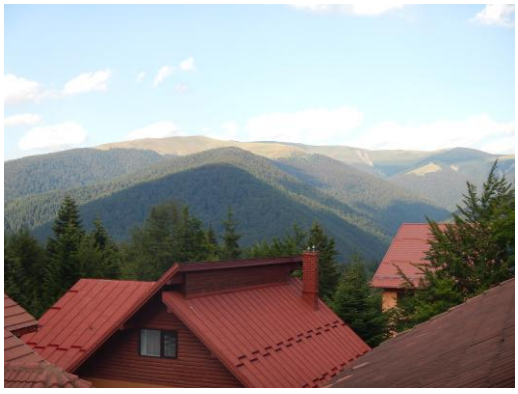
2015 – Trip to Romenia - 15 july -27 july

Left Zurich airport, without forgetting any luggage on the train, to the Bucaresti Otopeni (the local town) airport, named Coanda Airport (Henri Coanda was a avionics pioneer, claims to have invented the jet, I am not convinced, like the article from Wikipedia - I saw the contraption 2 years ago, in the air museum in Bucarest).
We took the bus to downtown (terminus) and taxi to Florin (a cousin) and Kathy. We ate with them. The next day, a visit to the dentist for T. then back to Florin's. In the evening we met with friends : Coca and Mihai, Ludmila and Rado joined us too. Nice dinner.



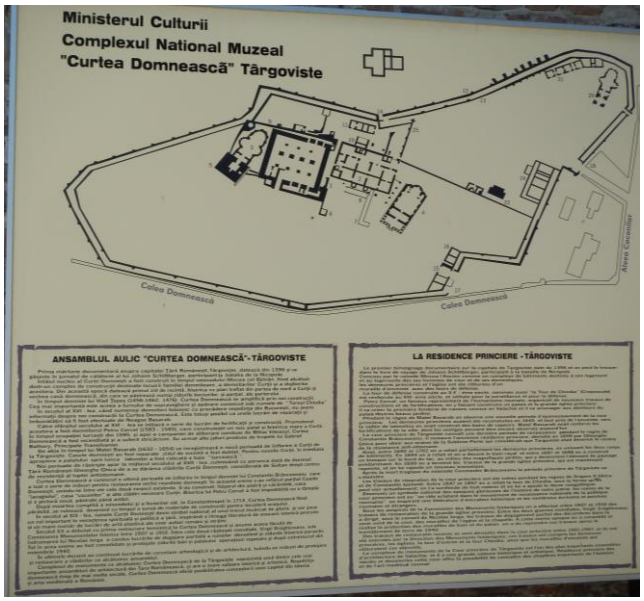
17.7 We rented a Ford Fiesta and drove to Targoviste (to visit the Biserica Domneasca - 1583-1585, the Chindia Tower XVth century, and Rasnov Citadel (1211-1225). The entrance is imposing, nice from far but the early constructions are extremely poorly maintained in the inside, the interior courtyard, which I failed to visit, seems nice - see Wikipedia's article) and Sinaia (Carpates, nice hilly city, we found a nice Villa, next to the start of the gondola, nice dinner and cool night).







18.7 In the morning we visited Peles Castle (built in 1873-1914) in a huge park (that includes different nice buildings), but the castle was like a museum of the XVIII and more a curiosity than of high historical value.



We then drove to Bran, we stopped before at **Rasnov**,



where we visited an old fortress on top of a hill, designed to defend the Bran Pass, it was built around 1377, it was a nice visit, but the explanations fall short from what one can read online;







then onto Brasov (Hotel Helis, ok, a bit hard to drive to, porter did not know much, he said he was substituting). It was hot, we wanted to take the cable car to the hill but it closed at 6 PM, 15 minutes before we got there, arggg, stupid schedule with a restaurant on top. We then found a small restaurant in a side street.



The hamburger was good and we were in the shade and it was cooler. We went then to a small festival (music with different local musicians) and we talked with an employee of the City Hall and he gave us tips for the next days, unfortunately, the noise level was high and our English did not allow as good a communication I would have liked and Tamara did not translate everything.
I like Brasov one of the nicest city in Romania.

