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ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



decade null

Art Culture in Budapest

Budapest, 1 Day

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Guide Description



AUTHOR NOTE: Some prefer their art to be classic, while others lean toward contemporary. Whatever direction your artistic tastes bend to, there is something for all to explore and enjoy. Chances are if given a chance, you will find most of the offerings here are compelling. Roth's mosaics are as emotionally impacting as Varga's statues. The Ludwig's modern art collection is as transforming as the classic art in the Museum of Fine Arts. Both of these now offer free guided tours of select galleries, so if you don't remember Art History 101, you can have an engaging refresher for an hour.

contact:

tel: +36 (0)1 266 0877

fax: +36 1 266 0877

<http://www.ernstmuseum.hu/dorottya/kiall.php>

location:

Dorottya utca, 8
Budapest 1051

hours:

M-Sa 10a-6p

1 Dorottya Gallery

DESCRIPTION: This gallery specializes in exhibiting new and emerging work as well as pieces by established artists. All of the work is contemporary and the exhibitions change quite frequently. Photography and modern decorative sculpture is also displayed. This gallery is definitely worth a visit for serious art fans. Admission is free. © wcities.com

contact:

tel: +36 1 341 4355

fax: +36 1 321 6410

<http://www.ernstmuseum.hu/>

location:

Nagymezo utca, 8
Budapest 1065

hours:

11a-7p Tu-Su

2 Ernst Museum

DESCRIPTION: This small gallery is the perfect place to find out what's happening in the world of contemporary art. The exhibition space is clean and simple, with few distractions, and the plain walls and floors set off the work well. Sculptures can also be found amongst the paintings and other contemporary projects. You may not like all of it, but there's bound to be something you will find fascinating. This is a great place to explore. © wcities.com

contact:

tel: +36 1 456 5107

fax: +36 1 217 5838

<http://www.imm.hu/>

location:

Üllői Road 33-37
Budapest 1091

3 Museum of Applied Arts

DESCRIPTION: The Museum of Applied Arts – opened in 1869 by Emperor Franz Joseph as part of the Millennium Celebrations – is housed in a spectacular Secessionist building covered in Hungarian Secessionism's signature colourful Zsolnay tiles designed by Lechner Ödön, incorporating oriental elements. Its collection, founded in 1872, is not the only reason to enter the magnificent building: its breathtakingly intricate interior design Secessionism is oh so famous for is an attraction within its own right, and is a must see for architecture enthusiasts. It is the second museum of its kind in Europe, after the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and houses a vast collection of innovative handmade goods, all fine examples of arts and crafts workmanship. The exhibitions are almost all temporary, except for the permanent exhibition of Hungarian arts and crafts including clothes, furniture and other items of practical use. Of the temporary exhibitions, major ones change on a yearly basis, while smaller ones change monthly. Examples of the types of items on show in the temporary exhibitions can be seen at the main entrance. © NileGuide



Alex Barrow

contact:
tel: 469-7100
fax: +36 1 469 7171
www.szepmuveszeti.hu

location:
Hősök tere District XIV
Budapest 1146

hours:
10a-5:30p Tu-Su

4 Museum of Fine Arts

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

The best times to visit are at 11 am or 2 pm Monday thru Friday, or at 11:00 am on Saturday, when trained docents give a free one-hour tour. Tours give a brief overview of the museum and then focus on one particular gallery.

DESCRIPTION: Directly to the left of Heroes Square is the Fine Arts Museum (Szépművészeti Múzeum), completed in 1906. It is an eclectic-neoclassical style adorned with three Greek temples connected by colonnades between; each representative of different muses of culture and relaxation. The Fine Arts Museum contains international art; it has the largest Spanish collection outside of Spain. In addition, there are over 3,000 paintings, 10,000 drawings, and 100,000 prints within the 8 different collections. © NileGuide



contact:
tel: 460-700
fax: +36 (0)1 266 7477
www.muacsarnok.hu

location:
Hősök tere District XIV
Budapest 1056

hours:
Tu-Su 10.00-18.00

5 Budapest Exhibition Hall

DESCRIPTION: To the right of Heroes Square, the impressive beauty of the Exhibition Hall (Múcsarnok) will most certainly capture your attention. Aside from the complementary architecture of the Fine Arts Museum, its most striking feature is the tympanum above the columns with a relief portraying the Temple of Zeus displaying a fight between Centaurs and Lapiths. The Exhibit Hall does not contain any permanent art collections, but is the venue for rotating contemporary exhibitions that are on display from weeks to months at a time. Signs posted on the outside will alert you to the current offering. However, just savoring the Exhibit Hall building as a piece of art unto itself is enough for some. © NileGuide

