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# My Top 11 Things To Do In Budapest, Hungary

Posted by Sarah Ricks, World TravelingMom | Jul 23, 2017 | 0 📌 | ★★★★★

**Disclosure:** Consideration provided by brands mentioned in this post.

Among the best things to do in Budapest, Hungary are enjoy pastries while sipping coffee in luxurious cafes, explore its gorgeous architecture, or visit a public bath, says World TravelingMom. Or walk its bridges over the Danube River for great views of the city. At night, the city lights up its monuments, a dramatic sight best appreciated from a boat on the river. Ready for more tips? Read on for this and other things to do in Budapest.



Matthias Church's brightly tiled roof against a blue sky (Photo: World TravelingMom Sarah Ricks)

Budapest, Hungary has changed dramatically over the five times I've visited since 1983. Now, Budapest is a thriving Central European capital city. Here are my top 11 things to do in Budapest.

## **Cruise The River At Night**

One of my favorite things to do in Budapest is to take a nighttime boat ride on the Danube River. Every night, Budapest lights up its gorgeous architecture. This summer, my husband, a friend, and I enjoyed an hour-long sunset cruise. To get our bearings in Budapest, we spent our first evening on the boat ride. Tickets sell out in summer, so we bought them that morning. And buying the day before is even safer.



Hungarian Parliament at night, seen from our CroisiEurope cruise on the Danube (Photo: World TravelingMom Sarah Ricks)

Last week, we got an even more stunning view of Budapest lit up at night. That's because our [CroisiEurope River Cruise from Vienna to Budapest](#) timed our ship's arrival in Budapest for late night. It took my breath away to see Budapest's buildings dramatically lit from a boat on the river.

## **Panoramic Views Are Among The Best Things To Do In Budapest**

Budapest is unusual because it is really two cities, on both sides of a river. Buda is the ancient city, high on a hill. Pest is across the river on a flat plain. Unlike ancient Buda, Pest is only about 200 years old.

For a glorious panoramic view of the city and river, we went up the hill in Buda. We've gone three different ways. First, we climbed Castle Hill in Buda. Then we took the fun funicular ride. Last, we drove up in a tour bus arranged by our [Danube River cruise with CroisiEurope](#) Each time, we stayed on Castle Hill in Buda for several hours, because there's lots to see.



Arch at Fisherman's Bastion on Castle Hill frames the view of the city below. (Photo: World TravelingMom Sarah Ricks)

## Top Of Castle Hill

On top of Castle Hill in Buda is Fisherman's Bastion, a cluster of terraces and staircases overlooking the city. It's free to visit and take in the view. Also on top of Castle Hill is Matthias Church. Its brightly colored tile roof contrasts with a blue sky. Inside, the church is colorfully decorated with folk patterns that make it feel distinctively Hungarian. We sipped drinks at the outdoor café on Castle Hill, enjoying its stunning view. Castle Hill also has monuments and a gorgeous fountain.



Pastry at New York Café is among the best things to do in Budapest (Photo: World TravelingMom Sarah Ricks)

While Castle Hill has several museums, we didn't have much luck. For example, I wrongly anticipated sumptuously furnished rooms at the Royal Palace, as in palaces in Vienna or Graz, Austria. My ignorance: the palace was destroyed in WWII. Now there are only photographs and artifacts. We missed the Hungarian National Gallery because they stopped letting in visitors an hour before they closed – unfortunately, right when we arrived.

