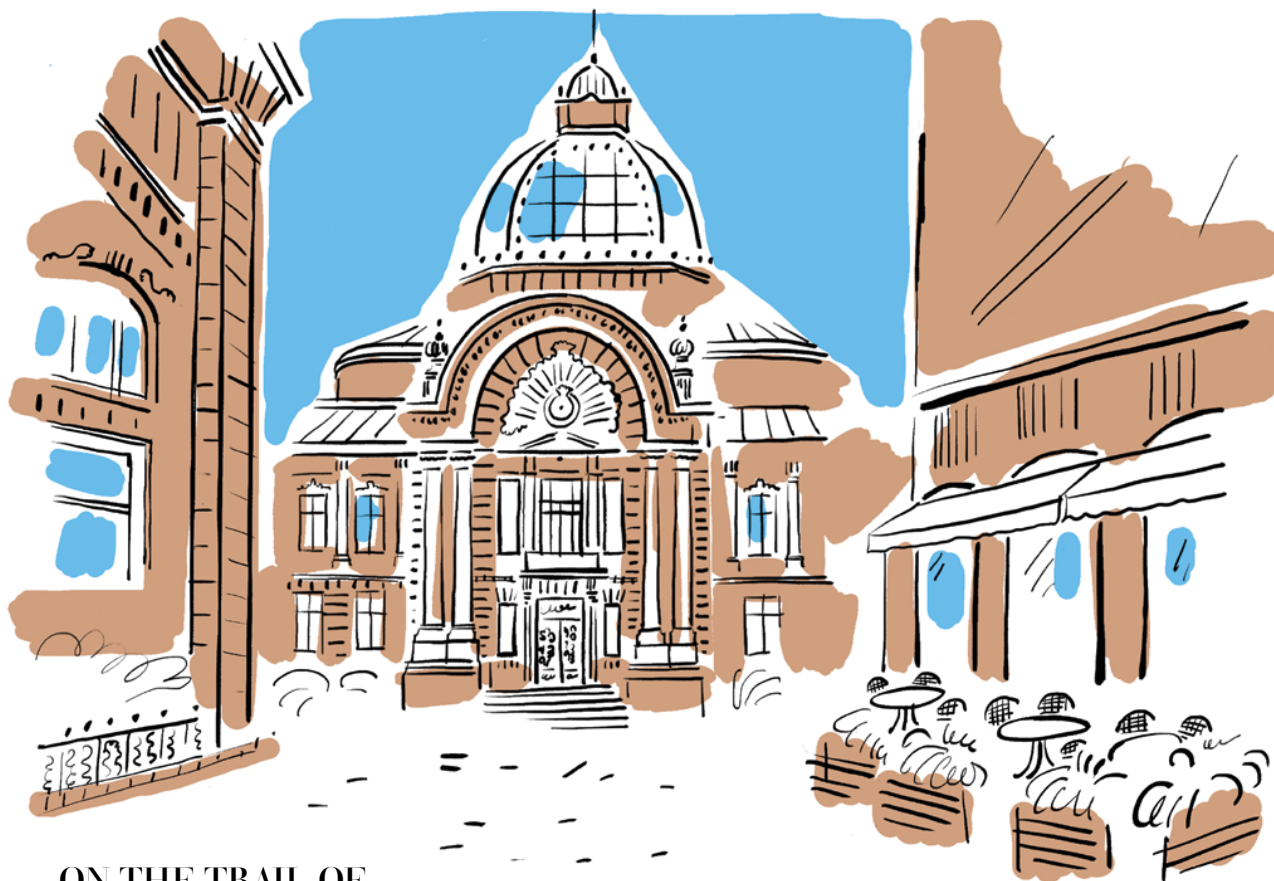


Words by Monica Suma

Photos by Monica Suma, by Shutterstock and Unsplash

Illustration by Agnese Negriha



ON THE TRAIL OF A ROMANIAN ADVENTURE

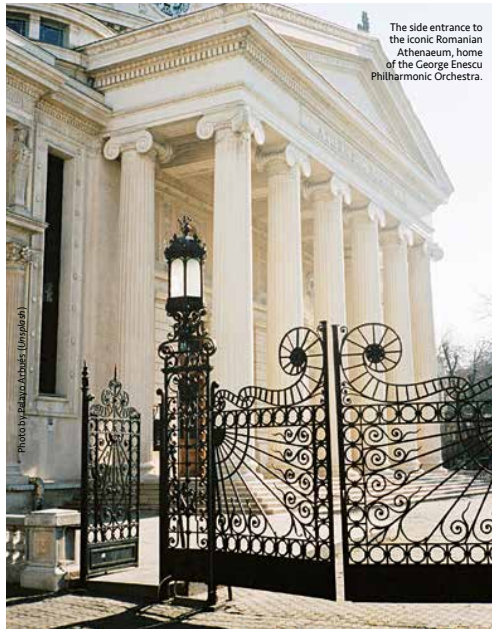
In recent years, Romania has emerged as a go-to destination for gastronomy, distinct heritage sites, and ecotourism. An exploration begins in the much-renewed, dynamic capital of Bucharest, the gateway to an enigmatic Transylvania and the unparalleled Carpathian Mountains. Following a decade in New York City and nearly settling in France, travel writer Monica Suma (a native of Romania) shares why she moved back and why you should visit, too.