contact:
tel: 201-9082
fax: +36 (0)1 212 7356
<http://www.mng.hu>

location:
Palota Wings A, B, C, D
District I Castle Hill
Budapest 1014

hours:
Tu-Su 10a-6p

6 Hungarian National Gallery

DESCRIPTION: A large section of the royal palace is dedicated to this gallery. Almost the entire history of Hungarian art is on display here, with the earliest pieces dating back to the tenth century so there's a thousand years or so to work your way through. Viewing the inside of the castle is interesting in itself. Guided tours are also available. © wcities.com



contact:
tel: +36 1 250 0304 / +36 1 388 8560
fax: +36 1 368 7917
<http://www.museum.hu/budapest/kiscelli>

location:

7 Kiscell Museum-Municipal Gallery

DESCRIPTION: The building itself has had a long and varied history. It was presented to the city as a gift in 1935. Today, it houses a wide-ranging and rather eclectic collection. The exterior of the building is in beautiful baroque style, while the interior has been renovated with tasteful simplicity and the emphasis has been placed on the exhibits. These range from an old printing press

Kiscelli ut, 108
Budapest 1037

where you can get a personal copy of the revolutionary 'Arise Hungarians!' to more contemporary paintings and turn-of-the-century furniture displays. © wcities.com

hours:

Apr-Oct: 10a-6p Tu-Su, Nov-
Mar: 10a-4p Tu-Su

contact:

tel: +36 (0)1 555 3444
fax: +36 (0)1 555 3458
<http://www.ludwigmuseum.hu/>

location:

Komor Marcell utca 1
Budapest Budapest 1095

hours:

Tu-Su 10a-8p, Every last Sa
of the month 10a-10p

8 Ludwig Museum

DESCRIPTION: The entire collection was a donation from Peter Ludwig (hence the name) in 1989. Once again, the setting of the museum is spectacular, situated as it is in one of the wings of the Castle. There are some big names on display although much of the work here is rather uninspired (Picasso's Matador and Nude is here, but it is a work that has attracted much derision). There is also a section devoted to Pop Art and a new collection of modern Hungarian work. © wcities.com



contact:

tel: +36 (0)1 250 0274

location:

Laktanya utca 7
Budapest 1033

hours:

Daily 10a-6p

9 Varga Imre Collection

DESCRIPTION: Imre Varga is Hungary's best-known contemporary sculptor. As you walk to the small museum, just off Óbuda's Fő tér, you will run into some ladies holding umbrellas regardless of the weather, one of his works on display outside. Inside the museum, a varied cross section of Varga's work will have you alternating smiles with wincing. At the back of the museum is a garden with more pieces; people are portrayed without embellished glory, while the museum's cats play in and out of the garden. For an example of the sculptor's work in a different public context, see the statue of Imre Nagy near Parliament. Have small currency ready; they rarely have change. © Frommer's

contact:

tel: 341-6789
<http://www.rothmuzeum.hu/html/22.htm>

location:

Nefelejcs utca 26 District VII
Budapest

hours:

Tram 4 or 6
Wessel´nyei

10 Róth Miksa Memorial House (Róth Miksa Emlékház)

DESCRIPTION: Few tourists are privy to this treasure or it falls from their radar. If Róth's work in the Parliament stimulated your senses, you will no doubt be again under his spell with the extensive collection of stained glass and mosaics for which he became famous. As the name implies, the Róth Miksa Memorial House is where the artist lived and had his studio. It may be difficult to locate, not being well marked. You will no doubt see other pieces of his work within the city such as the Queen of Hungary mosaic at Szervita square. His commissions were worldwide. © NileGuide

Budapest Snapshot

Local Info

Budapest is a Central European metropolis unlike any other; it combines over one thousand year's worth of history and culture with nature in a remarkable way. The bustling inner city of the Pest side and the romantic hills of the Buda side are separated from each other by the River Danube, along which 3 islands are dotted, creating a very diverse and picturesque cityscape. With such assets to boast with, no wonder Budapest has been entitled the "Pearl of the Danube". The city is divided into 23 districts, with 17 on the Pest side, and only 6 on the Buda side. Each district has its own unique flavor and hidden treasures in need of discovering. From parks and squares, through museums and Turkish era bath houses, to throbbing nightlife, Budapest has it all and is guaranteed to entertain!

