



THE ROUGH GUIDE TO

BUDAPEST



INSIDE THIS BOOK

INTRODUCTION What to see, what not to miss, author highlights and more – everything you need to get started

THE GUIDE Comprehensive neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood guide to the city, with full-colour maps featuring all the listings

LISTINGS Where to sleep, eat, drink and shop, plus all the best clubs, theatres and music venues

CONTEXTS History, music, recommended books and a useful language section

MAP SECTION Detailed city plans, for easy navigation

We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the Guide with the ★ symbol

Budapest chapters



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THE ROUGH GUIDE TO **BUDAPEST**

This seventh edition updated by
Charles Hebbert and Norm Longley





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Introduction to **Budapest**

With a wonderful natural setting straddling the River Danube, beautiful architecture and delicious Magyar cuisine, Budapest is one of the most rewarding cities in Europe to visit. Its magnificent bridges and boulevards and its grand riverside views invite comparisons with Paris, Prague and Vienna – as do many features of its cultural life, from coffee houses and a love of music to its restaurants and wine-producing tradition. Budapest has recently acquired a new modern edge all its own, too, with cool boutique hotels and hip bars springing up in artfully decaying buildings. The city is also distinctively Hungarian, its inhabitants displaying fierce pride in their Magyar ancestry. Their language, whose nearest European relative is Finnish, underlines the difference – this can represent a challenge to visitors, but is no barrier to enjoyment of this most cosmopolitan of European cities.

Fundamental to the city's layout and history, the **River Danube** (Duna) – which is seldom blue – separates **Buda** on the hilly west bank from **Pest** on the eastern plain. Until 1873 these were separate cities, and they still retain a different feel. Buda is older and more dignified: dominated by the Vár (Castle Hill), a mile-long plateau overlooking the Danube, it was the capital of medieval monarchs and the seat of power for successive occupying powers. Built during the city's golden age in the late nineteenth century, with boulevards of Haussmann-like apartment blocks sweeping out from the old medieval centre, **Pest** holds most of the capital's magnificent Art Nouveau edifices and has a noisy, bustling feel. Following construction of the first permanent bridge between the two cities in 1849, power gradually moved across the river, culminating in the building of the grandiose Parliament on the Pest side. The two halves of the city each preserve their distinctive feel, but as a whole Budapest is a vibrant place today, never in danger of being overwhelmed by tourism but nonetheless offering plenty for visitors to enjoy.

TOP 5 FOODIE TREATS

Great Market Hall Splendid wrought-iron structure harbouring a terrific assemblage of food stalls – try the *lángos* kiosks upstairs, too. See p.83

Goulash A tasty stew of meat and vegetables, seasoned with paprika, Hungary's classic national dish must be tried at least once. See p.159

Borkonyha The pick of the city's three Michelin-starred restaurants, *Borkonyha* oozes class. See p.161

Espresso Embassy One of Budapest's hip, new-style coffee houses, whose interior is as impressive as its coffee. See p.170

Szimplakert Farmers' Market Head to *Szimpla* on a Sunday morning to find all manner of delectable foodstuffs. See p.190

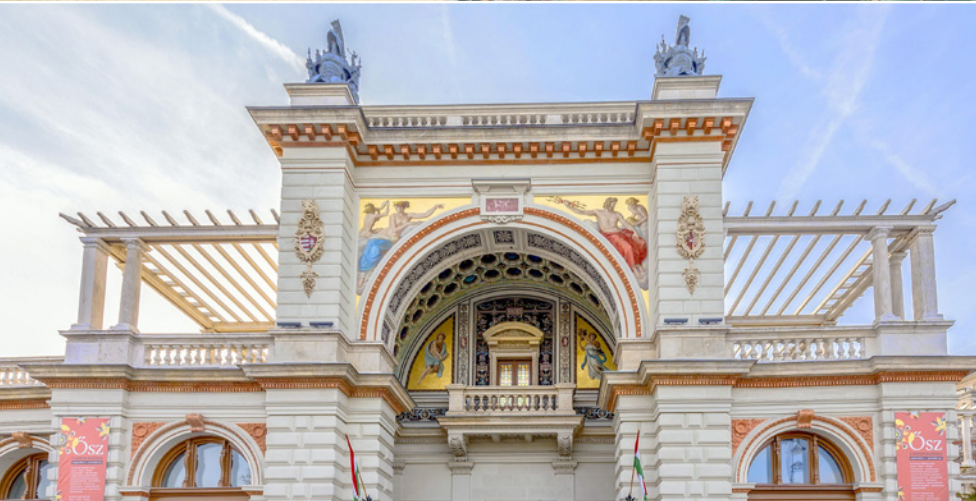
Above all, Budapest is probably best known for its **spas**, which range from fabulous Ottoman-era bathhouses like the Rudas, to fine nineteenth-century Art Nouveau buildings such as the Gellért. Another of Budapest's strong suits is its **restaurants**, which have made the city one of the new gastronomic destinations of Europe. Fantastically innovative, contemporary Hungarian cooking is now firmly to the fore, alongside some brilliant international cuisine. Hand in hand with this gastronomic renaissance is Hungary's superb **wine**; though often overlooked abroad, its quality may come as a surprise to many visitors. Catering for a wide range of tastes, Budapest's **nightlife** is also

very much of a draw. Generally trouble-free, welcoming and accessible, it ranges from the city's distinctive "ruin pubs" in decaying apartment blocks or courtyards to *táncház* (dance houses) where Hungarians of all ages perform wild stamping movements to the rhythms of darkest Transylvania, and internationally renowned artists such as Márta Sebestyén appear in an informal setting.

