

The BucketPest List

Near the end of our semester, my friends and I realized that there was much that we had wanted to do during our time in Hungary that we had never done. Budapest is an amazing city, with so much to do. Furthermore, there is a lot to experience in Hungary. Don't miss out on what the country has to offer. Instead of only seeing the sites of major cities around Europe, try experiencing this country. Traveling within the country will be less expensive, will take less time out of your trips, and will help you to understand the country. Visiting other nearby nations is also good, as those closest have histories that are very much linked to Hungary's.

This is a list of things to try to do while you are in Budapest. Next to each item, I will give a little information about it to help you determine if it is for you and look further into it. As a warning, some of the things on the list are time dependent, and so may not apply to when you are in Budapest. I was only there during the spring semester, and there may also be changes that have occurred since I wrote this list. There also may be things to do that I fail to put on here, but this was the list that my friends and I came up with. However, I sincerely hope that the BucketPest list helps you make the most of your time in the city.

My friends and I managed to complete 44 of the 54 items on the list; maybe see if you can complete more than we were able to.

Have a great semester!

Ryan Matzke
BSM Spring 2014

Talk to the locals

One of the best ways to learn about the place you are staying is by talking to the people who have been staying there a LOT longer than you. Do it wherever you go, whether just to learn about where to go or to just have friendly conversation. People have tons of interesting stories to share, and some are very interested in talking to foreigners.

Learn some Hungarian

While plenty of people speak some English, the degree of proficiency varies greatly, and locals are very impressed if you can speak some Hungarian. Also, there are many signs that are written only in Hungarian. There are many ways to help work on this: the three week intensive program, taking one of the Hungarian courses, getting a language partner, living with a family, and taking Hungarian + if it is offered.

Watch a Hungarian Movie

Try to make sure it is a good one. Two suggestions I have are VUK and Kontroll.

Go to a ruin pub

Budapest is full of bars and pubs that have been made from the ruins of other buildings. Each is different, and they make for a very unique experience. Some to try out are: Fogas ház, Ellátó kert, and Szimpla kert.

Go to the baths

Budapest has many thermal baths throughout it. I only ever went to Széchenyi, but there are others in the city. You can experience pools with various temperatures, mineral baths, and at Széchenyi, there are baths that produce their own whirlpools (nothing dangerous, just fun).

Go to Arena Plaza

This is the largest shopping mall in all of Central Europe. The best time to go is at night, because there is a screen around it outside which lights up.

Try the local food and drink

This is something good to do whenever you visit somewhere new. Whether or not you like them, it's always good to try it out. Some foods to try are lángos, kifli, palancsinta, csirkepaprikás, gesztenyepüré and gulyásleves, but those are just a few. Some places to try out to have Hungarian food are Pozsonyi Kisvendéglő, Bécsi Szelet Vendéglő, Nagy Palancsintázója, Trófea Grill Étterem, and almost any festival. As for drinks, unicum and pálinka are both drinks to try. As a warning: pálinka can be a very strong drink.

See a show at the Opera House

The Opera House is a beautiful building, both inside and outside. They have operas and ballets there, and you can get tickets online. Depending on when you get them and where you sit, tickets are not particularly expensive. I went and saw Onegin with some friends, and it was a lot of fun to watch.

See John von Neumann's plaque

John von Neumann lived in the first half of the 1900s, was a member of the Manhattan Project, and made major contributions in various areas of Mathematics, Physics, and Economics. He was born in Budapest, and there is a plaque on his former home to commemorate him.

Visit Hősök tere

Also known as Heroes' Square, this is a wide, mostly open area, where you can see bikers doing tricks, people working on projects, and the statues of some important figures in Hungary's history.

Visit the Museum of Fine Arts

The museum is beautiful from both the inside and the outside. It has sculptures, paintings, and various other exhibits.

Visit the Museum of Applied Arts

This museum contains everything from plates to dressers to swords to posters that were used as advertisements.

Visit the Invisible Exhibition

In this you are led through a tour in utter darkness by someone who is partially or completely blind. You go through only using your other four senses and your guide.

Visit the National Gallery

This is a museum specifically filled with Hungarian art, some of which dates back to the Middle Ages.

