



Bucharest

POP 2,100,000

Includes »

Sights	31
Activities.....	43
Tours.....	43
Festivals & Events	44
Sleeping.....	44
Eating	46
Drinking.....	47
Entertainment.....	48
Shopping.....	50
Around Bucharest.....	53

Best Places to Eat

- » Caru' cu Bere (p46)
- » Malagamba (p46)
- » Divan (p46)
- » Lente & Cafea (p47)
- » Sale e Pepe (p47)

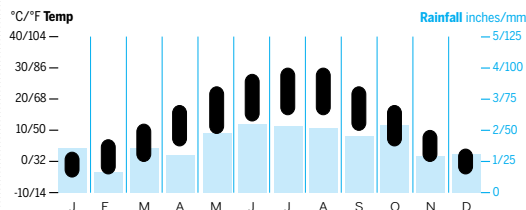
Best Places to Stay

- » Rembrandt Hotel (p44)
- » Z Hotel (p44)
- » The Doors (p45)
- » Hotel Amzei (p45)
- » Vila Arte (p45)

Why Go?

Romania's capital gets a bad rap, but in fact it's dynamic, energetic and more than a little bit funky. It's where still-unreconstructed communism meets unbridled capitalism; where the soporific forces of the EU meet the passions of the Balkans and Middle East. Many travellers give the city just a night or two before heading off to Transylvania, but we think that's not enough. Budget at least a few days to take in the good museums, stroll the parks and hang out at trendy cafes. While much of the centre is modern and garish, you will find some splendid 17th- and 18th-century Orthodox churches tucked away in quiet corners, and graceful art-nouveau villas. Communism changed the face of the city for good, and nowhere is this more evident than at the gargantuan Palace of Parliament, the craziest and arguably crassest tribute to dictatorial megalomania you'll ever see.

When to Go Bucharest



Apr & May City parks erupt into colour as trees blossom and flowers bloom.

Jul & Aug Avoid Bucharest in midsummer, when temps can be oppressively hot.

Sep & Oct Sunny and cooler, but still warm enough for terrace drinking and dining.

History

Lying on the Wallachian plains between the Carpathian foothills and the Danube River, Bucharest 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 Wallachian Prince Vlad Țepeș. By the end of the 17th century, the city was the capital of Wallachia and ranked among southeastern Europe's wealthiest centres. It became the national capital in 1862, as it lay on a 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, the city was known throughout Europe as 'Little Paris' or 'the Paris of the East'.

Bombing by the Allies during WWII, coupled with a 1940 earthquake, destroyed much of Bucharest's prewar beauty. In 1977, a second major earthquake claimed 1391 lives and flattened countless buildings. Former dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu's massive redevelopment of the city in the 1980s, culminating in his grandiose Palace of the Parliament (sometimes still referred to as the 'House of the People'), drove a stake through the heart of Bucharest's elegant past.

The violent revolution of 1989 inflicted serious wounds, both physically and psychologically. Many buildings still bear bullet holes as testament to those chaotic days in 1989 when the anticommunist uprising resembled nothing so much as a civil war. Less than a year later, in June 1990, miners poured into the centre to support a government crackdown on protesting students in a shocking wave of violence that reopened scars that had barely had time to heal.

Although it's still haunted by its recent bloody past, more than two decades on, Bucharest is clearly recovering. The historic core, the Old Town, particularly the area around Str Lipscani, has received a long overdue revamp and there isn't a more enjoyable place in Romania to spend a night out.

Sights

PALACE OF PARLIAMENT & AROUND

Palace of Parliament HISTORIC BUILDING
(Palatul Parlamentului; ②tour bookings 021-414 1426; www.cdep.ro; B-dul Națiunile Unite; standard tour adult/child 25/13 lei; ☉10am-4pm; ♿lzvor)
Facing B-dul Unirii is the impossible-to-miss

Palace of Parliament, the world's second-largest building (after the Pentagon near Washington, DC) and Ceaușescu's most infamous creation. Built in 1984 (and still unfinished), the building has 12 storeys and 3100 rooms covering 330,000 sq metres – an estimated €3.3 billion project. Entry is by guided tour only. Bring your passport as they check IDs.

Several types of tours are available, including a 'standard' tour and a 'complete' tour. Both take around 45 to 60 minutes – the complete tour includes a view of the terrace and the basement. Don't expect a particularly accomplished (or polite) tour guide, but this is the only way to get a glimpse inside. Entry to the palace is from B-dul Națiunile Unite on the building's northern side (to find it, face the front of the palace from B-dul Unirii and then walk around the building to the right). You don't normally have to book tours in advance, but we recommend giving them a call beforehand since the walk to the entrance is long indeed.

National Museum of Contemporary Art

GALLERY

(Muzeul Național de Artă Contemporană; ☎021-318 9137; www.mnac.ro; Calea 13 Septembrie 1; adult 5 lei, student free; ☉10am-6pm Wed-Sun) The Palace of Parliament houses a superb art gallery that displays temporary, ever-changing exhibitions of eclectic installations and video art. There's also a top-floor, open-air cafe. The entry is from the southwestern side of the building (opposite from the Palace of Parliament tour entrance). Check the website in advance to make sure something is on during your visit to spare yourself a long walk.

PIAȚA UNIVERSITĂȚII

If Bucharest has a true centre, which we're not sure it does, it would be somewhere around here, midway between Piața Victoriei in the north and Piața Unirii in the south, with two major north-south arteries on each side: B-dul IC Brătianu to the east and Calea Victoriei to the west. Many university buildings are situated here (hence the name), plus government institutions, grand old buildings and lots of restaurants and bars. This was also the scene of the some of the fiercest fighting during the 1989 revolution and the subsequent miners' revolt in June 1990. Journalists observed both outbursts of violence from the relative security of the upper floors of the Hotel Inter-Continental. Scour the area and you'll still find bullet marks in some buildings.