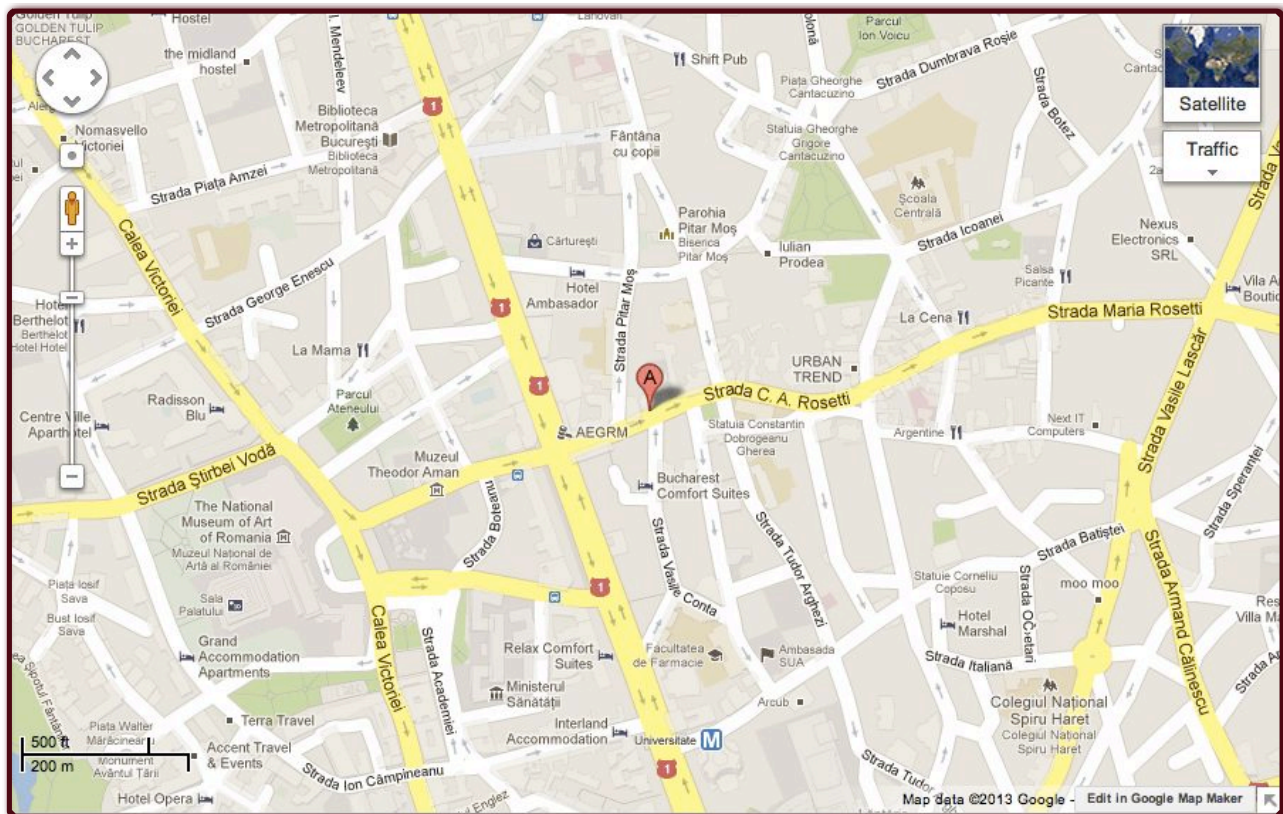


## HOTELS IN BUCHAREST

### SCALA HOTEL

Boutique hotel, homey feeling, bygone era comfort, someone's house, a past that overwhelms the guest upon his walking over the threshold: that is the Scala. A place that comes somewhat unexpectedly just off the main, busy North - South thoroughfare making the junction between Unirea and Victoria squares. A great location equally for the business and leisure traveler, with easy access to the Old Town, various academic centres (such as the Foreign Language Faculty, the main headquarters of the Bucharest University or the Academy of Economic Studies) and various government offices. And then, a few minutes' stroll takes one to a fine residential district: the Icoanei.



But first, the house. It was built for Ion Moscu, the personal doctor of the Romanian Patriarch and of the Royal Family. Architect Gheorghe Simotta (which also reconfigured the Patriarchal Palace in 1932-1935 and Dărvari Convent in 1933-1934) drew the plans for the property in his approach of the Neo-Brâncoveanu style which emphasized its Byzantine feature. The result was somewhat atypical for the main line of this architectural style, especially as far as the Rosetti Street facade is concerned. Yet, as soon as one approaches the small, nicely organized yard, it is impossible to miss the first floor loggia featuring the typical Brâncoveanu carved stone columns, even though the typical floral balcony railings are missing, being replaced with simpler, lighter hexagonal patterns. The latter betrays Simotta's other interest, towards Art Deco, which he often used - like here - in symbiosis with Brâncoveanu elements and patterns. When all is said and done, the result is pleasant, homey, posh without being opulent or outstanding. For the Scala - despite its name - remains that: someone's house welcoming the guest for the night and dinner.

Then, the hotel. There are 10 rooms and an apartment, all of them furnished in a blend of 19th century elegance and interwar simplicity. Contradictory? It might look like it. Yet that is far from bothering the visitor, this is actually the main charm of the place: the way the owner arranged it all and the very fact that, wherever one might find himself at the Scala, it feels like a private house, with old books spread on a desk or a painting on an easel. As for details, every other corner hides more, whether it is about the beautiful terra cotta stove, the carved wood stairway or the geometric pattern hardwood floorings.

Tous à table, s'il vous plaît... The restaurant on premises, Repertorium Gourmet, features a Mediterranean cuisine with fusion touches. White walls, light colours, enchanting, flowery both table cloths and porcelain dishes, a piano and the comfort that does not need either glitz or trumpets. Alas, I would throw away those plasma TVs though, they could not fit less this glorious place. Not cheap and definitely not an every day place, but hence its glory. As for those afternoon breaks when the heat of the Wallachian summer or the blizzard of February engulf the city, the Intermezzo, a comfy living room-cum-cigar bar, is there with the right cognac or single malt, a glass of Segarcea red or a cuppa of Ceylon black.

Does it sound like a commercial? Here's the reverse: it is not cheap and the street it is located on can be noisy. But then, life is never smooth or perfect. Hence its beauty.

