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# GLOBE AND MAIL

# DREAM TRIPS THE VIEW FROM BUDAPEST

"Magyar roots run deep in my husband's Hungarian soul, a soul as spicy as hot paprika und as smooth as a sip of plum brandy. Our visits to Budapest have been to see his mother. After she died, we promised ourselves that we would return and truly rediscover his heritage. He turns 70 this year and, to celebrate in grand style, I would love to take him back to his homeland."

- Jo-Ann Zador, Surrey, B.C.

### BY LASZLO BURASZ

The backstory

Budapest, with one-fifth of Hungary's population, is the country's financial, political and cultural centre. Since the fall of communism in 1989, and increasingly since the country's acceptance into the European Union in 2004, Budapest has the brand-name commercial bling of other major continental capitals. Still, its romantic setting on the east and west banks of the Danube, its restored belle époque architecture and remnants of both better and worse times evoke a more exotic past. It's good to remember, though, that Budapest represents Hungary the way Toronto or Montreal represent Canada. You have to travel away from the capital to really understand the country.

## How to do it

Several airlines will get you to Budapest with transfers, but the most convenient way to fly from Canada is with MALEV Hungarian Airlines (416-944-0093; www.malev.com). In May, it starts a summer schedule of five non-stop flights weekly between Toronto and Budapest.

Today, there is a good range of modern hotels in central Budapest, but don't expect a bargain. The best cost as much as comparable properties in Western Europe, A. good mid-range hotel within walking distance of the city's central attractions is the Mercure Budapest Korona (Kecskemeti St. 14: 36-1-486-8800: www.accornotels.com.) If you feel like splurging for a night, consider the recently opened Four Seasons Gresham Palace (Roosevelt Terrace 5-6, Budapest: 36-1-268-6000; www.fourseasons.com.) Even if you're not staying there, the art deco beauty is worth a visit for a drink in its intimate bar.

You don't have to spend a lot of money to sample good Hungarian



The view from Buda's Castle District across the Danube to Pest and Hungary's neo-Gothic Parliament building is one of the best in Budapest.

cuisine Traditional dishes, such as spicy fish soup. Transylvanian layered cabbage and dobos cake, can be found at Alfoldi (Kerskerneti St. 4; 36-1-314-4404). Nosztalgla (5 Oktober 6 St., 36-1-317-2987; www.nosztalgiaetterem.hu and Anonymous (Valdihumyalvar; 36-1-363-5905). But if you're feeling flush, reserve well ahead for a five-star meal at the Gundel (1146 Allatkerii St. 2e; 36-1-468-4040; www.gundel.hu/etterem).

The best old-style collections in the city are the elegant Gerbeaud (Vorosmarty Square) wavegarbeaud.htt), the art deco Cale New York (Erzsebet circle route 9-11) and the ancient and delightful Ruszwurm (Szentharomsag St. 7, in the Buda Castle District; www.ruszwurm.htm.

For upscale shopping and people watching walk along the Vaci Street pedestrian mall. For nightlife, check out the action along Raday Street. And for a drink while the sun sets behind Buda's Royal Palace, the outdoor resiaurants that line the Corso along the Pest hank of the Danube are perfect.

Budapest is famous for its ther-

mat waters, and visitors should try a soak in at least one of the classic baths in the city. The Kiraly Gyogyfurdo (Fo St. 82-84; 36-1-201-4392), for example, has been used since the Turks built it in the 1500s.

On a rainy day, visit the Kozponti Vasarcsarnok, or Central Market (Vamhaz circle road 1-3), a marvel of 19th-century brick-and-fron architecture. There are great food stalls on the third floor.

For dips into the city's culture and heritage, visit the Hungarian National Gallery (Budas Royal Palace: www.mng.hu), Matthias Church (Szendharomsag square, Castle district, www.matyas-templom.hui and the Hungarian National Museum (Muzeum circle road 14-16; www.hum.hu). For a look into the country's dark years of fascism and communism, visit the House of Terror (50 Andrassy Blvd.; 36-1-374-2600; www.house-ofierror.hu) and Statue Park (1223 Balatoniroad; 36-1-424-7500; szobornark.hu).

World-class concerts, plays and operas are bargains — a small fraction of the cost in North America.

Leave time to make day or over-

night trips from Budapest to the southern city of Szeged, with its renovated city centre and out-standing art deco architecture (www.szegedportal hu ), Tihany on Lake Balaton (www.tibany.hu); Veszprem, once a residence of Hungary's queens (www.veszpreminfo.hu); and Peztergom, birthplace of Hungary's first Christian king and the main seat of Catholicism in the country (www.esztergom). An easy day trip can combine Visegrad, with its castle ruins high above the panube (www.visegrad.hu), and the art colony of Szentendre (www.szentendre.hu), both just north of Budapest.

### When to an

In the spring and fall you avoid the tourist crush and humidity.

### Intelligence

for a few weeks before you go, read the Budapest Sm. an English-language newspaper online at www.budapesn.un.com, to get a feel for what's agus on.

feel for what's going on .

Good guides to the city are Budapest: A Critical Guide, by Andras Torok (Pallas Amene), Lonely Planet's Budapese City Guide, by Steve Fallon (Baincoast), and the Rough Guide's Hungary, by Dan Richardson and Charles Hebbert.

Helpful Budapest-related websites include www.budapestinfohu, www.budapest.com and www.budapest.com.

Online tourism information about Hungary can be found at www.gotahungary.com.

# You'll never forget

Budapest's castle district offers one of the most romantic views in Europe. The Danube, spanned by the Chain Bridge, curves past the gothic spires of Hungary's Parliament buildings, and the city stretches towards the great plains to the east.

Laszlo Buhasz was born in Rudapest and visits the city regularly

To send us your dream trips
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