

Traveller's Guide to

**IT.A.K.E
UNCONFERENCE**

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Thank you for joining I T.A.K.E. Unconference! Two intense days of learning with developers around Europe await you, along with a contest, social events and open space sessions. You can find everything you need on the unconference website, <http://itakeunconf.com>.

To make your stay in Bucharest as pleasant as possible, we wrote this ebook.

It contains useful information for:

- travelling
- accommodation
- eating and drinking.

It also contains important advice on things to avoid; pay attention especially to the [section about taxi trips](#) to avoid spending more than necessary. The [food and drink section](#) will help you accommodate to Romania's food culture. For your satisfaction, it's best to know and follow the eating and drinking advice from this guide while in Romania.

Should you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact Mozaic Works (the company that created and organizes I T.A.K.E. Unconference) using the information from the website <http://mozaicworks.com>. We will happily respond to your queries in order to ensure you have a good stay in Bucharest.

Chapter 2

Arriving in Bucharest

What to pack for your Bucharest trip

The weather in Bucharest in May is usually mild. Temperatures are usually in the range of 20-25⁰C during the day. It sometimes rain, although Bucharest is known for its sunny weather. Night temperatures are usually around 15-20⁰C.

Arriving in Bucharest

You can arrive in Bucharest by plane, train or car.

By Plane

Plane connections are available from all over Europe, usually at less than €300. The national airline is [Tarom](#). You will land at [Henri Coanda airport](#), also known as Otopeni airport (OTP), situated about 15 km outside Bucharest.

There are three ways to transfer from the airport to Bucharest:

- Taxi: call one using the taxi ordering station at the international arrivals. The system is fully automated, using a mobile application on a touch screen terminal. You can pick your price level and the companies of choice. A taxi usually arrives in 1-7 minutes. Take the printed receipt and keep it for reference. **Only take the taxi that has the company and id printed on the receipt.** Some drivers will try to make you take their taxi instead, and pay much more.
- Bus: the bus 783 has a station in front of the airport and it will take you to the center of the city, stopping in the most important stations on the way. The price for a trip is 3.5 lei, less than €1. The bus leaves every 15 minutes during the week and every 20 minutes in week-ends. You can check the schedule [here](#). You can buy tickets from the ticket machine in the bus station using cash or from the cashier.

- Train: a train exists from a nearby train station to the North Station (Gara de Nord). A transfer bus will take you from the airport to the train station. You can check the train schedule [here](#)



Figure 2.1: Taxi Cars

Since you'll probably have luggage and will want to go to the hotel as soon as possible, we recommend ordering a taxi from the airport. The price per km is quite low; the maximum you should pay for transfer is around 50 RON, less than €15, given that you order the right type of taxi (see the section "Traveling in Bucharest" for details). **Bucharest taxis are cash-only; make sure you have small bills: 10, 5, 1 RON because they might not have (or want) to give change.**

By Train

Good train connections exist from Wien and Budapest, with sleeping cars available. Unfortunately, the train speed is quite low in Romania, so it will take you about 8 hrs to travel from the border to Bucharest. Moreover, during the summer, due to high temperatures, the speed limit is lower than usual and the train might be late.

The good thing, if you don't mind traveling longer, is that most international trains have electric plugs. If you buy a mobile internet connection, you can work during the whole trip since mobile internet covers almost the whole country and is pretty fast in Romania. Expect temporary signal loss in areas situated between mountains. You can get a mobile connection without a monthly subscription from [Cosmote](#).

You will reach Bucharest in the main station, "Gara de Nord" (or North Station). **Don't get a taxi from the front of the station.** They are usually very pushy, negotiate prices and will take the long route. Instead, order a taxi or take the metro.

By Car

Traveling by car will allow you to see more of Romania. **It is strongly advised to use a navigation system with the last version of maps;** many roads are built in Romania and direction indicators are not that helpful. When planning your trip, take the following things into consideration.

Traveling by car takes longer in Romania than in other European countries, because Romania has only a few hundreds kilometers of highway (see A1, A2, A3 for details). All routes from border to Bucharest will take you through cities, so you need to pay attention to speed limits and to city traffic.

European roads, starting with E (e.g. E68), are the best maintained roads in the country. To have a fast trip, it's advisable to use them as much as possible and avoid national and regional roads.