Visit the Budapest History Museum

This museum is exactly what the title makes you think it is. It's good to be informed about the city you're staying in.

Visit the National Museum

Containing history and culture, this is another museum from which you can learn a lot about the country.

Visit the Museum of Ethnography

This museum gives you a look into the lives of the layfolk of Hungary from before World War II. It contains tools, instruments, clothing, and various other items, along with the stories of lives of some of the people who this museum represents.

Attend a festival

Over the course of the year, a lot of festivals are held in Budapest (and various other Hungarian cities). During my time in Budapest, I came across a fish festival, a mangalica festival, and a pálinka festival. Sometimes they will have

bands, and usually they have people running booths. They vary in size and theme. Ask around and find out when they are happening.

Go ice-skating

If you happen to be in Budapest during the winter, you can go ice skating behind Heros' Square. They play music and lots of people go to have fun there. Maybe try to get a picture with the giant letters spelling "BUDAPEST".

Visit the Great Market Hall

Whether you want to buy fresh food or souvenirs, this is a great place to visit. Depending on what you want to get, this also might be the place with the best prices.

Go to a Táncház

This is a nice casual folk dance event. Certain places in Budapest hold them regularly, and they will sometimes have them for big events in Hungary (like Busójárás). The norm is that for each song, at least a few people know the dance two it. These people begin dancing. You can join in at anytime. The dances tend to be repetitive, so if you watch for a bit, and sometimes if you join right in, you can pick up on what to do. They can involve a lot of movement, and can have a fast pace at times, but usually the movements are simple. No prior knowledge is needed, and if you've never done folk dancing, it's definitely something to try out.

Walk across the Bridges

Budapest has eight bridges that you can walk on to cross the Danube. They can be quite a sight to see at night when they are lit up. They each have their own charm, and crossing each of them may very well lead you to new parts of the city. In particular, you must cross the Chain Bridge at some point during your stay.

Go to a Karaoke bar

Whether you are a singer or just there to see the show, this can be a lot of fun. Depending on when you go, you might come across amazing singers, people

dancing to the songs, and you might get to hear a few Hungarian songs. A fun challenge is to try to learn a Hungarian song and sing it. You might really impress the locals with that. Two to consider are Old Rams and Janis' Pub.

Watch the sunrise from Buda Castle

The sun rises over the Pest side of the city, so if you are willing to wake up early to get to a high elevation on the Buda side, you'll be in for quite a sight.

Visit Parliament and see the Crown Jewels

Parliament is one of, if not the, most majestic looking buildings in Budapest. As a warning, they do have security there, so make sure that you don't bring anything with you that they might want you to leave behind.

Go to Katona József Theatre to see a performance

While I was in Budapest I saw the play Gypsies. It was very well done. You can see a performance with English subtitle. It's good entertainment, and you might learn a bit of culture from it.

Walk around the Castle District

The castle district is around where Buda Castle and Matthias Church are. It's a very lovely area.

Visit Lotz Terem

Lotz Terem is a book café, and a rather fancy looking one at that. Depending on when you go, there may be a performance going on, which you may or may not have to pay for if you want to see.

Visit every stop on the Green Line

A lot of time and money was put into making the Green line, and it shows. At each stop, there is an entirely different design. Some are really impressive.

Get some target practice at Buda Castle

I don't know if it is only there at certain times of the year, but during the spring, there was a range set up in the courtyard of Buda Castle. If you paid for it, you could use bows and arrows, crossbows and bolts, spears and shuriken to try to get a bull's-eye. If you succeeded, then you would get a prize. I don't know if it will be there again, or when it will be there, but if it is, you may get a very unique experience.

Visit Fisherman's Bastion

Fisherman's Bastion, especially when combined with Matthias Church, is probably the most regal looking structure on the Buda side of the city.

Visit the Zoo

The Budapest zoo is one of the oldest in the world, and has quite a lot to see. If you want to go through it in one trip, be sure to leave yourself plenty of time.

Visit Gellért Hill

The top of Gellért Hill gives you a great view of the city, and you can see the Citadella and the Liberty Statue. Behind the hill is a large open space that you can walk around and relax.