## **Public Baths Are Top Things To Do In Budapest**

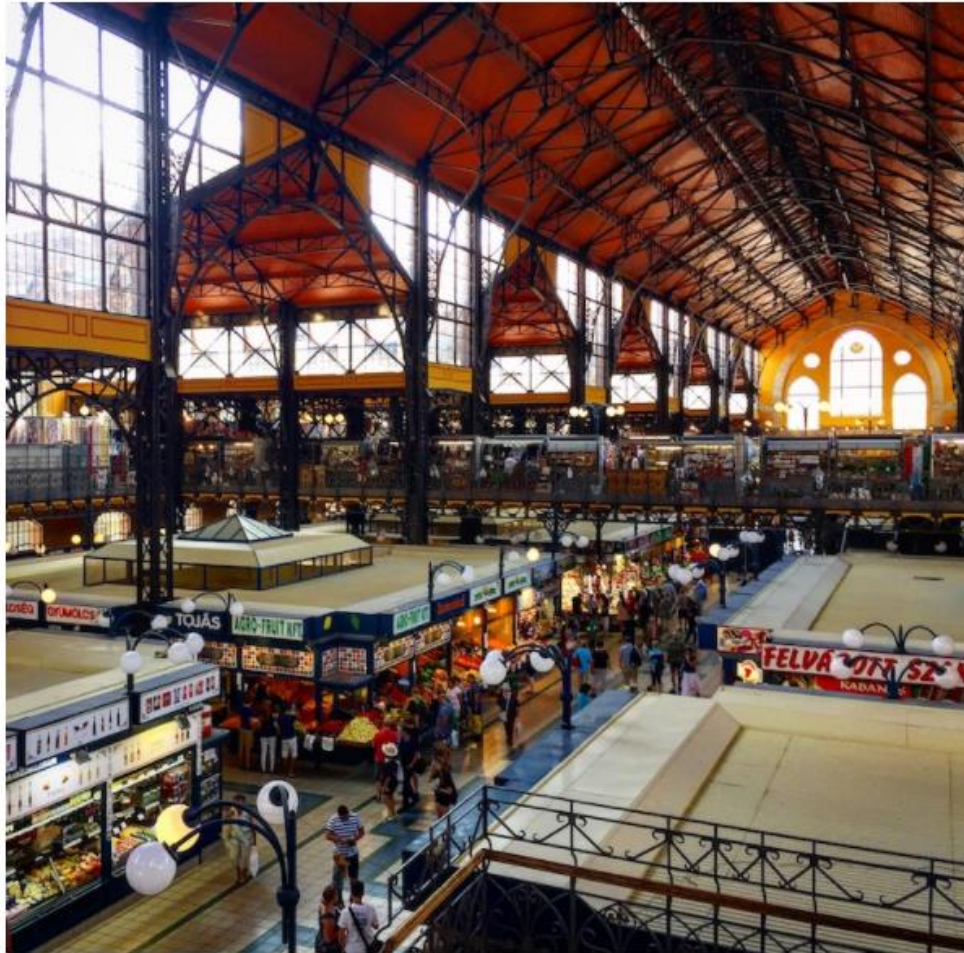
For hundreds of years, Budapest has used its thermal hot springs for public baths. No doubt, visiting a public bath is an iconic Budapest experience. While my husband and I enjoyed the outdoor Szechenyi Baths several years ago, since then [Russian immigrants opened a public bath near our home in Philadelphia](#). So we chose to explore other things to do in Budapest.

## **Shopping At Central Market**

Central Market Hall has dozens of small stalls selling produce, meats, prepared foods, and Hungarian crafts, like embroidery. Shopping at Central Market is one of the best things to do in Budapest.

## **Architecture Is One Of My Favorite Things To Do In Budapest**

The city is full of ornate doorways, elegant statues holding up pillars, and Art Nouveau flourishes. And of course, it's free to wander Budapest's lively streets and enjoy its varied architecture. We loved St. Stephen's Basilica. Not only was this church stunning inside, we got another reward for climbing up the spiral staircase to the top – a great city view.



Shopping at Central Market Hall is one of the best things to do in Budapest (Photo: World TravelingMom Sarah Ricks)

From outside, the Hungarian Parliament building looks like London's Parliament. Inside, it is like a palace, with a monumental staircase, ornate columns, and gold leaf ceilings. We enjoyed a guided tour of Parliament's elegant interior. We booked online the day before because this tour sells out.

When I first visited Budapest in 1983, it was Communist. Sooty industrial pollution covered its beautiful buildings. In 1993, when we visited Budapest again, capitalist energy filled the city. Businesses had started restoring Budapest's buildings and scrubbing off the industrial grime. Now, Budapest has transformed. While it is still a little gritty, unlike polished Vienna, I love this city's elegant architecture.