The speed limits in Romania on European roads are:

- 130 km/h on the highways
- 100 km/h outside cities
- 70 km/h inside cities, but be careful to **observe the city entrance indicators** because some cities have the 50 km/h limit instead

On national and regional roads, the speed limits are:

- 90 km/h outside cities
- 50 km/h inside cities

Due to the lack of highways, many Romanian drivers tend to go faster than the speed limits. Don't be surprised therefore if you'll see drivers going 130 - 180 km/h.

Due to this behavior, Romanian drivers will notify everyone when police is nearby by flashing their lights. To avoid tickets, observe the indicated speed limits whenever you see this signal.

In conclusion, the best thing to do is to go at your own pace, observe indicators and stay out of the way when speedy drivers close by.

After reaching Bucharest, you have to be aware of the local drivers' behavior. Driving in Bucharest often seems chaotic because drivers change lanes abruptly, go on the tram lines (even though they might get a fine) and do all kind of strange maneuvers. You will be more relaxed if you keep a constant speed and are careful to the cars near you, especially the one in front. Also, drivers behind you might hunk their horns immediately after the semaphore turns green; unfortunately there's little to do about this, except not getting annoyed :).

If you find yourself in a tough spot, like having to change lanes while stopped at the semaphore, hand communication is the best way; let the nearby drivers know your intention and they will usually make way for you to do your thing.

Parking is another challenge in Bucharest. Many drivers park wherever they find a spot; this is risky because your car could be taken and you need to pay to recover it. The simplest thing to do is to get a parking spot at your hotel. Otherwise, a few parkings exist in Bucharest around the "Piața Universității" and "Piața Unirii" areas. [This website](#) has more information about parking in Bucharest.

Chapter 3

Useful information for living in Bucharest

Language

The main language of Romania is unsurprisingly Romanian. It's a Latin language combined with Slavian words adopted from the neighbouring countries.

Most of the Bucharest citizens speak at least some English or French. Young people speak English very well, due to early education and exposure to American culture. You will notice that, unlike in many European countries, movies are subtitled in Romania, allowing the viewers to listen to the original language.

The official language of the I T.A.K.E. Unconference is English.

Money

Currency

The Romanian currency is called 'leu'. Its name means lion and has an interesting history. During the 17th century, Romania was using the Dutch currency called löwenthaler that has a lion on it. When Romanians created their own currency, they decided to call it leu.

Banknotes exist for 500, 200, 100, 50, 10, 5 and 1 leu. Coins exist for 50, 20, 10, 5, 1 ban (1 ban = 0.01 leu). You can see how they look on the [National Bank's website](#).

A source of confusion with the currency lies in its recent history. The currency was denominated a few years ago, which is a fancy word for saying that we cut 4 zeroes from all currency. If you hear someone talking about amounts like 'one million lei', it's most likely it means 100 lei in today's money. Same for 10.000 lei and 1 leu, 100.000 lei and 10 lei, 500.000 lei and 50 lei, 50.000 lei and 5 lei. The currency code has also changed; the old one was ROL (Romanian Leu) while the new one is RON (Romanian New leu). Prices are nowadays displayed in RON, but sometimes the ROL price will also be displayed.



Figure 3.1: Löwenthaler

Credit Cards

Many restaurants and shops accept major credit cards. Please be aware that not all of them do, and you might be surprised. The best way to find out is to ask the waiter or the shop assistant before buying anything.

A major exception is taxis. *Most taxis from Bucharest are cash only.* Make sure you have small banknotes, of 10, 5 and 1 leu because they often don't have (or don't want to give you) change.

Withdrawing Money

You can withdraw money from any cash machine. They are called "Bancomat" and are spread around the city. Depending on your bank, this might be the best deal for currency exchange.

Exchange Rate

The exchange rates have been relatively stable in the past years, somewhere in the following area:

1 EUR = 4,4 - 4,5 RON

1 GBP ~ 5,2 RON

1 USD ~ 3,4 RON
The reference exchange rate is available on the [National Bank's website](#). You'll find on the same page a RSS feed for each currency you're interested in.

Exchanging Money

Exchange houses and banks can change your cash into lei. There are usually no additional taxes for this service. Of course, the rate depends on the exchange house.

