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72-HOUR VACATIONS



Budapest, Hungary

Budapest
 Explore the Paris of the East
 By Ryan James

- Day 1 / [Where to Stay](#)
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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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Castle Hill view

DAY 2

After enjoying breakfast at your hotel, if Herend is on your wish list, head over to József Nádor tér 11, just a few blocks from the Pest side of the Chain Bridge, near the heart of the high end Andrassy utca shopping street. Here, you'll find the **Herend** shop, offering Hungary's finest porcelain since 1827. Queen Victoria chose a pattern for her own table during the Paris exhibition in 1896. Continue one block south to Váci u. As you make your way down this popular shopping street, you'll happen upon shops offering the wares of Hungary's other top porcelain companies, **Hollohaza** and **Zsolnay** in addition to a large selection of galleries and handicraft shops.

If you need refreshing, stop by the century-old **Central Kávéház**. This restaurant has been home to Hungarian literati since the early 1900s. It has been renovated to replicate its original design and is a luscious setting for a choice of numerous pastries as well as a full menu. Follow Váci u. to its southern end and discover small shops offering designer jewelry, unusual Hungarian clothing designs, and one of a kind crafts. At the end of Váci u. you will find the **Great Market Hall**. While the main floor of the gargantuan glass and iron hall is crowded with shoppers admiring choices from the vast array of fresh and colorful produce, spicy sausages, salamis and bright red peppers, the mezzanine level is more sedate. Merchants peddle souvenirs such as embroidered tablecloths, colorful peasant clothes, T-shirts, and leather goods. Do not hesitate to bargain for a better price. Another main attraction is the often crowded food stands, providing perhaps the best taste of regional customs, both cultural and culinary. Groups of garrulous locals convene for an afternoon beer and a generous helping of steaming sausages and sauerkraut. Delve into deep bowls of goulash heavily spiced with paprika or choose a copious portion of stuffed cabbage complete with sizzling sautéed potatoes. A meal here with a small glass



Synagogue

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of beer is roughly 1,500 Ft (\$8.50) per head. For a real culinary culture experience, try a lángos, Hungarian fried dough with shredded cheese, and garlic juice for 800 Ft (\$4.50). Although you have to eat standing at a tall table, lunch here should not be missed.



Széchenyi Thermal spa and baths

In the afternoon, to walk off a bit of your lunch, add some sightseeing to your shopping day. There are numerous worthwhile sites in Pest, but we recommend spending the afternoon visiting the **Dohány Synagogue** and **St. Stephen's Basilica**, two religious treasures. The **Dohány Synagogue** is the second largest Jewish synagogue in the world, after Emmanuel in New York City. Upon entering, you'll immediately be surprised to notice that the space strongly resembles a Catholic Church, because the original architects were not Jewish and were basing their designs on their own past experiences. Admission includes an informative one-hour guided tour offered in English, including visits to the temple, the memorial garden and its famous **Weeping Willow Memorial**, plus the attached **Jewish Museum**. If you are looking for some trendy hip clothing designs, turn left out of the synagogue and continue to **Látomás** at Dohány utca 20 where you will find a consortium of collections by young Hungarian designers. Turning back in the direction of the synagogue, take a 15-minute walk to St. Stephen's Basilica, which dominates much of Pest's skyline. The beautiful edifice combines Classical, Renaissance and Baroque styles because it was completed in distinct stages from 1845-1905. On your way, sneak into the Károly körút passage way to savor one of a dozen flavors of hot chocolate or special coffees at **Aztek Chocolat** or indulge in one of their sinfully delicious chocolate truffles.

Wine lovers are in luck; within easy walking distance of St. Stephen's is an excellent wine shop, **Boutique des Vins**. The shop is run by a former sommelier and is located at József Attila u. 12. When you find number 12, you'll see a large Jaguar dealership. Walk around the dealership to find the small wine shop on the side. A nice selection of Hungarian wines is on offer, as well as friendly and informative service. Ask for an explanation of the vintages and number system of the sweet, amber-hued Tokaji wines that is indigenous to Hungary.