19.7 We took off to the Sapte Scari Canyon (tripadvisor has a page on that too).
http://touristinromania.net/2014/01/18/7-stairs-canyon-breathtaking-experience-core-mountain-beware-7-ladders-7-mini-heart-attacks/ (pictures are old, ladders are now aluminum).
We walked over an hour on a mountain path to join the entrance of the canyon. There was a line and as we waited a thunderstorm formed (maybe a bit earlier) and it started raining. We decided to go on, as the people in the line took shelter, and we climbed the seven falls on metallic (aluminum, one had to hold on tight) ladders under at times heavy rain, it was chilly. The view of the falls and the gorges and the amount of water was average, but the exercise was good. Once we got out of the canyon, there was a one way path, we had to walk back to the base in an hour long loop, which was pretty slippery, wet and muddy (up over a pass and down). Close to the pass, lightning followed immediately by the thundering thunder made me jump (j'ai sursauté) and my heart beat a bit faster for a while, it was very, very close, but no sign of electrical charges.



On the way down, there was a Tyrolienne (very long, many segments, but I was not sure I could take the height, so we walked.
After half hour, the sun was out again, and I started to get slowly warm.

We drove to Sighisoara (mentioned in 1280, a small fortified city of Transylvanian Saxons) and we found the Villa Franca (which we warmly recommend, a very nice pension) just at the foot of the main gate of the citadel. We walked up to the citadel (medieval city in the world heritage list of UNESCO, birth city of Vlad Dracul, who many years later made Bram Stocker rewrite his almost finished book. We had dinner on

the main square and in the morning, we took a guided tour by a beautiful young student of the city. I enjoyed the tour of the towers.



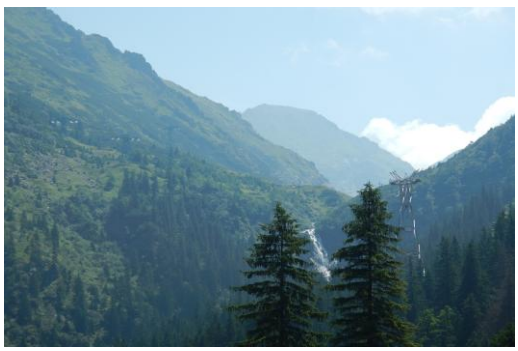




20.7 We left after the tour. Early afternoon, after Chirpar, Nou Roman, we are driving to the Carpates (the road is ok, almost no traffic and over a km, no pavement). In Romania, driving 80 kmh, the risk is to hit a “hidden” pothole or a dip on the road that is sometimes not indicated, and very hard to see, but on the more traveled road they are very rare, but not absent).





















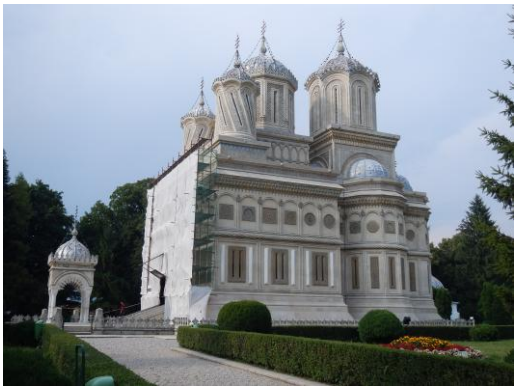


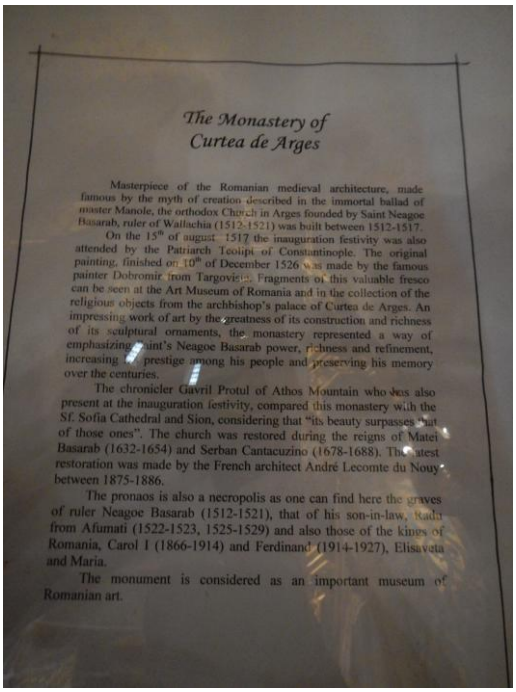
After a We drove a bit on the E68, we take a left towards the Transfăgărășan. This is a very touristy winding mountain road leading to a pass (with the quaint little Balea Lake, and food stands (I had a tasty and juicy sausage). Then the road passes a tunnel, only 800m long as the summits above peek at 2418, either slopes are very steep indeed. The road down is less crowded, winding still, but nice to drive. We then follow a long artificial lake over 10 kilometers. We have a drink in a fancy hotel next to a boat landing, at least 20 meters below the deck, then drove to the dam. Very high, in a narrow gorge, a nice piece of engineering work.