Walking always gets my juices flowing. This time, as so many times before, my steps lead me to the Athenaeum for an evening performance. I pay my respects to this neoclassical temple of culture, which welcomes me through its grand columns. No matter if I'm in a rush to get to my seat or not (I usually am), I always stop for photos. I marvel yet again at the magnificent Carrara marble lobby with its 12 pink-hued Doric columns and ornate ceiling and stop at the four monumental spiral staircases leading up to the Big Hall. 'How many photos are too many?' think to myself. It seems there are never enough – I snap away, as if seeing them for the very first time.

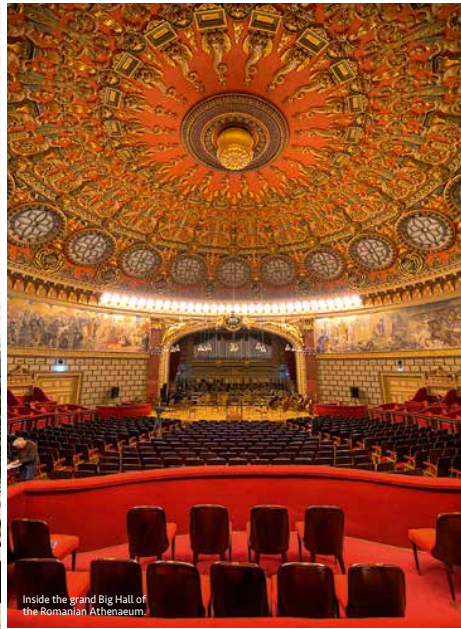
I take in the comings and goings of well-groomed ladies and gentlemen and head up the stairs. It's always my mother greeting me there along with a solid roster of her friends, some of whom come here weekly. Looking above the red velvet seats and loges, a large 70-metre fresco depicting 25 scenes from Romanian history adorns the ceiling, setting the stage for a momentous concert led by the principal conductor, Maestro Christian Badea.

Opened in 1888, the domed Romanian Athenaeum is the most prestigious concert hall in the country, marking a long tradition of classical music. Designed by French architect Albert Galleron, it's home to the George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra and is where this, the most celebrated Romanian composer in history, made his debut and gave the first performance of his masterpiece *Romanian Rhapsodies*. It's also my favourite landmark in Bucharest.

I've been coming here ever since I was a child, when my grandfather would get tickets for the whole family. I cannot think of a more defining location, no other place that conjures up so many memories for me. It was during the summer of 2020, the first year of the pandemic, that I sat here, transfixed, with tears in my eyes, as concerts were held outdoors by the Athenaeum's entrance, next to the stairs – playing in front of masked attendees all around. This is also where we went for our first proper concert back in the late spring of 2021, distanced at 50% capacity but happy. All would be well again.



The side entrance to the iconic Romanian Athenaeum, home of the George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra.



Inside the grand Big Hall of the Romanian Athenaeum.

Bucharest, city of interwar villas, lush parks, ivy-covered houses, and architectural richness

And one reason for that is the biennial George Enescu International Festival that's been honouring Enescu's legacy ever since 1958. The city is always buzzing during the festival, jam-packed with visitors from around the world. In fact, early autumn is a great time to visit Bucharest. The festival season ramps up, an Indian-summer vibe settles in, and holidaymakers are back in town. But late spring, when the scent of magnolias and linden blossoms sweetly soak the air, is also a great time to visit.

At the festival's 26th edition this year (from August 27 to September 24), famed Romanian conductor Cristian Măcelaru will lead as artistic director while also helming the Orchestre National de France as its musical director. Just like Enescu, who was known in the latter years of his life as Georges Enesco in Paris, so the purveyors of his legacy also embrace this century-old French-Romanian cultural connection. We even have our own Arch of Triumph, built to mark victory in the First World War during the reign of Queen Mary and King Ferdinand 100 years ago.