Being a highly centralized country, Budapest is undoubtedly the centre of Hungary, not geographically but socially, politically and economically. This is why the capital is inhabited by a stunning one fifth of the country's total population, being roughly two million people.

BUDAPEST IN A NUTSHELL

In the core of the Pest side inner city is Deák Square, the biggest junction of the city where all three metro lines intersect each other, next to which the green Elizabeth Square lays, the central park of the city decorated with an artificial lake. It is from here that the Andrassy Avenue stems, the longest and grandest boulevard of the city leading all the way to the City Park. South of the Andrassy is the Jewish District conserving the Jewish culture of the city with four synagogues, giving home to little designer boutiques, small pubs and restaurants. North of the inner city is the Kossuth Square where the imposing building of the houses of Parliament stands, along with two other architectural masterpieces; the Museum of Ethnography and the Ministry of Agriculture. The largest Roman Catholic church of the city, the St. Stephen's Basilica is located south of the Parliament. Vörösmarty Square and the Váci Street with its elegant Secessionist buildings are two gems decorating the centre between the Deák Square and the River Danube. At the end of Váci Street is the Central Market Hall, a great place to

experience authentic Hungarian food in an authentic Hungarian atmosphere. The Danube Embankment, known as the Duna-Korso with its gorgeous view of the Buda hills is the place to go for a stroll.

The hilly Buda side owns the city's natural assets, and is the place to go if one gets full to the brim with buildings and statues. The Gellért Hill is the tallest hill of the inner city with its 270 meters, decorated by the Statue of Liberty, the Citadel and a statue of Bishop Gellért with an artificial waterfall trickling down beneath it. The astonishing panorama from the top is a must see. On the Castle Hill is the Castle District- the oldest district of the city- with the Royal Palace. Here you can enter the Buda Castle Labyrinth, just one of the many caves in the city, and go wine tasting in the Royal Wine House and Wine Cellar Museum. From the Fishermen's Bastion, the view of the Pest side is incredible. A geological fault line runs along the Buda Embankment, responsible for the several million liters of thermal water coming to surface here in Budapest, and it is this water that feeds the numerous bath houses of the city. Just two of the many baths are the Turkish Rudas Bath and the Gellért Spa and Bath located along the embankment.

FLAVORS OF BUDAPEST

What makes Budapest so unique is the way it combines nature with culture. Fifteen minutes in any direction from the inner city is a green park, an island, a hill or a river. The City Park at the end of Andrassy, the Margaret Island a few meters north of the Parliament, and the St. John's Hill, the tallest hill of the city await those wanting to relax after hours of strenuous sightseeing.

Hidden in the jungle of Pest are numerous museums full of treasures. There is no aspect of Hungary's history that is not covered by an exhibition or another. The Hero's Square gives home to two museums located on opposite sides: the Museum of Fine Arts and the Art Gallery.

Budapest is one of the great spa cities of Europe, and it is said that one has not experienced Budapest until they have visited at least one bath house. Baths have existed here since the Roman times, but it was the Turks who best exploited the water resources.

Hungary is not as famous for its wine as it should be; the country has many outstanding wine regions, with the two most celebrated ones being Tokaj and Eger. The grapes of Tokaj are famous for their honey-sweet white desert wines, while the grapes of Eger are famous for their spicy red wines, the Bull's Blood in particular.
© NileGuide

History

Budapest is often called the "Pearl of the Danube," and it truly is a stunningly beautiful place. Geography, history and human creativity have all combined to create a city that simultaneously charms, amazes and fascinates. Budapest is full of diversity, and so is its history. The Romans settled here in the 1st century A.D. and despite the fact that they remained only a few hundred years, their influence can still be felt: they found the sun-drenched gentle slopes perfect for grape vines, and began what is now a huge viticulture industry. They also introduced modern architectural techniques (columns, stone, plaster, arches and so on), the remains of which can be viewed to this day. The Romans, famous for their love of baths, also made use of the abundant thermal springs that lie under the city: they created the very first public baths, a now world-famous feature of Budapest. During Roman times, Budapest was known as Aquincum.

Some 500 years later, in 896, a wave of brave and fiery people came sweeping into the Carpathian basin. These were the Magyars, the founders of the Hungarian nation. They established various settlements, but Buda and Pest were no more than tiny villages. King Bela built a fortress in Buda in the 13th century, and then King Charles Robert moved the court from Visegrad to Buda where his son (Louis the Great) began construction of the now famous Royal Palace.