Don't go to exchange houses that look strange. Never exchange money on the street. While these houses are regulated and verified, fraud is more possible than in other European countries. The safest money exchange is at bank offices, where the rate is usually better than in airport or at hotels. The simplest way is to withdraw money from a cash machine ('bancomat').

To exchange money, you will need to identify yourself with the passport or national ID.

Traveling in Bucharest

Public transport in Bucharest includes: buses, trams, metro and taxi.

Metro

The fastest way to travel is by metro. Modern trains with air conditioning, security and lots of space arrive every five minutes during the day and at around 15' during late evenings. If your destination is close to a metro station, it's a great way of traveling. You can find more details about the metro and the map [here](#).

The price for a metro trip is around 2 lei (~€0,40). Multiple trip cards are available for different prices, of which I mention: 2-trip, 10-trip and daily pass. An electronic wallet can also be used for metro, bus and tram. More details are available [here](#).

Trains are available between 5:00 am - 11:30 pm.

The only downside of the metro is that it doesn't cover the whole city. Sometimes, you'll need to use other ways of transportation.

Bus and Tram

Many bus lines are available in Bucharest. A full map of the lines can be downloaded [here](#). A tram map can be downloaded [here](#).

The price for a trip inside Bucharest is 1,3 lei (~€0.30). Tickets can be bought from ticket offices in the bus stations; most of them are cash only. The offices are closed after 6 pm and in week-ends.

The simplest way to get a ticket is for a day-ticket through a SMS with the content 'A' sent at 7456. You will shortly after receive a code that you can use on any normal city line (not on express buses). The price is €2.17 including VAT. The ticket is valid until midnight on the day it was bought.

When in the tram or bus, *be aware of pickpockets*. Police officers are sometimes in the bus to prevent unpleasant events, but not always.

Buses and trams are often full, especially in the morning and afternoon. Also, city buses rarely have a separate lane, making their schedule unpredictable. Trams also have delays due to cars sharing their lines on narrower streets.

Overall, buses and trams have larger coverage than metro but delays are to be expected.



Figure 3.2: Bucharest Metro Map

Taxi

Bucharest taxis are very inexpensive, if you know the good companies. The normal price is 1.39 lei / km and another 1.39 lei to start, 13.9 lei / hour when the taxi is waiting. A trip around the Bucharest center will cost maximum 40 lei (~€10), usually around 10 lei (~€2.5).

There are many hidden traps with taxis. Therefore, the most important thing is to choose the right taxi company. Here's a list of recommended companies:

- *Taxi 2000*
- *Meridian*
- *Cristaxi*
- *Cobălcescu*
- *Național*
- *Leone*
- *Confort*
- *As*

A few things to be wary of:

- Most taxis are cash only. Have small bills available
- Most taxi drivers speak only Romanian. It's best to write down your destination and show it to the driver.
- The trip price has to be displayed on the car and inside the car, in front of the passenger sit. Check that the price is correct
- The counter should be visible. The driver should start the counter before leaving. Ask him to do so if he didn't
- Drivers will sometimes move around in circles to increase the price. There's little you can do about it, other than having a local person with you or looking on navigation
- Before paying look at the hour from the receipt. A few cabbies would give you an older receipt, with a very big amount, and ask you to pay for it. Make sure that hour of the receipt corresponds to the hour when you arrived at the destination.

You can order a taxi by phone, but the simplest way by far is using a mobile applications. [Clever Taxi](#) is the most well-known, but others are available in the app stores. Search for Bucharest taxi apps.

Internet Access

Romania has a very good internet infrastructure. It was consistently rated second or third place in the world in terms of average speed.

Because internet access is very cheap (~10€/month for unlimited broadband, usually fiber optics), most cafes, bars, restaurants and hotels provide free, fast, unlimited internet access. Fast 3G and 4G connectivity is also available.

Healthcare

We hope you won't need any health assistance, but it's good to know where to go if something bad happens.

Healthcare is relatively cheap in Romania compared to other countries. Both state clinics and private clinics exist. [“Regina Maria” healthcare network](#) is well spread around the country, and it has good services.

Emergencies

Like in most EU countries, call 112 for any emergency. The operator will send the appropriate team to help you.

