BUCHAREST BY BUS

Written by

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The most exciting bus tour you've ever been on or your money back.

Chiang Mai, Thailand Jon.polandl@gmail.com EXT. STREET IN DOWNTOWN BUCHAREST - DAY

A man in his mid-30s wearing a light jacket and Seahawks cap (AMERICAN) strolls down the sidewalk on a beautiful spring day, admiring the architecture.

He reaches a square where two red one-story open-air shortbuses are parked.

The first bus sports scratches and dings, missing side mirrors, and has its door open to receive passengers. The second bus, with closed door, is in mint condition.

The signage on the first bus reads: "Bucharest By Bus" "Most exciting tour ever!" "Guided tour in 16 languages!" "Interactive portion!"

Beside the first bus stands a wiry hunched-over man in his 30s, dressed in a red Bucharest By Bus jacket (DRIVER).

He drags hard on a cigarette and grimaces as he nervously shifts his feet and studies people with a dour expression.

A young woman with an upbeat demeanor, wearing the same red jacket as Driver and carrying a red sign/clipboard (TOUT), addresses American.

TOUT (Romanian accent) Would you like to go on a sightseeing tour?

American considers this, but doesn't look convinced.

TOUT (CONT'D) I promise it will be the most exciting tour you have ever been on or your money back.

Driver suppresses a sly grunt/wheeze. American cocks an eyebrow at this assertion.

TOUT (CONT'D) Really, I swear. I will happily refund all your money if you don't completely agree. Plus we even throw in a bonus tour at no extra charge.

Driver nods with a sly grin. American shrugs.

AMERICAN What do I have to lose? Driver suppresses another grunt/wheeze.

EXT. SQUARE WITH TOUR BUSES - LATER

Tout works on a gruff German woman in her late 30s (MOTHER), who holds the hand of her bored-out-his-mind five year old son (BOY). Boy hangs limp like a rag-doll.

TOUT I even promise that your son will find it exciting or your money back. Really.

Driver eyeballs Boy. Boy eyeballs Driver right back.

MOTHER

Harumph!

Defiant, Mother yanks out her wallet with her free hand.

INT. TOUR BUS - LATER

Everyone is settled into their seats in the short bus.

The other passengers are:

A Japanese man in his early 50s (JAPANESE)

A frisky Italian couple in their early 20s (ITALIAN COUPLE)

A Spanish couple in their late 60s (SPANISH COUPLE)

A Frenchwoman in her late 50s (FRENCHWOMAN) with nervous bark-prone toy poodle (DOG)

An Indian man in his early 30s (INDIAN)

A tweed-wearing British gentleman in his 70s (BRIT)

A trashy mid-40s Russian couple in leather jackets and gold chains (RUSSIAN COUPLE) who just tore into a large bag of chips

Boy sulks with arms folded.

Driver tosses his cigarette, half-enters the main cabin, surveys the group with an ominous stare, then shuts the door and locks it. This startles many of the passengers.

He then enters the cab which is covered and fully enclosed in Plexiglas. He locks himself in as well.

American and Indian give each other looks and shrugs like, "What was that all about?"

Except for Italian Couple, who are too busy making out, and Boy, who is too busy sulking, everyone puts on their headphones.

As the bus heads off, American hears through the headphones...

SPANISH AUDIO GUIDE Bienvenido que...

American quickly switches the channel to an American Audio Guide (AUDIO GUIDE) who has a great resonant baritone voice.

For the most part, Audio Guide sounds rhythmically buoyant in that professional happy way.

AUDIO GUIDE

... By Bus. We are honored that you chose us as your tour guide and we endeavor make the next hour the most informative and exciting of your life. We even have an interactive portion in store for you that we are confident you will never forget. So for now, sit back and enjoy the sights of this great city as I walk you through its fascinating history. (beat)

At a human population of two million, Bucharest comprises roughly ten percent of Romania's population. And while that percentage has been growing over the last decade, during the same time Bucharest's population has actually declined slightly. To learn the reason why, you will have to ask the younger generation.

Audio Guide's tone reveals some disdain for the younger generation. American and Frenchwoman shoot each other a bemused look.

Italian Couple manage to let go of each other long enough to put on their headphones.