## **Walk Across The Chain Bridge**

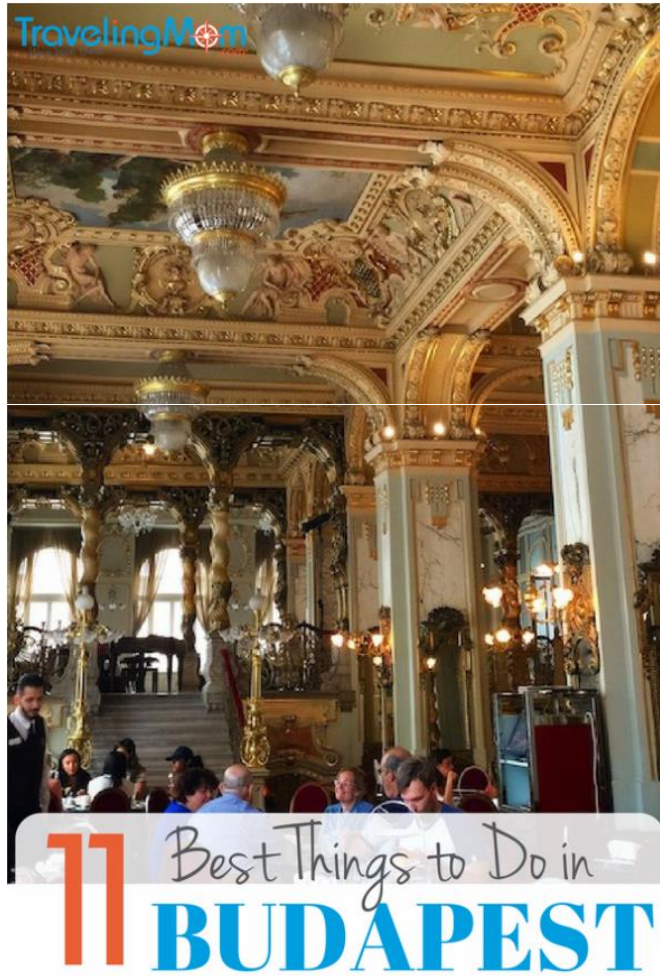
Budapest is on both sides of a river. Naturally, bridges are a key part of the city. One of my favorite things to do in Budapest is to walk across the 19th century Chain Bridge. It's fun to appreciate details of the bridge itself. And the view from the bridge is lovely. Bonus: it's free.

## **Pastries At A Decadent Café**

Budapest is a pastry city. Hungarian pastries have chocolate and cream – but also poppy seeds and walnuts. We especially enjoyed pastries while sipping coffee in Budapest's many sumptuously decorated cafés. At New York Café, we also enjoyed live violin music. It felt like we had stepped back in time and into lives of leisure.

## **Hungarian History At House Of Terror**

It isn't fun to visit the House of Terror, a museum honoring the victims of the Nazi and Communist governments of Hungary. But the exhibits are good reminders of the political freedoms we enjoy in the U.S. Hungarian Nazis used the building for their headquarters. From 1945 – 1956, the Communist government dominated by Russia used it for their secret police. The museum's honest look at brutal government repression was hard for my teenaged son. The exhibits left my husband and me shaken – but grateful for free speech in the U.S.



## History Walking Tours

My family enjoyed walking tours with [Context Travel in Paris](#) and in [Arles, France](#). So we knew their Jewish History Walking Tour would be excellent. And it was. Like all Context Travel guides, our Budapest guide was an expert and happily answered our questions. It was fascinating to learn about the pre-World War II Jewish population in Budapest. While this three-hour tour focused on the former Jewish neighborhood, on our own we visited the memorial *Shoes on the Danube Bank*, honoring Jews killed by the Hungarian fascist government.



On a visit to Budapest in 2014, my teenagers and I enjoyed the Hammer & Sickle walking tour. It was a fascinating look at the Communist history of Hungary and of Russians crushing their 1956 rebellion.

## **Budapest Is Still Affordable – And English Works**

On my first visit to Budapest in 1983, we communicated by pointing at a Hungarian dictionary. Then, Budapest was not used to tourists but it was cheap. Now, Budapest has a luxurious tourist infrastructure like guided tours and plenty of restaurants. While it is not cheap, Budapest is still affordable, and costs less than many Western European cities. More good news: in 2017, we got by in English. Today in Budapest, waiters and hotel clerks communicate in English. The many tourists from China, Korea, and India also get by in English.

**Do any things to do in Budapest appeal to you? Tell us about it in the comments.**