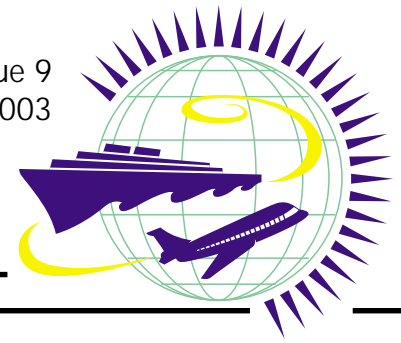


Routon's **ROUSING** Reports

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A Routon's Romantic Reservations Publication – not for resale

This year was to be the one where we spent more time at home relaxing. Well, maybe next year. We no sooner mailed the last edition of RRR and we were off to Romania. And things haven't slowed down since our return – and by the time we can get this written, published and mailed, we will be on the road again! As the Dodgers used to say, "Wait 'til next year".

As mentioned in the last report, it was Romania in August. What do you know about Romania? Probably about as much as I did before this trip. Well, Romania is a new country with an old people. As a country, there was no Romania at all until 1859 when Moldavia and Wallachia accepted a single ruler. With help from France – which explains the ties they still have today – they were able to withstand Hungarian aggressive actions and survive. It wasn't until 1920, after the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in World War I, that Romania took its present shape and was called "Greater Romania".

As a people, however, the roots are

deep, maybe as old as 4,000BC but certainly dating to the Thracians well before the 6th century BC, specifically the northern Thracian tribes called Dacians. The Emperor Trajan conquered the area in two campaigns during 101-106AD. Roman colonization over the next century and a half created a mini melting pot, the basis for Romania today. The language became that of the conquerors, and today's Romanian is still a "romance" or Latin based language, the only one in eastern Europe.

After the Roman armies withdrew, these "new Romanians" were overrun and ruled by first one and then another local or major power: Huns, Avars, Slavs, Bulgars, Magyars, Pechenegs, Tartars, Hungarians (multiple times), Turks, Saxons, and the Russians off and on from 1836 including their stooges in the last half of the 20th century. With the Hungarians on the west, the Turks to the south, and Russians to the northeast, the Romanians have been in the middle – a condition sure to be harmful to your health. Except for a few short years now



Tourist tries the Black Sea



The Last Judgement Fresco at Voronet Monastery

and then, the people have known little but war and subjugation for 2,000 years. Hopefully, the revolution of 1989 will lead to peace and prosperity for this old people in a new country. They have made good progress so far, but they have a long way to go.

Getting back to the trip, it was fun, interesting, thought provoking, entertaining, memorable, educational, heart warming, and exhausting – everything a trip should be. Actually, we started in Budapest, Hungary, where we boarded the *MV River Countess* for an eight day cruise down the Danube to Constanta, Romania, on the Black Sea. While I do not recommend this stretch of the Danube – too flat and uninteresting – I do recommend both the boat and the tour operator, Uniworld in Los Angeles. The boat was absolutely lovely and the food and service strictly 5 to 6 star. (It got me off to a head start on my gain of eight pounds!) We even had

dancing, albeit on a very small floor.

After leaving Budapest, we had stops at Kalocsa in Hungary, Belgrade in Serbia (old Yugoslavia), and Ruse in Bulgaria. In case you don't know, Kalocsa is the paprika capital of the world. They even have a museum dedicated to paprika. And that may give you an idea of how exciting Kalocsa is. They did have a Hungarian cowboy show for us, full of Magyar heritage with a really great finale.



One man "rode" five horses, three in front and two in back with no harness to keep them together. He stood on the rumps of the back two horses and had only reins to control all five. Quite a feat and fascinating to watch as his legs had to adjust to the varying motions of the two horses on which he was standing while controlling all five at a gallop. The trick got its start from a painting, I understand, but easier to paint than to do!

Belgrade is an old city. A fortress controlling the juncture of the Danube and the Sava rivers is still there from before the days of the Romans, and an interesting fortress high upon a hill it is. Our tour included a beer at the Hotel Majestic and, like Belgrade overall, it is not majestic. While there are nice areas, the city has deteriorated since Yugoslavia started coming apart during the Milosovich reign. The buildings we bombed a few years ago in the Kosovo action still sit as if bombed yesterday. (And what precision in the bombing – one building in ruins with buildings on each side untouched!) A quite new, completed, 12 story building



Romania is shaped like a fish

is sitting empty and older buildings have exterior plaster falling off. You feel that as Yugoslavia crumbled under the Serbian dictator, its capital did also – sad.

We skipped the tour in Bulgaria, so all we can report about Ruse from our "walk about" is McDonald's is flourishing, the people are friendly, and the beer is good. So what more do you need to know?