We drove further down the valley to Curtea de Argeș, where we visited Biserica Domneasca with very old frescoes and a gatekeeper who was very keen to share his knowledge, I very much appreciated that, even though I am left pretty cold at those middle age Christian symbolisms.
Then onto Metropolia (Bishop) Curtea de Arges (old but looking pretty new, a bit too polished for my taste, and a gravel path which felt like a penitence).







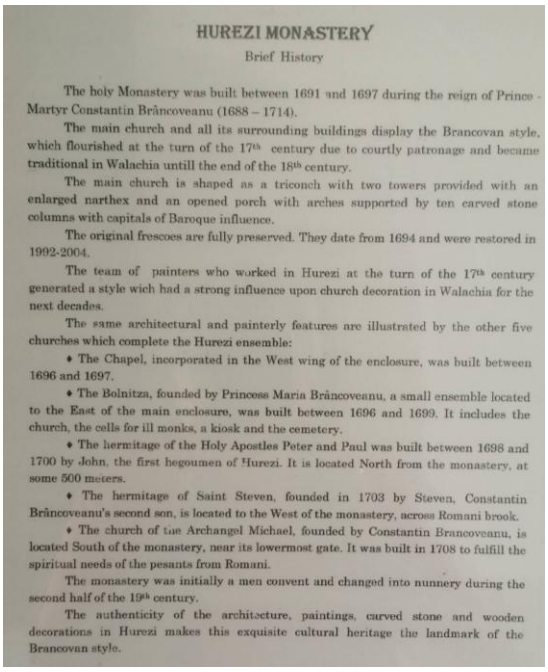
20.7th, still, we drive on to Rm.Valcea, where Alexandru and Monica live. We stayed at the Pension Maria, ok, except that the air conditioning broke down early in the night. Somehow, it worked again in the morning. We met Alex&Monica at the pension and they drove us to a nice Italian restaurant. The pasta were harder than al dente (as I insisted to have them al dente, the cook was Italian ☹... We shared our sailing pictures).

21.7 We drove to the city center where we gave pictures taken by Tamara over our last few trips to be copied, then to Nica (mother of Carmen - FL) and then with her to Calimanesti for Tamara to try to finish some paperwork. It turned out she must start over, as not the right forms were used (although the content stays the same).

Returned to Nica's for lunch than we drove to Horezu, Monaster fortificata Horezi. Well preserved (nuns still live in it), Brancovenesc style. Then we drove back in a rather heavy traffic to Pension Maria. I didn't feel driving for dinner, so we ate at the Pension's restaurant (somewhat of a mistake, food was less than average).







HUREZI MONASTERY

Brief History

The holy Monastery was built between 1691 and 1697 during the reign of Prince - Martyr Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688 – 1714).

The main church and all its surrounding buildings display the Brancovan style, which flourished at the turn of the 17th century due to courtly patronage and became traditional in Walachia untill the end of the 18th century.

The main church is shaped as a triconch with two towers provided with an enlarged narthex and an opened porch with arches supported by ten carved stone columns with capitals of Baroque influence.

The original frescoes are fully preserved. They date from 1694 and were restored in 1992-2004.

The team of painters who worked in Hurezi at the turn of the 17th century generated a style wich had a strong influence upon church decoration in Walachia for the next decades.