ONCE DUBBED THE 'LITTLE PARIS' FOR ITS GRAND BEAUX-ARTS PALACES, which ooze

Belle Époque grandeur to this day, George Enescu Square is where you should start your exploration of Bucharest. Here you're just steps away from Calea Victoriei (Victory Avenue, the capital's main thoroughfare), the former Royal Palace (which now hosts the National Museum of Art), and the site of events from the 1989 Revolution. It's a vibrant avenue to stroll along, a nucleus where pedestrian-only weekends now take place in the summer as well as events such as the Spotlight Festival, which features video mapping on top sites in the city. As a result of the harsh pandemic restrictions, life here began spilling out onto the sidewalks like never before. That buzz has remained, and these days the avenue is packed from late spring to late autumn with queues for artisanal ice cream, seating for Romanian craft beer bars, and new eateries galore.

Many people only associate Bucharest with communism and head straight to the gigantic Palace of the Parliament, infamous for being the second-largest building in the world after the Pentagon. We locals don't really care for it, aside from the fact that it hosts the Parliament of Romania. I've been inside it only two or three times. But it's inescapable, and it's become a site for events, the MNAC Contemporary Art Museum, and various markets and fairs throughout the year. After all, the palace has plenty of space – some 1100 rooms, most of them still unused.

The Palace of the Parliament is part of a recent brutal past that saw a dictator scrape away an entire neighbourhood, called Uranus, including significant monuments and churches, and displacing thousands



The lounge area at The Marmorosch Bucharest in the Old Town, a late-19th-century bank reopened as a five-star Autograph Collection hotel.



The pedestrian Calea Victoriei and the National Museum of Romanian History on a car-free summer weekend.

of people to erect this palace of preposterous opulence. While 42 years of communism certainly left its scars, the city I came back to has turned the page.

The Bucharest I grew up in and identify with is one of interwar villas, lush parks, ivy-covered houses hiding shady courtyards, and architectural richness. Here you'll find one of the largest concentrations of modernist buildings after Tel Aviv, an abundance of Art Nouveau and Art Deco gems, and also Neo-Romanian monuments. But to do so, you need to stay curious and be open to exploring. Go off the beaten track, outside the rowdy Old Town, and into the quieter districts. Growing up in a Parisian-style villa that my great-grandfather built taught me that.

I find inspiration in meandering through the historic Ioanei neighbourhood, the side streets surrounding the Armenian Quarter, and the tranquil Cotroceni district, which are most suitable for an architectural treasure hunt. Seeing palaces take on new life following sweeping restorations always puts a smile on my face, as does evidence of new establishments stepping in.

It's quarters like these that make us Romanians forget the sheer size of this spread-out capital originally certified as a royal residence in 1459 and with a current population of two million people (but three million transiting each weekday). Unlike its sister capitals in central and eastern Europe, Bucharest – which bustles with cars and a growing population – can at times feel like a beast needing hefty efforts to be tamed.

Despite the urban challenges, however, the city never lost its cultural effervescence. It was during my frequent trips back home while living in France that I first noticed its pull. During invites to the annual Art Safari (the biggest art event in the country) or Romanian Design Week editions, I realised I wanted to witness the flurry of happenings up close. To be part of this new breath of life, this new generation redefining the city. To impart to friends abroad a modern Romania they didn't know or expect to find. It was an energy I connected to, and like-minded people – a tribe I could perhaps join. Just like my mercurial, moody self, in constant need of creative pursuits, so was Bucharest on a quest for creative regeneration, eclectic and looking towards the future.

Ironically, after I moved back home, I became everyone's encyclopaedia of places to go. I had just spent twelve years abroad, so I arrived with fresh eyes. I was the excited newcomer seeing all the potential, a sponge hungry for discovery. And it was the culinary aspect that first drew me in.

Unimaginable perhaps even ten years ago, one of the main reasons to visit Bucharest today is gastronomy. With an ever-growing market of new restaurants, a specialty coffee scene rivaling that of Berlin and Scandinavia, and a revived Romanian wine industry, it's full of all the kinds of spots I'd grown accustomed to living in New York. Endless brunch options, rooftops, plenty of Asian cuisine hotspots... An exquisite New Romanian Cuisine had emerged, led by a new wave of young chefs



Photo by Marian Mera (Unsplash)



A lively café tucked away in a passage off bustling Calea Victoriei.

With a cuisine based on Balkan influences, Romanians take great pleasure in eating

with an interpretation of fine dining based on traditional fare.

I often joke with my foodie squad, passionate travellers, and fellow former expats that our *Excel* spreadsheet of locales never dwindles. As soon as we tick one off, three more places pop up. And of course, eating and drinking is always a nice excuse to 'recentre ourselves'. Or catch up with friends at design-forward cafés that have given rise to large communities and whose baristas are World Coffee Champions.

