

Instant Bucharest

Essential mini guides

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Hertz
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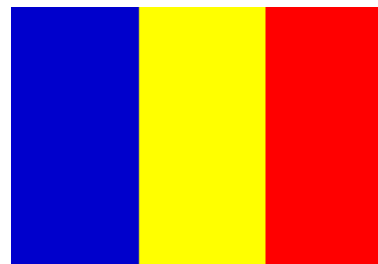
Introducing Bucharest

Bucharest isn't the first city to appear on a list of possible travel destinations, which is a shame, as there is much to enjoy in what is a dynamic, go-ahead city.

Almost completely rebuilt during the 1970s and 1980s, Bucharest is a Latin version of a Soviet city. With its wide streets, large parks, enormous public squares and intimate, hidden reminders of how it used to look, Bucharest offers almost everything you need from a modern city, whether you're coming to talk politics, do business, or simply have a holiday.

**Restaurants
Bars
Clubs
Sights
Culture
Hotels
Transport
and a whole host of other useful information**

Instant Bucharest



This small .pdf guide has been written to aid the traveller to Bucharest who doesn't need or want to carry an encyclopedia-sized guidebook around in their pocket. A bold experiment in travel writing, the best (and the worst) bits of Bucharest have been boiled down and generally condensed into one fun-sized read for the lightweight traveller.

Crime

If you keep your nose clean, Bucharest is safer than many other European capitals. Thankfully, there is no violent crime. However, if you go looking for trouble by visiting rough night clubs or by going to bad areas, you will find plenty. Petty crime is also a problem. Ripping out wing mirrors and stereos has grown from a pastime to a full time job for many.

Money

The national currency, the *leu* (plural *lei*) has become increasingly steady over the past year, and talk is in the air of a *leu greu* (convertible leu) next year. You will find lei in the following denominations: 500 (coins), 1000 (coins), 2000 (plastic notes), 5000 (coins), 10,000 (plastic notes), 50,000 (plastic notes), 100,000 (plastic notes), 500,000 (plastic notes) and new, one million lei plastic notes. There are plenty of places throughout the city to change money, with all major foreign currencies accepted. The exchange offices (*casa de schimb*) offer better rates than banks and usually show their rates on a board outside in the street. The best rates of exchange are to be found along the length of B-dul Magheru. Technically, it is illegal for foreigners to exchange lei into foreign currencies, but this law is rarely enforced. You will need ID when changing money. Now, we still feel the need to spell out the fact that you should *never* change money on the street: you will be ripped off. It is as simple as that. Finding ATMs is now a doddle. The most reliable are to be found at Banca Comerciala Romana (BCR) at Piata Universitatii.

Local time

Bucharest is in the Eastern European time zone at GMT+2hrs. So, when it's 12:00 in Bucharest, it will be 11:00 in Paris, 10:00 in London, 05:00 in New York and 19:00 in Tokyo. Daylight saving time (GMT+3hrs) falls between the last Sunday of March and the last Sunday of October.

Roads

Recent legislation has increased the fines imposed for traffic offences to forbiddingly punitive levels. Whether or not this improves the driving of Bucharest's car owners remains to be seen. Currently driving, or even being a pedestrian, is a challenging and often life-threatening experience in Bucharest. The quality of the city's roads often leaves a lot to be desired, and drivers are so dangerous it's impossible to make jokes about them. Streets can be badly lit at night and filled with poorly parked cars and other, stranger, hazards.

Tipping

Never assume you should tip a taxi driver. It is not the custom here and if you do as a matter of course, he will think you are a rich fool. So always wait until he has counted out the small change into your hand, no matter how little that amount may be. Then hand it back. In restaurants and bars always leave 10 per cent, but no more, and remember that the notion of *working* for a tip by giving good service is rare in Romania.

Toilets

Bucharest boasts one decent public toilet: in the underpass at Piata Universitatii, next to the pharmacy. In emergencies find the nearest McDonalds.

Visas

EU citizens do not need a visa and can stay in Romania indefinitely, as long as they arrive via an airport. If driving, you must report to the passport office (address below) after 30 days. Canadian, Japanese and Swiss citizens can stay in Romania for 90 days, while Turkish citizens can stay for 60 days, Americans 30 days. Citizens from almost all of Eastern Europe's former socialist countries can also stay visa-less for 30 days. All other nationalities, including Australians, New Zealanders and Israelis, need a visa, which must be purchased at a Romanian consulate outside of Romania. If you wish to extend your stay, you will need to present yourself at the passport office, found at Str. Luigi Cazavillian 9, open 08.30-13.00 Mon - Fri, closed Wed.

Practicalities

Getting there

From Britain, Canada and the US, your best bet is British Airways, which offers daily connecting flights to Bucharest from London.

The British Airways office in Bucharest is at **Calea Victoriei 15**, tel. 303 22 22, fax 303 22 11. Contact them by email at: barom@pcnet.com, www.britishairways.ro.

Tarom Romanian Airlines also fly daily from London.

Arriving in Bucharest

All international flights land at Otopeni International Airport (Aeroport International Otopeni), which is a 30 minute drive from the city centre. The airport was officially renamed Henri Coanda Airport recently, but nobody has so far paid the blindest bit of notice. Ignore any of the services on offer in the baggage claim area, be it currency exchange or limousines to the city centre. Instead, grab your luggage (if it fails to arrive head for the small office on the left hand of side of the exit, where staff will help you find out where it might have gone), and head for the arrivals hall, where there are a couple of ATMs, a small cafe, and car hire desks. Outside you will find a line up of shiny new taxis, all from the same company, Fly Taxi. DO NOT USE THESE TAXIS. The whole operation is a monopoly, and the cost, of 20,000 lei per kilometre, is about three times the cost of taking a normal Bucharest taxi, from a company such as CrisTaxi (tel. 021 9461) or Meridian (tel. 021 9444). Note that taxis from companies other than Fly Taxi are not allowed to wait directly outside the terminal, but you can call one and then meet it across the road in the upper level of the car park.

You can also get to town by taking bus 783, which stops underneath the arrivals hall, in front of the internal flights terminal and leaves for the city centre (stopping at Piata Victoriei, Piata Romana and Piata Universitatii) every 30 minutes from 05:23 until 23:53. Tickets costing 40,000 (valid for two trips) need to be purchased from the little booth which you'll find on your right hand side as you exit the airport building.

Car Rental

AAA Autorent Hertz G-3, Str. Ion Bianu 47, tel. 222 12 56, fax 222 12 57, reservations@hertz.com.ro, www.hertz.com.ro. Also at Crowne Plaza Hotel (tel./fax 202 10 57, Robuc62@hertz.com.ro, open 08:30 - 17:30. Closed Sat, Sun), Bucharest Marriott Grand Hotel (tel. 403 29 56, fax 403 29 57, Robuc63@hertz.com.ro, open 08:00 - 20:00) and Otopeni Airport (tel. 201 49 54, fax 201 49 55, Robuc51@hertz.com.ro, open 08:00 - 20:00). Recently voted the best car rental company in the world.