Safety

Bucharest and Romania are safe, provided that you follow common sense rules. Your embassy probably has information about Bucharest that you should read and follow; here's [what the US embassy has to say about Romania](#).

The central area of Bucharest has luxury shops, cultural treasures (for example the National Art Museum and the Ateneu concert hall) and government buildings. The Old Town, while quite filled with people most of the time, has a low rate of unpleasant events. All the central areas are safe for walking, even late in the evening.

A few things you need to be careful about:

- *Petty thieves and pickpockets*. They operate especially in crowded areas and in buses. Subways are safer because they have guards on the train. Keep eyes and hands on your wallets and purses when in a crowd.
- *Taxi drivers*. Call a cab using one of the mobile apps or take one of the taxi companies recommended in this ebook. Make sure the price is right (1.39-1.42 RON/km) and the driver starts the counter before moving. Have small bills available. Don't take a cab from the front of the North Station.
- *Scams*. Don't buy things or exchange money from people offering it on the street. If you see people who seem to be in trouble, call 112 and report the emergency because it could be a scam.
- *Beggars*. They are almost always part of an organized network. Don't give them money.
- *Speedy drivers*. Look around before crossing the streets; some drivers are very impatient and might even go through the red light. You need to be careful.
- *Stray dogs*. The dogs moved with the people when the communists displaced them from country side to the city blocks. Their numbers increased in time. The population is managed now, but they can still pose a problem. Avoid them as much as possible.
- It's not advisable to go into *certain neighbourhoods* from Bucharest in the evenings. They include: Ferentari, Rahova and Traian street.

If you need any help while in Bucharest, make sure to ask one of the local organizers; we would be happy to do whatever we can to make the visit nicer for you.

Chapter 4

What to eat and drink

Many visitors to Romania leave enchanted with the traditional food. This section lists local food you could try when visiting and tips and tricks about eating and drinking in Bucharest.

It's worth noting that Romanian cuisine has been heavily influenced by Turkish and Eastern European plates, and added a local touch that makes it interesting.

Soups



Figure 4.1: Potato Soup

A Google image search on “Romanian soups” will show you how serious Romanians are about their soups. So serious that we actually have three large categories of soups: soup, sour soup (“ciorbă” pronounced tchorba) and cream soup (not traditional, imported from Europe). Traditionally, we eat soup at lunch.

The most common options in Romanian restaurants are: vegetable soup, vegetable sour soup, beef soup, chicken soup, meatball sour soup, cream soups. In traditional restaurants you will also find beans soup, soup à la grecque or versions from various parts of the country (eg. “supă rădăuțeană” from near Suceava). Fish soups are more rare, but very good, especially when done in the “Danube Delta” style.

A tasty option, but less appealing for some foreigners, is the tripe soup. Maybe the description given to it by a famous local cuisine author, Radu Anton Roman, will make it sound better: “This dish looks like

is made for drunk coachmen but it has the most sophisticated and pretentious mode of preparation in all Romanian cuisine. It's sour and sweet, hot and velvety, fatty but delicate, eclectic and simple in the same time".

No matter what you like, vegetarian or meat, simple or complex taste, there is at least a soup that you'll enjoy in Romania.

Mici or Mititei



Figure 4.2: Mici (Mititei) Cooking

Mici or mititei are the local version of grilled hashed meat. They are made from a mix of meat, seasoned and carefully grilled on charcoal.

With a delicate taste, slightly spicy (not much), they are a perfectly matched with a cup mustard and a large beer. They are usually sold by piece; depending on how hungry you are you can pick between two and five. More than that, and you'll need to add some țuica on top.

Serve them with or without a side dish. Many people like them with potatoes, but they make a good meal by themselves as well.

The "City Grill" restaurant from the Old Town in Bucharest has created this year an assortment of mici from various parts of the country. If you want to sample them, it's a good place to go to.

Sarmale

Cabbage rolls, usually served with polenta, cream and hot pepper.

A traditional plate for every important day; be it Easter, Christmas, a wedding, the baptise of a child, sarmale are a very important part of the celebration.



