

**"SARBATRI FERICITE!"**

**2007 Christmas Greetings  
to:**

**from Romania**

As one "Born to Travel" I always want the next destination to be someplace special. So why not



Romania in Eastern Europe with its Old World charm? Certainly, one sees McDonald's

here and there, but the country has preserved its unique cultural traditions that go back centuries. Women still sweep doorsteps with handmade brooms, horses still pull wagons and citizens wear peasant costume in many areas.



Our visit centers on the three main provinces: Transylvania famous for its fortified churches; Wallachia known as the "Heart of Romania" with its centrally located capital of Bucharest; and Moldavia outstanding for its beautifully painted monasteries and great folklore traditions

In addition to all we planned to see and do, we anticipated participating in a real mystery. Would we find Maggie and Molly's "Mother Teresa?" Read on.

Romania is a beautiful country, roughly about the size of the state of Oregon nestled between the Danube River and the Black Sea at the edge of Eastern Europe. It borders Hungary and Serbia to the west, the Ukraine to the north and

east. Bulgaria borders Romania on the south. The Danube River forms much of the border with Bulgaria and Serbia.

"Romania" derives its name from the words "Roman" and "Rome." Romans occupied the province of Dacia from about A.D.100 to 271. The Romanian language originated in the West and shares Latin origins with other Romantic languages such as French and Spanish. However, Slavic influences prevailed, too. The straddling of east and west gave us much to look forward to.

Tolstoy visited Romania and he commented that Romanians seemed tormented by a "sad destiny," which he based on the country's troubled past. It's past is marked by wars. Peace and nationhood is new to a region that survived invasions from Saxons, Slavs, Magyars, Huns, Indians and the mighty Ottoman Empire. A series of tyrannical kings ruled Romania.

Romania fell into the Soviet sphere of influence as a result of the military agreements of Stalin and Churchill at Yalta in August 1944. A Communist-dominated government won elections in 1946. King Michael abdicated in 1947. The USSR controlled Romania until 1958.

An upstart Communist named Nicolae Ceausescu ran a neo-Stalinist iron curtain police state from 1967 to 1988. He ransacked the country of everything he could export – food, fuel and other essentials to pay for his \$410 million debt. He brought the country to the brink of starvation in 1982.

Furious anti-Communist protests in 1989 led to the execution of Ceausescu and his wife. Two years later Romania instituted a new democratic constitution.

Today President Basescu endorses an agenda of reform and rooting out corruption. Romania joined NATO in 2004 and in 2005 the EU approved

the entry of Romania effective in 2007 based on a number of reforms made by the country.

Bucharest is Romania's largest city and its name means gladness. Once dubbed the "Paris of the East." we found exquisite 18<sup>th</sup> century monasteries, broad boulevards and Romantic, Neoclassical and French architecture. We walked on cobbled narrow streets and saw ancient gateways leading to secret courtyards of old villas with stone and carved



pillars. Angels and demons alike adorn the windows and doorways. We rode down one wide boulevard where thirteen

islands filled with flowers and flowing fountains separate the lanes of traffic. Each island represents a province of Romania.

Budapest's great beauty crumbled during Ceausescu's reign. He demolished about one-sixth of Budapest's historic district so that he could erect a civic center and the House of Parliament. The area, equal in size to Venice, included an entire community of 9,000 nineteenth century homes, 26 churches, two synagogues, and one monastery. He relocated 70,000 people by moving them into poorly erected Stalin-type high-rises; they still live in these apartments.

We are surprised and pleased at the fury of activity in the city today. Bucharest is in the process of changing for the better: newly paved roads, old monuments and buildings under restoration, new commercial districts, and new buses are creating better lives for Bucharest's inhabitants. This also improves the image of the city and country in the eyes of the world.

Ceausescu's Palace of Parliament looms on the horizon like a huge

wedding cake with its 1,100 rooms and 12-story height. Some of the rugs are so immense workers moved their machines inside the building in order to weave them. Ceausescu depleted the supply of Romanian marble in such a manner that tombstone needed to be made from other materials. Coming into view are miles of silk drapery, walnut paneling, and tons of oak and gold leaf. 45,000 chandeliers dazzle the interiors of this building.

Known as the "Palace of the People," he intended to use it his headquarters. He welcomed President Nixon.

The building impressed me until I realized how much the people starved and how hospitals lacked supplies in order to satisfy the whims of this man. In one extreme three times in order to accommodate his small feet.

The Communist State lavishly funded the building of opera houses and music halls. Nearly every town boasts its own music center. In Bucharest the Romanian Athenaeum marks the cultural and social center of the city. Recognized as one of the loveliest buildings with an imposing rotunda and a huge dome, a French architect designed the building in 1888. There are mosaics of former rulers and frescoes that feature Romanian history. We look up into the dome and note painted lyres there.