Absolut Rent-a-Car Al, Trestiana 2, bl. 17, sc. A, ap. 42, tel. 330 42 55/0722 34 93 60, fax 330 87 03, absolut@pcnet.ro, www.rentacar.com.ro. Car rental starting at US\$22/day (including taxes and insurance) and unlimited mileage. Open 08:00 - 20:00. ☎

Autorent Otopeni Airport, tel./fax 201 46 68, tel. 0723 54 74 45, office@autorent.ro, www.autorent.ro. Open 11:00 - 19:00.

Avis Mihail Moxa 9, tel. 210 43 44/210 43 45, fax 210 69 12, reservations@avis.ro, avis.ro@pcnet.ro, www.avis.ro. Also hotel offices at the Hilton (tel. 312 20 43, open 08:00 - 20:00), Intercontinental (tel. 314 18 37, open 09:00 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun.), Minerva (tel. 312 27 38, open 09:00 - 17:00, closed Sat, Sun) and Otopeni (tel. 201 19 57, open 08:00 - 20:00). Open 09:00 - 17:30. Closed Sat, Sun. **Budget** Str. Polona 35, et.1, ap. 4, tel. 210 28 67/212 26 51, fax 210 29 95, budget@pcnet.ro, www.budget.ro. Prices from US\$45 per day including unlimited mileage, insurance and VAT for a new fleet of Ford and Opel cars. Also at the Liberty Agency, Str. Batistei 5 (tel. 313 70 70, open 08:00 - 20:00), at Otopeni Airport (tel. 204 16 67, open 24hrs), Hotel Bucuresti (tel. 312 70 70, ext. 1015, open 09:30 - 17:30, Sat 09:30 - 17:30, closed Sun), World Trade Centre - Mara II Agency (tel. 224 40 26, open 09:00 - 17:00, closed Sat, Sun), Constanta (tel. 0241 63 97 13, open 09:00 - 17:00), Neptun (tel. 0722 50 43 94, open 09:00 - 18:00), Timisoara Airport, Continental Hotel (tel. 0723 05 51 68, open 09:00 - 17:00), Brasov Aro Hotel (tel. 0268 47 45 64). Open 09:00 - 18:00, Sat 11:00 - 13:00. Closed Sun.

Europcar C-3, B-dul Magheru 7, tel./fax 314 39 10, europcar@ont.ro, www.europcar.com.ro. Also at Hotel Intercontinental (tel. 314 04 00, ext. 365, open 09:00 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun) and Otopeni Airport (tel. 312 70 78, open 08:00 - 22:00). Open 09:00 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

FrancRoCar B-2, Str. Louis Blank 2, tel. 230 47 89, fax 230 04 39, rent.a.car@francrocroc.com, www.francrocroc.com. Open 09:00 - 17:00, Sat 10:00 - 12:00. Closed Sun.

Mega Taxi A-3, Str. Institutul Medico Militar 11, tel. 0722 49 59 00/0722 49 59 01, megataxi99@yahoo.com. Cruise Romanian roads in true style in a revamped Pontiac Firebird (US\$25 a day). Also rents out a big and cosy shuttle bus that can seat up to 25 people. Reservations required.

Sixt I-3, Str. Horia, Closca si Crisan 17, tel. 233 22 22, fax 233 23 53, email@sixt.ro, www.sixt.ro. Also at Otopeni Airport (tel. 201 46 26), open 08:00 - 20:00. Open 09:00 - 18:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Restaurants



It wasn't that long ago when Bucharest was nothing but a culinary desert, with only one or two half-decent restaurants to choose from. How things have changed.

Amsterdam Grand Cafe Str. Covaci 6, tel. 313 75 80/313 75 81, www.amsterdam.ro. Opened earlier this year, the Amsterdam Grand Cafe has lived up to all expectations, and just gets better and better. Situated in historic Lipscaeni, this is a modern, well-appointed restaurant. Great value, a good, vibrant atmosphere, all owned and managed by Dutchmen who ensure true European standards of quality. Thoroughly recommended. Open 08:00 - 01:00. \$\$\$ ☎

Balthazar D-3, Str. Dumbrava Rosie 2, tel. 212 14 60/212 14 61, fax 212 14 61, balthazar@totalnet.ro, www.balthazar.ro. Unequaled eatery serving French-Asian posh nosh to the bling-bling set. The lounge-style décor is tastefully cool, as are the staff. This place is so chic, even the plates will be trendier than you. And the food is pretty good too. Expect to pay justifiably high prices. Balthazar would effortlessly hold its own in London or New York. Open 12:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$\$ ☎

Café Royal Brasserie Str. Episcopiei 1-3, tel. 303 37 77, fax 315 21 21. Situated on the ground floor of the Hilton, this is 'clubby' but in a positive way. It is relaxing and unstuffy and has captured the best business power diners in the city. Consistently of high standard, it is not overpriced for what you get. The menu changes frequently to reflect both seasonal produce and the new Western dishes that are so prevalent in European capitals. The ebullient Sous Chef, Matthew remains on hand for either your praise or your suggestions. We love it. Highly recommended. Open 12:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$\$ ☎

Casa Caragiale Str. Caragiale 21-23, tel. 211 15 18, fax 212 38 24, elkei@fx.ro. Since opening its elegant doors in 2000, Casa Caragiale has consistently managed to maintain it's high standard French cuisine. All kinds of real treats on offer here, served in surroundings that only complement the excellence of the food. Thoroughly recommended. Open 17:00 - 02:00. Closed Sun. \$\$\$\$ ☎

Casa Vernescu Calea Victoriei 133, tel. 231 02 20. Oozing class and elegance, the French food on offer is fabulous. Walking into this listed building-housed restaurant is enough to make you feel special, and the service is overtly attentive. In terms of food, the Bordeaux duck with liver and date sauce is rich and cooked perfectly. Superior French wines. Open 12:00 - 02:00. \$\$\$\$ ☎

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Editors Picks

Balthazar
Str. Dumbrava Rosie 2, tel. 212 14 60, balthazar@totalnet.ro. Contemporary Fusion restaurant that delights with its subtle Asiatic and French influences, and sublime atmosphere. The Chef, Robert, whose contemporary dishes astonish allcomers, may well be the finest local cook currently employed in the capital. Thoroughly recommended. Open 12:00 - 24:30. ☎

Barka Saffron Str. Av. Sanatescu 1, tel. 224 10 04, barka@bloodred.ro. A good Indian menu with the added bonus of an excellent Indian chef, which is a first in Bucharest. Super atmosphere, always a good crowd in, and just the kind of smiley, happy place that we both like and recommend. Open 12:00 - 01:00. \$\$\$ ☎

La Bastille Str. Caderea Bastiliei 72B, tel. 212 49 14. Easily one of the best French restaurants in town, and definitely the most reasonably priced. The food has a real French feel to it, as does the service, all without a hint of Romanian, which cannot be said for some. Well worth a meal with those you want to make grin a little. Open 12:00 - 01:00. \$\$\$ ☎