AS THE ESSENCE OF A HISTORICAL CAFÉ CULTURE, IT'S THE GARDEN BARS I MISSED THE MOST WHILE ABROAD. Going to a *terasă* is a social event of communing, a meeting place in which to socialise and catch up with friends. Just like Parisians break bread with wine and cheese on the Seine, we Romanians head to garden bars. Tucked behind *Cărturești Veronă*, one of the cultural references of the city and the first location of the biggest bookstore in the country, *Café Veronă* is one of the top favourites. *Sera Eden* is another beauty, sitting in a park-like greenhouse behind a

gorgeous mansion and exuding an aura of paradise, just as its name suggests. But perhaps the spot I frequent most is hip *Mercato Kultur* in the verdant, upmarket Aviatorilor area, right next to the German Embassy.

With a cuisine based on Balkan influences but with plenty of Turkish, German, Greek, and Hungarian flavours as well, Romanians take great pleasure in eating. And, despite being a magnet for tourists, I do recommend you sample some of the classic dishes at *Caru' cu Bere*, Bucharest's oldest brewery. Set in a timeless Neo-Gothic interior with stained-glass windows, the dishes are accompanied by buoyant folklore performances in the evening, thus truly completing the local experience.

The typical home-cooked meal involves *sarmale* (grape or cabbage leaves stuffed with minced meat and rice) with *mămăligă* (polenta), but I like to order the brewery's slow-roasted pork knuckle with braised sour cabbage and horseradish. It's on the big side, but it's fall-off-the-bone delicious. I'm always amused when visiting friends first look at the dish with suspicion, and then proceed to unapologetically tuck into it. It's *that* good, especially with a house beer whose recipe dates back to 1879.

For a cosier experience, Marius Tudosie's *Băcănia Veche* ('the old grocer') is the friend you didn't know you needed. Known for its artisanal delicacies and home-cooked meals, the latest bistro on Bulevardul Dacia is everyone's go-to place for a delicious, more refined take on local dishes. For my mother and me, it's like our home away from home. With an

intimate, softly-lit garden you never want to leave, we recommend the meat-and-cheese platter for making an exciting acquaintance with local charcuterie. Also delightful are the eggplant salad and the *zacuscă* – both staple, smoked-vegetable spreads. But frankly, anything is good if suitably washed down with a glass of Romanian wine. Try local grape varieties such as white Fetească Regală (meaning 'royal maiden') and red Fetească Neagră, among many others.

IN CONTRAST TO FLAT, BUSTLING BUCHAREST, A QUIETER WORLD OF MOUNTAINOUS ADVENTURE AND MEDIEVAL CHARM AWAITS IN TRANSYLVANIA. It might come as no surprise that 'the land beyond the forest' (as per its meaning in Latin) is the most popular region in the country, partly due to Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*. A real-life prince – an ancestor of the King of England, no less (although no vampires that I know of...) – did in fact inspire the story. But fables and folklore aside, prepare to discover a magical land of castles, fortresses, and Saxon villages crowned by fortified old churches.

But even more than the rich local culture (for which we can thank a unique merging of historical influences), the secret sauce that proves so alluring time and again in this province is not *so* secret after all. In the end, it's all about a simpler way of life here, about steadfast traditions passed down through the generations, about crafts and customs from yesteryear that are still practised and observed. And, more and more, it's also about ecotourism. Village



A local favourite, Café Veronă is a fine example of bohemian Bucharest – a chill, shaded garden terrace serving a variety of food and drinks, tucked behind the Belle Époque villa housing the Cărturești Veronă bookstore.

life is the bedrock from which Romanian culture springs, and nowhere is this more intriguing than in Transylvania.

Nature lovers are also in for a big treat. Amidst the vast wilderness of the Carpathian Mountains, Romania holds the last primal forests in Europe. It's why films such as *Cold Mountain* starring Nicole Kidman, Jude law, and Renée Zellweger were shot in the Carpathians, amidst snow-covered rural landscapes and in nearby fields and farms unfettered by signs of modern life. A life-long favourite destination of King Charles III and the subject of travel documentaries such as *Wild Carpathia* by Charlie Ottley (and several other docuseries that followed, including *Flavours of Romania on Netflix*), scenic beauty can be found all around this multicultural region where Romanians, Germans, Hungarians, and many others have left their imprint.

