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 318 7538; Str Gară de Nord 6-8), **Troy** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 318 7920; Piața Gară de Nord 2); and **Toros** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 233 1898; Calea Griviței 134-136). Each sends one or more buses daily. The 12-hour trip is about €37.50 one way.

### Western Europe

The biggest name in international buses is **Eurolines** (☎ 316 3661; www.eurolines.ro; Str Buzești 44; ☎ 24hr), which links many Western European destinations with Bucharest. One-way fares for sample routes include two weekly buses to Athens (€80, 22 hours) and Berlin (€115), a daily service to Rome (€115) and Vienna (€64), and three weekly buses to Paris (€125). Working with Eurolines, Atlassib handles Italian destinations. Buses pick up passengers at various Romanian cities, but there's no domestic service.

**Double T** (Map p66; ☎ 313 3642; www.doublet.ro; Calea Victoriei 2) has frequent buses to Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy and Spain. A ticket to Munich is €77.

### Car & Motorcycle

Bucharest offers some of the country's cheapest car-hire rates. Major car-hire agencies can be found at the Henri Coanda Airport arrivals hall, as well as offices around town.

**Absolut Rent-a-Car** (Map p66; ☎ 319 5473; www.rentacar.com.ro; Spl Unirii 160) Rates start with Daewoo Ticos at €22 per day.

**Avis** (www.avis.ro) Hilton (Map p66; ☎ 312 2043); Henri Coanda Airport (☎ 201 1957); Hotel Inter-Continental (Map p66; ☎ 314 1837) Typical rates of the international big boys: from €52 per day at airport, from €64 in town.

**Budget** (☎ 204 1667; www.budgetro.ro; Henri Coanda Airport) Other locations around town.

**C&V** (☎ 201 4611, 0788-998 877; www.dvtouring.ro; Henri Coanda Airport) Cheaper than the big names. Offers Dacia Solenzas for €42 per day (including unlimited mile-

age and insurance), or €27 per day if you hire for more than a week.

**Europcar** (☎ 201 4937; www.europcar.com; Henri Coanda Airport)

**Hertz** (☎ 201 4954; www.hertz.com; Henri Coanda Airport)

Parking a car in the centre, particularly off Piața Victoriei and Piața Universității, costs €0.30; look for the wardens in yellow-and-blue uniforms. In many places you can just pull up to the sidewalk. Petrol costs about €1 per litre.

## Train

**Gară de Nord** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 223 2060; Piața Gară de Nord 1) is the central station for national and international trains. Call ☎ 9521 or ☎ 9522 for telephone reservations. It has two halls, where same-day tickets can be purchased. Facing the station, the one to the right sells 1st- and 2nd-class domestic tickets; the one to the left sells international (marked *'casa internațională'*) and 1st-class domestic tickets. If you don't have a ticket, you have to pay €0.15 to get on the platform. Some train station workers push for tips for doing their job, such as pointing out the correct window.

For all advance tickets (more than 24 hours before departure), go to the central **Agentie de Voiaj CFR office** (Map p66; ☎ 313 2643; www.cfr.ro; Str Domnita Anastasia 10-14; ☎ 7.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1.30pm Sat). A seat reservation is compulsory if you are travelling with an Inter-Rail or Eurail pass. There's also a nearby **CFR office** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 319 0306; Calea Griviței; ☎ 7.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1.30pm Sat).

The Wasteels agency on the platform (see p67) can help out too. International tickets must be bought in advance.

Some local trains to/from Constanța use **Gară Obor station** (Map pp62-3) to the east of the centre. Bus 85 operates between the two stations.

Check the latest schedules on www.cfr.ro or the reliable German site www.bahn.de.