Due to the droughts in Europe this year, we ran out of water – well, deep enough water for our boat – and had to disembark a day early. After establishing a base camp in Bucharest, we did get a thrilling trip to the Black Sea by bus, the closer to the front of the bus the more thrilling! However, our driver only ran two cars *completely*

off the road. Once we arrived, we discovered the Black Sea isn't – isn't black, that is. But the water was warm and the beach crowded with summer vacationers from eastern Europe, Italy, and Germany. Some very nice resorts, nice beach and water, and good looking gals in swimsuits that make a bikini look like a cover-up.

To offset, there were the men with beer bellies hanging over their scant Speedo type trunks – YUCK!

In contrast to Belgrade, Bucharest appears to be a city on the mend. To be sure, much needs to be done to make it a London or Paris (like fixing the subway escalators), but the streets are wide and reasonably clean, the parks are extensive and very nice, the roads while not perfect are good, and while many buildings are old, they do not appear to be crumbling as in Belgrade. Good (and very inexpensive) restaurants, first rate hotels, and several very interesting sights make Bucharest a good tourist city now and one that seems to be getting better.



The roof is looking at you — in Sibiu



Romanian Palace of Parliament viewed from across the square...



...and from the Speaker's Balcony

Probably THE most interesting thing to see in Bucharest is the Palace of Parliament. This is the monstrous building started by the dictator Ceausescu who ruled from 1965 until he was overthrown in December, 1989. Second in size only to the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., this building was to be Ceausescu's headquarters and is complete with a speaker's balcony over a specially cleared square designed to hold thousands to cheer the "glorious leader". Only Ceausescu was executed before he could get the (forced) adulation of the throngs. (However, Michael Jackson was there and from this balcony announced to the crowd, "It's good to be here in *Budapest*." But then I guess he was never good at geography.) The building has a lobby longer than a football field, eleven hundred rooms, 4,500 chandeliers, and contains a whole mountain of marble – marble floors, marble

columns, marble walls. An entire neighborhood full of historic buildings and churches was wiped out to make room for the building and its approaches. The best guess is it also cost 20,000 lives and it definitely helped to devastate the economy of the whole nation.

After our brief stay in Bucharest, it was off to see the cousins and the country. And Helen's cousins and their families were wonderful to us. We had a week just visiting and then another week touring with Marcel, Helen's cousin's son, and his wife, Levisa. Marcel and Simona, another cousin's grand daughter, speak English and, of course, Helen speaks Romanian. To bridge the gap, I immediately learned key words in the local language, words like bere (beer), and va rog (please). Once you can say "bere, va rog", what else do you need to know? (I also found that bere, por favor got both

the beer and laughter.) Pronouncing vreau (I want) was a challenge solved by saying "meow vreau" with meow getting my mouth ready. This, of course, caused hilarity in the family. Nu means no, so "nu meow vreau" was easy. (No need for nu with "bere, va rog" – right?) With our hostess Levisa's wonderful and thoughtful hospitality, CNN in English for the news, lots of smiles, and a little pointing, all was well – I certainly did not go hungry and, yes, I had lots of bere.

We had a super trip around parts of Romania with Marcel and Levisa. With only eight days, we planned to see just portions of Transylvania and Moldavia. Transylvania for the Carpathian Mountains and history and Moldavia for the painted monasteries. The monasteries did not disappoint. Think of this: these monasteries – some still active today – have frescos telling religious stories painted on the outside as well as the inside. Outside walls that have been in the sun for *over 400 years!*, and are still beautiful today. (If we could just get these guys to paint our house next year!!) What was the secret? No one has been able to find out. Some of the exterior frescos are almost humorous in their simplicity and others are full of propaganda like the very fanciful depiction of the unsuccessful Persian siege of Constantinople in 626. (Why? To buoy up local morale against the approaching Turks.) Two of the monasteries we visited had almost duplicate frescos – whole walls – depicting a 16th century, Orthodox version of the Last Judgement with the enemies of the day, the Turks and Tartars, being the evil ones about to go to perdition. Fascinating, history and religion merged with art.

The province of Maramures was just on our route to somewhere else – but it became much more with two sights not to be missed. On a light note was the Merry Cemetery – yes, cemetery. Thanks to a wood carver named Stan Ion Patras and his two apprentices, the cemetery is a tourist site. Brightly painted, wooden headstones are carved with portraits or scenes from the life of the deceased complete with a limerick below. Sadly, limericks do not translate but some are hilarious. Like the one where the woman laments something like, "Why did the ambulance have to run over me?"