Whenever I crave a day trip outside the capital, I take the 90-minute train ride from the North Railway Station to Sinaia. I never tire of the elegance of this mountain resort town in picturesque Prahova County, chosen by King Carol I of Romania as his royal summer residence due to its outstanding location in the Bucegi Mountains. Stroll up the pathway leading to Peleș Castle, a commanding Neo-Renaissance and Gothic Revival castle erected for Carol I of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, honouring the family's German heritage. Now a museum, don't miss the guided tour inside. Thanks to its postcard vistas and grand interiors (as well as the smaller Pelișor Castle just a short walk away), several films

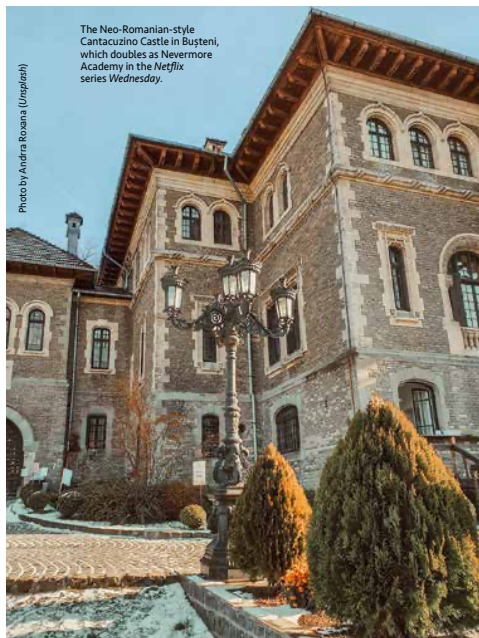


Photo by Andra Roșanu (Unsplash)

The Neo-Romanian-style Cantacuzino Castle in Bușteni, which doubles as Nevermore Academy in the Netflix series Wednesday.



Statuary décor overlooking the balconies of Cantacuzino Castle.

Photo by Tófan Teodor (Unsplash)

This is the site for Nevermore Academy in Tim Burton's ultra-popular series Wednesday

about princes and royal matchmaking have been shot here. You might also recognise the royal train station of Sinaia doubling as Burlington Station in the *Netflix* smash hit *Wednesday*.

Continue with a short train ride to Bușteni, where another resplendent castle awaits. Here, you can walk up to Cantacuzino Castle, a Neo-Romanian castle built in the Brâncovenesc style on the order of Prince Gheorghe Grigore Cantacuzino, the country's prime minister around the turn of the 20th century. Set on the premises of a former hunting lodge, this is the site for Nevermore Academy in Tim Burton's ultra-popular series *Wednesday*.

I loved to come here even before streaming viewership records magnified interest in this castle. Especially in autumn, when – as seen on the show – the foliage is golden and the weather stays warm until late October. It's definitely more radiant than the woeful yet brilliantly cinematic outbreak portrayed by the characters on TV. The guided tour inside is lovely, with art exhibits often on display, but the real cherry on the cake here is having lunch on the terrace of *Canta Cuisine Restaurant*, which overlooks a magnificent lineup of mountaintops. As

crowds are likely to be higher these days, especially when it's sunny, arrive early or during the week for better chances to get a table.

Further inland, dive deeper into Siebenbürgen, this region's German name referring to 'the seven citadels'. In the 12th and 15th centuries, Saxon settlers were brought in during the Hungarian rule of this area to protect its southern borders from invading Turks and Tatar Mongols. They erected a wealth of fortified churches and citadels, many of which still stand today.

IF YOU HAVE A FEW DAYS TO EXPLORE TRANSYLVANIA, HEAD SOME 40 KILOMETRES NORTH TO BRAȘOV, either by car or on a one-hour train ride. It's the most visited destination in Romania for a reason, and with a brand-new airport being inaugurated later this year, it's no wonder why. Brașov ticks all the boxes. As one of the best-preserved citadel towns, this compact mountain outpost is picture-perfect with Saxon architecture, bastion walls, Gothic spires, and orange-hued roofs. Located at the foot of forested Mount Tâmpa (easily accessed via hiking trails or cable car for panoramic views), a Hollywood-like sign spelling out 'Brașov' in white letters proudly glistens on the horizon. Lively Piața Sfatului is dotted with hip cafés, restaurants, and colourful architecture.

Aside from being a favourite for mountain lovers due to its proximity to the Poiana Brașov ski resort, Brașov is a great base from which to see more. And here comes your chance to learn what's the deal



A panoramic view of Brașov from the 15th-century Black Tower, easily accessible on foot.

with Dracula. Stoker's book catapulted sites such as the mystery-filled clifftop Bran Castle to fame, which is why tourists come here in droves. But the legend is exactly that – only a legend. Vlad Țepeș, the ruthless 15th-century Wallachian prince known as Vlad the Impaler, who inspired the fantasy novel, never lived

here. And Stoker never even set foot in Transylvania. That said, this medieval castle is nevertheless worth the trip, if you can avoid it during peak season.