Sample direct daily service includes:

Destination	Price	Duration	Daily Departures
Brașov	€7.60	2½hr	hourly
Cluj-Napoca	€11-16	7½hr	six
Constanța	€8.75	2½-4hr	almost hourly
Iași	€14.50	7hr	five

Destination	Price	Duration	Daily Departures
Sibiu	€14	5hr	three
Sighișoara	€8-12	4½hr	nine
Suceava	€15.50	8hr	one
Timișoara	€22.50	8hr	eight
Tulcea	€9.80	6hr	one

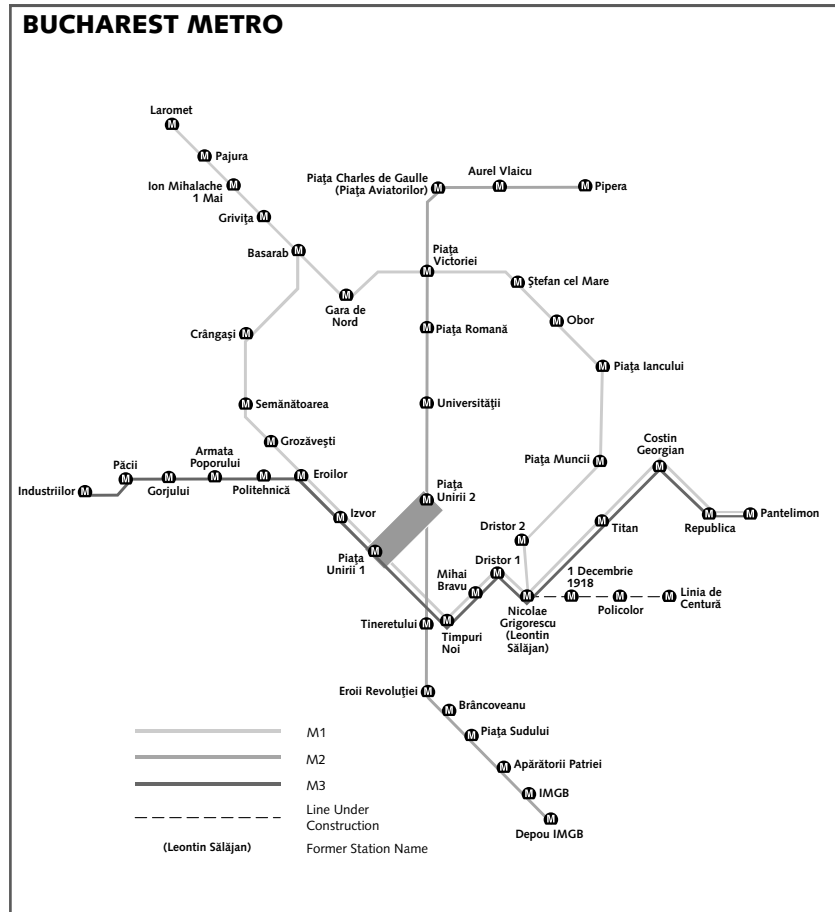
Daily international services include six trains to Budapest (13 to 15 hours); two trains to Sofia (11 hours) and Gorna Oryakhovitsa (near Veliko Tărnovo, Bulgaria; 6½ hours); and one train to Belgrade (12 hours), Chișinău (13 hours), Istanbul (19 hours), Kyiv (27 hours) and Moscow (39 hours).

## GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport BUS

To get to Henri Coanda (Otopeni) or Băneasa airport take bus 783 from the city centre, which departs every 15 minutes between 5.37am and 11.23pm (every half-hour at weekends) from Piața Unirii and goes via Piața Victoriei.

Buy a ticket, valid for two trips, for €1 at any RATB (Régie Autonome de Transport de București) bus-ticket booth near a bus stop. Once inside the bus remember to feed the ticket into the machine.

Băneasa is 20 minutes from the centre; get off at the 'aeroportul Băneasa' stop.



Henri Coanda is about 40 minutes from the city centre. The bus stops outside the departures hall before continuing to arrivals.

To get to the centre from Henri Coanda, catch bus 783 from the downstairs ramp outside the arrivals hall; you'll need to buy a ticket from the stand at the north end of the waiting platform (to right as you exit).

## TAXI

Taking a reputable taxi from the centre to Henri Coanda should cost no more than €6 or €7.

Fly Taxi monopolises airport transfers and charges about €15 to the centre – go for a flat rate; don't rely on the meter.

## Public Transport

For buses, trams and trolleybuses buy tickets (€0.35) at any RATB street kiosk, marked 'casa de bilete' or simply 'bilete'. Punch your ticket on board or risk a €10 on-the-spot fine.