Many famous musicians made their first appearance in the concert hall, but the most beloved person is the Romanian composer George Enescu. In 1889 he performed his masterpiece The Romanian Rhapsody; based on his country's

folksongs. Not only beloved by his countrymen, the world regards his work as synonymous with Romania. Today, the George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra claims the hall as it s own.

How fortunate we are to attend a concert of the works of Stravinsky and Dvorak one night in the Athenaeum.

The George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra gave the music much intensity. Romanians take such pride in the Romanian Rhapsody they willingly play the music at every request we make. We heard variations played by a trio of violins, a band with various instruments, and by an orchestra.

In addition to listening to



wonderful music, we enjoyed many traditional Romanian dances. Many restaurants offered programs of folk dancing during dinner hours.

Loud shouts and calls known as Strigaturi accompany many Romanian dances that are rhythmic and often cut across the melody. The selection of dances is usually in a fixed order – the slowest dances first, often followed by men dancing and showing off. The dance ends with the fastest selections.

The name for the most widespread dance in Romania is the Hora. Everyone gathers in a circle, the dancers with their hands joined at the shoulder and held slightly forward. The circle spins clockwise as each dancer follows... a sequence of three steps forward and one step back. Musical instruments accompanying the dance are the

cymbal, accordion, violin, double bass and violin.

The dancers wear traditional costumes; shirts worn by the men reach down to the knees and worn over trousers or leggings; women wear two aprons, one worn in the back and one in the front. The costumes vary in different districts.

Now, a little bit about Romanian food. Did you know the word "barbecue" comes from the Romanian word "barec" and means roast mutton?

Romanian cuisine is rich and flavorful. One recipe can require numerous ingredients, including meat, various kinds of vegetables, and plenty of herbs and spices. And take hours to make.

The freshness, quality and flavor of fruits and vegetables won us over! It's all very healthy because animals only feed on green grass and spring water.

Romanian cheese is great. One finds sheep cheese, cow cheese, or goat cheese. And wonderful wine comes from plums.

The Romanians retain their own traditional dishes such as a cornmeal mush, stuffed peppers, pork stews, cabbage rolls, and turkey soup, etc.

History makes Romanian food special. Austrians, Russians, Poles, and the Turks once occupied the territory. And they are still a Latin people. Where else would you find such a mixture?

A great number of proverbs and sayings have developed around the activity of eating for Romanians.

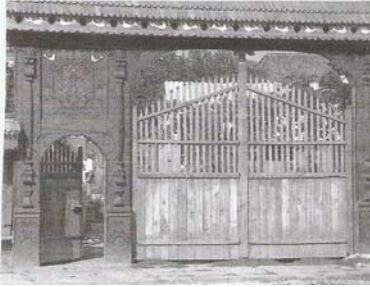
"Thank you for the meal  
It was good and tasty  
And the cook is beautiful."

"Thank you Lord  
For I have eaten  
And I am hungry again"



**The wonderful open-air Village Museum in Bucharest reflects the life of ethnic minorities of Romania.** Over three hundred wooden and clay structures include peasant dwellings, churches and workshops. This collection from every region of Romania shows the extreme diversity of Romanian folk architecture.

**The oaken houses from Maramures emphasize rope-motif carvings and shingled roofs.** Their



beamed gateways present carved hunting scenes: Adam and Eve and the Tree of Life, and suns and moons. Vegetables grow on the roofs of dugouts from Fraghiceni. The importance of livestock can be seen in Hardhat because the barns are taller than their houses.

**We follow the artistic route through Romania setting out on a tour of the green and craggy Carpathian Mountains.** The heart-stopping road is filled with hairpin curves on a 16 percent grade, overhanging sheer gray cliffs, and swiftly running mountain streams that tumble down from high above makes for dramatic beauty. Workmen repairing the road sometimes stopped traffic, but we didn't mind; it gave us more time to enjoy the scenery. Cars, horse-drawn carts, the animals wearing bridles adorned with the traditional red tassels gave us much to look at.

**The province of Moldova is famous for its painted monasteries as religious frescos cover the exterior walls, eaves to ground, in at least five monasteries In Voronets, Humor, Moldovista and**

**Sucevita.** The buildings vary little from one monastery to another, except for the colors. Colors vary from the greens of Sucevita to the blues of Veronet and the reds of Humor.

**Hundreds of tableaux on church walls remind us of Sunday school lessons.** Robed saints, with halos behind their heads, demons driving rows of sinners towards terrible fates, and the righteous, aided by angels, climbing ladders into heaven.

**UNESCO Heritage Monuments includes these churches with precious paintings as tourist attractions; to Romanians they remain active places of worship.** In several monasteries we heard the voices of the clergy responding to the chanting of the priest. In one instance we heard a clacking sound as a priest hit a long wooden board with small mallets announcing the start of services.