There's plenty to offer in terms of **classical music** and **opera**, too: world-class ensembles and soloists can be enjoyed in the Palace of Arts' state-of-the-art concert hall or the grander, older settings of the Music Academy and Opera House. Fans of **pop**, **rock** and **world music** can discover a wealth of local talent, especially on the folk scene, alongside big international names, but the biggest event of the year is the **Sziget Festival**, held on an island just north of the centre in August, and one of Europe's largest musical celebrations.

What to see

Pest is where you're likely to spend most of your time, enjoying the streetlife, bars and shops within the **Belváros** (Inner City) and the neighbouring districts. These surrounding areas are defined by two semicircular boulevards – the **Kiskörút** (Small Boulevard) and the **Nagykörút** (Great Boulevard) – and radial avenues such as Andrassy út and Rákóczi út. Exploring the area between them can easily occupy you for several days. In the financial and government centre of **Lipótváros**, interest lies in St Stephen's Basilica and the monumental Parliament building, which rivals the grand structures across the Danube; here, too, you'll find the city's most important monuments and statues of pre-eminent Hungarians, many of which are sprinkled



OFFBEAT BUDAPEST

Chess on the water Watch old-timers ponder their moves while taking a soak at Széchenyi Baths. See p.76

Communist trainers Check out retro brand Tisza for some cult 1970s Hungarian footwear. See p.193

Escape rooms Fancy being locked up in a ruined Soviet-era apartment block? Thought so... See p.198

Odd medicine Dried bats and mummified skulls are just some of the exhibits in the Semmelweis medical collection. See p.112

Sleep in a work of art Full of antiques, bric-a-brac and witty drawings – the *Lavender Circus* is a fantastically eccentric place to stay. See p.152

around the vast expanse of Kossuth Lajos tér. In **Terézváros**, Andrásy út leads out past the grandiose Opera House and the House of Terror to Hősök tere (Heroes' Square), a magnificent imperial set piece where the Fine Arts Museum displays a first-rate collection of old European masters. Beyond, the **Városliget** (City Park) holds one of the finest zoos in Europe, both in terms of its animals and its architecture, as well as the hugely popular Széchenyi Baths, served by its own thermal springs.

Of Pest's remaining inner-city districts, **Erzsébetváros** and **Józsefváros** hold the most appeal. The former is Budapest's old Jewish quarter, with a rich and tragic history that's still palpable in the bullet-scarred backstreets behind the Great Synagogue on Dohány utca. But its old apartment blocks have also spawned a new genre of drinking spots, the "ruin bars", which have become a popular destination for younger Budapestis. From here, it's not far to the National Museum, a well-presented introduction to Hungarian history, and the Great Market Hall, further round in

Ferencváros, whose hinterland harbours the Applied Arts Museum, Holocaust Memorial Centre and the Palace of Arts, one of Budapest's foremost cultural venues.



The **Vár** (Castle) on the **Buda** side was once the seat of Hungary's monarchs, and its palace, museums, churches and Baroque streets offer some absorbing sightseeing: notably the immense Hungarian National Gallery and the remarkable Hospital in the Rock. Down along the banks of the Danube, the historic Turkish baths – such as the Király and Rudas – are well worth experiencing, as is the remarkable Cave Church in **Gellért-hegy**. There's more history to the north in **Óbuda**, with its clutch of worthwhile museums clustered around the old centre, and extensive Roman remains at nearby Aquincum. In fine weather, people flock to **Margít-sziget**, the large, leafy island mid-river between Buda and Pest, to swim and sunbathe at the enormous lido and party through the night. Encircling the city to the west, the **Buda Hills** have a different kind of allure, with fun rides on the Cogwheel and Children's railways and chairlift, and intriguing caves to be visited. **Further out**, the steam trains of the Hungarian Railway History Park and the redundant Communist monuments within the Memento Park rate as major attractions.

There is plenty to see on **excursions** from Budapest. Top of the list is **Szentendre**, a picturesque artists' colony with a superb open-air ethnographic museum. Further upriver, the **Danube Bend** offers gorgeous scenery, a Renaissance palace and citadel and an amazing treetop zip-ride at **Visegrád**, while **Esztergom** boasts its basilica and a remarkable Turkish relic; while on the east bank of the Danube sits **Vác**, with its well-preserved Baroque centre. Classical-music lovers, meanwhile, will also enjoy concerts in the former Habsburg palace of **Gödöllő**, to the east of Budapest.

TOP 5 SHOPS

Bortársaság Super-helpful staff who will help you find your way around the stocks of superb Hungarian wines.

