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72-HOUR VACATIONS



**Budapest, Hungary**

**Budapest**

Explore the Paris of the East  
 By Ryan James

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Fishermen's Bastion offers excellent panoramic views of the city

Budapest is made up of two cities, Buda and Pest, separated by the river Danube. The Pest side is livelier and offers the best shopping for items ranging from antiques and porcelain to specialty Hungarian foods and wines.

Upon your arrival in the country, you'll note that Budapest's Ferihegy airport is small for a capital city airport making it a breeze for both arrivals and departures. The user-friendly **Airport Minibus**, a public service of the Budapest Airport Authority has a conveniently located reservation desk as you enter the main lobby after passing through Customs. Roundtrip service is offered to any destination in the city for 4,390 Ft (\$25) per person. It's the smoothest way to get to and from the airport, but remember to book your return 24 hours in advance. When you provide your flight information, they will tell you the time of your pickup. The ride into the city will average 30-45 minutes. If you prefer a taxi, the airport has licensed Zona Taxi as its official company. Their rates are based on the district to which you are traveling; the fee is per taxi, not per person.

When considering a hotel, there are excellent options on both sides of the Danube, which will provide easy access to transportation as well as fantastic views. Facing the **Széchenyi Chain Bridge** is the **Four Seasons Gresham Palace Hotel**, the most famous hotel on the Pest side due to its meticulous reconstruction of the original splendor of the Art Nouveau elegance. The hotel is ideally located for views of Buda Castle on the Buda side of the Chain Bridge. The **Corinthia Grand Hotel Royal** is housed in a grand building on the Pest side on the major ring road. Each hotel offers all of the amenities expected from a world-renowned hotel group, with locations that are centrally situated for shopping and sightseeing in Pest. The Buda side offers some excellent options also. One is the fun, modern **art'otel**, a member of the Park Plaza chain. The hotel is decorated with art by



Széchenyi Chain Bridge

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contemporary American artist Donald Sultan even the rugs in the guestrooms and the dinnerware in the restaurant were designed by the artist. One benefit of art'otel is that almost every room offers an intense view. The front rooms look across the Danube toward the **Parliament** building, while the back rooms look up Castle Hill toward **Matthias Church** and **Fishermen's Bastion**. Also, this hotel is located just a few blocks from the Batthyány tér metro and HÉV train station, which is the starting point for the popular day trip to Szentendre. If sleeping on the hill is appealing, the **Burg Hotel** is an excellent and cozy choice, directly across from Matthias Church.

As you plan your 72-hour getaway to Budapest, take into consideration that most shops close at 1pm on Saturday and are closed on Sunday, with few exceptions. Take advantage of your weekday mornings to do your shopping. Most museums are closed on Mondays. Also note that Budapest does not have a breakfast culture. While some restaurants offer breakfast menus for tourists, they are not normally open for business until after normal breakfast hours for Americans. For this reason, most hotels offer breakfasts to guests and we suggest you fortify yourself at your hotel before heading out for the day.

## DAY 1

Once settled into your hotel, make your way to Buda's **Castle District**. The last castle here was destroyed in WWII; the replacement building is now called the palace, but only houses museums and the national library. The area is located within the ramparts that encircle Castle Hill. You can walk, use the funicular or ride numbers 10 or 16 buses to the top.



The sights in the Castle District are well marked with pedestrian pointer signs, but once you get to the top, the **National Gallery** will be to your left. This museum concentrates on Hungarian art from the Middle Ages to the present. Highlights include fifteenth-century and late Gothic altars and panels depicting unusual takes on Catholic themes; Symbolist and Art Nouveau painting by Simon Hollosy, Janos Vaszary and Jozsef Rippl-Ronai; and a selection of contemporary Hungarian art.

Next take a leisurely stroll in the direction of **Matthias Church**. On your way, stop at the **Rétes Bar** to sample a mouth-watering Hungarian strudel, a rétes. Matthias Church, officially the Church of Our Lady, is perched high on Castle Hill. It is both a spellbinding testament to the turbulent history of

### Matthias Church

Hungary and a shining tribute to the great artists that continually rebuilt the city every century for more than 500 years. Matthias Church is a basilica built by King Béla IV after the original church was invaded and destroyed by Mongolians in the 13th century. In 1526, not long after King Matthias lovingly rehabilitated his place of worship, the country was attacked and divided by the Turks who transformed the church into a mosque. The Old Mosque existed for 145 years before being restored by the Jesuits. During this time the church suffered severe architectural ambiguity, from genuine gothic cathedral to a confused Baroque structure. Finally, in the late 19th century, the site was renovated in an effort to return to the original, medieval style of Matthias church. Today, the gothic exterior and five-story bell tower is exquisitely embellished by a vibrant, multicolored tile roof, but sadly parts are covered with scaffolding for repairs that will continue until 2012.

Equally breathtaking is the richly frescoed interior, replete with Art Nouveau floral and geometrical motifs, reminiscent of the oriental influence that is an inextricable part of Hungary's history. A perfect synchronization of Western and Eastern architecture and decoration, Matthias church is also a unique union of the tumultuous past and tranquil present that epitomizes the Magyar nation. Do not miss the small, but fascinating museum upstairs that relates to King St. Stephan's crown. In front of the church, you will find **Fishermen's Bastion**, which offers excellent panoramic views of the city from its flights of stairs, projections and turrets. Originally Fishermen's Town, a fish market was located behind the ramparts.



**Fishermen's Bastion**

The Castle area is also home to the **Budapest Museum**, the **Medieval Synagogue**, the **Golden Eagle Pharmacy Museum**, and others.

If you wish to linger among the charms and vistas of the hill, consider the **Rivalda Restaurant** as the perfect choice for dinner. Once an 18th century monastery, during the warm months you may dine in the old monastery courtyard with the ancient walls of the building whispering their secrets. In colder weather, indoor seating has a theatrical theme with flamboyant paintings on the walls and parachute cloth draped from the ceiling. After dinner, stroll along the vista spots once again to relish the Danube sights, alit and ready to welcome the night's rest.

[Continue to Day 2](#)

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