

B U D A P E S T



The area had been inhabited from early times, already the Romans built a settlement. They called it Aquincum and it was an important station along the limes which ran alongside the River Danube. The advantages of settling here were equally obvious at the time of the Magyar Conquest. The new settlers built a centre on both sides of the River. When Hungary was invaded and devastated by the Mongols (1241-1242), King Béla ordered new castles and fortresses to be built all around the country. He provided a good example, for he built the first Royal Palace in Buda on what from that time on become known as Castle Hill. It was also he who, in a gold-sealed letter of 1244, conferred privileges on the towns that enabled them to develop agriculture and

trade. Buda became the royal seat around the turn of the fifteenth century under the rule of Sigismund of Luxembourg, and the Royal Palace grew ever larger until its zenith was reached under King Matthias (ruled 1458-1490). Pest also prospered at this time, and Matthias raised it to equal rank with Buda. In the 17th century a printing press was established, an university was found and there were social developments as well.



The next challenge was the building of the first permanent bridge over the River Danube – the Chain Bridge, today still the most recognizable symbol of the city – and the logical conclusion of that was the legislative unification in 1873 of Buda, Pest and Óbuda into one city – Budapest. A Council of Public Works was formed, whose direction determined both the future shape and the enduring beauty of the city. The great boulevards were laid down – most notably Andrassy út and the ring roads – and the transformation of Budapest into a modern world class city truly began. There was an even greater impetus at the end of the nineteenth century as Hungary celebrated the millenary anniversary of the Magyar Conquest. The first continental Underground railway was built, the streets were paved, street lighting was introduced, the waterworks was constructed (it is still in operation today), and a public sewerage system was developed. The first trams appeared.



The political Compromise between Hungary and Austria in 1867 led to the beginning of the industrialization of Budapest. Agricultural industries, milling and food industries all moved into the capital, and engineering industries grew. The railways were built, and, as with the major roads, they all radiate out from Budapest. Budapest itself did not suffer particularly in the First World War, so after a brief halt, the process of development resumed. As the city continued to grow, neighbouring suburbs were absorbed into four new administrative districts.

The Second World War, however, had a catastrophic effect. Apart from the horrifying cost in terms of human casualties, the architectural splendor of the city was brought to ruin. Every one of the bridges over the River Danube was blown up by the retreating Germans. These the authorities managed to replace within four years, as work to rebuild the city progressed apace. There was a further administrative enlargement in 1950 when more neighbouring towns were absorbed; the city now comprised 22 districts (more recently this has become 23, as boundaries have been redrawn) covering an area of two hundred square miles and divided into 23 administrative districts, it is home today to a population of 1.8 million people. The city's buildings and transport network suffered afresh in the 1956 Uprising, but were again repaired. Large-scale building of blocks of flats took place in the 1960's, followed by construction of two new Underground lines. The Lágymányosi Bridge, the new National Theatre and the National Concert Hall have all appeared since the fall of Communism. There are many further developments planned, including a fourth Underground line.



Matthias Church

Its name refers to the fact that King Matthias held both of his weddings here. Its Southern entrance and the long chancel are from the 13th century, while the nave was built around 1400. Between 1873 and 1896 the church was restored. The ornamental painting of the church interior was also made in the middle of the last century, based on the pieces recovered in the course of restoration.

Fisherman's Bastion

The Fisherman's Bastion was designed and built in the place of an old fortress between 1895 and 1902 on the plans of Frigyes Schulek. Its seven towers represent the seven Magyar tribes that settled in the Carpathian Basin in 896. A statue of Stephen I of Hungary (St Stephen) can be seen in the middle of the bastion courtyard. The Fisherman's Bastion and the surrounding Buda Castle Quarter has been part of the Unesco World Heritage.

Buda Castle

The Royal Palace is one of the symbols of the country. It has seen many battles and wars since the 13th century. In its buildings there are three museums and it also gives home to the Széchenyi Library. The nearby, beautifully renovated Sándor Palace is the residence and workplace of the Head of the State. It was under siege in 1849, and then rebuilt again to host Hungarian ministries. After a long and peaceful period, it was reduced to ruins again in January 1945.