Fakopáncs You'll find a wonderful collection of wooden toys here in the appropriately named "Woodpecker" shop.

Írók Boltja The "Writer's Bookshop" is the best place in the city to find translated Hungarian works, and it's cosy too.

Mai Manó Galéria Housed inside the gallery of the same name, this is a terrific place for picking up all manner of photography-related items.

MesterPorta If it's Hungarian folk music you're after, look no further than this friendly, well-stocked shop.

A TRIBAL NATION

As a small, landlocked country whose language sets it apart from its neighbours, Hungary is a tribal nation, whose citizens still identify with their ancestors, pagan **Magyar** tribes who conquered the Carpathian Basin in 896 AD. Since the epochal Christmas Day when the Magyar ruler Vajk was baptized and crowned as King Stephen by a papal envoy, Hungary has identified itself with Europe while simultaneously remaining aware of its "otherness" – a sentiment reinforced by successive foreign occupations and the loss of much of its territory to neighbouring states.

The symbol of statehood is **St Stephen's Crown**, whose bent cross – caused by it being squashed in the eighteenth century – is a cherished sign of the vicissitudes that Hungary has endured, and features on the national **coat of arms** that you'll see everywhere in Budapest. The shield beneath the crown bears a Catholic cross of Lorraine, and the red and white "Árpád stripes" of the early Magyar tribal kings; today, the latter signify far-right loyalties, having formerly been employed as the flag of the Fascist Arrow Cross. With the fall of Communism, St Stephen's Crown returned to the coat of arms, but not to the national **flag** – which is a simple red, white and green tricolour.

RISING FROM THE RUINS

Now synonymous with Budapest nightlife, the city's first **ruin bars** (*romkocsmá*; see p.176) were guerrilla-like ventures, turning condemned buildings and crumbling courtyards into hip summer drinking spots. Decorated with graffiti and collages, the first wave of bars also put on entertainment in the form of music, film screenings and poetry readings. Once the authorities forced out a *romkocsmá* it would simply take its name elsewhere: at the start of the summer word would spread where the latest incarnations of the popular bars would be. This purely nomadic existence began to change when councils started to realize the commercial potential of the bars, not least in attracting tourists. While this has caused some inevitable commercialization, most bars retain an undeniable wackiness, and places like *Rácskert*, for example, hint at a return to the anarchic spirit. The thirst for a touch of novelty has led to some bars setting up alternative markets at weekends, such as at *Anker't* (see p.177) and *Szimplakert* (see p.178).

When to go

The best times to visit Budapest are **spring** (late March to the end of May) and **autumn** (Sept–Oct), when the weather is generally pretty mild – though there are often long days of sunshine during these periods – and there are fewer tourists (though things tend to get busy during the Budapest Spring Festival in late March/early April). **Summers** can be extremely hot with prolonged periods of sunshine and temperatures regularly reaching the mid-30s (°C), and often higher. It is during this time that many residents decamp to Lake Balaton and those who remain flock to the city's pools and parks to escape the heat and dust. Though some concert halls are closed over summer, there are all kinds of outdoor events to compensate – and also major international events such as the Formula One Grand Prix at the end of July, and the Sziget Festival in mid-August.

Winters can be bitterly cold, and may be snowy, which can make for a wonderful sight around the festive season, particularly with the markets in full flow. But you can still enjoy all the city's sights and cultural attractions (as well as trying roasted chestnuts from street vendors), while the thermal baths take on an extra allure. It's wise to book accommodation in advance for Christmas, New Year, the Spring Festival and Grand Prix, though prices are ramped up considerably during these periods.

BUDAPEST CLIMATE

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
AVERAGE DAILY TEMPERATURE												
Avg Min C°/Max F°	-4/25	-2/28	2/36	7/45	1/52	15/59	16/61	16/61	12/54	7/45	3/37	-1/30
Avg Min C°/Max F°	1/34	4/39	10/50	17/63	22/72	26/79	27/82	27/82	23/73	16/61	8/46	4/39
AVERAGE RAINFALL												
mm	37	44	38	45	72	69	56	47	33	57	70	46

Author picks

Our authors have scoured every corner of Budapest, seeking out everything from the quirkiest museums and coolest music to the finest coffee houses. Here are some of their favourite things to see, do, sip and savour.

Go flippin' crazy The Pinball Museum is the city's most unconventional attraction, offering some 130 lovingly restored machines, all of which you can have a bash at (p.58).

Ice cream Budapest's searing summer heat will have you yearning for something chilly, so make a beeline for one of the city's many enticing ice cream parlours; we love *Damniczki* (p.170), *Fragola* (p.171) and *Levendula* (p.173); wasabi hazelnut or wild garlic flavour perhaps?

Catch a concert The city rates some stellar performance spaces, but the beautifully decorated and acoustically brilliant Liszt Music Academy building takes some beating (p.63).

Caffeine kicks The third-wave coffee movement has hit Budapest with a vengeance: our top spots are *9Bar* (p.171), *Cube* (p.171) and *Kelet Kávészó* (p.173).