**These lovely churches give us a chance to learn a little history, too.** Located in the lonely outposts on the plains of Central Europe with no natural defenses, these churches served as fortresses. They withstood Turkish invasions, Austro-Hungarian rule, the chaos of two World Wars, and Ceausescu's cruel communist regime. Miraculously the well-preserved frescos appear much as they did 500 years ago when first built despite the wall's exposure to heat, snow, rain, wind and pollution.

**History also tells us that people, even the few who could read in the mid-1400s, rarely understood the Cyrillic script or the words of the clergy.** Therefore, the paintings provided the churchgoers something to look at and study when they visited since they couldn't read the Bible and understand the services.

**What makes these monasteries so special?** These frescos mix Romanian folk art style and mythology with Byzantine and Gothic influences.

Byzantine influence limited the art to non-religious forms; it also considered sculpture too profane as a means of expression. Carvings on the broken arches at doors and under the windows belong to the Gothic style.

**We stopped at the monastery of Voronet; sometimes called the Sistine Chapel of the East. But unlike the Sistine Chapel it represents the height of the Renaissance culture.** The Voronet monastery differs from its Italian counterpart: painted walls inside and out; and it lies a few miles off a main highway.

**Maria, our guide talks us through the Orthodox calendar just inside the entry.** She shows us the altar with its icon of God holding a Moldavian scarf representing the universe.

**Perhaps the most outstanding fresco of all fills the entire western wall of this monastery: the Last Judgment.** Vivid blue known as Veronet blue forms the background



for the images.

**The famous blue comes from lapis lazuli stones imported from Egypt.** As with the other monasteries, the formula for creating the exterior colors died with the painters.

**Some of the scenes on the western wall include a funnel of fire at the feet of Jesus as kings, popes, Adam and Eve and other sinners struggle to find their way out.** In another illustration, a hand holds the scale of justice where it weighs the sins of mankind. Animals, too, take part, handing back human body parts to complete the bodies torn

by pieces by wild beasts. The deer alone is innocent of all sins. At the Gate of Heaven, people rush to enter.

Today, through our modern eyes, the painted monasteries don't seem out of place among the quaint villages with cows grazing in pastures and farmers loading hay onto horse-driven carts. In the fields they grow corn, wheat and sunflowers, Tomatoes, cabbage, potatoes, peppers and squash ripen in the gardens.

Each year the European Union chooses one or two member cities to showcase their culture. This creates greater understanding between many cultures.

The city of Sibiu, the Capital of Culture for 2007, spruced up everything from its public squares to its sewers. Citizens restored



baroque architecture and returned treasures to their rightful places in museums. The lower town is one of Europe's best examples of a medieval neighborhood, full of narrow streets and 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century merchants' homes that today house small shops and cafes. Sections of the medieval wall still guard the historic area.

Downtown in the Great Square is a baroque palace, which is the site of Romania's first museum. Older than the Louve in Paris, it is one of the first in Europe. Baron Samuel Brukenthal built the palace to house his art collection. The museum hosts works by Rubens and Vandyke, as well as works from German, Austrian and Romanian masters under stucco ceiling and chandeliers. Masterpieces such as van Eyck's "Man With Ring" is back after the Communists took the painting to Bucharest.

Do you remember those ghost stories that always began: " It is a dark night lit up by lightning and thunder storms licking a castle's spires, with howling wolves and bats harassing the peasants." The stories always take place in the city of Bran, Transylvania; they feature the bloodthirsty Count Dracula as the villain. What usually follows is a scene of a castle sitting on a steep precipice of rock. The official name is Poienari Castle and is the reputed home of Count Dracula with a thick accent.



Dracula is a literary myth created by Anglo-Irish Bran Stoker who never set foot in Romania. He conducted research in the British Museum. His book became a movie with Bela Logos portraying the evil man.}

There is a legend that when the Pied Piper enticed the children from Hamelin, Germany, they vanished underground and emerged in Transylvania in the city of Brasov, near the Council Square.



German influence left a deep mark in fortified churches such as the evangelical Black Church in Brasov. It sits on the edge of the Council Square, the black spires of the church in sharp contrast to the pretty pastel colors of the merchant's houses. We lounge by a circular fountain in an outdoor café soaking in striking views.

The Lutheran fortress, known as the Black Church, took almost a century to complete (1385-1477.) Called the Black Church because a fire started by the Austrian army in 1689 covered the walls with soot, today the inside is startlingly white. Splendid Islamic prayer rugs hang on

the interior walls that proclaim victory over the Infidels and the glory of the God of Rome. In the belfry, it is noted, is the largest mobile bell in the country.