La Madeleine Str. C-tin Sandu Aldea 64, tel. 224 50 17. A new and wonderful French restaurant in a fine part of the city, just behind the Arc de Triumf. We enjoyed the lunchtime set menus (surely the best value in town: bring your clients here now), and can't wait to return to try dinner. Open 12:30 - 16:30, 19:00 - 01:00. \$\$ ☎

La Mama Str. B. Vacarescu 3, tel. 212 40 86, www.lamama.ro. Simply the most popular Romanian restaurant in town. Packed out nightly, booking is recommended. It serves every Romanian favourite, huge portions at that, at bargain prices. Recommended. Enjoy. Open 10:00 - 02:00, Fri 10:00 - 04:00, Sat 10:00 - 04:00. Also on, Str. Delea Veche 51 (tel. 320 52 13) and Str. Nicolae Gulescu. \$\$\$ ☎

La Provence Str. Barbu Vacarescu (formerly Baza Cutezatorii), tel. 243 17 77. Fantastic, quite frankly. A brand new French restaurant in what used to be the Cutezatorii sports club, and immediately installed as one of the best places to eat in the city. Not only do we recommend the exquisite food: we absolutely implore you to go and eat something here. Open 12:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$\$ ☎

Lobb's B-dul Expozitiei 2 (inside the World Trade Centre), tel. 224 27 13. The owner Uncle Bob is half Italian, half Scottish. But there is nothing mean about his prices or the quality of his Italian food. Situated in the dome of the World Trade Center it is well worth a visit. Live jazz each Friday night has already ensured that he has a faithful following. Recommended. Open 08:00 - 02:00. \$\$\$ ☎

La Villa Str. Al. Constantinescu 65, tel. 224 15 05/224 15 55. A wonderful French restaurant that has class, fantastic food, and an expert staff. We were impressed by everything, and have little problem in recommending you get here as quickly as possible. Open 13:00-17:00, 19:00-24:00. \$\$\$\$ ☎

Que Pasa? Str. Praporgescu 13B, tel. 315 85 02. The house speciality is the *plescovita* which is basically a Serbian hamburger that takes over your plate and, finally, stomach, but is well worth trying if you're a meat junkie. Other than that, the half-Slovenian/half-Serb chef can do you Serb-style *mici* or spicy Serbian stew. Open 12:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$

Tandoor A-2, Str. Teodor Rudeanu 3, tel. 0724 221 417/222 18 55, fax 222 18 55. Used to be the horrid Sahib, and is now one of the best restaurants in the city. Genuine Indian food, cooked and served by experts, in lovely surroundings. Completely recommended. **Open** 12:00 - 24:00. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

Uptown Bar & Grill Str. Rabat 2, tel. 231 40 77, fax 230 13 60, uptown@totalnet.ro. At lunchtime, you would be lucky to get a table without a reservation. Does that tell you something? Popular with the media set, in fact dominated by media/advertising folk it's a high quality burger/bistro. Fab location in a quiet leafy street off Aviatorilor it is relatively inexpensive and the burgers are simply the best in town. **Open** 11:00 - 01:00. \$\$\$☺☺☺☺☺☺

Vatra Romaneasca Str. Brezolanu 16. Another good little Romanian restaurant, right in the centre of town, and offering some of the best *ciorba* you'll find in the capital. Right around the corner from IYP towers, we've spent many a happy lunchtime in here for little more than a pittance. Completely recommended. **Open** 12:00 - 24:00. \$☺☺☺☺☺☺

Yacht Club Intr. Chefalului (Baza Keoke), tel./fax 233 22 12. A French restaurant in a super setting on the far side of the northern part of Herestrau lake. Super French and seafood cuisine make the trip well worthwhile. Recommended. **Open:** 12:00-24:00. \$\$\$☺☺☺☺☺☺

Zvon Str. Decebal 9, tel. 321 00 19. Not half-bad attempt at creating a genuine Italian bistro. The food is certainly excellent value, while the bar downstairs can often be enjoyed lively. **Open** 10:00 - 02:00, Sat, Sun 13:00 - 02:00. \$\$\$☺☺☺☺☺☺

Local Cuisine

Romanian cuisine is a delicious fusion of Balkanic flavours, whose sum is far greater than its individual parts. As such, Romanian food is best enjoyed, as are most good meals, over a long even at the dining table with a healthy selection of local wines. Wholesome rather than extravagant, favourite Romanian specialties include the much derided, but to be tried once *ciorba de burta* (tripe broth), *sarmale* (mincemeat, rice and onion wrapped in marinated cabbage or vine leaves), *saramura de crap* (grilled carp served with a potent pepper-based sauce), *tochitura* (goulash stew) and *mititei*, more popularly known as *mici* (a quasi-sausage made with mincemeat). Almost all of the above can be served with *mamaliga* (polenta), a staple of the local diet. Sweets are very sweet. Try *papanasi*: tiny round doughnuts soaked in syrup and covered in sugar, served with *smantana* (sour cream).

That good Romanian food exists has never been in question. The problem was that until very recently, finding good Romanian food outside of the home was difficult. No longer. A plethora of good, inexpensive Romanian restaurants now serve an increasing variety of local dishes.

Internet Cafes

Acces Internet B-dul L. Catargiu 6, tel. 650 78 79. Over 20 computers crammed in to a room with nicely painted windows, popular with Internet junkies. **Open** 24hrs. ☺☺☺☺☺☺



Biblioteca GDS Calea Victoriei 120, tel. 314 14 71. Good place for puritans (no smoking or coffee) with 11 computers with average connection times. **Open** 24hrs. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

Brit C@fe Calea Dorobantilor 14, tel. 210 03 14, britcafe@britishcouncil.ro. Feel like the Queen behind a fast and flash flat screen while perusing the net. Plenty of quality British food on offer from sandwiches to warm snacks and cakes. **Open** 09:30 - 21:00, Sat 10:00 - 14:00. Closed Sun. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

Cyber Espace B-dul Dacia 77, tel. 211 38 36. Great internet café in the French Institute; get yourself a membership card and surf away. **Open** 10:00 - 20:00. Closed Sun. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

eNET B-dul Nicolae Balcescu 24, tel. 315 48 71, www.enet.ro. Smoking only allowed at the bar. **Open** 24hrs. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

Extremis Str. Academiei 9. Eleven computers. Very intimate atmosphere (if you want to get in, you have to ring the bell: they lock the door and hand-select surfers). Hot and cold non-alcoholic drinks. **Open** 24hrs. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

FX B-dul Magheru 8 - 10. Fast, flash computers, and a serious atmosphere. No food, drink, or smoking. **Open** 10:00 - 24:00. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

Internet Café B-dul Carol I 25 (on Piata Rosetti), tel. 313 10 48, icafe@icafe.ro. More often used as a very quiet all night bar (serving beer and coffee) than an internet cafe due to the rather high prices. Fast computers, though. **Open** 24hrs. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