Mother places headphones on the head of still sulking Boy, who just sulks deeper into his seat. Mother rolls her eyes.

EXT. ENTERING UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - LATER

We see the facade of what appears to be an impressive campus.

AUDIO GUIDE And here we come to the campus of the University of Bucharest, the crown jewel of Romania's university system.

Passing through the facade reveals a ghost campus overrun by snarling street dogs and strewn with garbage and graffiti.

AUDIO GUIDE (CONT'D) That is until it went into receivership two years ago due to declining attendance. The edifices were recently auctioned off to a university in Oklahoma.

Workmen dismantle the edifices of some of the buildings.

INT. TOUR BUS - MOMENTS LATER

Russian male digs in the bag for the last of the chips. Brit nibbles on some gingerbread.

AUDIO GUIDE Why no interest in education? Well, to learn the answer to that, you would have to ask the *younger* generation.

Same disdainful tone for younger generation. American and Japanese exchange looks of surprise.

Through the rear view mirror we see Driver study the group with a slight smirk.

EXT. TURNING ONTO VICTORY AVE - LATER

The bus turns onto a broad avenue, but the expanse of the avenue is not yet seen.

INT. VIEW OF PASSENGERS' FACES - CONTINUOUS

While Audio Guide talks, we see shocked, appalled and confused expressions from the passengers.

AUDIO GUIDE

And now we reach the heart and soul of Bucharest, Victory Avenue, which got its name on October twelfth, eighteen seventy eight following the Romanian victory in the Independence War of eighteen seventy seven to eighteen seventy eight. Along this proud promenade can be seen statues of the giants that built and defended Romania over the centuries, exquisitely forged by some of our greatest sculptors.

Driver's grin has broadened into a smile.

EXT. VIEW OF VICTORY AVENUE FROM BUS - CONTINUOUS

All that is left of the statues are the pedestals they once stood on.

AUDIO GUIDE That is until we shipped them off to Oklahoma City to cover ballooning debts due to our deteriorating tax base. Care to hazard a guess as to which generation is responsible for that?

INT. DRIVING THROUGH REVOLUTION SQUARE - LATER

As the bus passes a large soviet-style building...

AUDIO GUIDE ...from the former Central Committee Building that the despised dictator Nicolae Ceausescu delivered his famous last address on the morning of December twenty first nineteen eighty nine and fled the capitol a day later. During the revolution, over a thousand patriots sacrificed their lives so that their *children* could enjoy a better future.

Most of the passengers look a little overwhelmed while Driver quietly chuckles.

EXT. RED LIGHT DISTRICT - MOMENTS LATER

The tour bus turns onto a street that is a sea of neon.

AUDIO GUIDE Ah, and now we reach the avenue that has *surpassed* Victory Avenue in popularity. Welcome to Europe's largest and most brazen red light district.

Male and female prostitutes, fashionably dressed, hustle and escort clients to hotels.

INT. TOUR BUS - MOMENTS LATER

Boy sits up, takes interest and adjusts his earphones.

Mother covers Boy's eyes as he squirms to see. Frenchwoman covers Dog's eyes.

A female prostitute attracts the attention of Italian Male. Italian Female slaps him so hard, his headphones go askew.

> AUDIO GUIDE It seems a *certain* generation doesn't care to apply themselves academically or make an honest living, but they still need to pay for their iPhones, Starbucks and Prada now don't they?

Russian Couple elbow each other and exchange sly looks as if to say, "Yeah, we are so going there."

Spanish Couple look on in resignation.

Brit, who has finished his gingerbread, is just wooden.

American is in mild shock.

Indian checks how much money he has in his wallet.

A male prostitute beckons to the bus. Frenchwoman and Japanese clandestinely wave back with interest.

Driver's chuckles become chortles.

EXT. PASSING BY THEATER - MOMENTS LATER

Banner and one-sheets advertise "Oklahoma!". A banner partially covering the other reads: "Last weekend before moving to Oklahoma!"

AUDIO GUIDE If you get a chance, check out a play in our award-winning repertory theater before it is dismantled.