We sat for a while and listened to the organist as he gave a concert on the church's 4000-pipe organ. The backs of the pews are reversible, so we can face the altar; turn the backs and we face the back of the church and the organ.

Also in the city of Brasov we visited some special children and best of all made four peoples' dream come true.



Ceausescu passed laws concerning women and children that are still have an effect today. In the belief that the key to industrial growth lay in building a larger workforce, he banned abortions and contraception in 1966. This law concerned women under the age of 40 with fewer than four children. Later he amended the law in 1972 by raising the age to 45 and five children. Unable to provide the barest necessities for their children, such as food, etc., the children suffered malnutrition and hunger. He forced families to give their children to the state. The government soon opened factory-like orphanages for the abandoned children

The plight of Romanian orphans in the 1990's, after Ceausescu's death, resulted in foreigners including Americans to adopt at least 10,000 children by 1991. The European Union required Romania to reduce its number of institutionalized

children in order to gain entrance into the Union. The government is now addressing the need for more funding and better housing. There still remain a large number of children in orphanages. Today, relief agencies focus on training and helping Romanians help themselves.

**In Brasov, volunteers now work in homes for orphans, housing about ten to twelve children between four and sixteen years old.** Citizens form organizations dedicated to caring for children and ending orphanages. Relatives and citizens are encouraged to take orphans home for weekend visits to give them love and show them life outside the orphanage. Children are now thriving due to personal interaction with a caring adult.

**We found this true when we visited two orphanages in Brasov.** The children ran to us laughing and smiling and readily grasped our hands. We brought, among many things, sweatshirts, socks, scrapbooks, pens, balls, hairclips, decorations for windows, and stickers, etc. We also served them ice cream bars for a special treat.

**Our trip presented a challenge.** Would we find the girls' "Mother Teresa?" The chances being slim, but why not give it a try? We know Teresa is the birth mother of two young adopted girls who accompanied us to Romania with their grandmother Elizabeth; she brought the two biological sisters on our trip so they could learn more about their heritage and hopefully meet their mother.

**Seventeen years ago Elizabeth and her daughter visited Romania.** They found two sisters forcibly taken by the state when their mother could not care for them. Teresa, only 27 years at the time and widowed, had seven children. Elizabeth and her daughter brought the adopted babies to the states.

Today Maggie, aged 20, is a student at the University. She is interested in foreign banking services with Wells Fargo Bank. Molly, who is 19, is at Tacoma Community College training to be an emergency technician and is currently a fireman's apprentice.

**We ride far into the countryside and stop at the first house on the street in a tiny village.** Our guide and driver knocked on the door. Suddenly, the residents of the house began to run down the street, running from house-to house. Someone knew where Teresa's present husband worked!

**What a feeling of suspense we**



**felt as he accompanied us to a more remote area.** At this house he ran up the stairs to tell her the good news. After an interval she came down the path with her four children by her new husband, a sister, grandchildren, and other family members. Gaps of joy, smiles, tears and hugs marked the reunion as family members embraced the girls.

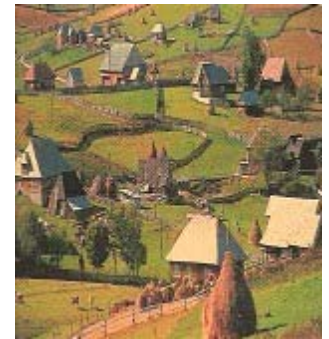
**Sadly, we learn that Teresa is due at the hospital for an examination and possible operation.** She shared a seat on the bus with Maggie and Molly back to the hospital. Molly and Maggie promised to keep in touch with her, and might return to Romania again. Communication is slow and unreliable between Romania and the states. As far as we know, Teresa received some medicine from Molly and doing quite well without an operation.

**Romania offers magnificent architecture and tiny quaint villages to explore; they appear timeless.** The world considers the painted

monasteries as some of Europe's greatest artistic treasures. Not many countries offer such a wealth of distinctive folk music and age-old customs.

**Once one of the most isolated countries under communism, Romania is progressing rapidly in rebuilding and restoring many of its treasures.** Yet, the country retains its rich culture and diversity of her people. The people have survived a troublesome past and a recent revolution with great pride.

**From the mountain peaks as I looked down on the miniature villages below, the quiet and clean air makes one almost forget the troubles of the world.** Visions of Julie Andrews running and singing across the fields came to my mind.



PEACE IS A PRECIOUS  
GIFT

Friends are the Gifts  
we hold in our Hearts  
Every day of the Year

**WISHING YOU ALL MUCH  
HAPPINESS AND GOOD  
HEALTH IN THE NEW YEAR.**

December 2007  
[ldleweiss418@att.net](mailto:ldleweiss418@att.net)

Photo on label by Judy Nadler