



# Romanian Rhapsody: An Overlooked Corner of Europe

*Dominique Fernandez*

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## **Romanian Rhapsody: An Overlooked Corner of Europe** Dominique Fernandez

The West has been courting Romania for a decade now. It was given the chairmanship of the OCSE in 2001, and the country has been a reliable US ally in international adventures since then. Once part of the Austrian Empire, then dominated by Soviet influence, the nation actually traces its heritage to the heady days of the expanding Roman Empire, and their language is closely related to Latin.

In four long journeys over a 6-year span, this traveling duo uncover a tantalizing blend of German efficiency and Latin nonchalance, French literature and Gypsy music, Western rationalism and Oriental mysteries. Fernandez reveals the rich Romanian essence. Attentive and precise, he digs beneath the somber heritage of communism to reach the deep roots of a European country that is so little-known.

Sharp, touching photographs accompany an insightful text.

Eschewing stereotypes of Transylvania they reveal the bucolic paradise that unfolds in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains just beginning to face an onslaught of Euro-wielding tourism developers and examine with a sensitive eye the aspirations of a people who treasure their past but are eager to share the prosperity and modern lifestyle of their neighbors further West.

Features include the Orthodox Church and its monasteries, still functioning throughout the region but especially to the east, in Moldova; ambitious building projects in the capital, Bucharest; and a look inside the homes of the gypsies, some of whom have turned out to be natural "capitalists" but many of whom still reject settled life; their horse-drawn wagons now share the country roads with speeding Mercedes as well as local Dacia cars.

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