The city began to flourish when suddenly the Mongols invaded and defeated the Magyars. Buda and Pest were reduced to ashes. However, just as quickly, the attackers mysteriously vanished allowing both the city and the country to regroup and rebuild.

Budapest Snapshot continued

Things seemed to be going well and the settlement was on the road to recovery, when the Turks, under the leadership of Suleyman the First, inflicted a crushing and total defeat on the Hungarian army at the battle of Mohacs on August 29, 1526. By 1541 the Turks had full control of Buda and its huge castle. The Turks, another people with a love of thermal baths, constructed some of the finest bathing facilities in the world here. Several of them are still in use and have brought healing relief to thousands. Also credited to the Turks is the introduction of paprika(although this is a bone of contention to many), and in the famous book "Eclipse of the Crescent Moon," the author Geza Gardonyi suggests that the Turks were also responsible for another Budapest specialty: coffee. Rozsadam, however, represents one thing that was indeed imported to Budapest from its invaders- roses.

It was the Poles who came to Budapest's rescue: in 1686 they liberated both Buda and the castle itself, sending the Turks into a full-scale retreat. Nevertheless, this did not bring about a free Hungary; instead, the nation became a province of the Hapsburg Empire. Still, Budapest continued to grow, despite the many political and military upheavals. While it was denied its place as capital of a free nation, it was not denied prosperity. Surprisingly, the city was still not known as Budapest. In fact there was not even a bridge across the River Danube. In 1849, the Chain Bridge opened, causing quite a stir. Not long after, in 1873, the city was finally united to encompass the formerly separate and independent Buda, Pest, Margaret Island and Obuda Island.

All of a sudden the city began to prosper like never before. As the year 1896 approached(the 1000 year anniversary of the arrival of the Magyars), a building program was launched on a massive scale. It was during this boom that many of the fine buildings still famous today were constructed. The metro(the first on the continent) was completed and Andrassy Ut(Andrassy Street) was created above it. Fine architecture became one of the city's trademarks.

The First World War saw Budapest emerge as the capital of a country only one third of its pre-war size. The Second World War brought about large-scale destruction: by the end of fighting and the Soviet liberation,

not a single bridge was left standing across the Danube, the Royal Palace lay in ruins and the Castle District was devastated.

The next big event in Budapest's history was the 1956 uprising. On October 23, a peaceful protest became violent after shots were fired. Thousands of people took to the streets, a new leader Imre Nagy was appointed, Stalin's statue was pulled down and the people were ecstatic. However, the Soviets would not tolerate this for long: they sent in troops and tanks, crushing the revolution and killing some 2000-3000 people. Many thousands more were arrested and the famous Hungarian brain-drain began with some 250,000(mostly well-educated) people leaving the country to settle in the West. Many buildings around town still have pockmarked facades: these are the scars of 1956 and they are a telling reminder of those grim times.

1989 was a true headline year for Budapest and Hungary. Troops began dismantling the fence separating the nation from Austria, while Gorbachev watched silently from Moscow. In Budapest a statue of Lenin was removed, and in June a crowd of a quarter million people attended a ceremony at Heroes' Square for the reburial of Imre Nagy. By 1991, there were no more Soviet troops in Hungary and only seven years later the country became a member of NATO.

Today, Budapest is quickly reclaiming its rightful place as one of Europe's most beautiful and scenic cities. The Pearl of the Danube is once again on full display.

©

Hotel Insights

Picking a place to stay in Budapest is a pleasure: there is something for everyone. The hardest part is deciding what you want as with so many tempting options. Even in the middle of summer and the height of tourist season, you should still be able to get a room somewhere. The notable exception is Formula 1(Grand Prix) weekend in August: hundreds of thousands of fans descend on the city, and hotels, panzios and hostels are booked up for the event up to a year in advance. Still another option is to stay in a private room: these are usually rented out by ordinary people trying to supplement their income. It's a great way to meet the locals(even

though you may not have any language in common!) and the service is regulated. Breakfast is almost always included in the quoted hotel prices, and many places-including panzios, offer wonderful food in their own restaurants.

You need to decide what you want before you start making calls. Would you prefer being right downtown? Do you want incredible views? Maybe you want a spa hotel, or a quiet, peaceful sojourn in the fresh air of the Buda Hills?

