

Bits & Pieces of Bucharest

By: Topi & Kaius



Monday the 7th of April was a special day in many regards as our group embarked upon the journey to Romania. Helsinki's chilly air was soon forgotten as the packed aircraft greeted us with its narrow aisle and fairly spacious seat rows. Due to a lengthy delay our pit stop in Amsterdam nearly turned into a mini vacation in the Netherlands, but co-operative staff and group leaders' swift feet allowed us to continue the flight to Bucharest without extra stamps in our passports. First sights of Romania were crowded airport, night-time traffic and an alternative hotel for the first night. The trip had already begun with unexpected adventures.

“Pit stop in Amsterdam nearly turned into a mini vacation in The Netherlands”



Despite a few surprising occurrences, **Tuesday** kicked off with an excellent breakfast. The coffee was not particularly tasty, but the much needed caffeine held us together checking in at the new hotel and heading to the first destination.

Palace of the Parliament is a marvel at the core of Bucharest. Surrounded by beautiful flora, it has a close-to-nature-look in the midst of otherwise urban environment. Inside we were faced with high security procedures as one would assume. Metal detectors, guest badges and strict routes to follow. All this accompanied by dedicated guards and a pleasant tour guide called Francesc. History is always exciting, but the most memorable bits of information were the not so tiny details. 365 000 square meters fit into the building. There are over 2000 chandeliers decorating palace ceilings in 11 different floors. Nearly 2.5 million tons of marble has been quarried from faraway mountains and thousands of hand-woven carpets have been hauled from faraway towns. The palace hails eclectic architectural styles, ranging from Roccoco, Baroque and 19th century Germany.



Tuesday's programme was concluded with delicious Romanian cuisine in **the old town**. The table was set with chicken soup, moussaka with polenta, tasty cabbage salad and childhood cake. Later in the evening we paid a visit to a jazz club and proceeded to get a good night's sleep for the next day's adventures.



THAT'S
A MAP

“Metal detectors, guest badges and strict routes to follow. All this accompanied by dedicated guards and a pleasant tour guide.”

Wednesday greeted us with another nutritious breakfast. Our first bus ride was not without minor complications, but eventually we found ourselves in the desired destination, A.D. Xenopol School of Economics. We heard about the local school system and future dreams of high schoolers. Our group was received with open hearts and wide smiles, not to mention great conversations about politics, international relations and sports. Our first visit ended with a small volleyball game, treats of local candy and a deep-level group reflection on important stuff that we have learned so far. The mutual understanding was that cross-cultural interaction is an invaluable lesson in life.



“Cross-cultural interaction is an invaluable lesson.”

FUN FACT:

Romanian schools don't **generally** offer lunch. There are recesses and breaks similar to Finnish school system, but food and drinks are students' individual responsibility.





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Thursday began a tad later than the days before. After the nourishing breakfast the group headed yet again towards the A.D. Xenopol School of Economics where a charity event was held by 1st and 2nd year students. The salesperson determination and tenacity was ubiquitous in the air and it was obvious that sales strategy and bartering was inherent for each student.

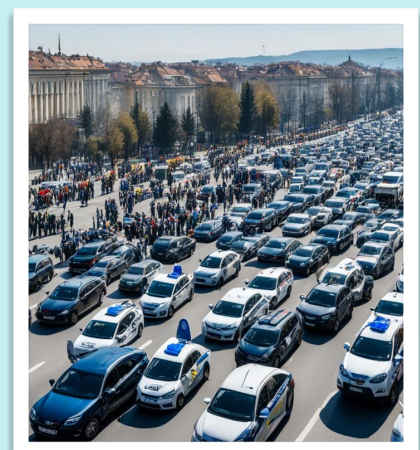
After business deals were conducted, various school faculty members enlightened us on religion and learning difficulties in Romania. We had a mini lecture from ‘supporting teachers’, which as a profession is an amalgamation of special needs teacher, speech and language therapist, psychologist and student consultant, which was awfully fitting for our group of students.

The rest of the day was spent on various free-time activities across smaller groups. Our students became acquainted with conveyor belt sushi (something we hadn’t found in Finland), local movie theatres and various sights to be seen around the **Dâmbovița river** and **Old Town**, which have formed into old acquaintances for our eclectic group.