Figure 4.3: Sarmale with polenta and cream

They are made with various types of meat: beef, turkey, pork, even fish. A common variation is to use vineyard leaf instead of cabbage leaf, especially in the early summer. Another, less common, variation is the nest: three or more sarmale with different fillings are rolled together in a larger leaf and slowly boiled in special cooking pottery.

Works perfectly with white wine or țuică.

Vegetarian options exist, usually filled with a mushrooms and tomatoes or other vegetable mixes.

Two cousins of sarmale exist: filled peppers and filled pumpkins. The mix inside them is similar but not exactly the same, and the vegetable containing it lends some of its taste to the filling. Also served with cream but without polenta. Also have vegetarian options, very tasty when properly prepared.

Tocaniță or the Local Stew



Figure 4.4: Tocaniță

Tocaniță (pronounced tocanitza) is a family of food best described as the local version of a stew. As always, it's similar but not quite like the stew recipes from around Europe; the most important difference

is that usually bones are used during the cooking and often they are part of the final dish. It's a delicate dish, with a mix of tastes and a great sauce. Often contains garlic.

You will find tocaniță made of almost anything: vegetables only (mushrooms, tomatoes, peas, beans etc), chicken (with bones), beef, pork, fish. It's almost always served with polenta and it works perfectly with a hot pepper.

Red wine or țuica works great with it. Ok, sparkling water too.

Some variations of tocaniță became so important that they got their own name. Ostropel is a tocaniță made from chicken or turkey, traditionally with a lot of garlic and onion. You'll probably find the "politically correct" version in restaurants.

Bites of the day

Mamaliguță (Polenta)



Figure 4.5: Mamaliguță

Mamaliguță is a very important part of Romanian food. It can accompany other plates (sarmale, tocaniță, grilled or fried fish, even soup) or can be served as a separate dish. A large variation of mamaliguță-based dishes exist, but the most common is by far mamaliguță with cheese and cream. If you're more hungry, add a boiled or fried egg. For the meat lovers, add ham in the mix. For more sophistication, bulz is a ball of mamaliguță baked with a mix of cheeses and ham.

Serve it with a glass of white wine or țuică (of course).



Figure 4.6: Zacuscă

Zacuscă

Zacuscă is a mix of slightly fried and then boiled vegetables, usually containing peppers and seasoned to be slightly spicy. The mix is then conserved for the winter and served as an appetizer. A very tasty mix, it's best served spread on bread and accompanied by a beer or red wine.

Countless variations of zacuscă exist but are less likely to be found in restaurants: mushroom zacuscă, eggplant zacuscă, beans zacuscă, with or without tomatoes, etc.

Fasole Bătută (Mashed Beans)



Figure 4.7: Fasole Bătută

Another traditional appetizer, mashed beans is a dish that tastes much better than its modest description would tell you. The secret is usually a slight touch of garlic and onions, just enough to give it personality. Served by itself or spread on bread, accompanied with white wine or țuică, it's very enjoyable in the afternoon or for a light dinner.

Salată de Vinete (Eggplant Salad)

You might have tried this in an oriental restaurant. Romanians do it differently, and love the way they do it.



Figure 4.8: Salată de vinete

Baked eggplants are carefully peeled and thinly diced, mixed with oil and onions, sometimes with garlic as well, and spread on bread with tomato slices on top. White wine or sparkling water give them more character. Restaurants usually serve the politically correct version, with sliced onions separate from the mix.

The trinity of Romanian appetizers works very well together: Eggplant Salad, Mashed Beans and Zacusă are enough for an enjoyable, unpretentious dinner.

Fried Liver

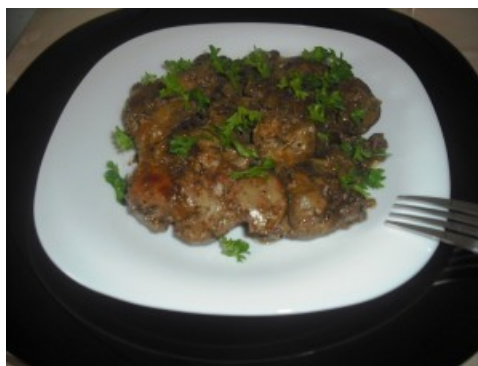


Figure 4.9: Ficăței la tigaie

Although a more heavy plate, it's something we traditionally enjoy at any time of the day. Chicken liver is the most common, but pork and beef liver is sometimes on the menu.