Going round the bend Take a leisurely cruise up to the Danube Bend, one of the grandest stretches of this mighty river; boat trips are also a great way to reach the historic towns of Szentendre (p.130), Visegrád (p.136), Vác (p.145) and Esztergom (p.141).

Retro Design Center Wallow in a little 1970s nostalgia with a visit to this entertaining retro museum in Szentendre, with its wonderful collection of Communist-era cars (p.133).

Super sleeps From the bohemian *Brody House* (p.154) to the leftfield *Lavender Circus* (p.152), Budapest is chock-full of truly idiosyncratic places to bed down for the night.

It's child's play Explore the city's many kid-centric entertainments, from the wonderful Zoo's carousel (p.75) and the Houdini Museum's magic displays (p.205) to the interactive Center of Scientific Wonders (p.128 & p.205) and the Railway History Park (p.127).

Our author recommendations don't end here. We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the Guide, highlighted with the ★ symbol.

FROM TOP RETRO DESIGN CENTER; PINBALL MUSEUM;
DANUBE BEND



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things not to miss

It's not possible to see everything that Budapest has to offer in one trip – and we don't suggest you try. What follows is a selective taste of the city's highlights: magnificent Art Nouveau treasures, unique thermal baths, and world-class concerts and festivals. All highlights have a page reference to take you straight into the Guide, where you can find out more. Coloured numbers refer to chapters in the Guide section.





1 THERMAL BATHS

Page 199

Bathe in splendour at the city's magnificent Ottoman-era and Art Nouveau spas, some fed by hot springs.

2 BUDAPEST ZOO

Page 75

Feed the giraffes, tickle the rhinos and marvel at the magnificent Art Nouveau buildings – the Elephant and Palm houses are particularly impressive.

3 BUDA HILLS

Page 121

Both children and adults will enjoy this delightful ride up into the verdant Buda Hills.

4 LIVE MUSIC

Page 184

The city's lively music scene offers everything from Gypsy fiddlers and Hungarian folk singers to world-class opera and classical performances.

5 #2 TRAM RIDE

Page 49

This route past Parliament and along the Pest embankment affords some wonderful views of Buda.





6 FISHERMEN'S BASTION

Page 92

Take a stroll along the Fishermen's Bastion for superlative views of the Danube and Pest beyond.

7 HUNGARIAN NATIONAL GALLERY

Page 99

Showcased in the imposing Royal Palace, this is Hungary's premier collection of home-grown art, from Gothic altarpieces to Art Nouveau and Abstract Expressionism.

8 DESIGN HOTELS

Page 150

Awash with colour, creativity and flair, Budapest possesses an impressive ensemble of superbly conceived design hotels.

9 SZIGET FESTIVAL

Page 183

Hungary's Glastonbury, this enormous mid-August bash draws some of the biggest bands on the planet.

10 COFFEE HOUSES

Page 169

Ponder the world over a coffee and cake – after all, it's an old Central European tradition.

11 MEMENTO PARK

Page 127

Re-live the city's Communist past in this atmospheric park on the outskirts of Budapest, where Lenin and his comrades now reside.





12

12 RUIN BARS

Page 176

Quartered within abandoned apartment blocks and courtyards, these wonderfully ramshackle bars are terrific fun.

13 GREAT SYNAGOGUE

Page 65

Looming over the Jewish district, this is Europe's largest and most impressive synagogue.

14 HOUSE OF TERROR

Page 63

A dramatic memorial-museum to the victims of state repression, occupying the former headquarters of the secret police.

15 HUNGARIAN RAILWAY HISTORY PARK

Page 127

Railway buffs are sure to get all misty-eyed at this marvellous collection of old locos; you can even drive your own steam engine.

16 FOOD MARKETS

Page 189

Stock up on sausages, cheeses and other goodies at Budapest's atmospheric market halls, and refuel afterwards with a bowl of goulash.

17 BUDAPEST'S CEMETERIES

Pages 82, 83, 125 & 127

Take a wander through the elaborate tombs in the city's many atmospheric cemeteries.

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Itineraries

Budapest is essentially two cities in one: Buda and Pest, but on both sides of the Danube, you'll find glorious architecture alongside remnants of the city's Communist past, not to mention all manner of superb music – and there are some fun ways to get around, too.

ARCHITECTURAL BUDAPEST

Museum of Applied Arts Lechner's flamboyantly designed Secessionist building is as much an exhibit as the voluminous displays inside. **See p.84**

Gellért Baths Soothe any aching limbs with a wallow in the hot pool and steam rooms of these magnificent Art Nouveau baths. **See p.110**

Centrál Kávéház If you only take coffee – alright then, cake too – in one place, then make it *Centrál*, which has retained its pre-World War II grandeur, when it was the meeting place of the Budapest literati. **See p.174**

Great Synagogue The crowning glory of the Jewish District is the Byzantine-inspired Great Synagogue, the largest in Europe; admire, too, Imre Varga's Holocaust Memorial, beautifully cast in the shape of a willow tree. **See p.65**

