

## Half day tour in Bucharest

Known for its wide, tree-lined boulevards, glorious Belle Époque buildings and a reputation for the high life (which in the 1900s earned its nickname of "Little Paris"), Bucharest, Romania's largest city and capital, is today a bustling metropolis.

Romanian legend has it that the city of Bucharest was founded on the banks of the Dambovitza River by a shepherd named Bucur, whose name literally means "joy." His flute playing reportedly dazzled the people and his hearty wine from nearby vineyards endeared him to the local traders, who gave his name to the place.

Remodeled in the late 19th century by French and French-trained architects, the city features large neoclassical buildings, fashionable parks, and even its very own Arc de Triomphe on the elegant Soseaua Kiseleff, an avenue longer than the famed Champs-Élysées and home to the city's mansion district.

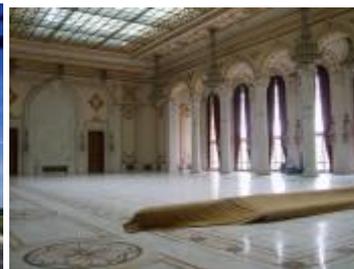
### **Parliament Palace (Palatul Parlamentului)**

Built by Communist Party leader, Nicolae Ceausescu, the colossal Parliament Palace (formerly known as the People's Palace) is the second largest administrative building in the world after the Pentagon. It took 20,000 workers and 700 architects to build. The palace boasts 12 stories, 1,100 rooms, a 328-ft-long lobby and four underground levels, including an enormous nuclear bunker.

When construction started in 1984, the dictator intended it to be the headquarters of his government. Today, it houses Romania's Parliament and serves as an international conference centre. Built and furnished exclusively with Romanian materials, the building reflects the work of the country's best artisans. A guided tour takes visitors through a small section of dazzling rooms, huge halls and quarters used by the Senate (when not in session). The interior is a luxurious display of crystal chandeliers, mosaics, oak paneling, marble, gold leaf, stained-glass windows and floors covered in rich carpets.

#### Interesting facts:

- It is the world's second-largest office building in surface (after the Pentagon) and the third largest in volume (after Cape Canaveral in the U.S. and the Great Pyramid in Egypt)
- The crystal chandelier in the Human Rights Hall (Sala Drepturilor Omului) weighs 2.5 tons
- Some of the chandeliers have as many as 7,000 light bulbs



**The Ceausescu Mansion** was for a quarter of a century the private residence of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu and of their children. Built in the mid – 1960s and known at the time as the Spring Palace, the mansion was enlarged between 1970 and 1972. The preferred choice for the design of the Ceausescu family's residence was Aron Grimberg-Solari.

Inside the mansion there is an impressive collection of famous Romanian paintings; a wide variety of handmade tapestries, plus a large number of mosaics designed by Prof Olga Porumbaru and Prof Florina Parvulescu.