The other stop was not light, not

expected, but has created a lasting memory – hopefully. It is now a museum, but it was the Prison of the Ministers. It was here that the Communist government put its most prominent political prisoners, men who were guilty only of being prominent and not Communist. There was no heat, little food, they were not allowed to speak, each one was isolated in 8 x 10 cell, at night they had an iron bed, the rest of the time they had to stand. Solitary confinement was so bad the offending prisoner had to be shackled to the center of the floor. If not, they would try to commit suicide by hitting their head against the cement walls. Death was a blessing. Not new and, God help us, still going on in places in this world. Another reason the Romanians are willing to help us in Iraq.

Transylvania is the large, centrally located province of Romania and is the primary tourist destination. The Carpathian Mountains are beautiful, not rugged but beautiful, and history and its remnants abound. The very roots of the hatred that still burns today between the Hungarians and the Romanians are planted in Transylvanian soil. The Romanians claim the area's indigenous population has been Romanian from Roman times. The Hungarians say it was "empty" land when they, as Magyars, occupied it in the 10th century. And the Hungarians with the Saxons they imported to control the area and fight off the Tartars, Turks, etc., have been the primary controlling power for a thousand years – until the Austro-Hungarian Empire lost World War I and the Romanians were rewarded with most of present day Romania in 1920. This history can be seen in the fortified Saxon villages designed to withstand the Tartar and Turk sieges and the Saxon fortified cities like Sibiu.

I think Sibiu was my favorite city. For history, Sibiu has fortifications, its four ring walls and forty towers from the 14th and 15th centuries that stopped the Turks three times. It has a 14th century Evangelical Cathedral, its sandstone center aisle gently sculpted by hundreds of years of shuffling feet. When its pipe organ, the largest in Romania, is played, it is felt as much as heard. Nearby is the Liar's Bridge. If you tell a lie while standing on the bridge, it collapses. (It must have been out of order the day we were there.) Sibiu is also a fun place with a lovely

Helen's Corner

My last visit to Romania was in the summer of 1970 when I took my Mother to visit her ailing brother, her first visit in 30 years. With the Communists then in power, we were restricted as to where we could go, and a secret service agent became like part of the family, watching and listening. There was uneasiness everywhere. People were afraid to speak about their life. While everyone was very kind, hospitable, and warm toward us, the sadness was pervasive. There was a total lack of modern conveniences. Store shelves were empty, and long lines formed in the early morning darkness to get whatever might come in that day. All farm land was owned by the state. The farmers worked the collective farms but were allowed to keep little for their survival. Most of their meager food supply was what they could raise on the small plot of land behind their house. My cousin's brother was sent to the coal mines – a virtual death sentence – simply because he had relatives, my family, living in the United States.

Today, Romania is still struggling, but oh, how different from what I remembered! There are no secret police and no travel restrictions. People speak freely about their lives, feelings, and beliefs. Many people still lack modern conveniences in their homes, but store shelves are full and overflowing, everything is available. To be sure, money is in short supply and times are very hard, especially for the elderly on meager pensions. Small gardens, chickens, and, in the villages, maybe even a cow and pigs are kept to help make ends meet. The prevailing sadness of 1970 is gone and the uneasiness now is about finances and what the future holds. The one thing that hasn't changed is the kindness, warmth, and hospitality of the people.

My relatives now speak freely about their past experiences. And this brings me to the story of Ana and Florica, my cousins. In 1939, Ana was due to come and join us in the US. However, her mother was ill and plans were delayed too long. Then the war changed Ana's life forever. Florica told me – with tears

in her eyes, even now, 60 years later – one of their stories. They were living with their grandmother – who was also my grandmother – in the farm village of Talposi close to the Hungarian border. One day during the war the word spread, "**The Hungarians are Coming – the Hungarians are Coming**". The whole village was terrified. The Hungarians would be vicious. Villagers loaded their belongings into their horse-drawn wagons and headed eastward. Grandmother decided that Ana, Florica, and their brother should go because even children would be in great danger. Grandma would stay behind to care for the animals and farm. She spoke Hungarian and felt she could pass for Hungarian and would not be harmed.

Ana was put in charge of the wagon and horses and the two younger children. The sparse provisions available were loaded, and they headed eastward following the other villagers, not knowing where they were going – or if they would survive – or if they would ever see their home again. The food disappeared quickly and little Florica, about 6 years old, went from house to house holding out her apron and begging for bread. They were frightened, dirty, hungry. Bombers came and Florica remembers Ana holding her hand and crouching under a bridge abutment as bombs dropped and bullets flew so close their "breeze" fluttered her skirt.

After what seemed like a lifetime, the word came that the Russians were coming from the east and they would be liberated and could go home. They danced with joy in the streets and gave the Russian soldiers whatever bread or fruit they had. Their joy was short-lived as the soldiers were not kind and took advantage of them, taking whatever they wanted. Ana managed to keep the horses but they took the bridles. So, Ana had to walk across Romania, leading the precious horses, as they tried to find the way home. They finally made it. They survived. The leader – Ana – was *13 years old*.

