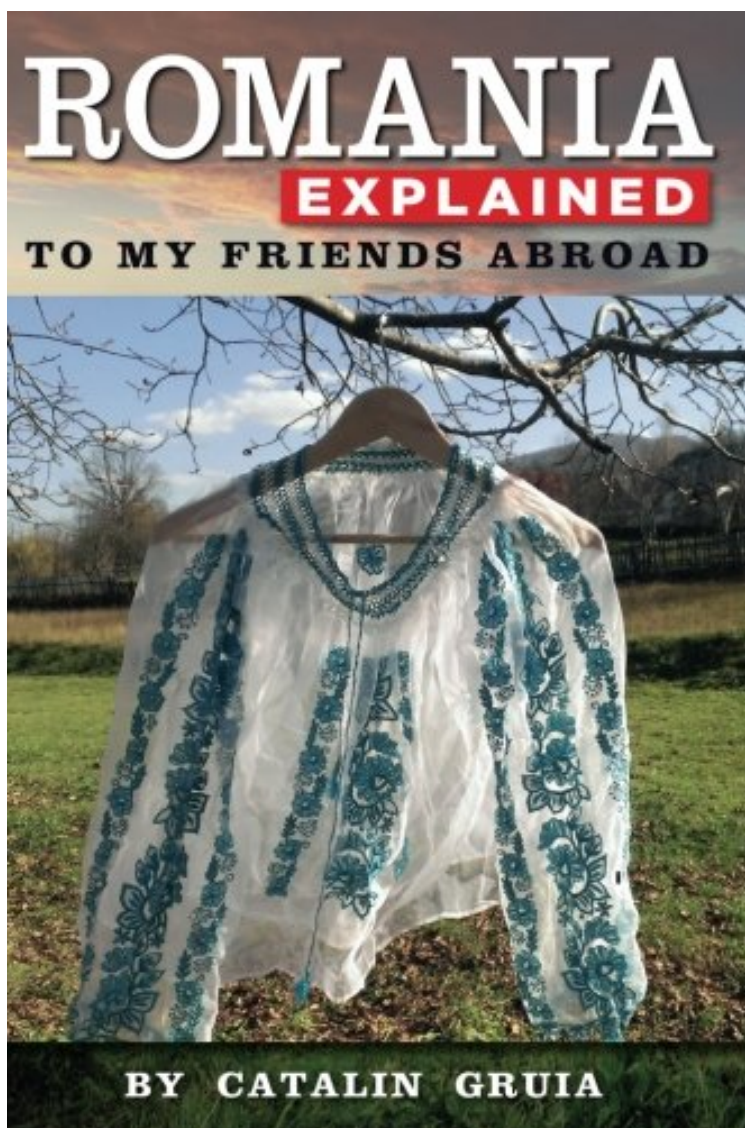


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Dear Reader, You should know from the very beginning this is not an exhaustive, academic paper on Romania; nor is it a travel guide of Romania. I'm a simple journalist and this is just my own private Romania – a subjective puzzle of

all the things I know from experience to be interesting for foreign tourists. I've been working for the Romanian edition of National Geographic for over ten years. Mostly because of my job I've met many foreigners – either when they visited Romania or when I went abroad. I guess now I've got more friends from the other side of the Earth than from my native land. I've learned a lot from them and from trying to answer their questions: • Do Romanians consider Ceausescu a good or a bad dictator? • Are Gypsies dangerous? • Where do vampires come from? • Why did the Saxons leave Transylvania? • How dangerous is it to ride a bicycle in Bucharest? • Why do most Romanian surnames end in escu? • Why do you have so many monks? • Where can I find Gerovital? • Any recommendations, must-see places? • How many Jews still live in Romania? • What are your most interesting traditions? • And so on... I had to research and prepare myself each and every time, for every curiosity they had. After a while, some of these studies became the essays I've collected in this book. I'm a fan of Montaigne's Essays whose model I've tried to emulate. Now I'm bold enough to think that if you want a bite of Romania and for whatever reason you don't have the stomach or the time to sample it here – for a month, a year or a lifetime – this is exactly the book you need!