19 C. A. Rosetti, <http://www.hotelscalabucuresti.ro/> (the hotel), <http://www.repertoriumgourmet.ro/> (the restaurant)

#### REMBRANDT HOTEL

Opposite to what many Romanians like, lacking that spiteful 'much ado', woof woof and glitter on top or on the doorway, the Rembrandt is a standard of comfortable decency and of joyful, alas not sparkling style. Hosting 16 rooms which are simply impeccable and exquisitely (which does not stand for "overwhelming" or "glamorously") furnished, the hotel is a gem in itself. I for one like the way they restored the property raised in 1925, granting it a touch of comfort and intimacy only rarely met in this city. Even as a visitor and not as a guest, I like spending an hour or two in their small, but warm and pleasant first floor Klein Bar. And I like that omnipresent copper touch, which takes one into another world as soon as he / she steps inside. Add here a location on Smârdan Street, in the Old Quarter, one of those merchant houses that are quite plentiful (but equally decaying) all around, and you are there: "normality" the way it should be (somewhere else but here, thank Nanak for that), but this very way makes it all more interesting and appealing. And then, I reckon I enormously enjoyed the night when, while having a glass of wine with friends at the Klein, an elder foreigner approached us in English, saying there is nothing to see in Bucharest: he had been the hotel's first customer, he had traveled to Romania for many years and he was reading Kaspar Schnetzler's soap opera-fit "Das Gute", therefore *he knew*. He had turned into a Romanian without noticing (it happens) or admitting it (that is bad, very bad though). And then people ask me why I love this city: it tickles, upsets, excites, torments and eventually it does change people. For good.

GPS - N44 25.937 E26 06.006

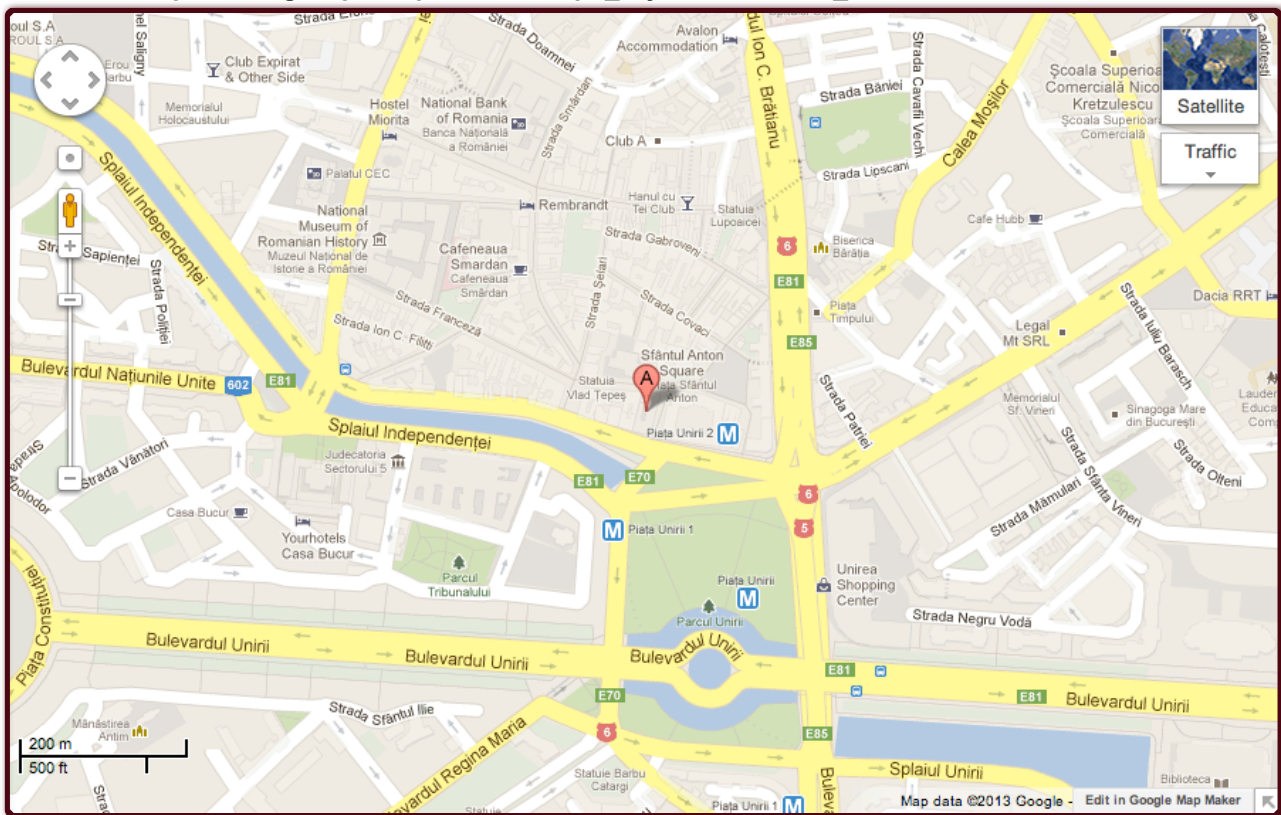
11 Smârdan, <http://www.rembrandt.ro>



### EUROPA ROYALE HOTEL

The hotel is hosted in a 19th century property that was entirely refurbished and reinforced. Basically they only kept the facade and replaced the old structure with a new one, hence being able to configure the rooms according to their needs. On one side, it faces the busy Piața Unirii, while on the other side rooms open towards the historic Old Court, respectively the adjacent church, Bucharest's oldest. The common spaces (the lobby, hallways) are a pleasant combination of elegance and contemporary minimalism, while rooms are rather functional, with a welcome touch of warm colours and personal touch, wooden inserts. The hotel has a Swiss-in-the-mix restaurant, the Mica Elveție, run by a Zurich chef school graduate. Should you want a change after a few dinners there, the historic Hanul lui Manuc lies across the street, while the Old Town stretches in the immediate vicinity, with over 100 bars and restaurants to choose from. As of 2013, the hotel had very good rates compared to other 4\* units in the centre, so it might be well worth checking it out. Just note that it is as central as you get and that the Old Town means plenty of coming and going at nighttime. On the other hand, the party teen in you will love it.