EXT. APPROACHING SECTOR 27 - MOMENTS LATER

The bus heads toward the entrance of a giant prison with entrance shaped just like the front of the bus. The entrance is covered by a solid metal portico.

INT. TOUR BUS - CONTINUOUS

Passengers express alarm at the approaching structure.

Spanish couple in front knock on the Plexiglas cab to get Driver's attention. Driver ignores them.

AUDIO GUIDE And now we reach the promised interactive portion of our tour. Underneath your seat you will find a truncheon. Please take it out.

The passengers take out their truncheons and give each other bewildered looks -- all except Boy, who holds his up like he just drew Excalibur from the stone.

Driver turns around to face the passengers, sporting a crazed "Here's Johnny!" expression. He then turns forward, fastens/cinches his seat belt, and grips the steering wheel.

EXT. ENTRANCE TO SECTOR 27 - MOMENTS LATER

As the bus reaches the entrance, the portico rapidly ascends.

AUDIO GUIDE This is where we gun it.

INT. TOUR BUS - CONTINUOUS

Looks of dread from the passengers, except for Boy, who is excited, and Brit, who is unflappable. As the bus ROARS to life, passengers press into their seats.

EXT. ENTERING SECTOR 27 - CONTINUOUS

As the bus zooms through the entrance, it plows into SCORES OF ZOMBIES trying to get out.

The zombies look a bit like the prostitutes seen earlier.

But now they move awkwardly, moan, have pale/gaunt skin, bruises/scratches, the occasional missing nose/eyeball, and their designer clothes are torn/frayed.

A dozen zombies latch onto the bus and make their way along the sides toward the cabin.

The bus swerves to shake them and avoid hitting more zombies lurching at it in uncoordinated zombie fashion.

INT. TOUR BUS - CONTINUOUS

The passengers try to stay in their seats as they get tossed around. They cower in fear -- all except for Boy, who is in ecstasy, and Brit, who maintains a stiff upper lip.

AUDIO GUIDE

Welcome to Sector Twenty Seven. This is the legacy the *younger* generation has given us. You see, all that whoring resulted in a mutation known as The Phage. We should not have been surprised really. Nothing *good* could have come from this behavior.

The zombies reach the lip of the open-air cabin. Passengers beat zombie arms and heads with their truncheons.

AUDIO GUIDE (CONT'D) Now, instead of *developing* their brains, they want to eat yours! Typical. We pleaded with them to make better choices with their lives, but would they listen to their parents? *Noooo*.

EXT. BARRELING THROUGH SECTOR 27 - MOMENTS LATER

The bus tears down a broad avenue while zigzagging as passengers whack on zombies trying to get in.

AUDIO GUIDE

Please use short controlled strokes so as to refrain from hitting your neighbors. We don't exactly carry liability insurance as you know from the waver you signed. You did read the fine print?

INT. TOUR BUS - CONTINUOUS

Boy does not heed this advice as he joyously whacks zombies. Back-swings hit other passengers, who wail in anguish.

One such swing catches the cord of Italian Male's headphones. His headphones dislodge and fall to his neck so that they momentarily strangle him.

> AUDIO GUIDE We are approaching the Arcul de Triumf. I understand you are somewhat preoccupied at the moment and I would not otherwise bother to point out this architectural marvel, built in nineteen thirty six to commemorate Romania's independence from the Ottoman Empire in eighteen seventy seven, a feat that is celebrated every May ninth with parades, reenactments and fireworks -- but for the jumpers.

Until this point the group has paid no attention to the approaching Arcul de Triumf as they busily whack zombies. Upon hearing "jumpers", all crane their heads in unison.

EXT. LOOKING DOWN FROM THE ARCUL - CONTINUOUS

A half dozen zombies prepare to jump on the bus. The passengers scream in unison, except for Boy, who giggles.

INT. LOOKING UP AT THE ZOMBIES - CONTINUOUS

The zombies jump. Some miss the swerving bus and go SPLAT on the pavement. Passengers use the ends of their truncheons to repel the others. AUDIO GUIDE Some Oklahoman wants it for the entrance to his ranch, but we don't know how he's going to get it out of there.

A couple zombies on the lip manage to grab Spanish Female and Brit. One zombie wrestles Frenchwoman for Dog.