Budapest Zoo As famous for its architecture as its animals, the city's fabulous zoo will entertain kids and parents alike – don't miss the elephant house. Afterwards, take a stroll through Városliget Park. **See p.75**

Mátyás Church and Fishermen's Bastion At the heart of cobbled Castle Hill stands the glorious, colourfully patterned Mátyás Church, and just across the way, the Fishermen's Bastion with its sweeping views of Pest. **See p.91 & p.92**

ON THE RAILS AND ON THE WATER

Sikló Hop on the nineteenth-century funicular perched atop Castle Hill, and enjoy a great view of the city as you ride down to the riverside. **See p.103**

Millennium Line Completed in 1896 for Hungary's millennium celebrations – making it the second oldest metro in the world after London – a ride on yellow line #1 from Vörösmarty tér to Hősök tere is sure to conjure up images of a bygone era. **See p.41**

Tram ride Tram #2 along the Pest embankment offers the best views of Buda, so jump aboard at the southern terminus near the Palace of Arts, and take in the sights all the way up to the Parliament building and beyond. **See p.49**

River cruise What better way to appreciate the not always so blue Danube than on a lazy afternoon cruise. **See p.26**

Cogwheel and Children's railways Kids and adults alike will love this 3km climb up into the Buda Hills; and once you've reached the upper terminus, you can board the narrow-gauge railway, which runs for a further 11km through deep woods. **See p.122**

Castle Bus It might not be the most comfortable ride in the world, but as it rattles through the cobbled streets of the Vár, you'll get to see the pick of the sights hereabouts. **See p.89**

RED BUDAPEST

House of Terror Housed in the former headquarters of the Secret Police, this gripping and often sobering museum commemorates the victims of the Communist regime. **See p.63**

Memento Park Head to the city outskirts and wander among Red Army soldiers and Communist dictators, then have your picture taken in the Trabant. **See p.127**

Soviet Army Memorial This typically stern Cold War-era memorial honours the soldiers killed during the liberation of the city from the Nazis. **See p.52**

Budapest Poster Gallery Pick up a piece of Communist chic at this fabulous poster shop, specializing in Soviet-era art. **See p.190**

Hospital in the Rock The Cold War comes to life in this fascinating former military-hospital-cum-nuclear-bunker located deep below Castle Hill. **See p.97**

MUSICAL BUDAPEST

Akvárium A semi-subterranean hub for live bands and DJs, plus an “underwater” restaurant – what’s not to like? **See p.176**

Liszt Music Academy Get your classical kicks by attending a concert in the Grand Hall of the prestigious, and recently renovated, academy building, named after Hungary’s most revered musician. **See p.63**

Music History Museum Learn more about Hungary’s rich musical heritage at this engaging collection, from the irrepressible sounds of the Roma to the classical genius of Liszt and Bartók. **See p.93**

Cocoa concerts Themed, child-friendly concerts run by the Budapest Festival Orchestra are a fun way to introduce a bit of culture to the under-12s. **See p.205**

Opera House Take a backstage tour through one of central Europe’s great opera houses, or, better still, take in a performance. **See p.61**

Jazz A strong jazz tradition prevails in Budapest, but for the very best, seek out the *Budapest Jazz Club* or the *Opus Jazz Club*, both of which feature a regular roster of high-class acts. **See p.185**

Folk music One of the most prominent aspects of Magyar culture is folk music, and one of the best places to appreciate these traditional sounds is a *táncház* (dance house); the Fonó Music Hall is a good place to start. **See p.186**





GETTING AROUND ON TWO WHEELS

Basics

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- 32 Travel essentials

Getting there

Flying is the easiest way to reach Budapest, with several airlines operating direct from the UK. Flying from North America, Australasia or South Africa will entail one or more changes. Travelling overland from the UK is another option, though this inevitably takes much longer and usually works out far more expensive.

To get the cheapest flight deals, you'll need to book weeks, if not months, in advance, with the highest fares from June to September, Christmas and New Year. You'll get the best prices during the low season, November to February. As well as checking **fares** on airline websites and searching via sites such as [skyscanner.net](#), [kayak.co.uk](#) or [momondo.co.uk](#), you may also be able to cut costs by going through a specialist flight agent, who in addition to dealing with discounted flights may offer student and youth fares and travel insurance. Other specialist **tour operators** can book you onto a variety of city breaks or themed tours in Budapest.

Flights from the UK and Ireland

Flying time to Budapest from the UK or Ireland is between two and a half and three hours, depending on your departure airport. There are currently several **budget airlines** flying from the UK to Budapest: easyJet ([easyjet.com](#)) from London Gatwick; Norwegian Air ([norwegian.com](#)) from London Gatwick; Wizz Air ([wizzair.com](#)) from Luton, Liverpool, Birmingham and Glasgow; Ryanair ([ryanair.com](#)) from Bristol, East Midlands, Manchester and Stansted; and Jet2 ([jet2.com](#)) from East Midlands, Leeds Bradford, Manchester and Edinburgh. In addition, British Airways ([ba.com](#)) has daily flights from Heathrow, though these tend to be more expensive than the budget airlines with a return costing £100–120. Book far enough in advance with one of the low-cost airlines and you can pick up a ticket for as

little as £60–70 return, even in summer; book anything less than three or four weeks in advance and this could triple in price.