Closer to reality, consider continuing 60 kilometres further north into storybook Sighișoara, a UNESCO-protected town that's not to be missed.

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In Transylvania, rural landscapes are enhanced by the commanding peaks of the Carpathian Mountains.

This is where, in 1431, the same dreaded Vlad Țepeș is said to have been born in a house that can be visited today. The town is the last inhabited medieval fortress in Europe, whose famous 14th-century Clock Tower is still standing. But history aside, you may just fall in love with all the rainbow-coloured houses, ancient cobblestone streets, and pretty merchant houses.

Sighișoara tends to get filled with tourists, though, so plan on spending an afternoon there but staying the night elsewhere. And you may find the best opportunities for that off the beaten path, in the quiet, old-world Saxon villages nearby. Because this area is more remote, exploring by car is ideal here.

Inscribed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site due to their unique fortified churches, the villages of Biertan, Călnic, Dârjiu, Prejmer, Saschiz, Valea Viilor, and Viscri – six of them Saxon and one Székely – are a dream come true for adherents of the slow-travel movement encouraged here. With distinct, traditional crafts still observed and many of the characteristically Saxon houses wonderfully restored in bright colours, plan a stop here for a real slice of Transylvanian idyll.

I recently spent a few days in Biertan, and the mist-shrouded village provided the reset I needed. Waking up in a traditional guesthouse to the sound of tranquillity, the smell of a wood-burning stove, and



Driving the Transfăgărașan mountain road crossing the Southern Carpathians is one of the most unforgettable experiences in Romania.

the joyous sound of birdsong in the brisk morning air with the Fortified Church of Biertan in the background remains imprinted on my memory. That, along with the richness of rose-hip jam and tarragon soups prepared in the area, never served without a shot of gut-wrenching *țuică* or *pălincă* (a plum brandy between 40 and 50% alcohol) to start things off. This is an extraordinary part of Transylvania, free of the busyness and noise we've grown all too accustomed to. Which is why initiatives such as the newly inaugurated Via Transilvanica – a long-distance trail that will be 1400 kilometres long when completed and cross the entire country – aims to nurture rural Transylvania and other unique areas.

Not far from nearby Sibiu, another main citadel city worthy of an extended stop, the thrilling 85-kilometre Transfăgărașan road leads south. Labelled one of the best driving roads in the world by the BBC's *Top Gear*, adventure seekers will love this jaw-dropping marvel. Connecting Transylvania with Muntenia (the region in historic Wallachia where Bucharest lies) through the highest and most spectacular mountain range of the Southern Carpathians, the Făgăraș Mountains, the journey peaks at 2042 metres at Bălea Glacier Lake. The road is open from mid-June to the end of October, but do double-check before setting out, just in case the route is temporarily closed due to weather or some other reason.

Take in the bulging hills and waterfalls flashing before you, and be prepared for likely encounters with brown bears, of which Romania has the most in Europe (about 60%). On the Transfăgărașan, you're some three hours away from Bucharest and probably quite content with your adventure thus far. Perhaps you're even craving for more. Are you?



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Photo by Christina Tudose

Chef Radu CM Ionescu and Cezara Tănase are the young duo behind the intrepid *Kaïamo*, a restaurant serving state-of-the-art, experimental Romanian cuisine. Inspired by the food of their childhoods, Chef Radu and his partner returned home after seven years studying, training, and working in the United Kingdom. Wishing to deliver a slice of Romania, they went about creating a sensorial experience from A to Z – from a carefully curated, artisanal interior concept to storytelling on a plate. Included on the 50 Best Discovery list by *The World's 50 Best Restaurants*, *Kaïamo* is bustling with creativity and love for the motherland.

What made you decide to open *Kaïamo* in Romania and move back to Bucharest? While living in London, we used to travel back home for the Easter and Christmas holidays. On a winter day back in 2017, while surrounded by family, we made the decision to open *Kaïamo* in Bucharest rather than London, which was the initial plan. We had high hopes of influencing the local gastronomic scene and of becoming a pioneer in the culinary change we felt our country deserved.

At its core, *Kaïamo* tells a story – a story of Romanian customs, artisans, and local, seasonal products. How do you continue to innovate and introduce new menus, and therefore also new stories?

Our aim was to return to our origins, to when our ancestors' meals were defined by their geographical location and the season of the year. We construct two menus each year: a spring-summer menu and an autumn-winter menu. Each dish is created and connected to its own manifesto. We adjust according to Mother Nature, the seasons, and the micro-seasons. We work with as many local products as possible, and sustainability plays a major role in our restaurant.