District II and District III

One of the best things about being in Budapest is the proximity of the Buda Hills. These are wonderfully green and in many places provide spectacular panoramas over the city and the Danube. If you want to enjoy the hectic pace of the city by day, but feel like you are in the countryside at night, then you will want to stay in the hills. The air is clean, the birds sing to wake you up in the morning and there are dozens of possibilities for hiking, biking etc., all over the area. For all this and more at extremely affordable prices the Grand Hostel Budapest is an ideal place in which to stay. The Europa is an apartment-style hotel for those planning long-term stays in the city. Other elegant options include the Victoria Hotel, the Kristaly Panzio and the Panda Hotel, all of which offer excellent customer service and comfortable rooms.

District III also offers many wonderful accommodation options. A hotel that offers thermal waters is the Ramada Plaza Budapest. The Monte Christo Hotel has a private beach and swimming pool, ideally located near Roman Beach. The Dunapart Hotel is set within the cabin's of a real ship, and offers stunning views of the Danube. Close to the Szentendre Island is Duna-Party Panzio, which is convenient to many public transportation options.

District V

If you want to be right downtown, then you have a choice of everything from backpackers' hostels to luxurious world-class hotels. Among the latter, the Marriott Hotel, InterContinental and Sofitel Atrium have fantastic views over the River Danube, while the Kempinski Hotel Corvinus offers some of the most luxurious accommodations in the city. To get the best of both worlds try the beautiful Four Seasons Hotel Gresham Palace, where

Budapest Snapshot continued

you'll be treated like royalty while you look out over the river. Other good choices in the center include the Yellow Submarine Youth Hostel or the Diakspport.

District XI

Many people come to Budapest to take advantage of the healing thermal waters that spill out of the ground in various locations. Several hotels have incorporated this into their actual buildings; the most famous example being the Gellert Hotel. The Gellert Baths are justifiably famous and can be used by anyone (they are usually considered a must-see on a trip to Budapest).

If you're in the budget category, you can still have a great view of the city: some of the *panzios* in the Buda Hills are very reasonably priced. There is also the one-star Hotel Citadella, which sits atop Gellert Hill. The views from up here are so stunning that the tour buses drive by from morning until night. So what will it be? Five stars and a balcony on the Danube? A quiet *panzio* in the Buda Hills? Or maybe a happening downtown hostel with an all night bar and disco...the choice is yours.

District XII

The Buda Hills are where you will find many of Budapest's *panzios*. These are usually family-run guest houses. The standards can and do range from being almost hostel-like to very luxurious indeed. Staying at a *panzio* is a great way to meet the locals. One of the best, with stunning views of the twinkling city below, is the Molnar *Panzio*. The Danubius Health Spa Resort Margitsziget and the Grand Hotel on Margaret Island.

©

Restaurants Insights

There was a time not long ago when all Budapest had to offer its hoards of hungry tourists and locals were hundreds of traditional restaurants offering slabs of fatty breaded and fried pork, surly service and not a vegetable in sight. How times have changed! Since 1990 and the new political system, restaurants, clubs, bars and cafés have begun appearing in the hundreds. Now, you can find more dishes than you can shake a chip at, involving every ingredient from whatever country takes your fancy, from the high luxury of

Gundel to the simple student handout, from Mongolian barbecued meat to Middle Eastern falafel chickpea balls and salad.

District II and District III

You can eat anything and everything here from fast food (McDonalds, Burger King, Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken) to long leisurely lunches for business or pleasure on the leafy terraces of Remiz. Fish eaters should set sail for the Horgaszanya on the Buda bank of the River Danube.

Kacska offers some of the best duck and for great goose liver, try the Magnaskert *etterem*. Maharaja, which serves up some divine concoctions and is very vegetarian-friendly. The underwater-themed restaurant Vasmacska in Obuda's ancient square, whose name translates as "anchor," serves delicious cuts of meat and also has vegetarian dishes.

District V

The French are justifiably proud of their cuisine and it is possible to dine *'comme les rois'* in Kepiro, La Fontaine and Lou Lou without breaking the bank. The combination of delicious fresh Hungarian vegetables—succulent tomatoes, peppers, organic mushrooms—and fresh sea fish flown in thrice weekly makes for healthy haute cuisine.