Under the Communist rule, Ana was relegated to manual labor in the fields outside the village. Ana is still in the same farm village doing what she has always

done – surviving. She still has her cow, pigs, chickens, and works her garden. She is no longer hungry. Her biggest problem now is having enough money left from her meager pension (about \$60 month) to buy wood to warm her little house this winter. But this very intelligent woman has a wonderful spirit – she can still laugh and joke. She says, “I’m glad that things are much better now for the young people who can work”, like her granddaughter who is now working toward her doctorate degree. But Ana quietly goes on to say, “*It is too late for me.*”

Please, join me as I pray for these lovely people. They deserve some of the good things in life.



Florica

pedestrian area complete with outdoor cafes. And it has the Sibiu Vechi, a wine cellar converted to an excellent restaurant. (Dinner and wine for four about \$25.)

Of course, no trip to Transylvania would be complete without a trip to the castle at Bran. Now the movie crowd says this was the castle of Dracula. But a couple of problems. First, the supposed Dracula was Vlad the Impaler. While Vlad had a rather bad habit of impaling anyone who disagreed with him – it did definitely eliminate crime, he was not a vampire. Also, the Bran castle was not his castle. No matter, the tourist business is booming and the castle, which was built high on a hill to control the mountain pass and collect taxes, is a delight.

Another must on a trip to Transylvania is Sinaia, actually just over the summit in Wallachia. Overcrowded, but in a beautiful Carpathian valley, Sinaia has the frescos of the 17th century monastery for which the town is named, and they are lovely. But the number one sight is the Peles Palace nestled in a nearby, lush mountain valley. It is spectacular, as nice as any palace I’ve ever seen. 106 rooms richly decorated in ebony, mother of pearl, walnut and leather with 800 stained glass windows, all built for King Carol I, a German imported to be the first king of Romania. Thus, the palace is all done in German renaissance style with the setting, the lush décor, and the architecture all combining to create a gem not to be missed.

And our trip had much more. A salt



mine where our bus drove into a mountain, 3 km in, to a chamber used as a play area and treatment center for asthmatic children. There was the fortified village at Harman. And we had a visit with old friends for Marcel and Livica and new friends for us in Rasnov. We were hosted by Nelu and Stella and their children, Bianca and Christian. Warm and lovely people with Bianca speaking very good English – as well as *four* other languages. Her age – 13! And then just seeing the countryside. The lush valleys and streams of the Carpathians cry out, “Camp here”, while the flat lands are corn, sunflowers, and hay. Animals and poultry graze along the verges of the roads. The cows are tethered but the rest are smart enough to be range free. Where the US is large farm spreads

Ana



and trucks, Romania is still little farms with the horses and wagons yet to be replaced by pick up trucks. This will change as they progress and efficiency replaces picturesque, but for now and for us, it's a "Kodak moment"...

And food!! The cream pastries at Vatra Ardealului in Brasov were so good Helen had *two!* The peasant potatoes were indescribably good with tasty pork or chicken plus a "Bulgarian" salad. The latter was what I called the "clean out the fridge salad". Piles of red, ripe water-melons were in every farm market – and they still "plug them" so you can taste before buying. Delicious food everywhere. Back "home" in Salonta, was no exception. Home made sausage, home cured bacon, tomatoes from the garden, delicious cheese and not last but first, the bread from the outdoor oven made by Marioara, Helen's second cousin!! The loaves were round and weighed in at about 11 pounds. Helen said, "You can't take bread home!" But I did – about half of the 11 pound loaf – *Wonderful!!!*



Pele Palace in Sinaia



*Gravemarker at the Merry Cemetary
"Why did the ambulance have to run over me?"*



So now it's time for holiday family trips in November and December and to prepare for next year. Instead of around South America to and from Ft. Lauderdale for 50 days, as in the last report, it will be 75 days from Southampton – such a deal Cunard offered! This also may give us a chance to visit a few of you in the UK. Not the best time of the year for sight seeing, but the warmth of good friends knows no season. And after that cruise, some rest at home...well, we'll see next year.



Moldavian farmhouse — note the fence running along the bottom

Helen and I would like to take this opportunity – and with our schedule the rest of the year this is probably our only opportunity – to wish each and every one of you a wonderful holiday season. May your spirits be renewed and may the year ahead be good to you and yours, full of

good health, happiness, and joy. May peace come to all of us in the new year. And 'til next time my traditional but sincere prayer, *may a kind and loving God walk with us and with each of you.*

Amen.