From **Ireland**, both Aer Lingus ([aerlingus.com](#)) and Ryanair ([ryanair.com](#)) fly between Dublin and Budapest. Flights take around three hours and **fares** start at around €100 in low season.

Flights from the US and Canada

With no direct flights from North America to Budapest, your best bet is to fly with one of the major European-based airlines like Air France ([airfrance.com](#)), British Airways ([ba.com](#)) or Lufthansa ([lufthansa.com](#)), where you'll probably be routed via their respective European hubs.

From the east coast of the **US**, **fares** average around US\$650 in low season and US\$1000 in high season; and from the west coast around US\$950 in low season and US\$1300 in high season. From **Canada**, expect to pay around Can\$1200 in low season from Toronto (Can\$1600 high season), and Can\$1800 in low season from Vancouver (Can\$2200 high season).

Flights from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa

There are no direct flights to Budapest from Australia, New Zealand or South Africa, so the best option is to fly to a western European gateway and get a connecting flight from there. A return **fare** to Budapest from eastern **Australia** costs around Aus\$2200 in low season and Aus\$2700 in high season. From **New Zealand**, a return fare costs around NZ\$2400 in low season and NZ\$3000 in high season. Flying from **South Africa**, you can get return flights for around ZAR9200 in low season and ZAR10,000 in high season.

City breaks and tours

Budapest is an extremely popular **city-break** destination and this is reflected in the number of operators offering the city as a destination in itself

A BETTER KIND OF TRAVEL

At Rough Guides we are passionately committed to travel. We believe it helps us understand the world we live in and the people we share it with – and of course tourism is vital to many developing economies. But the scale of modern tourism has also damaged some places irreparably, and climate change is accelerated by most forms of transport, especially flying. All Rough Guides' flights are carbon-offset, and every year we donate money to a variety of environmental charities.

or as part of a two- or three-centre trip, usually combined with Prague and Vienna.

AGENTS AND OPERATORS

Cox & Kings UK 📞 020 3797 4759, 🌐 coxandkings.co.uk. Upmarket cultural trips to Budapest staying in five-star hotels such as the *Corinthia*. Three-night breaks start at around £400 including flights and transfers. There are also luxury and private group tours aboard the *Danube Express*, which stops off in Budapest.

Kirker Holidays UK 📞 020 7593 1899, 🌐 kirkerholidays.com. Three-night cultural breaks in four- and five-star hotels from around £500 per person, including flights and transfers. They can reserve opera tickets and arrange walking tours of the city.

North South Travel UK 📞 01245 608 291, 🌐 northsouthtravel.co.uk. Friendly, competitive travel agency, offering discounted fares worldwide. Profits are used to support projects in the developing world, especially the promotion of sustainable tourism.

Osprey Holidays UK 📞 0131 243 8098, 🌐 ospreyholidays.com. Two-night breaks in one of several three-, four- and five-star hotels, from around £330 per person, including flights and transfers.

Regent Holidays UK 📞 020 3811 3588, 🌐 regent-holidays.co.uk. Central and Eastern European specialist offering three-night city breaks in three-, four- and five-star accommodation from £345, including flights, as well as tailor-made itineraries.

Stag Republic UK 📞 0845 686 0619, 🌐 stagrepublic.co.uk. A Budapest-based operation that arranges stag packages that can include Trabant treks, quad-biking, visits to the baths and stag dinners. Prices start at around £55 per person for a two-night hostel stay, on top of which you add flights and the various activities.

STA Travel UK 📞 0333 321 0099, US 📞 1 800 781 4040, Australia 📞 134 782, New Zealand 📞 0800 474 400, South Africa 📞 0861 781 781; 🌐 statravel.co.uk. Worldwide specialists in independent travel; also student IDs, travel insurance, car rental, rail pass and more. Good discounts for students and under-26s.

Thermalia Spas UK 📞 01843 864 688, 🌐 thermaliaspas.co.uk. Spa-holiday specialists offering stays centred around health and fitness at the four-star *Danubius Health Spa Resort Margitsziget*. Prices from around £450 for three nights, including flights.

Traillfinders UK 📞 0207 368 1200, Ireland 📞 016 777 888; 🌐 traillfinders.com. One of the best-informed and most efficient agents for independent travellers.

Trains

Getting to Budapest by **train** is likely to be considerably more expensive than flying, though it's a great deal more fun. First stop should be seat61.com, an excellent website that provides route, ticket, timetable and contact information for all European train services.

The quickest and most straightforward option from the UK is to take the **Eurostar** from London's St Pancras International to Paris, and then continue from Gare de l'Est to Munich before catching the

night train to Budapest; the entire journey takes around twenty hours in total. A standard second-class **return ticket** on this route costs around £320. An alternative is to go via Brussels, Cologne and Vienna: it involves more changing of trains and takes up to twenty-four hours but the views along the Rhine Valley are delightful. There are discounts for students, and those under 26 or over 60.