Public transport runs from 5am to approximately 11pm (reduced service on Sunday). There's some info online at [www.ratb.ro](http://www.ratb.ro). See Maps (p64) for a good one with routes.

Bucharest's metro dates from 1979 and has four lines and 46 stations. Trains run every five to seven minutes during peak periods and about every 20 minutes off-peak between 5.30am and 11.30pm.

To use the metro buy a magnetic-strip ticket at the subterranean kiosks inside the main entrance to the metro station. Tickets valid for two/10 journeys cost €0.60/1.90. A one-month unlimited travel ticket costs €5.75.

## Taxi

Opt for a cab with a meter, and avoid the guys outside Gară de Nord. It's best to call one – or have a restaurant or hotel call one for you. Reputable companies include **Cobalcescu** (☎ 9451), **Cristaxi** (☎ 9461) and **Taxi Sprint** (☎ 9495).

Check to see the meter is on. Rates are posted on the door. Better (and common) rates are about €0.30 per kilometre.

## AROUND BUCHAREST

Most visitors looking for a break from Bucharest keep going through this broad plain to the mountains north. But there are some nice day trips nearby, peaking with the blood-curling Dracula's tomb in Snagov, 'Lenin's graveyard' outside Mogoșoia Palace, and a

monastery pretty enough to host a Swedish tennis star's wedding. The nearest and best slopes and hiking trails are in Sinaia (p118), two hours north.

## SNAGOV

☎ 21 / pop 7040

Most visitors to this serpent-shaped lake 30km north of Bucharest couldn't care less about its main draw for foreign visitors – the wee island in the middle, home to a 16th-century monastery and the remains of Vlad Țepeș. Bucharestians love this place for the water and sun and fresh air, coming in droves on weekends (aim for a weekday) in good weather, picnicking at places like Complex Astoria.

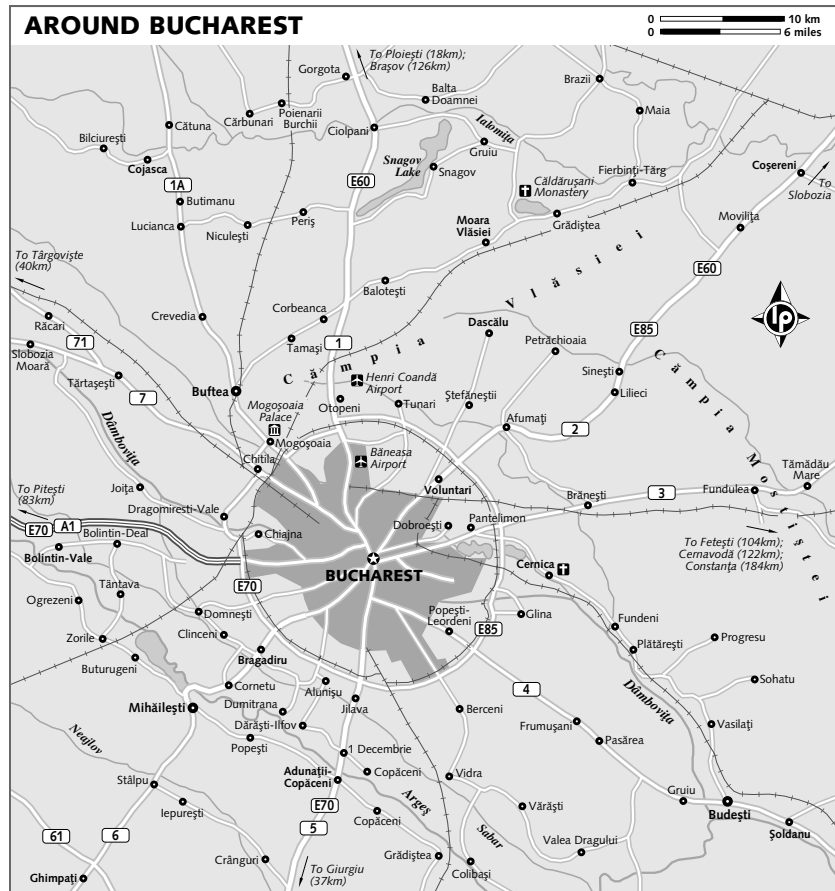
The rather unexciting village runs south of the 18km (and out of sight from town) Snagov Lake.