60 Franceză, [http://www.groupeuropa.com/europa\\_royale/bucharest\\_hotel/](http://www.groupeuropa.com/europa_royale/bucharest_hotel/)



### CAROL PARC HOTEL

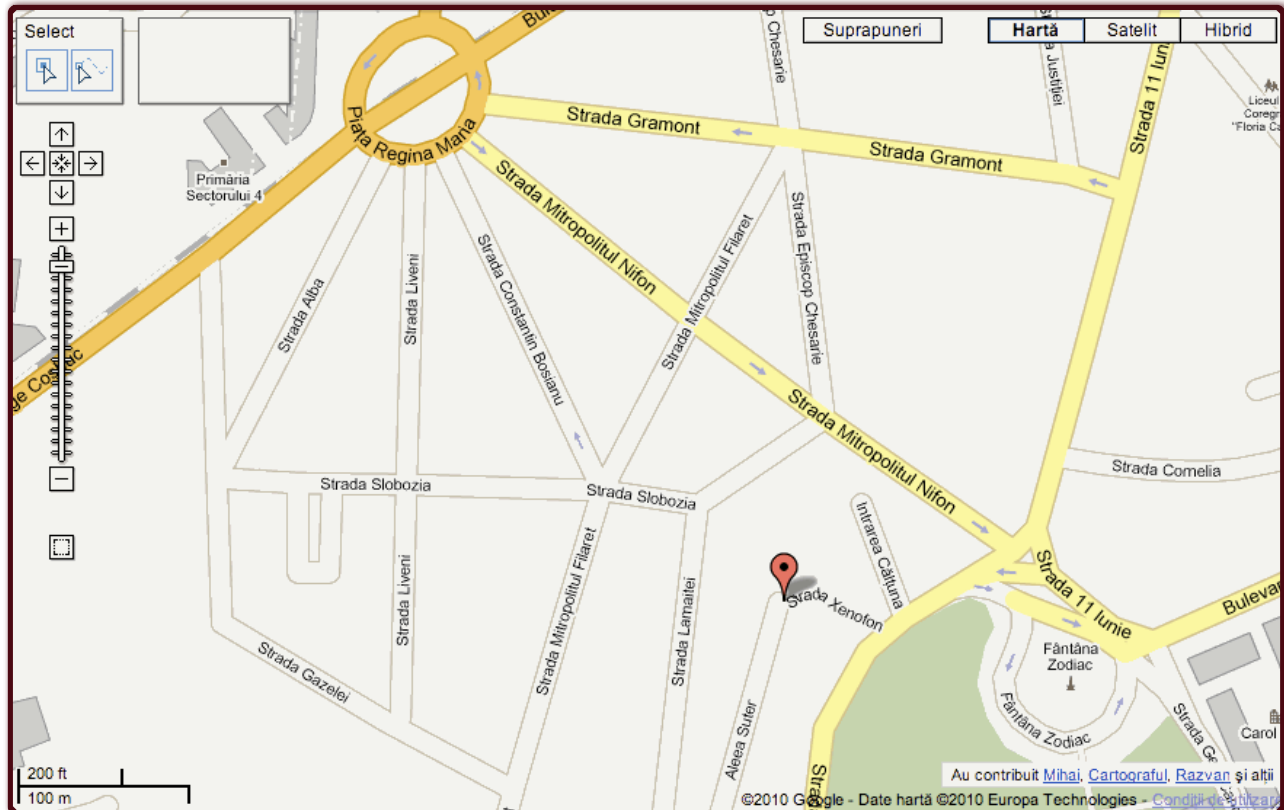
The property was built on Filaret Hill, Bucharest's highest point in 1906 in Brâncoveanu style (see my articles on **Mogoșoaia** and **Potlogi** palaces near Bucharest). Designed by Architect Gustav Adolf Sutter, passing through the better (the rich and famous before WW2) and the worse (NKVD and the Commies), the small palace hosting this hotel is best described as 'plush'. A 2 ton Murano glass chandelier, especially designed, Italian furniture, green silk, a marble chimney, yes, it is overdone (especially some of the bathrooms, such as the one in the Venetian room), but, as everything has been tastefully appointed, it does right to the property; it is a joy to see such a beautiful property restored to this extent in Bucharest. The hotel is not in the very city centre, making it for those that want to live and be treated differently and those looking for a quiet stay. The view from the apartment with a belfry (they do have such a thing, and that is my picky recommendation) is great and different from other top hotels in the city simply because it comes from a natural level and not from the tzhspeth floor. The club living downstairs would only compete with **La Residenza's** living room (in Timișoara), while there also exists a small, private bar on the first floor. The cosy restaurant, complete with its terrace, is pleasant, if not a bit cramped, but it could certainly do with a brighter, happier colour scheme. To add the cherry on the cake, the hotel has its own Bucarest d'antan narrow street ending with it, and a stairway leads down to the wide Carol Park.



Bucharestian's last visit at the Carol Parc was not too joyful though, pointing to a (typical for this country) decay in service quality: the staff - including management - attitude had changed a from the previous visit, all the way to the 'I know it all, so you'd better shut up and swallow' approach so frequently met in Romania. When showed to the reunion room, we found a clerk heavily smoking there, with the air hardly breathable and not even bothering to say hello, apologize or stop smoking. Later, while we ordered a black and a green tea, the green was replaced with a black and the black with mint infusion, both being served without any explanation / excuse / note. Therefore, for the time being, while the rooms at the Carol Parc remain among Bucharest's most beautiful and elegantly appointed, for the service I would stick to **the Capșa**.

GPS - N44 25.144 E26 05.586

23-25 Aleea Suter, <http://www.carolparchotel.ro/>



#### CAPȘA HOTEL

It is hard to describe the Capșa. Its restaurant used to be one of Bucharest's most famous, gathering all that social, political, literary and artistic elite of the times when this city was a little more than the mockery target of the European continent, as it is nowadays in certain reviews. It was entirely refurbished a few years ago, when both its hotel and its restaurant were turned into 5\* places where the class and that exclusive, but secluded flavour can be felt even if one has a soft drink in the bar. The rooms are as classy as they can, being comparable from this point of view only with the Alcove Rooms at the Athenee Palace Hilton (which however gets a thumb down after the addition of the uninspiring Cube to the back of it) and with the new addition of the Carol Parc. As for the endowments, I think that the phrase above has said it all. As a special "pro" note, the confectionery shop next door is definitely Bucharest's best, with great chocolate delicacies and the finest pricomigdale around. Their papanashi are served in the finest way around, with a (more than decent) quantity (and quality) of sour cream and berry jam. Kindly ask the waiter to serve them in the cosy bar rather than in the restaurant and add a glass of Vinars de Jidvei aside.

