

B U C H A R E S T

Bucharest is the capital and largest city of Romania, located in the southeastern part of the country. The city is situated about 65 km north of the Danube River, near Ploiești, on the banks of the Dâmbovița River. Bucharest lies on a generally level plain and, including suburban districts, occupies an area of about 300 sq km.

The first written appearance of the name Bucuresti dates from 1459, when it was recorded in a document of Vlad III the Impaler, the ruler of Walachia. Vlad III built the fortress of Bucharest--the first of many fortifications--with the aim of holding back the Turks who were threatening the existence of the Walachian state. By the end of the 16th century, Bucharest was South-Eastern Europe's largest christian city. In 1640, a traveller remarked that the population of the city exceed 100,000. Under the Ottoman suzerainty that was eventually established, Bucharest developed rapidly as the main economic centre of Walachia, becoming the capital in 1659.

In 1859 Bucharest became the administrative center of the united principalities of Walachia and Moldavia, under Ottoman suzerainty. By the decisions of the Congress of Berlin, which provided for a general settlement of the Balkan situation after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877 and 1878, Romania was recognized as an independent country with Bucharest as its capital. German troops occupied Bucharest from December 1916 until mid-1918 during World War I. During World War II Romanian dictator Ion Antonescu admitted German troops into Romania in October 1940, and the Germans occupied Bucharest until 1944. Weakened by Romanian insurrection and Allied bombings, the Germans surrendered when Soviet forces entered the city in August. Soviet military occupation lasted until 1958.



The city is divided into two sections by the Dâmbovița River and is crossed by two wide boulevards. Bucharest contains six administrative districts; the adjacent rural area forms a seventh district. Most industrial areas are located in the suburbs, while the city is primarily residential. Bucharest, known as the “Paris of the Balkans” in the early 20th century, was a cosmopolitan city before 1944 when its architecture, city

planning, and culture were French-inspired. After a Communist government came to power following World War II (1939-1945), French cultural qualities were ended, although the architecture remains. During the 1980s, under the orders of Romanian dictator

Nicolae Ceaușescu, a vast area on the banks of the Dâmbovița was razed, including houses and historical monuments. Buildings of North Korean architectural style were then erected.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the city's streets were lit by electric bulbs and petrol lamps. In 1904, the public transportation system saw the introduction of electric street cars. After World War I, Bucharest strengthened its position as the most important city of a greatly enlarged country.

In 1930 the population of Bucharest was 631,288. By the 1950s, as a result of industrialization and urbanization policies, the population doubled, and it has continued to increase steadily. The population was 2,037,000 in 1997.



Bucharest is a major industrial center and the main financial and trade center of Romania. The city accounts for about 20 percent of the country's industrial production. Industries include heavy machinery, aviation, precision machinery, agricultural tools, furniture, electronics, chemicals, textiles, leather goods, wire, soap, cosmetics, and food processing.

Noteworthy secular structures include the Palace of Justice (1864), the Stirbey Palace (1835), the National Bank (1885), the Presidential Palace (previously Cotroceni Palace; 17th century with later additions), and the buildings of the Central Library of the University (1893). In the 20th century, the Cantacuzino Palace (1900), the Central Post Palace (1900), the Central Savings Bank (1900), the Royal Palace (1935), the Central Army House (1913), and the Arch of Triumph (1920) were built. Among Bucharest's outstanding religious structures are the Antim Monastery (1715) and the Patriarchate Church (1665). Bucharest has many parks and wooded areas, including Herăstrău, a large park with lakes.

The city has a large number of churches, usually small, in Byzantine style. Apart from the Curtea Veche (Old Court) church, the Antim Monastery (1715) and the churches of Stavropoleos (1724) and Spiridon (1747) are of considerable architectural interest. The most important centres for higher education are the Technical Institute of Bucharest (founded 1819) and the University of Bucharest (founded 1694). In addition, there are several academies in both arts and sciences, as well as numerous research institutes.