Chinese cuisine is best exemplified by Tian Tan while Japanese sushi, sashimi and noodle bars offer exotic delicacies. Central Kavezo, a source of literary inspiration at the turn of the last century and now rapidly recreating the ambiance of well-read society, is a great place to spend the day. Hungarians love their cakes and Gerbeaud and Augustz make some of the most mouth-watering pastries, desserts and torte. One thing to try is the *Langos*—a Hungarian delicacy. This deep-fried frisbee-sized doughnut is served with sour cream, grated cheese and a splash of garlic water dribbled from a jam jar using a twig and feather device. Such delights are more difficult to find these days, replaced by the all-pervasive burger, but you can still try one in vegetable or flea markets and these are an essential start to bargain hunting on a bitter winter's morning—preferably accompanied by a shot of powerful pear *palinka* (brandy).

District VI

Sip a cocktail with a famous blues singer at Janis' Pub. Pompei Pizzeria on Liszt Ferenc square is a convenient and tasty way to fill up before hitting the trendy bars in Pest's most fashionable hang-out. While on the subject, vegetarians are now much better off than even just a decade ago, when the sole, melancholy option consisted of fried cheese/cauliflower/mushroom with a 'salad' or pickled cucumber. Now, many restaurants offer imaginative vegetable dishes (try the gorgeous tapas at Ket Szerecsen). If you want to experience a traditional atmosphere you can find it in following the coffee houses; Muvesz is one of the most well-known. Its cakes are a major draw for tourists.

District VII

Theme bars are also very popular—you could dine in a submarine at Club Verne. Hungarians adore Italian food and Fausto's serves some of the best. Despite its reputation, Hungarian food is not particularly spicy, so for something with a little bite, you could try Indian restaurants such as Shalimar Indiai *Etterem*. Of course, visitors to Hungary will not want to leave without trying a Hungarian dish with some excellent local wine—goulash, chicken paprika, *fozelek* (vegetable goop) and reds from Villanyi and Eger in traditional, atmospheric surroundings. Kulacs is a good place to sample the food while listening to talented Gypsy musicians. This is where Rezso Seress composed 'Gloomy Sunday,' which could be said to be a theme tune for the bitter sweet Magyar soul. Feszék is an old artists' lounge that serves many varieties of game stew.

©

Nightlife Insights

From eating and drinking well (and inexpensively) to classical music and opera to rock concerts and discos, Budapest offers pretty much as wide a choice of things to do as you'll find in any city of a comparable size.

Cinemas

There are about 24 cinemas in the city ranging from the 14-screen multiplex in West End City Center down to small art movie houses.

At any one time, there are usually around 40 movies playing in English (original

Budapest Snapshot continued

soundtrack with Hungarian sub-titles); check the weekly English paper *The Budapest Sun* for a full listing. Films arrive here relatively early (often before a London release). Dubbing of movies is a big business, and some (usually those appealing to children) are shown only in a dubbed version. The paper can sometimes get it wrong, so if it's not obvious from the cinema's listings, check by asking *felirat?* ("is it sub-titled?") at the cash desk. Be sure to save some cash to load up on coke and popcorn as many Hungarians love to do.

Music

You'll pay very little money to hear the Budapest Philharmonic at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music. Concerts are often held at the Vigado Concert Hall, though the acoustics could be better. Concerts are occasionally held in the domed hall of parliament, and Bach organ music is a delight to hear either in the castle's Matthias Church or the Basilica on the Pest side.

Opera is performed at the state Opera House on Andrássy út (mainly in Italian with Hungarian sub-titles), or at the 3,000-seat Erkel Theatre on Koztársaság tér, near Keleti station. The Erkel tends to concentrate on Hungarian operas. During its season, the Operetta theatre on Nagymező utca generally tends to stage Hungarian operettas.

Performances are regularly held in the Duna Palota or the Budai Vigado. Many restaurants think that a gypsy band is an expected accompaniment to a meal, so you can get your fill at no extra cost (other than the obligatory tip to the violinist!).

Theatre

Hungarians love their theatre and their performances are usually well-attended. Of course, these tend to be predominantly in Hungarian. The Merlin International, sponsored by the city council, puts on performances in English; these are either by visiting troupes or local ex-pat residents.

Discos

Petöfi Csarnok occupies a cavernous hall at the rear of Varosliget or City Park. This is a stage and disco complex that serves as a venue for local and international rock bands where you can find people dancing the night away every night of the week. E-Klub is next to the Planetarium. It is open on Fridays and Saturdays and is always

packed with Technical University students. The ex-pats make for Made Inn which has a nice patio and garden and where summer brings out large crowds. When groups like the Rolling Stones or U2 come to town, they play the Nepstadion, which has the largest seating capacity of any venue in the area.