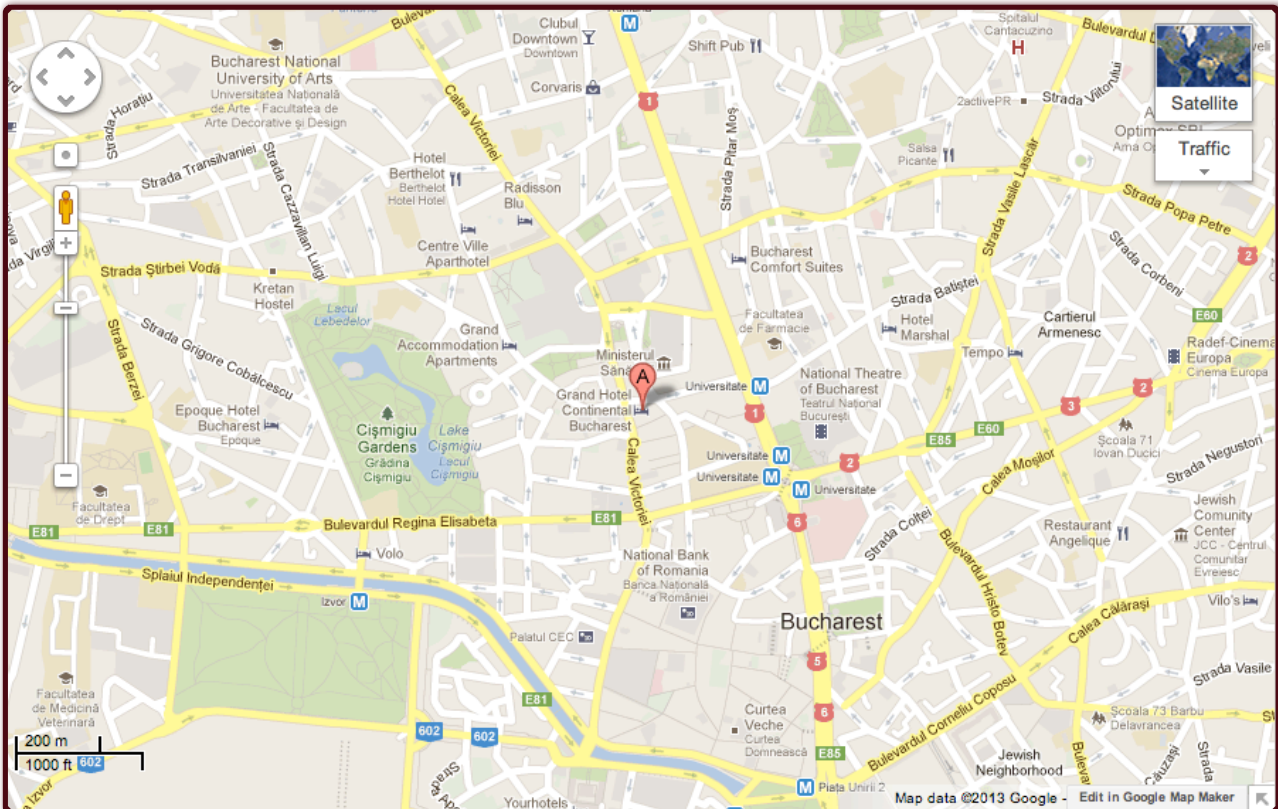
Central location on Bucharest's historical avenue, a fine building with a French classical touch, good enough staff (a bit stiff at times, but that is granted once one enters this country, no matter where and when), the best history among Bucharest restaurants, cosy rooms.