The same architectural and painterly features are illustrated by the other five churches which complete the Hurezi ensemble:

- The Chapel, incorporated in the West wing of the enclosure, was built between 1696 and 1697.
- The Bolnitza, founded by Princess Maria Brâncoveanu, a small ensemble located to the East of the main enclosure, was built between 1696 and 1699. It includes the church, the cells for ill monks, a kiosk and the cemetery.
- The hermitage of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul was built between 1698 and 1700 by John, the first hegoumen of Hurezi. It is located North from the monastery, at some 500 meters.
- The hermitage of Saint Steven, founded in 1703 by Steven, Constantin Brâncoveanu's second son, is located to the West of the monastery, across Romani brook.
- The church of the Archangel Michael, founded by Constantin Brancoveanu, is located South of the monastery, near its lowermost gate. It was built in 1708 to fulfill the spiritual needs of the pesants from Romani.

The monastery was initially a men convent and changed into nunnery during the second half of the 19th century.

The authenticity of the architecture, paintings, carved stone and wooden decorations in Hurezi makes this exquisite cultural heritage the landmark of the Brancovan style.



22.7 We picked up the pictures, breakfast at Nica then drove to Constanta, over the dealul negru pass. The road was much better than 2 years ago and passing was possible, but not as easy as in the plain. After Pitesti, we took the freeway and the centura West, which was very slow (too many crossings), then on the freeway to Constanta, where we could drive between 130 (the speed limit) and 150 km/h (the rich citizen), with little traffic. We took the exit to port, which was a dead end, reserved for the trucks loading or unloading there. Which was not right, it added some 3 km detour).

24.7 Second morning in Constanta (I do not tell everything). Good breakfast next to the hotel, then taxi to the center. Shopping We had a drink with Victor (T.' brother) and Marianna, Radu (son of Viktor) and his wife and then we took a cab to Porto Tomis, where I ate excellent moules (huge and fat) à la crème.

25.7 We went to the cemetery where Victor, Marianna and Tamara cleaned up the grave of their parents. We then drove south to Neptun (just after Olimpia and before Pluto). We had a nice lunch in a bungalow on *piloti*. The next day, we learned that the restaurant burned down (some electrical short-circuit), what a shame, it was so romantic.



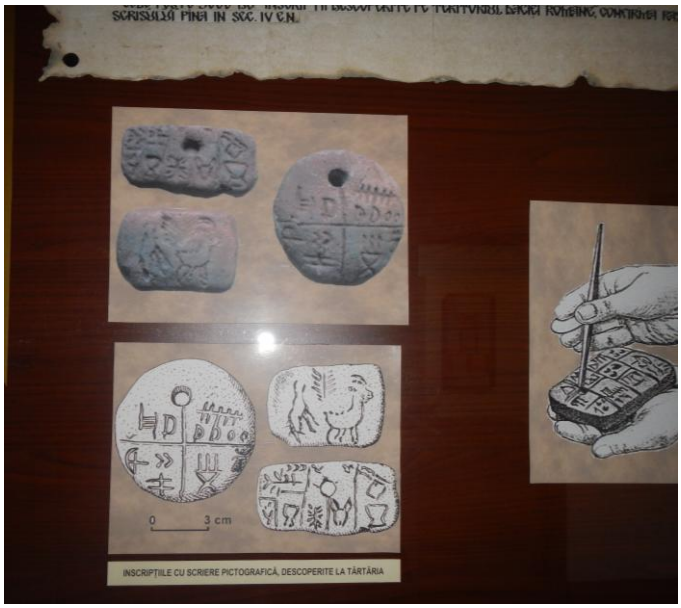
26.7 We drove to Bucuresti, checked into our hotel (Est, supposedly ***, but the air conditioning was turning off after 30 min. The bed was lumpy, the sheets too small). We were picked up by Miha and Coca to go to a restaurant Zexe : excellent (tartar followed by a selection of sausages (ok) then one of the best mousse au chocolate I ever had). Night was uncomfortable.
27.7 T. was staying and I would go back home. In the morning, we dropped Tamara's luggage at a relative then drove to the airport, we returned the car and had to wait a long time to be able to check-in. Tamara took the bus back and I waited to board the plane.

Very good memories mixed with the view of the sad state of development of some, many cities.

Selected map areas







Interesting