We take an ethical approach when it comes to product sourcing and do not compromise on taste, flavours, or the creativity within this process. In our kitchen, food needs to be fun. It also needs to stimulate both the appetite and the mind. That's an important element that we constantly strive for.

What do you enjoy most about Bucharest? What did you miss while living in London? We're constantly fascinated by how this city, like Romania itself, is reminiscent of an era of simpler things, of artisans and architectural gems, and also of a bohemian spirit that keeps it alive and unique in terms of cultural and gastronomic flavours.

Nonetheless, in recent years, this bohemian spirit has been blending perfectly with a new generation of specialty coffee shops, cocktail and wine bars, and micro-breweries that have created their own communities. You'll see this contrast of old vs. new in many corners of Bucharest,

making the city so much more exciting than it was ten years ago. We strongly believe that our return to Romania came at the perfect time, when the demand and desire emerged in the local market to move forward and create a new Bucharest – for locals as well as tourists.

Aside from *Kaïamo*, where do you like to eat in Bucharest? Any hidden gems visitors should know about?

No visit to Bucharest is complete without the famous *mică* at the Obor Market. These barbecued meat rolls are a must-try when you visit our country. Consider it the most authentic street-food experience you can get in the city. Otherwise, for burgers, don't miss the guys at *Burger Van*. For fish and seafood, it's always *Fish House* for us. Go to *Kunnai* for a perfectly cooked Thai curry, and *Pizza Mania* is always the first choice for pizza. For Asian flavours, you'll leave a happy client at either *Ruka Izakaya* in Floreasca or *Yoshi Izakaya* by Cișmigiu Park.

Bucharest has changed dramatically in terms of gastronomy in the past few years. What do you say to foreign guests who perhaps don't know what to expect?

Expect to be deliciously surprised! This city is the definition of the phrase 'under-promise and over-deliver'. This is how we see Bucharest these days, and to some extent we receive that same feedback every night from our guests. For example, 'I was not expecting to have the best dinner of my life in Bucharest!' We love seeing the reactions of surprise combined with the right amount of satisfaction, joy, and indulgence.

We've evolved so much as a country in the past few years. And Bucharest is, without a doubt, the pinnacle of change when it comes to culinary evolution.

What's coming up next for *Kaïamo*?

The best part of our story is still under construction. And we don't plan to ruin that surprise for you. After all, we're #notjustarestaurant. As a guest, we invite you to step into our world and allow us to influence your stories. Contemplate this! kaïamo.com

USEFUL ADDRESSES

WHERE TO STAY

The Marmorosch Bucharest, Autograph Collection

In the heart of Bucharest's Old Town, the legendary late-19th-century *Marmorosch-Blank Bank* oozes Belle Époque grandeur and has now reopened as *The Marmorosch Hotel*. High ceilings and exquisitely restored Neo-Romanian features dominate the Art Deco interiors. There's bouchon-style dining, a generous spa, and the former bank safe repurposed into *The Vault*, a speakeasy complete with original safety deposit boxes.

Strada Doamnei 2
marmorosch.com

InterContinental Athénée Palace Bucharest

Originally opened in 1914, the *Athénée Palace Bucharest* directly across from the Romanian Athenaeum is the most iconic hotel in the city. Overlooking the former Royal Palace on Calea Victoriei, this was one of Europe's most notorious hideouts for spies leading up to the First World War. The swanky Art Nouveau and Beaux Arts hotel was recently renovated and reopened under the *InterContinental* umbrella.

Strada Episcopiei 1-3
atheneepalace-hotel.ro

Hotel Epoque Relais & Châteaux

Situated right by Cișmigiu Park, the city's premier English-style garden dating back to 1847, this five-star retreat is centrally located yet sheltered from the noisy streets. The classy boutique hotel strikes a chord in terms of individuality and discreet luxury. There's a soothing spa, a restaurant featuring indulgent French gastronomy, and impeccable service that makes you feel right at home.

Intrarea Aurora 17C
hotelepogue.ro

WHERE TO EAT

POT.Stories

Located in the happening Floreasca quarter, eating at *POT.Stories* is like taking a trip around the world. With dishes referred to as short stories, such as 'Piperchi from the Armânji Tales, a legendary Vlaho-Machedonji spell made with Romanian bell pepper, cherry tomatoes, and local sheep's cheese', this airy, expansive eatery is an oasis-like retreat. Expect exotic chandeliers made of organic textures, a lounge area with burning incense, and a striking wooden horse. Plants are in abundance, and the restroom is a sight in and of itself.