GPS - N44 26.126 E26 05.904

36 Calea Victoriei, <http://www.capsa.ro/>

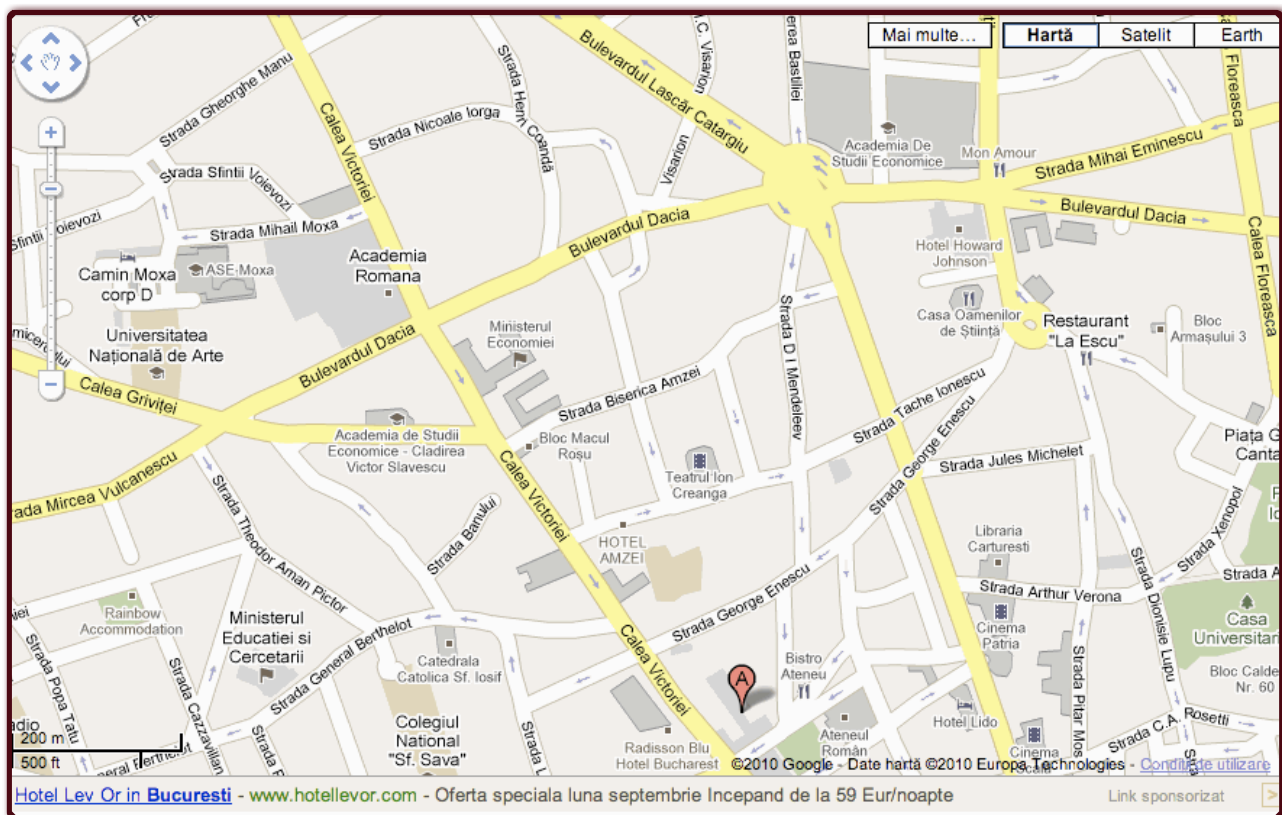
### GRAND CONTINENTAL HOTEL



56 Calea Victoriei, <http://continentalhotels.ro/Grand-Hotel-Continental-Bucuresti/en/>

A German renaissance style building, the Grand Continental was completed in 1886 on the site of yet another famous hotel at the time, the Grand Broft. It then had its ups (around the turn of the century) and downs (during the Communist regime, when it slowly decayed and also lost the 'Grand' tag). The glitz returned to the Grand Continental in 2009, following a 2 year renovation process. Auction furniture, English silverware and porcelain, Italian mirrors and silk embroideries, an ex-Ritz concierge desk, all add to the Continental charm. Even though some (including the always mumbling Bucharestian) might argue it is overdone: too much of gold-plated this and that. That aside, the Grand Continental is a recommended hotel for the visitor aiming at a good location (spot on the historic Calea Victoriei), a comfortable stay and dining options on premises to choose from. While the Balkan Bistro comes with the typical, alas country assigned, Balkan dishes, the Concerto features the nouvelle cuisine concept, Victoria Club brings in the Chesterfield sofas, cigars and a fine selection of teas, while the TeKaffe adds both the cake and the cherry to the white Continental. A small spa was hosted in the former cellars and it sure has a mysterious touch to it. When all is said and done, a good competitor for the Capșa nearby.

ATHENEE PALACE HILTON HOTEL



GPS - N44 26.473 E26 05.764, 1-3 Episcopiei, <http://www.hilton.com/en/hi/hotels/index.jhtml?ctyhocn=BUHHTW>

There are hotels, and then there are legends; there are stars and then there are falling stars. History has had its share of happiness and sorrow with Romania, and quite a significant part of it has passed through the lobby of the Athenee Palace. King Charles the 2nd's love affairs, Nazis' secrets during WW2, Soviets' 1940 ultimatums, Securitate agents' wide open ears in the 1980s, all of them, just like people ordering a țuică or some of sarma, have passed through this hotel, its lobby or its English Bar. The rooms have everything one expects in a 5\* unit, but, if you come to the Hilton, stay at the Hilton and choose an Alcove Room (currently known as Junior Suites and Presidential Suites) overlooking Revoluției Square and the reason for the name of the hotel, i.e. the Athenaeum. Compared to these ones, the "standard" rooms in the glass covered backyard concrete box (see picture opposite) are simply not worth looking into.

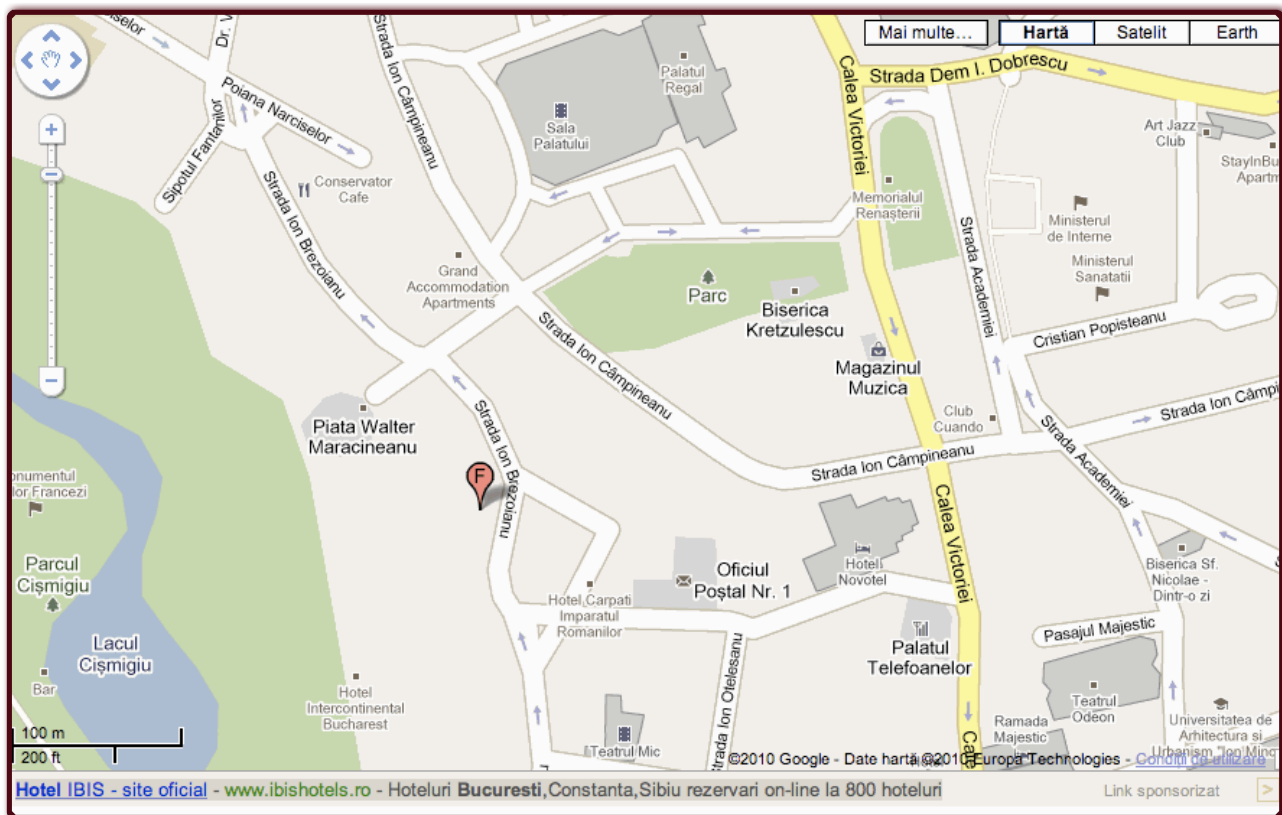
Otherwise, three thumbs down for the August 2010 addition, that fake, tacky ceiling that comes with dwarf phallus-like lights not matching the old architecture of the lobby and column hall, as well as for those tacky chandeliers (sort of) hanging on plastic wires and lit by halogen lights. As for the new lobby area furniture, it matches nothing at all in style,



colour or size. To put it in one word, the Bucharest Hilton is slowly turning in a Dubai mall, as someone suggested. However, on the politically correct side of the coin, as Mr. Hilton said himself: "if I were to describe the three best features of a successful hotel, they would be: location, location and location". Recommended? For its history, yes, for the present tense, definitely not, rather head for the equally central and usually cheaper **Capsa** or **Rembrandt**, while for the a real treat without unnecessary fake ceilings and certainly without a dime a dozen chandeliers head for the **Carol Parc**, places with an authentic charm and service. Not to mention **Capsa's confectionery shop**, **Carol Parc's exquisite restaurant**, **Rembrandt's fine atmosphere and large rooms** or **Opera's considerably lower rates**. In terms of service, the experience I had with the last group there says it all: while they had two large groups checking out and departing at almost the same time (previous, like in months ahead, notice given) and they were not able to handle the situation without major delays, everyone (guides, drivers, foreign TDs) was helping with luggage. In the middle of the chaos they themselves had generated by a lousy management, one of the bellboys yelled at a guide helping with luggage: "ay, dude, you don't know how to handle luggage!". Indeed, and you, Sir, have no idea of what service (or professional behaviour) is.