## Sights

The headless torso of Vlad Țepeș – Romania's favourite impaling tyrant of yester-century – lies in a grave on the tiny island. A simple wooden church was built on the island in the 11th century by Mircea cel Bătrân. A monastery was added in the late 14th century during the reign of King Dan I (r 1383–86), and in 1453 the wooden church was replaced by a stone edifice, which later sank in the lake.

In 1456 Vlad Țepeș (the Impaler) built fortifications around the monastery. He also built a bridge from the lake to the mainland, a bell tower, a new church, an escape tunnel, and a prison and torture chamber. Nicolae Bălcescu, leader of the 1848 revolution in Wallachia, and other 1848 revolutionaries were imprisoned in Snagov prison for a short time. A mass grave for those who died in the prison was dug in the grounds. The remains of the prison behind the present-day church can still be seen today.

The present stone church, listed as a Unesco World Heritage building and under renovation for several years, dates from 1521. Some paintings date from 1563. The body of Vlad Țepeș was reputedly buried below the dome, just in front of the church's wooden iconostasis, but when the grave was opened in 1931 it was reported to be empty. Nevertheless, there is mounting credibility given to the presence of a headless torso, evidence that the unfortunate owner was killed by the Turks. The humble grave inside the church, marked by a simple portrait of Vlad, is simply known as 'Dracula's tomb' today.



The early-20th-century **Snagov Palace**, just across the lake from the island, was built by Prince Nicolae, brother of King Carol II, in the Italian Renaissance style. During the Ceaușescu era the palace was used for meetings of high-level government officials, and today it houses a restaurant, conference centre and hotel reserved exclusively for state guests. Ceaușescu had a summer home on Snagov Lake, **Villa No 10**, now occasionally hired to rich and famous tourists.

The bulk of visitors come by tour – and it isn't a breeze to get here on your own – but it's possible to hire a rowboat from Complex Astoria (€3 per hour) and visit by yourself. You can also hire a rowboat from the northern shore at the village Silestru. To get to Sile-

stru, continue north along the E60 past the 'Snagov Sat. 11km' turn-off and turn right in Ciolpani.

Some winters, in December and January, it is often possible to walk or ice skate across the frozen lake to the monastery.

### Sleeping & Eating

Most people visit Snagov on a day trip.

**Complex Astoria** (☎ 316 7550; r €28-45) A few kilometres east of Snagov on the southern side of the lake, this 22-acre wooded complex has plenty of space to pitch your tent or stay in one of the pleasant hotel rooms. On weekends it's the number-one spot for Bucharest locals (who can number in the hundreds); weekdays are quiet. There is a

pool (€4.25), tennis (€5.75 per hour), boats to hire, and ping pong, plus a couple of restaurants. Entrance to the complex costs €2.80 Saturday and Sunday, and is free Monday to Friday.

To get to there by car, turn east off the E60 (signposted 'Snagov Sat. 11km') and follow the road for 11km to Snagov village. Continue past the village, ignoring the sign 'centru', for a further 2km to the complex (signposted 'Baza Turistică Snagov').

### Getting There & Away

The best way to get here is to grab a maxitaxi, which go every hour from the Press House in Bucharest (€1.30 each way; 45 minutes).

Otherwise there are several local trains which run between May and September to and from Gară de Nord and Snagov Plajă. A stop in the middle of an oak forest which is 10 minutes' walk from Complex Astoria.

Some hotels, as well as the Butterfly Villa Hostel (p82) and the Villa Helga Youth Hostel (p82), offer guided tours to Snagov. A hostel tour is around €10 per person, including a stop at the monastery. An agent like Jolly Tours (p80) charges about €40 per person for a group of two, including Mogoșoaia Palace.