Family-Friendly

Children obviously deserve to be entertained as much as anyone. A good area for them is around the Varosliget. Here you will find the Zoo and the Amusement Park (Vidam Park). In the park itself is a lake used for boating in the summer and ice-skating in the winter.

Many of the museums would be of interest to children including the Postal Museum and the War History Museum. Another interesting spot for children is the Buda Castle Labyrinth, an underground exhibition of the city's early history. Alternatively, the Gellert Hotel and Baths has artificial waves in the large pool and the paddling pool is full of very warm water.

Further afield, you could take them up the Cogwheel Railway to the top of the hills, then on to the Children's Railway, where all the signal-men and conductors are children. ©

Things to Do Insights

Not only are there a million and one of things to do in Budapest, but the attractions are all easily found. The River Danube, Andrássy Avenue and Great Ring Road on the Pest side, and the two hills, the Gellért and the Castle Hill on the Buda side serve as great landmarks.

Budapest may seem overwhelming at first, so guided tours are the best way to get an overall view of the city. With such a diverse landscape, there are a great variety of tours to choose from: Cruises along the River Danube run by the Legenda and Eurama company amongst others give a beautiful view of the buildings lining the river. Bus tours such as the Hop on Hop off city circle take you to the must see's. Bike, segway and walking tours provide a fun and active way of discovering the city. Budapest is interesting not just from above, but from underground as well, and this aspect can also be explored by tours such as wine cellar tours and caving.

OVERVIEW

The Pest side gives home to the man made treasures of the city, with architectural masterpieces, museums, statues, restaurants, and cafés, imposing boulevards, streets and alleys.

The Buda side is where all the city's natural assets can be found, from hills and woods through caves to thermal water. Caving and wine cellar visit can be done on this side.

The River Danube elegantly flows in between the two half-cities. Not only does it give Budapest its picturesque appearance, but provides opportunities for cruises and water sports. Kayaking and canoeing from Margaret Island are fun weekend activities, even for locals.

There are three islands dotted along the river within the city: the Margaret Island, located centrally at the Margaret Bridge is a park for outdoor recreation and water sports, the Óbudai Island that hosts the Sziget Festival every year in August with two popular clubs Dokk and Bed Beach the rest of the year. The third one, Csepel Island, is of no interest to visitors housing most of the city's factories and some residential buildings.

The bridges spanning the river make for great walks; there are 5 within the inner city with exquisite view of both sides of the city. ©

Travel Tips

TO BUDAPEST BY AIR

Many international airlines have direct flights to Budapest, and the age of budget flights have made the city an easily accessible weekend destination within Europe. The Ferihegy International Airport (<http://www.bud.hu/>) consists of 3 terminals located approximately 24 km (15 mi) from the city: Ferihegy 2A reserved for Hungarian airline Malév and its partners, Ferihegy 2B for foreign airlines and Ferihegy 1 around 5 km (3 mi) west of terminal 2 designated for low cost airlines. It is not uncommon for terminal of departure not being stated on the boarding card, so checking online or by phone is advisable to avoid any inconveniences.

Travel Regulations

Budapest Snapshot continued

Valid ID or passport is enough for citizens of the EU, and those arriving from the USA, Canada, Australia or New Zealand. South African citizens require a Visa.

FROM THE AIRPORT

Direct transport services are provided to the inner city, including taxis and shuttle buses, but public transport and the national rail also provide a relatively easy ride into town:

Train

The least expensive and most convenient way to get into town: Trains(<http://www.mav-start.hu/>) leave from just outside terminal 1 every 10 to 20 minutes and run all the way to centrally located Nyugati Station. The journey takes a surprising 19 minutes with no changes necessary and full fair costing no more than 365 HUF. Arriving at Ferihegy 2 means having to take bus no. 200 to terminal 1 and changing to the train there.

Public Transport

Buses no. 200 and 93 run regularly between Ferihegy 2 and Kobanya-Kispest metro station, stopping en route at Ferihegy 1. Metro line no. 3 (otherwise known as the blue metro line) runs all the way into the inner city from the bus terminal. Two single tickets costing 320ft each are necessary as they lose their validity after one ride. (<http://bkv.hu/en/>)

Airport Shuttles

Want door-to-door transfer? Then the Budapest Airport Minibus(+36 1 296 8555) is the service to chose. A one way ride within the city costs 2100 HUF per person. Reservations should be made at least 24 hours before arriving.