Other passengers go to their defense.

EXT. CUTTING THROUGH SQUARE - MOMENTS LATER

The bus heads toward a fountain with broad descending staircase.

AUDIO GUIDE A fun fact about Sector Twenty Seven is that UNESCO is considering designating it the world's first zombie wildlife refuge. Oh, and please mind the bump.

The bus flies off the fountain, clears the stairs, and lands in the street. A couple zombies fall off as the passengers rattle around.

EXT. HEADING TOWARD THE GATE - MOMENTS LATER

The exit gate of Sector 27 looks like the entrance.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

AUDIO GUIDE

Sadly, we are approaching the end of the interactive portion of the tour. Please be sure to have all your body parts along with your truncheon inside the bus by the time we reach the screed.

The zombies see the approaching tunnel and begin to panic. They rapidly inch toward the back of the bus, which allows caught passengers to slip from their grasp.

> AUDIO GUIDE (CONT'D) Also, we insist that you observe our strict policy about refraining from taking souvenirs which could jeopardize our UNESCO application.

Boy reluctantly tosses out a writhing arm.

EXT. EXITING SECTOR 27 - MOMENTS LATER

The bus reaches the tunnel and the remaining zombies get knocked off with a THUNK THUNK.

They slid down the wall and lay in heaps on either side of the tunnel entrance, GROANING.

EXT. APPROACHING NATIONAL GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

The gate closes behind and the bus slows down to its prior pace. It approaches a large neoclassical building.

AUDIO GUIDE

On your right you can see our National Museum of Art, which once served as the royal palace. If you hurry, you can catch our last remaining Rembrandt. Otherwise, you will have see it with the other Rembrandts, *in Tulsa*.

INT. TOUR BUS - MOMENTS LATER

Everyone except Boy clutches their truncheon and stares forward in complete shock. Boy, wistfully happy, rests his truncheon on his lap.

AUDIO GUIDE

This concludes our tour. On behalf of the entire staff of Bucharest By Bus, thank you for entrusting us with your Bucharest experience. We hope you found it interesting and we remind you that you signed a waiver not to sue us for physical or psychological harm. Please do us a favor and replace your truncheon underneath your seat for the next passenger.

EXT. SQUARE WITH TOUR BUSES - MOMENTS LATER

The bus pulls into its original spot.

Driver unlocks his door and springs out in a great mood.

He unlocks the passenger compartment and gives an exaggerated sweeping gesture that motions people to exit.

He then watches with chagrin as the shell-shocked, disheveled, banged-up passengers emerge. Tout waits at the door with her characteristic smile.

American emerges. He is hunched over and looks a lot like Driver did before departure.

TOUT Exciting-enough for you?

Driver suppresses a sly grunt/wheeze as he gleefully watches other shell-shocked passengers exit.

AMERICAN (deadpan) Yes, quite.

As American limps away, Tout calls after him.

TOUT Don't forget about our free bonus tour, Dark Secrets of Bucharest! I promise it's at least as exciting!

Mother and son emerge. Boy desperately tries to drag Mother to the bonus bus. Mother even more desperately resists.

BOY Muter muter!

MOTHER Nein nein!!!

Boy goes limp and throws a tantrum. Mother drags him away.

INT. BONUS BUS - MOMENTS LATER

The interior of the bonus tour bus is full of cobwebs and a layer of dust.

EXT. SQUARE WITH TOUR BUSSES - MOMENTS LATER

Frenchwoman is the last to exit. She clutches Dog in one hand and her truncheon in the other. She shakes like her toy poodle.

Tout places a hand on the truncheon. With the sweetest caring expression and tone...

TOUT I'm sorry, the truncheons are company property.

Frenchwoman is frozen and just stares at Tout. Tout raises a can of mace with her other hand.

TOUT (CONT'D) (sing-song) If you don't let go, I'm afraid I'll have to mace you.

Dog growls at Tout, bearing teeth. Tout drops the sweet facade.

TOUT (CONT'D) And your little dog too.

EXT. HIGH ABOVE THE SQUARE WITH TOUR BUSES - LATER

As credits role, we see Tout happily sign up passers-by as rehunched dour cigarette-dragging Driver studies them.