Calea Floreasca 111-113
potstories.ro

Noua Bucătărie Românească

Inside an ivy-covered house built in 1915 in the Armenian quarter, a journey into Romania's culinary heritage is theatrically served 'in six acts' on a wooden board in the shape of the country. In this Romania-on-a-platter puzzle of sorts, each bite-sized appetiser represents one of the country's six regions. It's an innovative new approach to Romanian cuisine in this dinner-only venue headed by chef Alex Petricean. His latest venue, the more casual *Noua B. A. R.*, is an equally

fascinating universe of popular classics with a twist and tantalising brunch-like treats.

Strada Popa Nan 7
nouarestaurant.ro

The Artist

More than ten years since opening, this fine-dining locale set in an elegant villa in a prime location on Calea Victoriei remains one of the most awarded and visited culinary destinations in the city. In this modern European restaurant with a Romanian twist, Dutch chef Paul Oppenkamp prepares his dishes like pieces of art. Serving a molecular gastronomy experience of superb gourmet artistry, this classy entry on the 50 Best Discovery list by the World's 50 Best Restaurants is not to be missed.

Calea Victoriei 147
theartist.ro

WHERE TO SHOP

Cărturești Carusel

As one of the outposts of the top bookstore *Cărturești*, which has many locations across the country, *Cărturești Carusel* has won plaudits as one of the most beautiful bookstores in the world. Housed in a famed 19th-century building that reopened after a quarter of a century, the sixth-floor cultural venue boasts a bistro up top and is a most suitable spot not only for your *Instagram* account but also for a chance to stock up on souvenirs.

Strada Lipscani 55
carturesticarusel.ro

Ototo

With already three locations in Bucharest, new local favourite *Ototo* breaks the mould as a concept store for organic, artisanal Romanian foods and drinks as well as high-quality, natural cosmetics. It also has a community-driven specialty coffee shop on site. This, the biggest address on Calea Victoriei, dedicates the entire second floor to small, independent fashion brands focused on sustainability and conscious living.

Calea Victoriei 153
ototo.ro

AlbAlb

Housed in a charming interwar villa in the elegant Dorobanți district, *AlbAlb* is a well-curated shop promoting contemporary Romanian art and design where visitors will find artisanal jewellery, ceramics, illustrations, and fashion labels. This concept store features one-off

creations by Romanian artists in a minimalist, discrete setting with a cosy vibe.

Strada Locotenent Aviator Șerban Petrescu 1
albalb.com

WHAT NOT TO MISS

National Village Museum

Take in a sample of rural Romania at the National Village Museum on the shores of Herăstrău Lake and follow up the ethnographic cultural immersion with a long stroll through the sprawling King Michael I Park. Dozens of barns, farmsteads, wooden churches, windmills, peasant homes, and more are on display – all original ensembles embodying different styles from across the country.

Șoseaua Pavel D. Kiseleff 28-30
muzeul-satului.ro

Spring Palace

In the exclusive Primăverii district, dive into Bucharest's communist past at the Spring Palace, the former family home of Nicolae Ceaușescu, his wife Elena, and their three children. Left as it was the day they fled, the guided tours (by appointment only) take you inside the mind of a dictator as well as his golden bathroom and decadent mosaic-lined spa.

Bulevardul Primăverii 50
casaceausescu.ro

MARe/ Museum of Recent Art

As a stark contrast to the Spring Palace just down the block, the private Museum of Recent Art (MARe) features communist-era modern art from the 1960s onwards displayed in a minimalist Scandinavian-like building. On the ground floor, *Beans & Dots* offers specialty coffee and selected eats, extending to a great terrace during the warm season. Don't miss the design-centric shop at the entrance, which is perfect for hip souvenirs. Bulevardul Primăverii 15
mare.ro



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| 03 | B | GISELLE | |
| 04 | B | THE FOUNTAIN OF BAKHCHISARAI | |
| 05 | O | CARMEN | |
| 08 | O | DIE LUSTIGE WITWE | |
| 09 | B | TELL ME (NO) TALES. HAMLET | |
| 10 | O | MADAMA BUTTERFLY | |
| 11 | B | LA BAYADÈRE | |
| 12 | O | TURANDOT | Returns to the repertoire! |
| 16 | B | SWAN LAKE | |
| 17 | B | SWAN LAKE | |
| 18 | O | THE QUEEN OF SPADES | Conductor Vassily Sinaisky |
| 19 | B | KARLSSON FLIES... | |
| 22 | O | SIMON BOCCANEGRA | |
| 23 | B | SERENADE. CARMINA BURANA | |
| 24 | O | DIE LUSTIGE WITWE | |
| 25 | B | AT THE BLUE DANUBE | |
| 26 | O | LA TRAVIATA | |
| 29 | B | DRACULA | |
| 30 | O | DON GIOVANNI | |
| 31 | B | DON QUIXOTE | |

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