

# The Romanians of Cayman

*In part II of a series on the many nationalities that have made the Cayman Islands a true international melting pot, Steven Knipp takes a look at the Romanian community.*

WITH a population of 22 million, Romania is perhaps best known as the home of the mythical character Dracula, five-time Olympic Gold medal winner Nadia Comaneci and the deceased dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu.

The country's largest city and its capital, Bucharest, is home to 1.9 million people.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, Romania is the fourth fastest growing country in the world in terms of tourism.

George Musat, a Food and Beverage Supervisor at The Ritz-Carlton, Grand Cayman, is one of the 70 Romanians now living in Cayman. He was born in Bucharest and has

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# The Romanians of Cayman reflect on island life

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been living in the Cayman Islands since Christmas Eve 2005. Before coming here, he had worked as a waiter for a cruise line and so had visited many times and knew it was a beautiful place.

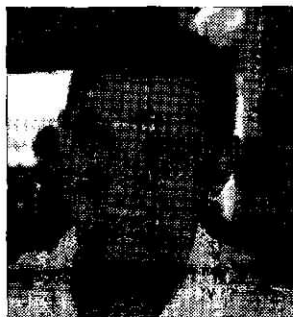
"I was at home in Romania on my vacation and looking for a change in jobs, and noticed that the Ritz-Carlton was actually holding recruitment sessions in Bucharest. I went along to the interview. It was an all-day affair and very intense; but I found out the same day that my interview was successful."

From his time on the cruise ships, Mr Musat was already familiar with George Town, but said, "It was very interesting to see different parts of the island, beyond the tourist sights. And once I started exploring more it was fun to see the real island living."

Coming from Eastern Europe, where there are four seasons, the regular heat and humidity took some getting used to, he says, but he notes that this has been offset by the relaxed way of life in Cayman.

"There's no real traffic or crime, nobody gets stressed and everyone is friendly. The social life here is also fun. I enjoy going to the restaurants and bars in the evening, and also the water sports activities on the beach. Since I've arrived, parasailing, jet skiing and fishing are my favourite things to do at the beach."

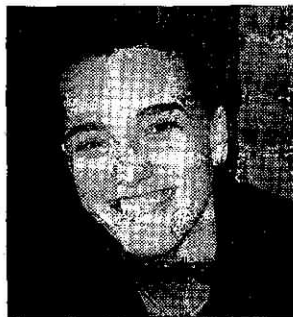
Describing his homeland, Mr Musat says: "I think many people would be surprised by the beauty of the Romanian countryside. Many people have probably seen pictures of the cities, and I notice in the news, only the bad things about our country seem to make the headlines.



George Musat

"But experiencing the countryside of Romania is like stepping back in time. We have rolling green hills that look like from a fairytale, the mountains and ski villages could compare to anywhere else in Western Europe, the food is as organic as you can get and in some parts people still use horse and carts to get around. It's a very beautiful and simple way of life."

As with many expats, he longs for some things from home. "I miss the food, of course, traditional Romanian



Valentina Zaharia

dishes such as ciorba [a kind of sour soup] and sarmale [stuffed cabbage rolls]. In Romania, the food is very seasonal and going to the market each day for the best ingredients is a part of local life.

"I also miss the snow," he adds. "I love snowboarding and skiing and feeling the cold weather. And maybe it sounds bad, but I also miss watching Romanian television, and hearing Romanian music as well."

Mr Musat adds: "Romania is a country with very strong traditions. We are a very social people, and love to celebrate every occasion. So I try to bring that special experience here to Cayman

as much as I can."

Valentina Zaharia, a Wholesale Reservations Coordinator, also at the Ritz-Carlton, was born in the south-eastern Romanian city of Galati, near the Danube River. She arrived almost three years ago. Previously, she spent a few years in the US and then returned home to Romania to finish university. She was looking for new opportunities for her career when she was offered a job at the Ritz-Carlton.

On first arriving, she said she was "amazed by the beauty of the sea and the island, the warm weather and also was so excited about having the chance to work in such a beautiful hotel with people from so many different countries.

What she enjoys most about Cayman is the "nice weather, the crystal clear waters, and the wide range of watersports." She also relishes "the opportunity to be able to interact with so many different cultures from all over the world, and share nice moments with my boyfriend and my friends, whom I met here on the island."

Aside from missing her family and her cat, Ms Zaharia longs for Romanian food.

Describing her homeland, she says: "We are actually a very religious country, with the Orthodox Church being the nation's leading church. The eastern part of the country is especially famous for its churches and very old medieval monasteries. We also have both beautiful beaches and mountains.

"We have different traditions and customs, such as going from house to house during Christmas, and before New Year's, singing songs about Jesus. Then, like other places in the world, we celebrate with a big Christmas dinner. Except we eat pork in our Christmas dinner instead of the traditional turkey.

"Maybe not many people know that Romania is the country where the famous Count Dracula lived. His castle is still standing and can be visited anytime. However, I can assure you that there are no more vampires any more in my beautiful country," she says, with a grin.

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