PC-Net Café Calea Victoriei 136, tel. 650 42 14. Popular webcafé with quality terminals and quick connections. **Open** 24hrs. 40,000 lei/hr. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

Silence Café Str. Caderea Bastiliei 19, tel. 659 40 89. A true internet café, with computers and good coffee. **Open** 24hrs. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

XES Calea Victoriei 32-34. You'll find it in the same block as Benetton. **Open** 24hrs. 20,000 lei/hr. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

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Bars

Editor's Pick

Dublina B-dul Titulescu 18, tel. 222 94 73, www.irishpubs.ro. The first real pub in Bucharest, opened in 1995, and despite the fact that the list of competition now runs in to the hundreds, this is still the market leader. Super food (the pies, chips and steak sandwiches are unbeatable), and Sky Sports, which means English/Scottish football folks. **Open** 09:00 - 02:00. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

Best of the rest

English Bar Str. Episcopiei 1-3, tel. 303 3777 ext. 3962. The Hilton's English bar is a haven of sensibility in the middle of Bucharest's madness. Excellent service, a good crowd, and, of course, the monthly Cigar Club. **Open** 11:00 - 02:00. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

Jukebox Str. Sepcari 22, tel. 314 83 14. Without a doubt, the best basement/cellar bar in town. Come here after 21:00 and you will find happy staff, happy customers and happy prices. At less than 35,000 lei for a pint, it is unbeatable. The main attraction is their live Jukebox band who could stand on their own against any Euro competition. When the band isn't playing, karaoke is lively, and groaning full at weekends, this place is an absolute winner. Popular for corporate parties. **Open** 20:00 - 03:00. Closed Sun. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

La 80 Str. J.L. Calderon 80, tel. 212 48 86. Increasingly popular, spacious quality bar that also offers steaks, salads and snacks for reasonable prices - but the quality is good. The music taste is above average - with average in Romania meaning eurodisco/latino - but sadly the place shuts too early. Packed out at weekends, so reserve ahead (ask for the table at 'la place Pigalle' which looks down on everyone). **Open** 10:00 - 01:00. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

Opium Studio Str. Horei 5 bis, tel. 0722 50 50 66/253 07 88. The fact that Opium is difficult to find (your job - not ours) accentuates the secret feel of the place. The decor has a sort of French-surrealist out-of-a-job feel to it, but it gets you talking - which means the place is great for new dates and sparking up romances. The basement is a little more conservative but retains its pleasant and exclusive feel. **Open** 13:00 - 03:00. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

The Harp Str. Bibescu Voda 1, tel. 335 65 08. Boasting a prime location on Piata Unirii, The Harp has the usual good food you've come to expect from the Irish Pub people (the Harp and the Dubliner have the same owners), as well as charm, class and a dose of good humour. Darts upstairs, as is a huge

Gay Bucharest

Queen's Str. Culmea Veche 2.

The first real gay destination in Bucharest. Bar and disco for members only: membership costs 25,000 lei. To become a member you have to come in with an existing member, or be prepared to answer a few personal questions. **Open** 12:00 - 03:00. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

The Local Favourite

Laptaria Enache B-dul Balcescu 2, www.laptaria.totalnet.ro. An institution rather than a bar (everyone in town knows this place) the *Laptaria* (situated on the fourth floor of the National Theatre) is legendary, and absurdly popular. I do wish somebody would tell me why. It's small, always crowded, and it takes hours to get a drink. **Open** 10:00 - 02:00, Fri, Sat 10:00 - 04:00, Sun 13:00 - 02:00. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

screen showing the latest sports action, while the downstairs open fire is a real hit in the Winter. Recommended. **Open** 09:00 - 02:00. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

The Fifties Str. Roma 5, tel. 231 50 51. Drawing in a loyal crowd, the Fifties, with its hip, pastel and plastic decor, great service, drinks and music actually manages to recreate (to a certain extent) a genuine '50s atmosphere. Then again, the nearby B-dul. Stefan cel Mare manages to recreate a genuine socialist early '80s feel. **Open** 12:00 - 03:00, Sat, Sun 14:00 - 04:00. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

White Horse Str. George Calinescu 4A, tel. 231 27 95. Consistently the winner amongst the top bars with impromptu table dancing late on weekend nights by pretty customers. This is the liveliest night bar in town, but smoky as hell, and it can take forever to get served. Still, well worth the hassle. **Open** 12:30 - 24:00. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

Yellow Bar D-4, Str. Edgar Quinet 10, Universitate, tel. 310 13 51. Great, central place to relax and listen to good tunes, unwind and feel nicely cut off from the street above. Flashy leather/brightly coloured but somehow ambient decor. **Open** 10:00 - 03:00, Sat 12:00 - 05:00, Sun 15:00 - 05:00. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

Casinos

Casino Bucharest D-4, B-dul Nicolae Balcescu 4 (Hotel Intercontinental), Universitate, tel. 310 20 20, ext 7592, www.casinobucharest.ro. Excellent casino found in the Intercontinental hotel. **Open** 18:00 - 06:00. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

Cesar Casinos G-1, P-ta Montreal 10 (at World Trade Center), tel. 224 44 02/224 44 06, fax 224 43 03, marketing@cesarcasinos.com, www.cesarcasinos.com. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

Grand Casino C-4, Str. Episcopiei 1-3, tel. 314 72 00, fax 314 72 11. **Open** 21:00 - 04:00. Closed Mon, Sun. **Open** 21:00 - 04:00. Closed Mon, Sun. Also at the Bucharest Marriott Grand Hotel, tel. 403 08 00.

Mirage Casino C-3, Bd. Magheru 8-10, P-ta Romana, tel. 313 89 52/0740 309 309, fax 313 89 72, office@miragecasino.ro, www.miragecasino.ro. Casino adjacent to the Ambassador Hotel. **Open** 00:00 - 24:00. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

Plaza Casino B-3, Calea Victoriei 163, P-ta Victoriei, tel. 310 24 80/310 24 81, plaza@dia.kappa.ro. The Plaza occupies a real gem of a building. **Open** 14:00 - 07:00. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

Clubs

Of all the wonderful things that Bucharest has to offer, nightlife is not the least of them. There is something for everyone in this town: and we mean everyone. Nor will you have to worry about wandering the streets late at night: this is an incredibly safe city. What is lacking, however, is a central nightlife strip: an area where you know you will always find lively people and a good atmosphere. Alas, like most other things in Bucharest, you often have to travel to find what you really want. But find it you will...