ANOTHER FUN FACT:

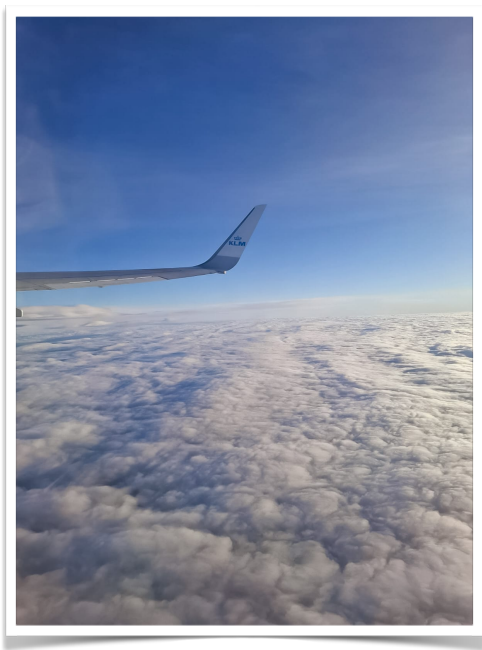
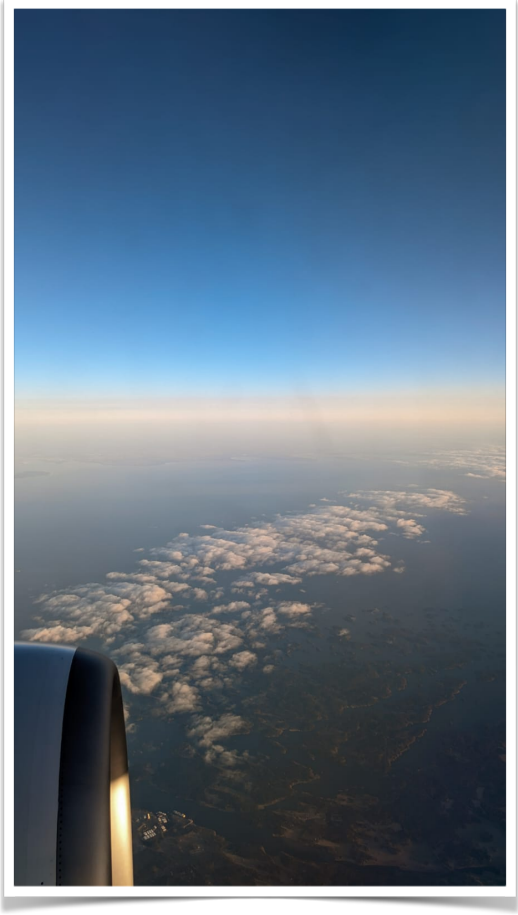
For South Ostrobothnian folk, Bucharest traffic is indeed a wild, wild west. Buses constantly honking, cars either stopping in the middle of an intersection or driving in reverse. One of us spotted an ambulance switching to the oncoming lane in hopes for a faster route.



Friday was entirely dedicated to personal endeavours. We were tasked with planning out our own curriculum for the final day. In small groups, Bucharest was explored in various gripping locations. Some of us mistaked the **Museum of Art Collections** for the **National Museum of Art**, others chose **Chocoloco**, a fancy coffee house for sweet teeth. Museums overall were the overarching theme for all groups: In addition to the aforementioned ones **Museum of Senses** and the **Grigore Antipa National Museum of Natural History** were the cultural retreats our groups especially enjoyed visiting.

The evening was spent exploring and shopping. Bucharest is teeming with all kinds of vintage jewellery, clothing, souvenir shops and book stores. Cuisine differed from the other days: We had a taste of Romanian fast-food, brisket sandwiches and local interpretation of typical italian dishes.

By the early hours of **Saturday** dawn, our sleep-deprived, yet relieved entourage finally hopped on three taxis that drove us to the airport. We bid farewell to Bucharest in hopes of many similar adventures in the horizon.



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FINAL FUN FACT:

You may come across Hesburger restaurants in Bucharest. In addition to Finland, Hesburger chain operates in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Bulgaria, Germany, Romania and Ukraine.