### CĂLDĂRUȘANI MONASTERY

Filled with icons painted by Romanian master Nicolae Grigorescu at 16 years old, this idyllic monastery, 6km southeast of Snagov, is often included in tours of Dracula's tomb. Eight exquisite icons line the walls of the former monks' dining hall.

It was built in 1638, under the guidance of Wallachian prince Matei Basarab (r 1632–54), and was forced into the international spotlight when Swedish tennis champion Björn Borg married Romanian player Mariana Simionescu here.

In 1945 a fire destroyed the building – and it took eight years to rebuild between 1950 and 1958. It's generally possible to sleep here for a donation.

Bus 452 leaves twice a day for the monastery from the Press House in Bucharest. Most people go by car, but note that some road maps incorrectly mark its location. By car, take the E60 highway north to Ploiești for 16km and turn right onto the 101C road to Fierbinți. Go for another 16km and do a left at the sign for the monastery.

Some Bucharest–Galați trains, departing from Gară de Nord, stop at Greci (50 minutes), 2km south of the monastery.

### MOGOȘOIA PALACE

Easily combined with a day trip to Snagov, the **Mogoșoaia Palace** (☎ 350 6618; admission €0.45; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Fri, to 7pm Sat & Sun), 14km north-west of Bucharest, gives an inside look at one of Romania's best examples of Brâncoveanu architecture, plus the scrappy 'graveyard' of a few knocked-down communist statues.

Located in Mogoșoaia (literally, Mogoș' wife), the palace was built by Wallachian prince Constantin Brâncoveanu between 1698 and 1702 as a summer residence. After he and his four sons were killed in Istanbul in 1714, the palace became an inn and was all but demolished by Russian forces in 1853. At the end of the 19th century, the estate was handed down to the Bibescu family, descendants of the Brâncoveanus through the female line. A large guesthouse was built and, in 1912, Prince George Valentin Bibescu (1880–1941) relinquished Mogoșoaia to his wife, Martha (1886–1973). Under her guidance, Italian architect Domenico Rupolo restored the estate. State-owned since 1956, the palace served as a museum until the 1970s, when Ceaușescu closed it and took the furniture for his own use. It's again a museum, albeit a bit of a bare one, with a collection of tapestries and old photos.

Prince George Valentin Bibescu is buried in the small, white 1688 church on the estate. A path from the main entrance to the palace leads to the **Bibescu family tomb** where Elizabeth Asquith (1898–1945), the daughter of former British prime minister Henry Herbert Asquith, lies.

The **grave of 'Lenin'** is just north of the palace walls, where statues of Lenin and 1940s communist prime minister Petru Groza lie head-to-head in the weeds. The Lenin statue previously stood outside Bucharest's Press House, and was dumped here after the downfall of Romanian communism.

### Getting There & Away

The palace entrance is 750m north of the start of the lake, on its east side. To get here take tram 20 from Gară de Nord to the last stop on the line (in the Laromet district), from where bus 460 trundles to/from Mogoșoaia.

By car, take national road DN 1A.



## CERNICA

Often missed, but home to some breathtaking interior paintings, Cernica (Sfânta Mănăstire Cernica) is on a small island in the middle of Cernica Lake, 14km east of Bucharest. Two churches, some chapels, a cemetery, seminary and a small **museum** are contained within the intensely beautiful fortified complex, founded on the site of a 17th-century church in 1781.

An earthquake destroyed much of the complex in 1842 but it was successfully restored in the 1990s. A smaller church, **St Nicolae's Church** (Biserica Sfântul Nicolae din Ostrov) was built in 1815, but it was not until the mid-19th century, under the guidance of St Calinic of Cernica, that the monastery really flourished.

Between 1831 and 1838 **St Gheorghe's Church** (Biserica Sfântul Gheorghe) was built, a library and seminary was opened and a school for religious painting set up. After WWII the monastery was closed, not reopening until 1995. Some 50 monks live on the island complex – joined by a causeway to the mainland.

### Getting There & Away

From Bucharest's Pantelimon metro station in east Bucharest, take bus 410 or 459 for about 20 minutes, where it stops outside the monastery gates.

By car, take road 3 past Pantelimon; once across the lake turn right on Șos Cernica towards Budrești.