A **train pass from** InterRail (🌐 interrail.eu) or Eurail (🌐 eurail.com) – both cover Hungary – makes it convenient to take in the country as part of a wider rail trip around Europe.

RAIL CONTACTS

European Rail UK 📞 020 7619 1080, 🌐 traintours4u.co.uk.

Eurostar UK 📞 08432 186 186, 🌐 eurostar.com.

Rail Europe UK 📞 0844 848 5848, 🌐 uk.voyages-sncf.com.

By bus

Eurolines (🌐 eurolines.co.uk) operates two **buses** a week directly from London to Budapest, which take around thirty hours. Otherwise, you can change in Vienna. A standard return **fare** costs around £140, though advance deals and special offers can bring this down considerably. Although by no means a particularly comfortable journey, buses are air-conditioned and have on-board toilets. The usual route is to take the ferry across the Channel to Calais and then on via Brussels and Vienna.

Driving to Budapest

Driving to Hungary from the UK can be a pleasant proposition, particularly if you want to make stops in other places along the way. It's about 1600km from London to Budapest which, with stops, takes two days to drive. To plan your route, try **motoring organizations** such as the AA (🌐 theaa.com), the RAC (🌐 rac.co.uk) and Via Michelin (🌐 viamicheлин.com).

The most common cross-Channel options are the **ferry** links between Dover and Calais or Ostend. However, the quickest way of crossing the Channel is to go via the **Eurotunnel** service (🌐 eurotunnel.com), which operates drive-on drive-off shuttle trains between Folkestone and Calais/Coquelles. The 24-hour service runs every twenty minutes throughout the day.

Once across the Channel, the most direct route to Budapest is via Brussels, Aachen, Cologne, Frankfurt, Nürnberg, Linz and Vienna. To avoid the long queues at Hegyeshalom, consider entering Hungary from Deutsch-Kreutz, just south of Einstadt, instead.

The main cause for any queues is the need to buy an electronic motorway **vignette** (e-Vignette) – compulsory if you are driving on Hungarian motorways. The shortest vignette you can get is the ten-day one which costs 2975Ft (around €10); see toll-charge.hu for details. You can buy the *vignette* online ahead of travelling, or at one of the petrol stations in Austria before you cross the border, which should reduce any waiting. A system of mobile patrols and electronic number-plate readers enforces the scheme, and there are steep fines for travelling on a motorway without one.

FERRY CONTACTS

P&O Ferries UK ☎ 0800 130 0030, Ireland ☎ +353 1 686 9467;

poferries.com.

Stena Line UK ☎ 0844 770 7070, stenaline.co.uk.

Arrival

Other than the airport, all points of arrival are fairly central and most within walking distance or just a few stops by metro from downtown Pest. Budapest's excellent public transport system ensures that few parts of the city are more than thirty minutes' journey from the centre; many places can be reached in half that time. Three of the city's four metro lines and three main roads meet at the major junction of Deák tér in Pest, making this the main transport hub of the city; there's a transport map at the back of this book.

By air

Liszt Ferenc International Airport (☎ 1 296 7000, bud.hu), 20km southeast of the centre in Ferihegy (which it is still sometimes known as), has two passenger terminals. Terminal 2A serves countries covered by the Schengen Agreement, while 2B serves all non-Schengen destinations (UK, the US etc). Before leaving, it is worth checking which terminal you're flying from, as the Schengen divide might be subject to revision. There are **ATMs**, exchange facilities, tourist information desks and car-rental offices in both terminal buildings.

The easiest – but most expensive – way to get into the centre is an **airport taxi**. Run by Fótaxi (☎ 1 222 2222), these charge a fixed fee to different zones (you'll pay around 6500Ft or €22 to the centre). The next fastest option is the excellent

miniBUD airport shuttle service (☎ 1 550 0000, minibud.hu), which will take you directly to any address in the city. Tickets (4800Ft/€15 for one person, 5900Ft/€19 for two) can be bought at their desk in arrivals, or you can make a reservation online. Travelling from the city centre to the airport, you can either reserve online or by phone.

Far cheaper is **public transport**; bus #200E departs every fifteen minutes from the stop between terminals 2A and 2B to Kőbánya-Kispest Station; from here, you switch to metro line #3 (blue) to get to the centre. Buses run between 4am and 11pm and the journey time to Kőbánya-Kispest is about forty minutes. To get to the centre you'll need a transfer ticket (530Ft); just remember to validate the second portion of the ticket before you board the metro. Buy your tickets (and collect a public transport map) from the **BKK (Budapest Transport Centre**; daily 9am–9pm) desk inside arrivals, next to the Budapest Information desk. Otherwise, you can buy **tickets** from the vending machine next to the bus stop (350Ft), or from the driver on board (450Ft); note that this is just for the bus leg of the journey – you will need to buy another ticket for the metro at Kőbánya-Kispest. With a Budapest Card (see p.32), available from the Budapest Information desk, it's free to travel on the bus from the airport.