Just like at the Marriott, there is a taxi mafia around (possibly the toughest in town), so beware in what kind of car you get, for otherwise you will pay dearly. Never take a taxi car parked opposite the entrance, rather hail a **trustworthy one** passing by, or, if asking the front desk / concierge to call one, be precise for the company you are interested in, so as to avoid paying EUR 20 instead of RON 10 for the same ride. If driving your own car, most times you will not be able to stop right in front of the hotel and unload your luggage, as that place is reserved to limos staying there all day long, with makeshift driver-guides preying on the odd, naive businessman, to put it the local way.

OPERA HOTEL



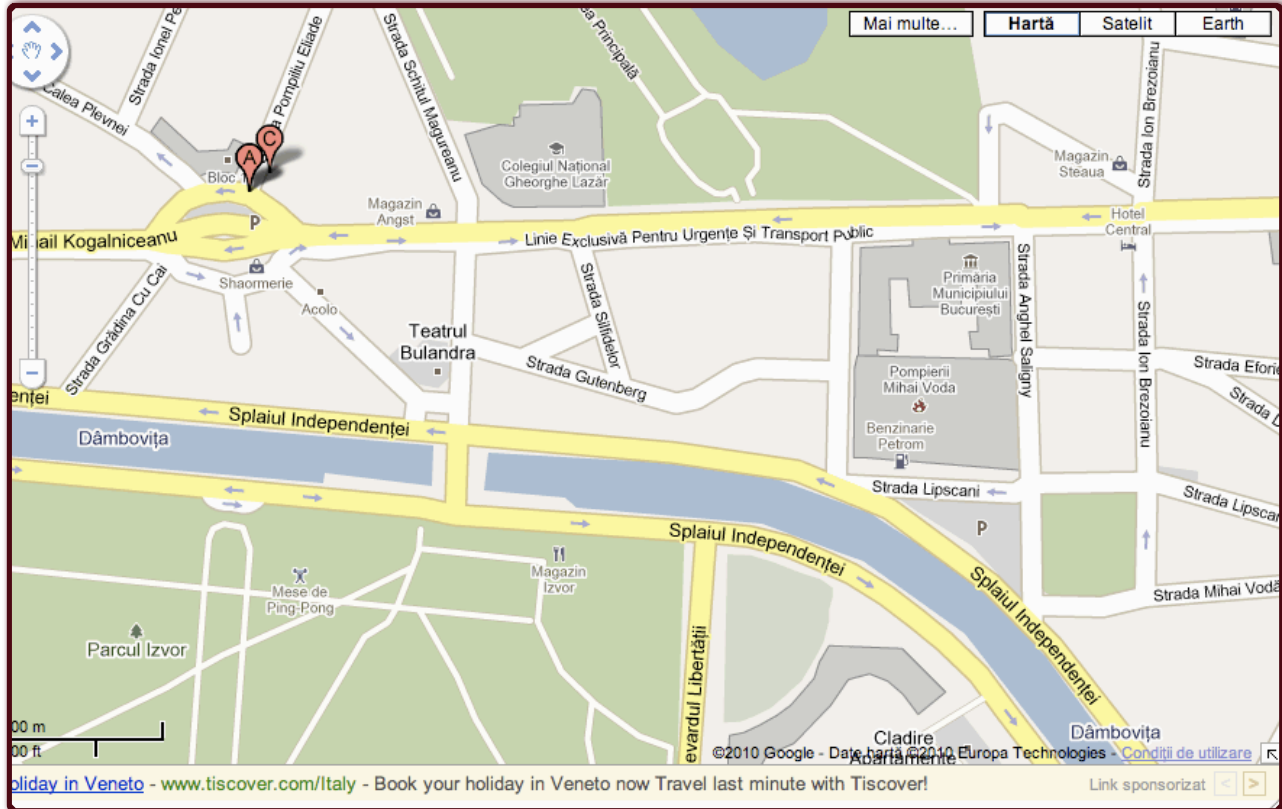
There are many 3\* hotels in Bucharest just as there are elsewhere. However this is the place where class comes included. One of the few places featuring an interwar atmosphere, which is central, but not on the main drag, where you live well, but do not have to stand those large groups of tourists coming and going. A place of its own and nevertheless a relaxed, nice place with fine staff, located near Bucharest's oldest gardens and also just off Revoluției Square.

It is central and quiet, it has an atmosphere of its own, the staff is great, all rooms are well (but not over) furnished, there are all mod-cons one needs, and there is a fine traditional restaurant a hundred steps away: Vatra Restaurant. Only check your room first, there are (only a couple of them) that have some problem with... plumbing (ay, remember **those** days?).

**GPS - N44 26.227 E26 05.660**, 37 Ion Brezoianu, <http://www.hotelopera.ro/>

**VENEZIA HOTEL**

Restored and reopened in 2007, this hotel belongs to the same chain with the Opera and the Central, being quite similar to the former. With an elegant breakfast hall and with finely furnished rooms, it perfectly fits the boutique hotel concept. This is my top “above average” recommendation in the city, together with the good rooms at the Opera. Only keep in mind the fact that it only has rooms with double beds, there are no twins. And that sometimes they tend to have problems with their phones; they are there, even though there seems to be nobody answering the phone.