The Hungarian National Gallery



The Hungarian National Gallery is the largest public collection documenting and presenting the rise and development of the fine arts in Hungary. Its temporary exhibitions include Mediaeval and Renaissance Stone Carvings, Panel Paintings and Wooden Sculptures from the Gothic Period, Late Gothic Winged Altarpieces, Late Renaissance and Baroque Art, the art of Mihály Munkácsy and László Paál as well as 19th and 20th century Paintings and sculptures.

House of Royal Wines and Cellar Museum

The real thing to be admired here can be found under the surface: these former royal and civil wine cellars, in which today there are exhibitions and the events form a unique live museum where visitors can taste and purchase the special objects of the exhibition: the wines, champagnes and palinkas.

Labyrinth of Buda Castle

The unique calcareous tuff caves of Castle Hill were created as an effect of the hot water springs at the dawn of the history of the Earth. These caves then served as refuge as well as hunting ground for the prehistoric appearing half a million years ago. Later the small caves were connected to each other and also to the cellarage of the houses of the Castle District for economic and military purposes, and the complex thus developed into a veritable labyrinth. The 1200 meter long cave and deep cellar system awaits visitors with half-million-year-old rock ceilings, historical walls and magical „exhibitions”.

Funicular to the Buda Castle



The Funicular, which at first, in 1870 run on steam but today is electric-powered, runs between the Chain Bridge and the Buda Castle. Its length is 95 meters and has two, stepped-construction carriages to take visitors up the 48-degree slope.

Chain Bridge

It was the first permanent bridge between Pest and Buda, earlier there had only been a so-called „floating bridge” between the two sides from spring until autumn. The bridge was completed in seven years by 1849, based on the plans of the British William Tierney Clark. Its two large pillars are significant elements of the Pest and Buda landscape, just like the four lions guarding the bridge on each side. The Tunnel was opened in 1857.

Saint Stephen's Basilica

Budapest's largest church, whose landmark dome can be seen from all over the city, was built in Classical style between 1851 and 1905. Inside is the Hungarians' most revered relic – the mummified right hand of Hungary's first monarch, King Saint Stephen.

Opera House

The Hungarian National State Opera House was finished in 1884. A masterpiece of Hungarian architect Miklós Ybl, it is one of the most magnificent of its kind in Europe. It has 1200 seats, and has been completely renovated by 1984. The roof of the building features the sculptures of distinguished composers of the Opera.

Heroes' Square

It is surrounded by two important buildings, Museum of Fine Arts on the left and Palace of Art on the right. On the other side it faces Andrassy Avenue. The central site of the hero's square, as well as a landmark of Budapest, is the Millennium Memorial (also known as Millennium Monument) with statues of the leaders of the seven tribes that founded Hungary in the 9th century and other outstanding figures of Hungarian history. The construction of the memorial was started when the one thousandth anniversary was celebrated (in 1896), but it was finished only in 1929 and the square got its name then.



Museum of Fine Arts

The building borders the square from the left. It was finished in 1906 in neo-Classical style and displays a foreign art collection — including a modern section. The Spanish collection is quite significant, especially El Greco's paintings are often referred to in this context.

Múcsarnok Art Hall

This ornamental building was completed in 1896. Since it does not have its own collection, it is not a museum but hosts various exhibitions.

Vajdahunyad Castle

The building consists of seven parts and it was built for the Millennial Expo in 1896 (using temporary materials originally). It includes complex features of a smaller-size replica of a Gothic Transylvanian castle in Vajdahunyad hence the name.

Museum of Applied Arts

Budapest was essentially built in the third part of the 19th century and the early 20th century with a tempo that can be compared to the construction of Chicago. The end of this peaceful period, which lasted until 1914, was characterized by the Art Nouveau style in architecture, the Museum of Applied arts is one of the most beautiful building of Art Nouveau. There are to find the most magnificent art nouveau bottles, Italian majolica, Zsolnay ceramics, French furniture, and pieces of Augsburg gold ware from the baroque period.