By train

The Hungarian word *pályaudvar* (abbreviated "*pu.*" in writing) is used to designate a **train station**. Of the six in Budapest, only three are important for tourists, but note that their names, which are sometimes translated into English, refer to the direction of services handled rather than their location.

Most international trains terminate at Pest's **Keleti Station**, on Baross tér in the VIII district. Although the hawks and hustlers here are not nearly as prominent these days, if you are approached by anyone offering anything, it's best to simply ignore them. The best source of tourist information here is the Mellow Mood agency (June–Aug daily 7am–10pm; Sept–May Mon–Sat 8am–4pm; ☎ 1 343 0748, mellowmood.hu), whose office is to the right of the big glass doorways at the station entrance. The international ticket office is located in a passageway a little way along platform 6, which is to the left as you enter. You can get all local transport tickets and passes from the BKK public transport centre (daily 5.30am–10pm) located in the underpass. There are also 24-hour left-luggage lockers here (600Ft/800Ft for 24hr).

Nyugati Station, north of central Pest in the VI district, is the second most useful terminus. It has left-luggage lockers (400Ft/600Ft for 24hr) next to the international ticket office (daily 6.45am–6.45pm). To reach Deák tér, take the blue #3 metro line two stops in the direction of Kőbánya-Kispest. The third main station – though it's unlikely you'll need to use it – is **Déli Station**, near the Vár in Buda, and just four stops from Deák tér on the red #2 metro line. There are left-luggage lockers here but no tourist office.

Avoid all offers of a **taxi** at any of these stations – you'll almost certainly be ripped off. Instead, look out for taxis from companies such as Fótaxi (see p.26). Better still, call one.

By bus or hydrofoil

International buses and services from the Great Plain and Transdanubia terminate at **Népliget bus station**, 5km southeast of the centre at Úllői út 131 in the IX district. The international ticket counters are on the main concourse, where there's a travel centre, with domestic ticket counters located downstairs, which is where you'll also find the left-luggage office (daily 6am–9pm; 300Ft). An underpass links the bus station to metro line #3 (blue), from where it's just six stops to Deák tér in the centre.

Of the other bus stations, the **Újpest Városkapú** in the XIII district (on the blue #3 metro line) is the jumping-off point for buses to and from Szentendre and the Danube Bend; the **Stadion bus station** in the XIV district (on the red #2 metro line) serves the Northern Uplands and the **Etele tér bus station** in the XI district (take bus #7 or #7E to the centre) serves the Buda hinterland. None of the city's bus stations has any tourist facilities.

Hydrofoils (operated by Mahart; ☎ 1 484 4013, 🌐 mahartpassnave.hu) from Vienna (June–Sept) dock at the **international landing stage**, on the Belgrád rakpart (embankment), near downtown Pest.

By car

Most drivers enter Budapest along the M1 motorway from Vienna via **Hegyeshalom**, which is a busy road, heavily policed to fine speeding foreigners. It approaches Budapest from the southwest, and goes straight through to Erzsébet híd in the centre, with turn-offs signed to Petőfi híd in the south of the centre, and Széll Kálmán tér and Margit híd to the north.

Getting around

Budapest's well-integrated transport system comprises the metro, buses, trams and trains, all of which reach most areas of interest to tourists, while the outer suburbs are well served by the overground HÉV rail network. Services operate generally between 5am and 11pm, and there are also night-time buses covering much of the city.

The local transport authority, the **Budapest Transport Centre (BKK; 🌐 bkk.hu)**, operates an increasing number of customer service points (Budapesti Közlekedési Központ), the most useful of which are located at Deák tér metro, Ferenciek tere metro, the Keleti station underpass, and on Széll Kálmán tér – these are all open daily from 5.30am to 10pm. The excellent website has full timetable and ticket information.

Tickets and passes

There is a whole array of **tickets** and passes available for use on public transport. Standard single **tickets (Vonaljegy)** valid for the metro, buses, trams, trolleybuses, the Cogwheel Railway (see p.122) and suburban HÉV lines (up to the edge of the city) cost 350Ft per journey and are sold at train and metro stations (via staffed counters and vending machines) as well as newspaper kiosks and tobacconists. There are also an increasing number of vending machines at bus and tram stops. Metro tickets also come in a variety of other types, depending on whether you are changing trains and how many stops you want to go: a short section metro ticket (*metrószakasz*; 300Ft) takes you three stops on the same line; a metro transfer ticket (*atszállójegy*; 530Ft) is valid for as many stops as you like with one line change. Tickets bought on board buses, trams and trolleybuses cost 450Ft. Books of ten standard single tickets (*tíz-darabos gyűjtőjegy*; 3000Ft) are also available – these are still valid if torn out of the book but cannot be used on night services.

Tickets must be **validated** when you use them. On the metro and HÉV you punch them in the machines at station entrances (remember to validate a new ticket if you change lines, unless you have a metro transfer ticket); on trams, buses and trolleybuses, you punch the tickets on board in the small red or orange machines.

Day **passes (napjegy)** cost 1650Ft and are valid for unlimited travel from midnight to midnight on