

A Weekend in Budapest

It seems only suiting to a city divided that we should find ourselves torn between taking in the plethora of venerable monuments that stack and outline the city or delving deeper to where the locals hide a secret wealth of art, music and history. Being that “Buda” and “Pest” dwell opposite each other, separated by the mighty blue Danube, there seems to beg and tug internally the question: Where to start? Perhaps it is this duality within the city which separated night from day and light from dark, calling forth a separation of weekend into what we now call “Saturday” and “Sunday”, allowing us to draw from both sides and, in the end, proudly proclaim that we visited “Budapest.”

Budapest is a relatively easy city to navigate by foot if you have the time and patience. If you simply wish to get around quicker, the public transportation system is a fantastic way to experience the city. There are a number of buses, trolleys and trams to help zip you around town or you can try taking the metro, which has been functioning and operational since 1896. Regardless where you start, each and every turn will hold a historical masterpiece, an exceptional cafe or a brilliant example of Hungarian culture.

There are a thousand reasons to visit Budapest and if one were to ask a thousand residents of their experiences they would receive a thousand different perspectives. For our purposes, let us start at Andrassy Avenue where you will find a lovely morning for coffee at a sidewalk cafe, followed by window shopping the old antique stores and taking in the lovely rows upon rows of trees. A good reason to start on Andrassy is due to the location. If you would like to stop by and see the Hungarian State Opera House or peruse past St. Stephen's Basilica, then this is the right area. The 130-year-old Opera house is the largest in Hungary boasting magnificent architecture and St Stephen's Basilica, named in honor of the first king of Hungary, is one of the largest and most important church buildings in the country.

Traveling down Dalszínház Street toward the Danube river, one will notice the bustling city life of Budapest as cars zip by and people shout to each other. If you'd like a nice place to rest and eat, there's Murci Wine house just down the road. Hosting amazing Hungarian wine, a cozy shag décor and a giant terrace, this restaurant features some of the best food you will find in Budapest. Once you finish up there, take a walk toward the Széchenyi Chain Bridge, ca. 1849, to see the “Shoes on the Danube” memorial and to cross the fabled Danube River from Pest into Buda.

While both sides are beautiful and undoubtedly matched, there seems to be an air of romance and mystery one you cross into Buda. A fifteen-minute walk to the right will produce the famous Castle district, home to Matthias Church, the Fisherman's Bastion and the Royal Castle, which houses the National Gallery. The beauty, history and brilliance of the castle district is enough to fill up weeks' worth of time standing in awe, but, if a moment is found wandering aimlessly and wishing for rest, a favorite local hang out and bookstore “Litea” can be found nearby with coffee, books, conversation and food.

After all the walking that transpires while soaking up the history and culture of this beautiful city, it would be a mistake to forget one of the shining attributes that Budapest has to

offer. Thermal baths are a source of relaxation and luxury that has kept people coming back for centuries. Since 1565 Budapest has been known for the many spas that it houses, the most famous of which being the Szechenyi Baths. While beautiful and still regarded as one of the only medicinal bathhouses left, its popularity has been known to draw thousands of tourists. If you are looking for a smaller spa on the Buda side of the Danube, try the Gellért Baths near Gellért hill on the south end of Buda.

It only seems appropriate to end the weekend bathing in ancient baths near Gellért hill. If you can manage to climb the hill, the view from the top shows the most scenic side of Buda & Pest coming together as one. From this vantage point, it becomes easy to understand how the lovely flowing Danube River can be the separation as well as the binding that holds Budapest together. It's this magnetism and duality that keeps us coming back time and again to learn the secret mysteries of the ancient city and all that it has to offer.