Firm favourites

Backstage Str. Gabroveni 14, tel. 312 39 45, fax 312 29 16, www.backstage.ro. Steamy, as the heaving crowds and lack of air conditioning mean that you're going to sweat. The music is dated, 1980s-90s, but we assume deliberately so, in a retro style, while the crowd always appears to be having a good time. Good central location. Open 21:00 - 05:00. [P]

Club A Str. Blanari 14, tel. 315 68 53, www.cluba.ro. Club A has become something of an institution in Bucharest, with a loyal following of die-hard devotees, which is easy to see why. This is the most famous club in town. The drinks are cheap, the music is fabulous (ranging from Beck to Brian Adams to Bob Marley to just about anything) and everyone is always having a very good time. Regular party nights (check the local press). Recommended. Open 10:00 - 20:00, Fri, Sat 21:00 - 06:00, Sun 21:00 - 05:00. [P]

Club Sugar Str. Batistel 11, tel. 0723 20 06 22. The amount of black BMWs and Mercedes parked outside Sugar should tell you something about what to expect inside. Dress code is the strictest we have come across in Bucharest, so off with those trainers and on with those brogues. If you make it in, you'll come across a pleasant enough and ambient atmosphere, lots of statues, expensive drinks, house music and a great feeling of exclusivity. Open 21:00 - 06:00. [P]

Planter's Str. Mendeleev 10, tel. 659 76 06. Eternally popular and crowded with plenty of smoothies wanting a bit of action - but are unable to get it as there's hardly enough room (at weekends, at least) to lift up your arm to take a sip of your drink. Try and jostle for space on the dance floor to enjoy the very mainstream muzak, or try and stand still while people push past you. Not enough toilets, surly bar staff and hassly characters outside all guaranteed to compliment the night. Open 10:00 - 05:00.

Ramirez Montague & Associates Str. 11 Iunie 51, tel. 337 25 41. From the people that brought you Barka Saffron comes Salsa reincarnated. But whereas Salsa could often be a haven for low lifes and hangers on, so Ramirez is a sophisticated addition to the capital's nightlife scene. Regular special events with live music, jam sessions and imported DJs playing top tunes for a knowing, cruisey, choosy crowd. Open 16:00 - 05:00. Closed Mon, Tue. [P][P]

Studio Martin B-dul Iancu de Hunedoara 41, tel. 230 32 43. Currently the hotspot in town, and the number one choice for one-nighters. The sound is as strong as ever as the imported DJs just keep coming over with their vinyl wizardry. A top, top venue, to be indulged. Open 22:00 - 05:00. Closed Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Sun. [P]

Adult Entertainment

Most of the places listed here will, for a not inconsiderable fee, allow you to entertain one of the dancing girls in a more intimate location (often on the same premises). You should never assume this, however, and be aware that such practices are in fact illegal. Ask the girls themselves, and be discreet.

Cabaret Moldova D-3, Str. Icoanei 2, tel. 210 59 21. Still as infamous as they come, the Moldova is the home of the city's first live shower show: although you'll have to spend lots of cash and wait an age in order to see it. Open 21:00 - 04:00. [P][P]

Cindy B-3, Str. Mircea Vulcanescu 47, tel. 0722 237 396/314 47 61, fax 314 47 61. If its sexy young Romanian girls dancing the night away on your midriff you're after, then look no further. Every girl employed here is a cracker, and some can even do you a massage. A top notch place. Recommended. Open 21:00 - 05:00, Open: 21:00-05:00, 17:00-05:00 for massage. [P][P]

Disco Club Herăstrău G-1, Sos. Nordului 7-9, tel. 679 63 42/232 21 28. A Bucharest legend. This is the place where incredibly attractive young ladies from the former Soviet Union meet US\$100 bills. Non negotiable. To be indulged by all male visitors at least once, for sheer amusement if nothing else. Recommended. Open 22:00 - 05:00. [P][P]

Diva D-4, Str. Batistel 9, [M] Universitate, tel. 0723 642 485. While the divas at Diva tend not to sing, they will still have you dancing to their tune in no time at all... Table dancing a speciality. Open 21:00 - 05:00. [P]

Jazz



Green Hours 22 Club Jazz Café
Calea Victoriei 120,
tel. 211 95 92 /
0723 58 08 38,
greenhours@yahoo.com,
www.green-hours.ro.

Smooth, dark and eloquently cheesy 1980s decor make Green Hours one of the best places to listen to jazz or see a quality amateur play. Open 24 hours. [P][P]

Editor's Pick

The Office Str. Tache Ionescu 2, tel. 659 45 18. Rejoice! Rejoice! A little piece of London in the middle of Europe's backside. Exclusive, expensive, outstanding. Top tunes all night every night, a cruisey-choosy crowd, good drinks, staff, and the best leather sofas in the city. Indulge yourself, loads of others do. Worry about the cost the next morning. Open 19:30 - 02:00. [P][P]

Sights

Thanks to the bulldozers of the communist era there remains little of historical note to see in Bucharest. A few gems survive, and of course, lovers of Socialist architecture will be delighted by the city...

The Historic Centre



Bucharest retains an historic center, but it is something of a miracle that the area still exists. Originally a fabulous area housing the city residences of the Romanian bourgeoisie, the communist regime was eager to see the demise of the area, and decided to go about it by moving in as many gypsy families as possible. The area, usually known as Lipsani, which consists of a jumble of streets between the river, Calea Victoriei, Bulevardul Bratianu and Bulevardul Regina Elisabeta, is today in a rather shabby condition, but it is also one of the most fascinating areas of the city to visit. There are markets selling shabby clothing, textiles, antiques, bric-a-brac, and an increasing amount of cafes, restaurants and bars. The area is set for great things in the not too distant future.

Communist Bucharest

Casa Presei Libere Piata Presei Libere 1. Bearing a striking resemblance to Warsaw's Palace of Science and Culture, Casa Presei Libere, formerly known as Casa Scanteii (House of the Spark) was designed to symbolise the power and glory of the Communist party, to let the people of Bucharest know that Uncle Joe was watching them. Standing at the entrance to the city (you cannot miss it as you drive in from the airport) the building housed Romania's entire printed press and newsrooms. Nowadays, many newspapers and magazines remain accommodated in the building, as (ironically) does the Bucharest Stock Exchange. The red marble pedestal at the front of the building once played host to Bucharest's statue of Lenin (removed in 1990), but other symbols of communism remain on the building: if you look closely half-way up the towers you should be able to make out the remains of a hammer and sickle.

Civic Centre B-dul Unirii. Running a lengthy five kilometres from east to west, Bulevardul Unirii (original name Bulevardul Victoria Socialismului - Boulevard of the Victory of Socialism) was intended as the main axis for Ceausescu's Centru Civic project that was designed to make the city a monument to the 'modern Socialist.' The boulevard starts at Piata Alba Iulia, crosses Piata Unirii (one of the largest public squares in Europe) and continues all the way to the highlight of the route, the Palace of Parliament. The boulevard was built, quite deliberately, to exceed the length of Paris' Champs Elysées by 6m. The wide, tree-lined pavements are almost eerily (Piata Unirii excepted) devoid of street life.