**GPS - N44 26.086 E26 05.292**, 2 Pompiliu Eliade, <http://www.hotelvenezia.ro>

**MOXA HOTEL**

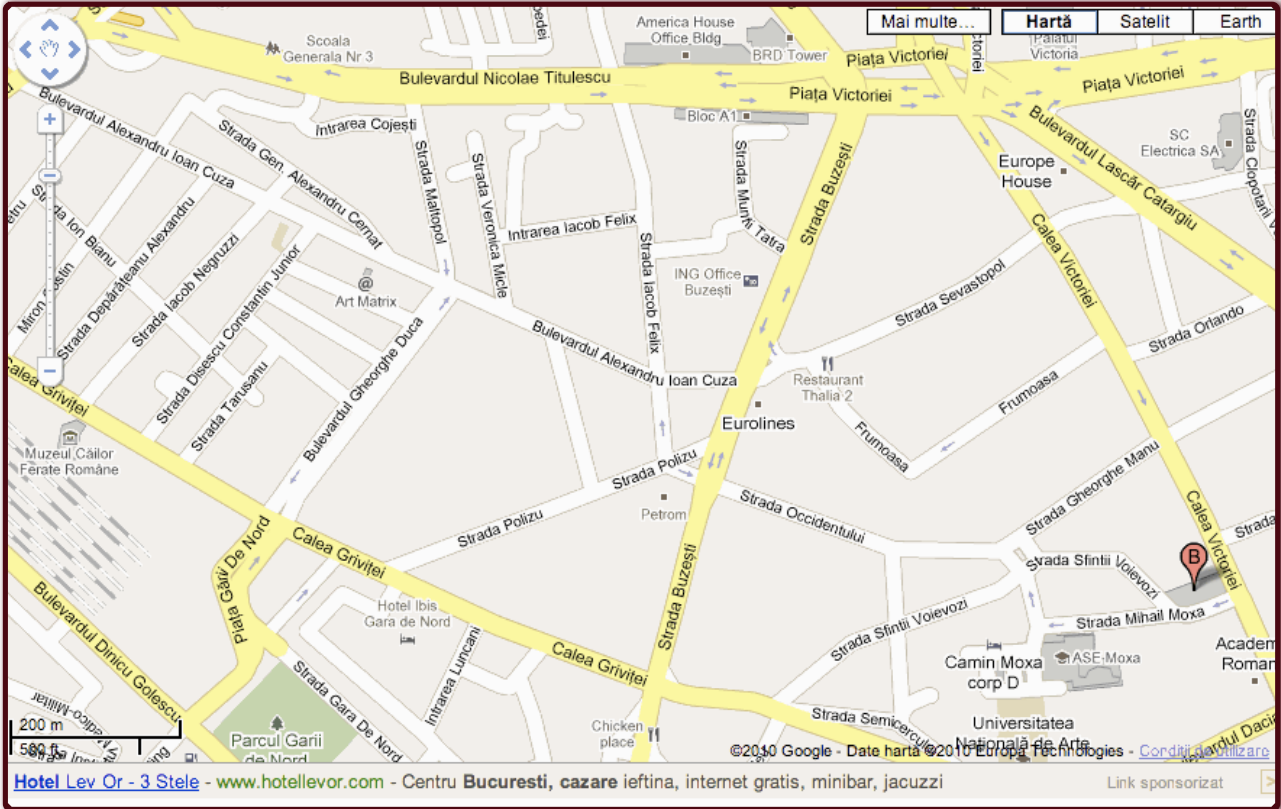
Seen from Calea Victoriei, this hotel is hosted by a period building. Seen from Mihail Moxa Street (that splits from the above-mentioned avenue), it is hosted by a concrete’n glass buff. Because the property has two wings, separated by a nice terrace: a classical one facing the busy avenue (windows are sound proof, but I would not open them too often), respectively a quieter one (except for the students in ASE’s Moxa Campus passing by) in the contemporary one.

Choosing the contemporary building, once inside, one cannot but be nicely touched by the warm atmosphere, the very interesting common area / bar lounge, as well as by the nicely appointed rooms. The classical building next door looks even more inviting. And the hall on the ground floor is not that bad. But, once one faces the 3rd, 4th or 5th huge Buddha figure, or those otherwise fine, but way too crowded chandeliers on the 1st floor hallway, those huge, tacky golden frame mirrors in most rooms (which are way too small for such large scale pieces of decoration), there is a sense of many limits which have been broken in this space, creating an overcrowded, atmosphere, where one feels breathless simply because there is no air to breathe, that huge Buddha and the immense bed canopy took it all. Visiting this otherwise beautiful building and seeing some otherwise fine objets d’art (well, leaving the existent kitsch aside), I could not but remember what a B&R guide once told me: “everything must be big around here. Huge. Mare. You people cannot live without Mare in this country. There’s a desperate quest for Big and Holy everywhere in Romania.” So, my recommendation: go for the rooms in the new wing and if you have 5 minutes to spare, ask to be shown to the old wing too, just to have an image of what you have missed. But then, if you fancy furniture that does not match the size of the room, heavy golden frames and out-of-the-box (golden even) Buddhas, then ask for rooms that begin with 70 or 80, they are all in the old wing.

The location is just off the main drag, a 5 minute walk from Romană Square (and also close to a small park for your those