One of the very special things about Budapest is the prevalence of thermal springs right in the centre of the city. There are 118 springs and boreholes altogether, supplying the city's spas and baths with 15.4 million gallons of water daily ranging in temperature from 21 to 78 degrees Celsius. One of the reasons the Romans first colonized the area immediately to the west of the River Danube and established their regional capital at Aquincum (now part of Óbuda, in northern Budapest) is so that they could utilize and enjoy the thermal springs. There are still ruins visible today of the enormous baths that were built during that period. The new baths that were constructed during the Turkish period (1541-1686) served both bathing and medicinal purposes, and some of these are happily still in use to this day. Indeed in 1934 Budapest was officially ranked as a "City of Spas." The Gellért Baths and Hotel were built in 1918 and is today mostly frequented by the older generation.

Gellért Hill

The hill is a very popular place, largely because of its fantastic views over the city. The big statue near the base of the hill is of Bishop Saint Gellért, martyred on this spot in the eleventh century, and the buildings comprising the Citadel on the top mark the putting down by the Habsburgs of the War of Independence in 1848. There is a small chapel built into the south face of the hill. Resembling the one at Lourdes it dates originally from 1926, but after being forcibly closed for many years it was reopened in 1989.

Underground Railway Museum

Continental Europe's first motor-powered underground railway was established in Budapest in 1896. Two carriages from this period are on display in an original section of the tunnel.

Parliament

The Hungarian Parliament Building is the second largest Parliament in Europe. Budapest was united from three cities in 1873 and seven years later the National Assembly resolved to establish a new, representative Parliament Building, expressing the sovereignty of the nation. Construction was started in 1885 and the building was inaugurated on the 1000th anniversary of the country in 1896, and completed in 1904. (The architect of the building went blind before its completion.) There were about one thousand people working on its construction in which 40 million bricks, half a million precious stones and 40 kg gold were used. Similar to the Palace of Westminster, it was built in Gothic Revival style; it has a symmetrical facade and a central dome. It is 268 m long and 123 m wide. With its height of 96 m, it is one of the tallest buildings in Budapest, along with Saint Stephen's Basilica. The number 96 refers to the nation's millennium, 1896, and the conquest of the later Kingdom of Hungary in 896.

Tomb of Gül Baba

The octagonal building constructed of carved stone commemorates the saint dervish, Gül Baba, („the father of roses”). He died during a sermon in 1491, after the occupation of Buda. The ceremony was held in the Matthias Church, which was turned into a djami in three days. After the Christian reconquest of Buda, the tomb operated as a Christian chapel for over a hundred years, but it has been a place of pilgrimage for Muslim believers since 1822.

Western Railway Station

The station was built by the Eiffel company and it was opened in 1877. Previously another station stood in its place, the end station of Hungary's first railway line, but this building was pulled down in order to construct the Nagykörút.

Hungarian National Museum



In 1802, Count Ferenc Széchenyi offered his rich collection to the nation to establish the Hungarian National Museum. Those days, the collection comprised 11884 prints, 1156 manuscripts, 142 books, maps and copperplates. The Museum played a significant role in the events of the revolution in 1848 and 1849. On 15th March, 1848, the Museum's garden was an important scene of the revolution, where, according to the traditions, Sándor Petőfi recited the National Song. The Upper House of the first representative parliament held its sessions in the Ceremial in 1848. (From then on, the Upper House held its sessions here until the building of the new House of Parliament.). From 1848 on, the Museum has become the symbol of the national freedom, and the national commemorations day of 1848 is held in front of the Museum.

Synagogue

Designed in Byzantine and Moorish styles in the mid nineteenth. This is the biggest synagogue in Europe. With its red and white brickwork, onion domes and rich ceramic ornamentation it is one of the most distinctive buildings in Budapest. The adjacent museum contains an extremely rich collection of Jewish artefacts spanning the last two millennia.