Editor's Pick

Palace of Parliament (Palatul Parlamentului, International Conference Centre) Calea 13 Septembrie 1, tel. 311 36 11, fax 312 09 02, clc@camera.ro. What is without doubt Romania's most famous building, the Palace of Parliament (known as the House of the People, or Casa Poporului before 1989) was built during the darkest days of the Ceausescu regime. Standing 84m above ground level on 12 floors, the building has long been shrouded in mystery, rumour and hyperbole. Originally designed to house almost all the organs of the Communist state, it today plays host to the Romanian parliament and a modern, well equipped conference center. Open 10:00 - 16:00.

Museums

History Museum (Muzeul National de Istorie) C-5, Calea Victoriei 12, tel. 315 70 56/311 33 56. The beautiful and grand neoclassical exterior hides a museum that is in urgent need of restoration and revitalization. Plenty of skeletons, jewellery, weapons and tools to see, but all arranged in a rather confusing manner. The best exhibits are downstairs: the Lapidarium features a plastercast of Trajan's column. A super exhibition called *Si tu ai fost urmarit* (You too were followed) showing Stasi and Securitate surveillance techniques is currently bringing in the crowds. Open 10:00 - 18:00. Closed Mon, Tue.

Peasant Museum (Muzeul Taranului Roman) B-2, Sos. Kiseleff 3, tel. 650 53 60, fax 312 98 75, muztar@mc.ro, www.ltc.ro/mtr/tar_e.htm. In most people's opinion, the Peasant Museum is the best museum in Bucharest. Well laid out and presented exhibits tell you all you need to know about the diverse and fascinating history of life around the country over the past few centuries. Recommended. Open 10:00 - 18:00. Closed Mon. Admission 20,000 lei, children 5,000 lei, guides 50,000 lei/hr.

Village Museum (Muzeul Satului) G-1, Sos. Kiseleff 28-30, tel. 222 91 10, fax 222 90 68. Sadly no longer the proud museum it was a few years ago, thanks to an arson attack in 1997 and then another devastating fire in early 2002 that damaged 15 buildings, five of which were burnt beyond repair. Still, walking around the grounds and ignoring the ruins, you'll see around 50 cottages, farmsteads, churches, workshops, water mills and roadside crosses from all over Romania. The open-air museum, founded by Royal Decree in 1936, covers some 15 hectares on the shores of Lake Herastrau, in the north of the city. Good gift shop. Open 09:00 - 19:00. Admission 40,000 lei, students 15,000 lei.

Sightseeing Tours

Athenee Palace Hilton

Vasile, the Hilton concierge, runs a great tour of the city and its sights and museums every Saturday and Sunday at 09.30. Just US\$18 for a three hour tour, including all entrance fees, transport and refreshments. Call in at the Hilton or tel. 303 37 77 ext. 3845 for details.

Culture

Art Galleries

Art Collection Museum (Muzeul Colectiilor de Artă) Calea Victoriei 111, tel. 659 66 93. To a certain extent, the collection has not been arranged in a suitable manner - going more by individual collection rather than artist or period - but there are a few treats for the viewer. The amount of Romanian artists (though none that are really known abroad, such as Brancusi) is obviously high, but there's not too many international artists on show. Some of the original collections were tragically (and stupidly) destroyed or seriously damaged during the 1989 revolution. **Open 10:00 - 18:00. Closed Mon, Tue.**

National Art Museum (Muzeul National de Artă) Calea Victoriei 49-53, tel. 313 30 30/314 81 19, fax 312 43 27, national.art@art.museum.ro, <http://art.museum.ro>. Badly damaged during the revolution the National Art Museum has now been largely restored thanks to private donors and various international organisations. The most interesting area is the European Gallery, which contains 15 rooms full of paintings and sculptures by Rembrandt, Veneziano, Monet, Sisley, El Greco, Breughel and Rubens to name but a few. **Open 10:00 - 18:00. Closed Mon, Tue.**

Cultural Centres

The British Council Calea Dorobantilor 14, tel. 210 03 14, fax 210 03 10, bc.romania@britishcouncil.ro, www.britishcouncil.ro. A little bit of Britain in the centre of Bucharest that is teeming with life and energy. The library on the top floor is extensive and receives plenty of new publications on a frequent basis. Internet cafe too. **Open 10:00-19:00, Sat 10:00-13:00. Closed Sun.**

Institut Français de Bucharest B-dul Dacia 77, tel. 210 02 24, fax 210 02 25, mediateque@ifb.ro, www.ifb.ro. One of the grandest-looking cultural centres you're ever likely to come across, the French Institute won't leave you feeling unsatisfied with what's on offer. A good library, French language courses and a wide range of French films, concerts and events always on offer. **Open 10:30-18:15, Fri 10:30-16:15, Sat 10:30-14:00.**

Instituto Italiano di Cultura Alea Alexandru 41, tel. 322 71 72/322 86 87, fax 323 48 41, bibliot@canad.ro, www.canad.ro/itcultrro. A recent change of location has done this cultural centre a load of good, making the large library and video collection all the more easier to access. **Open Mon, Wed 10:00 - 18:00, Tue, Thr, Fri 10:00 - 14:00.**

When dialling Bucharest from abroad make sure to dial the international access code (+40-21)

Opera & Ballet

Opera Romana

B-dul Kogalniceanu 70-72, tel. 314 69 80/313 18 57, onr@kappa.ro, www.onrbucuresti.fx.ro.

Still the first point of reference for all visitors to Romania seeking hardcore opera and ballet, Bucharest's opera house, built at the turn of the century, is in urgent need of repair. Yet under no circumstances should that deter you from taking in a performance. Productions are invariably excellent, and prices are cheap (tickets are priced from 10,500 -126,000 lei). You will almost certainly need to buy tickets in advance from the opera box office. (Box office pen 10:00 - 13:00, 14:00 - 19:00. Closed Mon.)

English language books

Salingers, Calea 13 Septembrie 90 (Marriott Grand Avenue), tel. 403 35 34/0745 10 29 92, fax 403 35 35, info@salingers-bookstore.com/ililealexandra@hotmail.com. Bookshop offering a far better than average range of English language fiction and non-fiction books. Always a good selection of new arrivals, with more and more titles appearing everyday. **Open 12:00-21:00, Sun 10:00-21:00. Also at Str. Episcopiei 1-3 (inside the Hilton), tel. 312 67 46.**

Romanian business brief

Doing business in Romania follows no easy formula that we can fit and distill into a handy sized box in our guide. What we can do is tell you the facts...

Romania is still not considered by the EU as a functioning market economy. Corruption is legendary - from bottom to top constant bribes need to be paid to oil the wheels, bureaucracy is stifling (though, credit where it is due, progress is being made here) and any chance Romania had of becoming a member of the EU in 2007 is now long gone. 2012 is now a more realistic entry date. But it is not all bad news. A strong Foreign Investor's Council (tel. 222 19 31) constantly badgers the government to get real, while an equally influential newsgroup, Romania-Economics (romania-economics@yahoo.com) also keeps the government on its toes.

As for the facts and figures, the Economist's *World In 2004* sees Romania's GDP growing by five per cent next year (to total of US\$63 billion), while inflation holding reasonably at around 12.5 per cent.