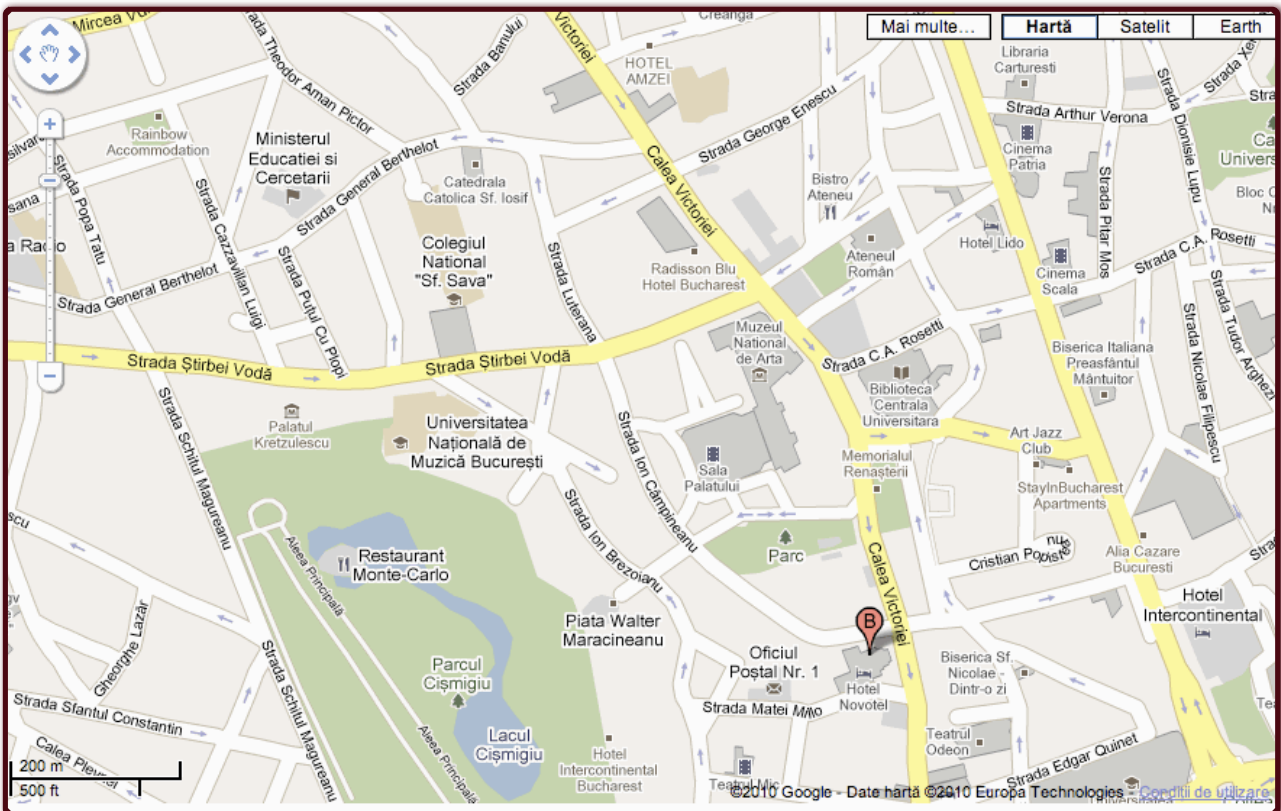


wishing to do a morning jogging session), 10-15 minutes walking from the Royal Palace.



GPS - N44 26.798 E26 05.369, 4 Mihail Moxa, <http://www.hotelmoxa.ro/>

NOVOTEL HOTEL



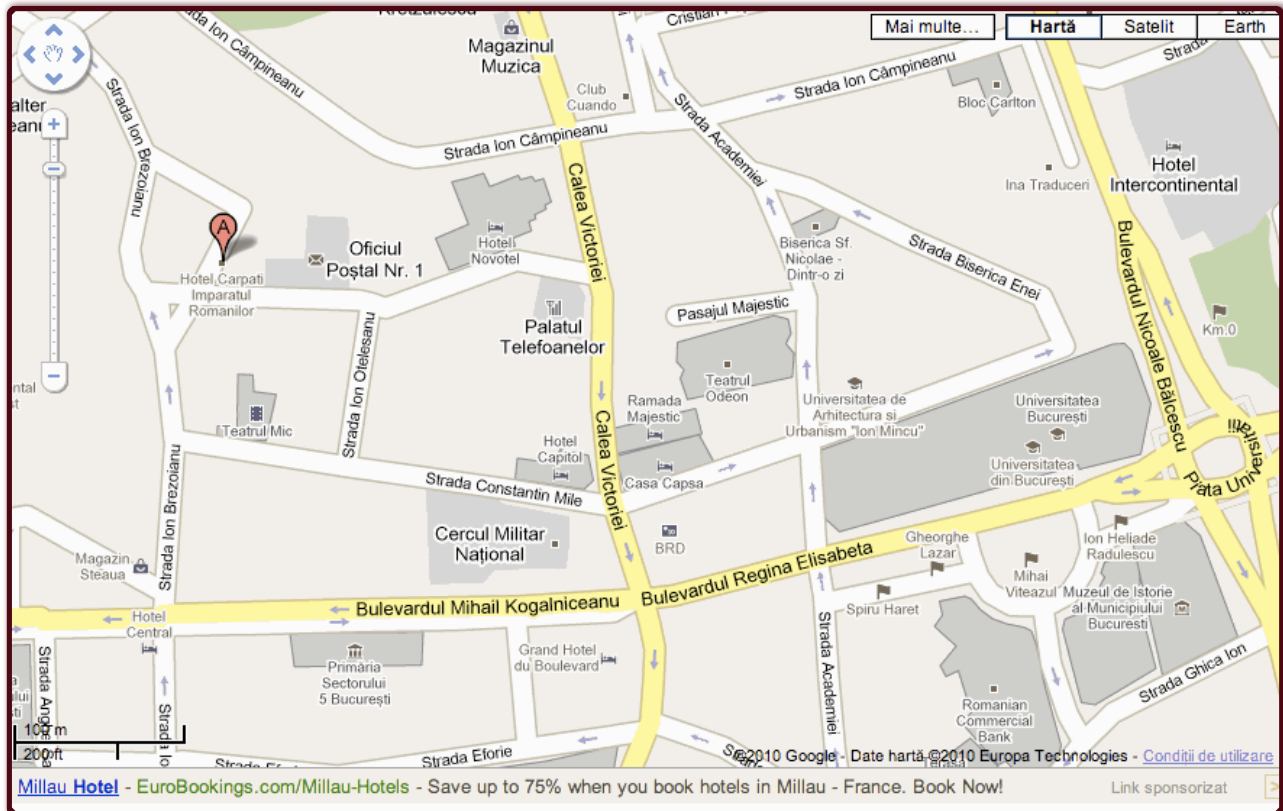
Built a few years ago, this hotel would be just another misplaced glass covered concrete box, unless they had recreated the facade of the old National Theatre in front of it. The National Theatre was built in 1859 and it was bombed by the US Air Force during WW2 (1944), a new theatre being built later on in University Square. The hotel provides well-appointed rooms (even though I fail to see why a business travel - targeted hotel has two bathrooms in every room; they could have made rooms larger instead), a wide (and therefore welcome in Romania) lobby, and a nice terrace to the back. The breakfast area (also used as restaurant) is too small for the capacity of the hotel. The staff is polite and the general service of the hotel is satisfactory. The only reason that made me list this hotel was the facade of a historical building they have re-created.

GPS - N44 26.212 E26 05.853

37B Calea Victoriei, [http://www.novotel.com/novotel/fichehotel/gb/nov/5558/fiche\\_hotel.shtml](http://www.novotel.com/novotel/fichehotel/gb/nov/5558/fiche_hotel.shtml)

#### CARPAȚI HOTEL

If you liked it in Casablanca around the Marché Central (like I did) and money is an issue, then this is just for you. It is a refurbished hotel just 5 minutes from the centre. Singles with shared bathrooms are more like a wardrobe where one crammed a bed and some sheets. Therefore the claustrophobic should be aware. As for those gilded, stained armchairs that remind one of the falling apart **Împăratul Romanilor** (Sibiu), that can be overlooked, as the two hotels belong to the same company. State your preference when booking, as some rooms do not have their own bathroom. The hotel has no restaurant, but **the Vatra** lies very close.



GPS - N44 26.192 E26 05.723

16 Matei Millo, <http://www.hotelcarpatibucuresti.ro/>

**Note:** the information here reflects my opinion. It does not mean to be a complete presentation or an official, professional one. Just like anyone else, I tend to like, be indifferent or hate things according to my own preferences and perception of the world. If you want to drop me a line, there is a link for that at bucharestian.com. Thank you.

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