Rental Cars

Several rental car companies can be found at Ferihegy Airport, a good option for those on a longer visit and planning several excursions out of the city on their stay.

TO BUDAPEST BY TRAIN

The Hungarian State Railway(MAV) (<http://www.mav.hu/>) links Budapest to the European railroad network via three international railway stations: the Keleti(Eastern), Nyugati(Western) and Deli(Southern), with the Keleti Station being responsible for most of the international traffic. The following rail passes are

valid within Hungary: Inter Rail, Bij, Euro Domino, Res, City-Star and Eurail.

TO BUDAPEST BY BUS

Volanbusz Rt. (<http://www.volanbusz.hu/en/>) as part of Eurolines(<http://www.eurolines.com/>) provides fares to and from 15 European countries. The three main bus stations in Budapest are Népliget, Népstadion and Árpád hid.

OrangeWays(<http://www.orangeways.com/en/>) provides fares between Budapest and several European cities such as Berlin, Bratislava and Krakow for fixed prices of 3000 HUF one way and 5000 HUF return.

GETTING AROUND

By Public Transport

The network powered by the Budapest Transport Ltd.(BKV Zrt.) includes the underground(metro) consisting of 3 lines, the extensive system of buses, trams and trolley buses within the city plus the 4 suburban railway lines to surrounding suburbs. Leisure lines, namely the cogwheel railway, funicular, children's railway and chairlift in the Buda hills are popular tourists routs. Single tickets and passes are available at every underground metro station, bus, tram, and trolley terminal, all valid for all means of transport listed above excluding the funicular, chairlift and children's railway. Separate tickets can be purchased on the spot. Tickets must be validated on entering the transport vehicle, and one ticket is valid for one journey in one direction. Changing vehicles means validating a new ticket. For more detailed information about public transportation, go to the bkv.hu website or check out the "survival guide to Budapest's public transport" on the Budapest Local Flavor Blog site powered by NileGuide.

By Taxi

Taxis are available throughout Budapest, but rather than hailing them off the streets it is advisable to call one by phone. They normally arrive at the requested location within 10 minutes and it is handy to know that all taxis in Budapest have yellow number plates. Agree upon the price beforehand and make sure the meter is set back to zero.

By Car

Driving in Budapest is unadvisable unless you know the city well, as the system of one way streets are enough to drive anyone

mad. Plus frequent traffic jams and road closures around construction sites are what to expect.

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Fun Facts

1. Interesting fact: The first subway line of continental Europe was built in Budapest. It is called the Millennium Line as it was constructed for the Millennium Celebration of 1896, commemorating the Hungarian Conquest of 896.
2. Fun fact: 123 thermal springs can be found in Budapest pouring out over 80m litres of the thermal water every day.
3. Impressive fact: The world's largest panoramic image was taken in Budapest from the top of Gellért Hill. It has broken two world records, doubling the previous one.
4. Random fact: The "biro" or ballpoint pen was invented by a Hungarian, Sir Biro László József, born in Budapest. His former home under 24 Nagymező Street now houses the Thália Theatre.
5. Interesting fact: The Dohány Synagogue of Budapest is Europe's largest synagogue. It is also second largest in the world after New York's Temple Emanu-El.
6. Fun fact for the superstitious: Touching the pen held by the Statue of Anonymous makes you a better writer!
7. Exciting fact: The world's largest geothermic cave system can be found under Budapest. In addition, the largest underground lake of Europe, one of the largest in the world, has recently been discovered under Gellért Hill.
8. Interesting fact: The largest spa complex of Europe, the Széchenyi Thermal Bath is located in Budapest. The city is famous for its bath culture dating back to the Romans times and later greatly influenced by the Turks.
9. Fun fact: Budapest used to be not two, but three cities before 1873: Buda, Pest, and Óbuda. These three settlements were united by the Habsburg rule.
10. Random fact: The Western Railway Station(Nyugati Pályaudvar) was built by the Eiffel Company.
11. Impressive fact: Budapest has been entitled the "Pearl of the Danube." To

Budapest Snapshot continued

see why check out the view from the top of Gellért Hill.

12. Factual fact: Several world heritage sights can be found in Budapest: the Castle

District, Andrásy Avenue, Hero's Square and both banks of the River Danube between the Elizabeth and Margaret Bridge.

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