Hotels

Finding good value accommodation is no longer a problem in Bucharest. From the luxury of the five-star market leaders, through comfortable three-star establishments to the ever-increasing number of good hostels, there is a bed in the Romanian capital to suit the needs and limitations of every pocket. The stock of accommodation is not limited, however, and you are advised to book well in advance.

Athénée Palace Hilton Str. Episcopiei 1-3, tel. 303 77 77, fax 315 21 21, hilton@hilton.ro, www.hilton.com. The most famous, central, and probably best hotel in Bucharest. All the rooms have wonderful facilities, such as spacious, luxurious bathrooms, beds large enough to accommodate a sleepy grand piano, interactive TV and non-stop room service. Hotel facilities are endless, and include free use of the health centre, a choice of top-class restaurants, cafes and bars, as well as some excellent shops. 272 rooms (153 singles US\$310, 59 doubles US\$340, 45 junior suites US\$345, 5 diplomatic suites US\$430, 5 presidential suites US\$560, 5 courtyard suites US\$510). 19% VAT not included.  ★★★★★

Best Western Parc Hotel B-dul Poligrafiei 3-5, Bucuresti, tel. 224 20 00, fax 224 29 84, bestwest@parch.ro, www.parch.ro. The transformation from what was a rather bleak hotel into a smart, professional and totally modernised establishment is rather outstanding. The size of the rooms is generous, the decor is in good taste, and mod cons - including dataports - are plentiful. Only ten minutes away from the centre of town, this hotel is probably the best three-star place around. 267 rooms (180 singles US\$128, 79 doubles US\$146, 8 suites US\$188).  ★★

JW Marriott Grand Hotel Calea 13 Septembrie 90, tel. 403 00 00, fax 403 00 01, marriott.bucharest@marriott-hotels.com, www.marriott-hotels.com. Grand in every way from actual size to service and facilities, the Marriott Grand is another contender for best hotel in Bucharest. The Grand has successfully created a thriving community nestled on a hill just behind the Casa Poporului, and offers rooms that are accordingly large and have pretty much all you could wish for, including bathrooms you'd be happy to sleep in. 402 rooms (10 singles US\$290, 369 double US\$290, 8 junior suites US\$400, 6 corner suites US\$450, 7 business apartments US\$550, 2 presidential suites US\$800). 19% VAT not included.  ★★★★★

Crowne Plaza Bucharest B-dul Poligrafiei 1, tel. 224 00 34, fax 224 11 26, bucharest@crowneplaza.ro, www.bucharest.crowneplaza.com. Set in the quiet and leafy north of the city, this is another of the city's top hotels. Rooms are impressively equipped and include dataports for laptops, safes, as well as fancy bathrooms. Other amenities include a free airport shuttle and a separate entrance to the adjacent Romexpo complex. The conference rooms can hold up to 200 guests. 164 rooms (87 singles •180, 42 doubles •200, 26 junior suites •215, 8 suites •280, 1 presidential suite upon request). 19% VAT not included.  ★★★★★

Green Forum Hotel Str. Pictor Barbu Iscovescu 19, tel. 230 66 66, fax 230 52 90, greenforum@axagroup.ro. The first health retreat in the city. Virtually all the food on offer is of a healthy variety - as in salads and quality fresh meats and fish - and the basement has a well equipped health centre (with Asian rejuvenating therapy), a steam shower and hydromassage bath. The rooms themselves are big and have luxurious adjoining bathrooms. Good views of the northern suburbs. Kosher restaurant (see page 30). 14 rooms (13 suites •100, 1 deluxe suite •130). Prices include VAT 

Ibis Calea Grivitei 143, tel. 222 27 22/222 27 24, fax 222 27 23, reservations@ibisaccor.ro, www.ibishotel.com, www.accordionhotels.com. The Ibis is just about the best value hotel in the Romanian capital, offering well appointed rooms with good bathrooms, comfy beds and televisions boasting more channels than you can watch, at a more than reasonable price. The Ibis is not found in the most salubrious area of town, it must be said, but it should be hoped that the hotel will act as a catalyst for much needed rejuvenation of the zone around Gara de Nord. 250 rooms (196 singles US\$69, 38 doubles US\$69, 16 apartments US\$99). Prices include VAT.  ★★

Intercontinental B-dul Nicolae Balcescu 4, tel. 310 20 20, fax 312 04 86, bucharest@interconti.com, www.interconti.com. Much newer, but almost as famous as the Athénée Palace Hilton, the Bucharest Intercontinental remains the tallest building in the city, and had a bird's eye view of the 1989 revolution that took place, literally, on its doorstep. As a result, it remains the favourite of journalists, and with good reason. All rooms have now been renovated to five-star status, and all have large, comfy beds and super bathrooms. 386 rooms (224 singles •325, 152 doubles •352, 9 suites •440, 1 apartment •1,320).  ★★★★★

Minerva C-2, Str. Gheorghe Manu 2-4, tel. 311 15 50/55/212 85 26/30/31/41, fax 312 39 63/312 27 34, reservation@minerva.ro, www.minerva.ro. Recently renovated, the hotel is renowned and popular and has a pleasantly intimate and slightly secretive atmosphere. The rooms are sizeable, have TVs and fat beds and adjoining bathrooms. There are also two flats that can be rented out for long-term stays. 87 rooms (16 singles US\$110, 59 doubles US\$115, 12 suites US\$135 - 162). Prices include VAT.  ★★

Muntenia Str. Academiei 19-21, tel. 314 60 10/313 68 19, fax 314 17 82, muntenia@diai.kappa.ro, <http://muntenia.kappa.ro>. Large, cheap hotel in the centre of town offering good value for budget travellers. Some rooms have a private bath, others share bathrooms on the corridor. A few have a TV, hence their higher price. 110 rooms (17 singles US\$16, 50 doubles US\$25, 19 triples US\$33 - 45, 23 suites US\$50 - 60, 1 apartment US\$67). Prices include VAT.  ★

Pension

Four Seasons Str. Erou Iancu Nicolae 129C, tel./fax 490 85 13, tel. 490 85 14, 4seasons@4seasonsbucharest.com, www.4seasonsbucharest.com. New pension in a leafy suburb offering excellent value rooms, with cable television and all the other mod cons you could possibly need. The bathrooms are fabulous, and the breakfasts (included in the price) are to die for. 10 rooms (10 doubles US\$57). 19% VAT included.