The remainder of your second day should be devoted to relaxation and pleasure. Spend the late afternoon at the **Széchenyi Thermal** spa and baths, one of Europe's largest, located in City Park. Take a swim in the lap pool, or just soak your travel weary body in one of the thermal pools with Lida and the swans looking over your shoulder. Each thermal spas has a different heat setting and is mineral-rich for therapeutic relaxation. A full suite of massages and treatments are also available. As you enter the building, consult the English-language "menu" of options located on the wall.



Parliament

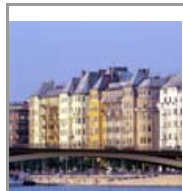
If you are feeling energized, walk through City Park to Heroes Square, the most celebrated square in the city. There you will find the statues of fourteen of the greatest leaders of Hungary starting with King St. Stephan on the far left. All seven on the left side were Hungarian kings. On the right side, only Matthias Corvinus was a king, while the others were Hungarian heroes. To the left of the square is the **Fine Arts Museum** and to the right is the **Art Exhibition Hall**.

After travel, shopping, and sightseeing on your second day in the city, you'll want to finish the evening with a casual dinner. For a traditional restaurant with an extensive country-style menu of Hungarian specialties, look no further than **Paprika Etterem** at Dózsa György u. 72. This country hunting lodge-style restaurant has bountiful portions of Hungarian favorites including goose and wild boar. For those who like choices, head over to **Liszt Ferenc tér** or **Ráday u.** Each has over a dozen restaurants with a variety of cuisines.

[Continue to Day 3](#)

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Buda Castle District

DAY 3

On your final day in Budapest, you may want to just wander the streets of Pest, finding architectural gems along the way and making your way to some of the sights you haven't visited. Some other highlights include the **National Museum**, the **Opera House**, and of course, the incredible neo-Gothic **Parliament** building.

Another option is to spend your final day taking a day trip to the small, picturesque town of **Szentendre**. Just 12 miles north of Budapest, it's a 40-minute trip from the Batthyány tér HÉV train station. The town has a tumultuous past. Serbian and Greek refugees originally settled here during the 14th century in an attempt to escape Turkish forces. Although occupation and upheaval typified daily life in Szentendre until the late 17th century, the community managed to retain its traditional Orthodox beliefs by gathering in simple wooden churches to worship. During the Habsburg era, a more liberal attitude allowed the freedom to worship without restriction. Eventually, the Serbs were required to swear an oath of allegiance to Hungary resulting in many leaving. Today, Szentendre draws a significant tourist crowd, because of its proximity to Budapest. There are a number of tiny, but interesting museums and a vibrant art scene that started with the arrival of artists in the 1920s.



Fishermen's Bastion

Fő tér is the town's main square where various streets leading away from this square offer numerous shops for souvenirs, ranging from traditional lace to communist memorabilia. More interesting than the tourist shops, though, are the town's buildings, art exhibitions, and museums.

Take note that the museums have irregular operating hours, regardless of what is posted on the door. However, if one is closed, there are plenty of others to visit. Surely you will want to climb to the top of the hill to see the **Serbian Ecclesiastical History Collection**. The

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Buda Castle

You are sure to find other museums and sights of interest as wandering through the streets are an adventure.

Make sure you walk to the river to see the Danube Bend in a magnificently picturesque panorama. You'll want more than just a slice of cake after visiting several of the town's museums, so make your way to **Régimódi** for a full meal. Near the central square, this beautifully decorated establishment offers a menu of Hungarian specialties with a focus on game dishes. 🍷

For more information, visit the Budapest Tourism Office at www.budapestinfo.hu.

ladies who run the museum will then unlock the church next door for you to visit. The **Margit Kovács Museum** features the work of Hungary 's most well-known ceramicist (and one of the first artists to arrive here in the 1920s).

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