Lutheran Church in Deák tér

It was built between 1799 and 1805, originally it did not have a gallery, but a small awkward looking tower, which was later pulled down.

Vígszínház (theatre)

Its elegant and radiant late-nineteen-century design makes it the final section of the Boulevard's most attractive building. The Vígszínház is one of the finest examples of theatre buildings designed by Fellner and Helmer, whose 19th century "new-standard theatres" can be found scattered across central Europe.

Margaret Island

Budapest's finest green spot is Margaret Island (Margitsziget) located in the middle of the river Danube between Margaret Bridge and Árpád Bridge. Originally there were three islands here, the islands of Spa, Pictors and Rabbits. These were framed with a common concrete shore as part of river regulation efforts in the 19th century and so the 2.5-kilometre-long and 100 hectares of parkland island was formed.

The island was already inhabited by Roman times. In the Middle Ages monks preferred the island for its calm and kings for its excellent hunting. The island bears the name of Margit (Margaret), daughter of King Béla IV (Adalbert), who renounced the world and entered the island's convent after surviving the rampage of the Tatars in the 13th century. After centuries of neglect, the island was reborn in the 19th century when an open park and entertainment centre was opened to the general public. This was made possible by the Margaret Bridge embranchment built to the island in 1900, opening the island to pedestrians. The park is beautiful and very varied: century-old chestnut avenues, English, Japanese and French gardens alternate with ruins of a nunnery, an old water tower and a wide range of sports facilities.



Sightseeing from the number 2 tram

There cannot be many tram rides even in the great cities of the world where it is possible to see all the best tourist attractions for the price of just a single ticket. In Budapest, though, a ride on the number 2 tram is just such. The tramcars themselves are of Hungarian design and date from 1967.

JÁSZAI MARI TÉR: The big building between the stop and the river is popularly known as the “White House.” During the Communist era this was Party’s power house. Nowadays it contains parliamentary offices.

SZALAY UTCA: On the right is the Parliament building, on the left the former Palace of Justice, now the Museum of Ethnography. The big square is named after Lajos Kossuth, one of the leaders of the Uprising and War of Independence of 1848/49. The somewhat idealistic statue of Kossuth behind us dates from the 1950’s.

KOSSUTH LAJOS TÉR: At almost 900 feet long, the Parliament building is of such a size that the tram stops a second time at the other end of the square. Here there is a statue of a freedom fighter from another age, Ferenc Rákóczi II. The statue was erected in 1935, on the two hundredth anniversary of his death.

ROOSEVELT TÉR: On the left hand side is the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and to the right the Chain Bridge and the whole panorama of Buda.

EÖTVÖS TÉR: To the left is the first of several luxury hotels that line the river bank. The pedestrianized embankment, known as the Korzó, is a traditional favourite for a gentle promenade.

VIGADÓ TÉR: The main building on the square is a famous concert hall and ballroom. Passing the Elizabeth Bridge (opened 1964), this is one of the best examples of modern architecture in the city.

MÁRCIUS 15. TÉR: This is a good viewpoint for Gellért with the citadel.

FŐVÁM TÉR: Alight here for a much-to-be-recommended visit to the Central Market Hall. The tram stop is in an unattractive underpass, permanently covered in graffiti, no matter how often it is cleaned off.

ZSIL UTCA: This is a stop used by students. There are many university buildings on the Buda side as well, mostly connected with the various science and engineering faculties.

BORÁROS TÉR: There are not many tourists around here, for this is very much everyday Budapest.

HALLER UTCA: The liqueur factory on the left hand side is a venerable Budapest institution. The flats and office buildings on the right are part of the brand new Millennium City Centre complex. The bridge whose red support columns are now coming into view is the Lágymányosi Bridge.

KÖZVÁGÓHÍD - MILLENNIUM CULTURAL CENTRE: On the right is the new National Theatre and the popular Palace of Arts buildings.