Residence Str. Clucerului 19, tel. 223 19 48/223 19 12, fax 222 90 46, reservations@residence.com.ro, www.residence.com.ro. Fantastic new hotel in a good area of the capital, offering large, excellent value rooms and super services. There are little touches of class all over the hotel that suggest they really care. The wrought iron beds, for example, are fabulous. Prices include breakfast. Airport transfer available on demand. The restaurant is also worth a visit, serving good international cuisine. Entirely recommended. 30 rooms (15 singles •60, 10 doubles •70, 5 apartments •80). VAT not included.  ★★

Turist B-dul Poligrafiei 3-5, tel. 224 20 00, fax 224 23 17, dht@parch.ro. A large concrete hotel, hidden behind hotel Parc. Quiet and green surroundings but overpriced, small rooms, small beds, and small bathrooms with curtain-less showers. The friendly staff and the swimming pool next door may make up for the worn carpets and over-valued breakfast. 293 rooms (54 singles US\$34 - 44, 239 doubles US\$45 - 59). Prices include VAT.  ★

Hostels & Villas

Elvis's Villa I-3, Str. Avram Iancu 5, tel. 312 16 53, elvis@elvisvilla.ro, www.elvisvilla.ro. Plenty of mod-cons to keep you amused while staying at this hostel, including free laundry, internet access and breakfast. A little tricky to find, go three stops on any trolleybus east on B-dul Carol I from Universitate, walk past the roundabout and the Acropolis-like building and turn right. There are another two Elvis establishments in Romania: you can reserve a bed in them here. (1 bed US\$10/night, US\$12 per person for a private room), US\$26/3 nights, US\$55/week, US\$150/month.

Vila 11 A-3, Str. Institutul Medico Militar 11, tel. 0722 49 59 00/0722 49 59 01, vila11bb@hotmail.com. Sweet and very friendly pension very close to Gara de Nord (one block east of Str. Vespasian and B-dul Dinicu Golescu) that is highly recommended for those wanting a good dose of peace, quiet and a personal atmosphere. Phone in advance for reservations. Transport to/from the airport possible. (14 beds, US\$12.50/person; airport pickup US\$12.50).

Villa Helga I-3, Str. Salcamilor 2, tel./fax 610 22 14, helga@rotravel.com, www.rotravel.com/hotels/helga. An official and charismatic HI hostel a short distance from the centre attracting a wide variety of international travellers all with stories to tell. For your much-loved cash you can use the laundry and have breakfast. Get there by bus 86 from the train station (Piata Gemeni stop) and take the first turning on the right. 6 dorm rooms, 30 beds (1 bed US\$9.50/night, discounts for long-term stays).

Getting around

Taxis

There is currently a severe taxi shortage in Bucharest, as absurdly low prices make them more economical than almost any other form of transport. Almost every day a new company appears on the market offering prices cheaper than anybody else, but still demand, at these prices, outstrips supply. So how cheap are we talking? Between 6500 lei and 8000 lei per kilometre, while a litre of petrol costs 22.500 lei. Never get in to an unmarked cab: you will be conned, at best, driven to a less than pretty area of town, beaten up and robbed at worst. Given the demand, phoning for a taxi from home can be a little trying on one's patience. The most reliable companies are Meridian (tel. 9444/9888), Cristaxi (9461/9466), Prof Taxi (9422) and Perrozzi (9631). All have at least one call operator that can speak English, but you should learn how to say your address in Romanian just in case.

Metro Opened in 1979, Bucharest's metro has four lines and 45 stations, but while the system is certainly clean, reliable, safe and cheap, much is wrong. It is not user friendly, and can be confusing. The city centre is poorly served, and the stations are poorly marked at platform level, while the only maps that can be understood in any way are at station entrances at street level. Trains run between 05:30 - 23:15 at frequencies of about six or seven minutes.

Trams, Buses & Trolleybuses

Even though the public transport network is cheap, extensive and reliable, taking a bus, trolleybus or tram can be a headache due to the amount of people that cram on to the blasted things. A total lack of air conditioning and ventilation makes the use of public transport highly undesirable at any time of year. Anyway, tickets valid for one journey cost 8.000 lei and must be purchased from the metal kiosks next to major stops before climbing aboard, then punched in one of the strange looking devices located all over the vehicle (watch how others do it first).

In the air

Angel Airlines

Str. C-tin Bălescu 18, tel. 231 59 44/231 59 45, fax 201 17 04, marketing@angelairlines.ro/rezervari@angelairlines.ro, www.angelairlines.ro. An up-and-coming airline that serves many of Romania's regional cities. Open 06:00 - 20:00. Closed Sat, Sun. Baneasa Airport (tel. 201 17 01/02), open 06:00 - 20:00.

Useful information

Ambulance

Puls Str. Turda 127, bl. 2, sc. E, ground floor, tel. 224 01 87. Ambulance service. Open 07:30 - 19:30, Sun 07:30 - 13:30. For emergencies, tel. 450 28 55 or 973.

Hospital

Emergency Clinic Hospital Calea Floreasca 8, tel. 230 01 06/962, spital@urgenta.ro, www.urgenta.ro. If you're in need of emergency treatment, you'll be in good hands here in what is the best state-run hospital in Romania. Efficient, clean, and well-run. Brits will be particularly impressed.

Pharmacies

Sensiblu Calea Dorobantilor 65, tel. 211 11 27.

Excellent non-stop pharmacies, with branches all over town. Open 24hrs. Also on Str. Berzei 50 bis (tel. 212 64 01), Piata Amzei 10-22 (tel. 303 85 79), B-dul Balcescu 7 (tel. 212 49 23), Str. G. Enescu 36-40 (tel. 211 53 34), B-dul Titulescu 39-49 (tel. 310 10 14) and Unirea Department Store (tel. 303 02 67).

Shopping

Markets Romanian fruit and vegetables are simply fabulous. Although they are strictly seasonal, and of differing sizes and shapes, they are organically grown due to an overall lack of pesticides. Their intense flavours make a mockery of the rubbish you are offered in Western European supermarkets. The best markets in Bucharest are those at *Piata Amzei* (Str. Piata Amzei), *Piata Matache* (Str. Buzesti), *Piata Unu Mai* (B-dul I. Mihalache), and *Piata Obor*. In addition to fruit and vegetables, all of the above markets sell a wide range of flowers, while *Piata Obor* is the home to a range of junk, from car spares to sofas, so vast that a visit is an essential part of any trip.

Souvenirs

Athenaeum Shop Str. Episcopiei 1-3 (inside the Hilton), tel. 303 37 77. Wide selection of good quality souvenirs to take home. Our tip would be to go for the official (and rare) Romanian version of Monopoly. Open 11:00 - 19:00.

Gold Art Str. Episcopiei 1-3 (inside the Hilton) tel. 310 18 27. Contemporary artwork (glassware, sculpture, paintings, ceramics). Open 10:00 - 20:00, Mon 13:00 - 20:00, Sun 11:00 - 14:00.

Nemtoi Gallery Calea Victoriei 126, tel./fax 212 75 86, tel. 0744 535 264, nemtoi_gallery@hotmail.com. Glass, vases, all kinds of wonderful gift ideas. Open 10:00 - 20:00. Closed Sun.

BRITISH AIRWAYS

15, Calea Victoriei, Bucharest Financial Plaza, Ground Floor, Sector 3, Bucharest, Romania
Tel: +4021 303 22 22
Fax: +4021 303 22 11

Instant Bucharest

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