Walk through Margaret Island

Margaret Island is a great place to go to relax and be outdoors. It has open grassy spaces, a small zoo, gardens, a running path, and fountains, to name just a few things. Lots of people go there to do all kinds of things, from playing music, to sports, to reading. It's lovely.

See the musical fountain

On Margaret Island, around summer time, there is a fountain that at certain times of the day will put on a musical show. Songs will play, and the direction and height of the streams change. If you see a show at night, lights come on to color the streams of water.

See a Hungarian band

Odds are that during your semester, at least one major Hungarian band will have a concert in Budapest.

Go on the free Budapest Walking Tour

If you can help it, try to do this early on. It's a good way to be introduced to the city, and can really help you get your bearings. Plus, the tour guides are usually a lot of fun.

Go on the free Jewish Quarter Tour

This is a great tour to learn quite a bit of history of the Jews in Budapest and in Europe as a whole.

Go on the free Communism Walking Tour

As its name suggests, this tour covers some of the effects of the Soviet Union in Budapest.

Do a timed Puzzle Challenge

Budapest has a bunch of places that you can go where you are given a set amount of time (usually an hour) to complete a task (normally, it is so escape the building you're in). To do so, you must solve a number of puzzles (combination codes, figuring out where objects are hidden, sometimes it's a puzzle to figure out what a puzzle is). Some of the top ones are Claustrophilia, and TRAP.

Visit Memento Park

This park contains a number of statues from the time that the Soviet Union ruled Hungary, along with reports about some of the events that took place during. It is a good place to go to gain some perspective on what happened during that time.

See the Shoes along the Danube

This is a memorial to the Jews who were brought to the Danube, forced to strip of all of their worldly possessions, then jump into the River, and fired upon.

Visit Szent Istvan Basilica

A very large grand building, it is quite a sight to behold, both inside and out. You can go up towards the top to see the city from above. Maybe see how many buildings you recognize.

Take a Promenade along the Danube

The city of Budapest is beautiful, and has several amazing sights to offer. A walk along the Danube offers a great chance to see many of them. Going along the Pest side will eventually lead you to the Shoes mentioned above.

Visit Matthias Church

A beautiful building, this church is definitely something to see up close, even if you don't enter.

Visit the National Library

Housing art, artifacts, and plenty of books, any country's national library is worth checking out. It's also a good place to go to study or find books to practice your Hungarian.

Visit the House of Terror

This is a very powerful museum. It focuses on the various terrible acts committed both by the Nazis and the Soviets during their respective occupations of Budapest. This museum very much captures how bad both events were.

Visit the Dohány Street Synagogue

This is the second biggest synagogue in the world, with the one in New York City taking first. It has a very different style of architecture from many other synagogues, and a memorial to the Holocaust victims of the city.

Go caving

There is a network of caves and catacombs under the city of Budapest. There are guided trips through some of these that you can partake in if you are feeling very adventurous.

Visit the grave of Paul Erdős

A genius who did groundbreaking work in several fields of mathematics and co-authored so many papers that people count how many degrees of separation you are from having published with him, Paul Erdős now lies in Kozma Utcai Temető, the biggest Jewish cemetery in Budapest.

Go on a cruise along the Danube

Just like walking along the Danube is a great way to see much of the city, riding on a boat is another way to take in the sights. There are several other cities along the Danube, so taking a boat to or from Budapest to another city is definitely an available option.

Visit the Sunday Farmers' Market

There are many different ways to get the groceries you need, and this is a great way of getting them fresh.

Visit Aquincum

For those that are fans of the Romans, Aquincum used to be one of their cities, and now the city of Budapest holds its ruins. There are ruins out in the open, along with a museum to learn more about it.

Walk around City Park

This is a lovely place to visit, and during warmer seasons, there is plenty of fun to be had. There are ping pong tables, the zoo is right nearby, and depending on when you go, there may be shops open, and various other things to do.

Outside of Budapest

Hungary is a beautiful country, and has interesting cities outside of Budapest as well. The places that I visited and can highly recommend are:

Balaton (any town around the lake)

Eger

Esztergom

Mohács (visit during Busójárás)

Pécs

Szeged

Visegrád