Works well with polenta or bread, mușdei on top (if you don't have a date), and wine or țuica.

A similar, very tasty plate but fit for the less-opinionated consumers is tocaniță of chicken hearts and gizzards.

Tochitură



Figure 4.10: Tochitură

Mix of fried ground meat, polenta, an egg and sauce. Must drink țuică with it. Red wine works well, but choose țuică anyway.

Sweets

Păpănași



Figure 4.11: Păpănași

Looks like a donut, only larger. This is probably the most impressive dessert you can find at Romanian restaurants. I will let you find out why 😊.

Traditionally filled with cheese and served with cream, sugar and jam. Restaurants have reduced the calories by adding only jam on top, but you're welcome to ask for cream as well (and run 5 miles afterwards).

Try them, even if you need to break your unbreakable vows to do it.

Colțunași



Figure 4.12: Colțunași cu vișine

Unfortunately, too rarely found in restaurants, this is a great dessert. Batter filled with cheese or sour cherries, boiled and served with cream, sugar and sour cherry syrup. So good that you can build a complete meal with them: cheese colțunași for the main plate and sour cherry colțunași for dessert.

Ștrudel



Figure 4.13: Ștrudel

Ok, you caught me: we imported them from Germany without many changes. It has become such a big part of our tradition though, that they're worth mentioning.



Figure 4.14: Kurtocs Kalacs

Kurtocs Kalacs

Original from the secui (szekely) country, you'll find them at specialized shops on the street. Great for a dessert on the go. A rolled batter is cooked over charcoal and covered with your preferred topping: nuts, caramel, cinnamon, coconut, etc.

Drinks

Țuică and Palincă



Figure 4.15: Țuică

The local spirit drink, țuică is a plum or pear distilled alcoholic drink with a strength between 40-60% alcohol. When it's double distilled, it becomes palincă and its strength increases to 60-80%. Best tried directly at farmers who make it for their own use. Commercial versions exist, some of them good quality. If you're passionate about it, ask us for details.

A word of advice: one or two glasses will make you feel better. More than that, and you might not enjoy it anymore.



Figure 4.16: Vișinată in the making

Vișinată, Afinată and other ...inată

When țuică is mixed with fruits and left for a few months, it becomes a sweet, flavoured drink. Although considered a woman choice, many men enjoy it (oops, I let the secret out).

The variations are endless, but you can usually find vișinată (sour cherry ...inată) and afinată (cranberry ...inată).

Beers



Figure 4.17: Ciuc Beer

Most Romanian beers are blond lagers, although you'll also find brown, red and radler.

Recommended locally produced brands are: Ciucaș, Ciuc, Silva, Timișoreana, Bergenbier and Ursus.

If you prefer micro-breweries, "Caru' cu Bere" restaurant produces its own draught beer.



Figure 4.18: wines

Wines

Romania has always been a producer and consumer of wines. A large variation of red, white and dessert wines is available. Unfortunately, the quality varies a lot, so it's better to have a list of recommendations.

And here it is 😊 . The order is arbitrary.

Red wines:

- Fetească Neagră, Special Reserve from Halewood (dry)
- Prince Mircea (dry)
- Busuioaca de Bohotin (sweet or medium dry)
- Negru de Dragășani

White wines:

- Zghihara de Huși
- Grasa de Cotnari (sweet or medium dry)
- Feteasca Alba (dry)
- Gewurtztraminer Receaș (sweet or medium dry)

Dessert wines:

- Lacrima lui Ovidiu, usually white but also red

Better Not Try

Grilled beef is generally not well done in Romania. The reason is that traditionally, beef is served boiled or in tocănița, which means the cuts are very different from grilling. While you'll find grilled beef on the menus, you should know that only few specialized restaurants in Bucharest can deliver a good beef steak. Things got better in the past few years, but it's usually better to stick to Romanian alternatives: pork steaks or grilled trout (locally grown and usually very fresh).

Chapter 5

Closing

Thank you for reading this guide! We hope it will help you have a nice stay in Romania.

If you have feedback regarding the content, please [contact Mozaic Works](#). We will do our best to include it in the next edition. See you at I T.A.K.E. Unconference!