



AUDIO BOOKS → MY FAVOURITE CITY

# BUDAPEST

NARRATED BY

ROBERT SEBASTIAN COOPER



CD included

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On my arrival to Budapest, I felt totally enthralled by the highly exciting, cultural, beautiful city. I arrived just a few years after the political changes and concept of democracy was just starting to take hold.

The city offers a vast selection of historic, culture and entertainment catering for all tastes and age groups making it an excellent location for a family holiday. There is an array of museums, churches and cathedrals, art galleries, parks, theatres, cinemas, hotels, restaurants and bars, as well as the zoo, funfair and castle. The thermal baths which are enclosed by beautiful historic buildings are a must-see in Budapest. Here you can swim and relax in the thermal pools.

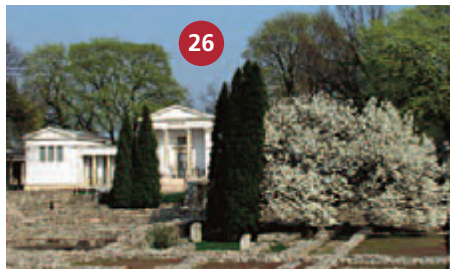
No matter what time of year you decide to visit this cosmopolitan city there is a wide variety of entertainment. In the winter it possible to skate the in Városliget (City Park) and in the spring and summer walking by the Danube or on Margaret Island is an excellent way to unwind after a day of sightseeing.

The traditional Hungarian restaurants provide Hungarian gourmet food, and for those who wish to partake in alcoholic beverages, it is strongly recommended to sample the vast selection of fine Hungarian wines, spirits and beers.

After visiting Budapest most people including myself fall in love with this beautiful city and return.



**ROBERT SEBASTIAN COOPER**



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- c.10, 000–8000 BC The first prehistoric settlements in the Buda Hills.
- c.2000–1000 BC Bronze Age villages appear along the River Danube.
- c.4. century BC The arrival of the Szkita tribes (archaeologists have found beautiful jewellery from this period).
- c.4–3. century BC The Celts establish a settlement in the Gellért Hill area.
- A few years after AD The Roman legions occupy the Western part of the country. They call it Pannónia, which becomes one of the provinces of the Roman Empire. The legions build a fortress system alongside the River Danube.
- 2–4. century AD The heyday of Óbuda's military settlement (Aquincum in Latin).
- 409 The victory of the Huns over the Roman troops. The Roman legions withdraw.
- 5–6. century After the fall of the Hun Empire Germanic, Goth, Avar and Longobard tribes attack the area which is today's capital.
- Around 895 The foundation of Hungary: the unified Magyar troops lead by chieftain Árpád arrive and conquer the country.
- 1000 King (Saint) Stephen I. embraces Christianity. He receives his crown from Pope Sylvester II. The city of Székesfehérvár becomes the capital of the kingdom.
- 1220 The royal court moves to Óbuda.
- 1241 The Mongol invasion. The Mongol tribes ravage and destroy Pest.
- 1247–1265 King Bela IV. relocates the royal court to Buda. The building of the Castle begins.
- 1387–1437 Under King Zsigmond (Sigismund) the expansion of the royal palace continues in Renaissance style.
- 1458–1490 The reign of King Mátyás Hunyadi (Matthias Corvinus). This period is the heyday of the Renaissance arts in Hungary.
- 1473 The first printed book is made in András Hess' press in Buda, the *Chronica Hungarorum* (The History of Hungary).
- 1526 After the battle of Mohács Hungary falls into three parts: the Western region is controlled by the Habsburgs, the Ottomans conquer the South-eastern part of the country.
- 1541 The Ottoman troops occupy Buda Castle. This is the beginning of the 150 years of Ottoman rule.
- 1686 Austria led Christian forces reoccupy Buda from the Ottomans. From 1718 Austria annexes Hungary.
- 1749 The building of the Baroque royal palace begins on the top of Castle Hill.
- 1802 Ferenc Széchenyi donates his entire library to the nation. The foundation of the National Library which later was named after him.



- 1825–1848 The age of reforms: the transport system develops, cultural life and science flourishes. The building of the National Museum, the Academy of Science and the National Theatre.
- 1838 The great flood of the Danube destroys Pest and damages many buildings.
- 1848–1849 The outbreak of the revolution in Pest. The Habsburgs suppress the revolution with the help of the Russian army, and execute the first Prime minister and many generals. The building of the Chain bridge, the first permanent bridge on the River Danube.
- 1867 The Austro–Hungarian Compromise: the two countries form the Austro–Hungarian Empire.
- 1872 Pest, Buda and Óbuda unite under the name of Budapest.
- 1896 The millennium celebrations of the founding of Hungary. The start of the first underground line (the second in Europe after the English). The building of the Vajdahunyad Castle, the memorial on Heroes Square and many museums.
- 1905 The consecration of Saint Stephen's Basilica.
- 1914–1918 The First World War destroys the country's economy.
- 1918 Revolution, the foundation of the first republic.
- 1919 The brief period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic.
- 1920 After the Treaty of Trianon Hungary surrenders two thirds of its lands.
- 1944 German troops invade the country; Prime minister Pál Teleki commits suicide to show his disagreement.
- 1945 The Soviet invasion. Hungary becomes a soviet country for 50 years.
- 1956 The outbreak of the anti-soviet revolution which the Russian tanks destroy quickly. The beginning of the political court cases, imprisonments and executions.
- 1980s The communist dictatorship weakens.
- 1989 The proclamation of the republic. By 1990 the Russian soldiers have left Hungary.
- 1999 The country joins NATO.
- 2004 Hungary joins the European Union.



← *Relief with King Matthias' figure*

*The flowers of remembrance on the 1956 Memorial*



*The Neo-Gothic Parliament building on the bank of the River Danube*

*From the dome of Saint Stephen's Basilica a stunning view can be admired*



*The home of kings: Buda Castle*





*The romantic Vajdahunyad Castle in the City park*



*Unique museums and a charming park surround Heroes Square*



*Many restaurants and cafés attract visitors with tasty Hungarian dishes in Budapest*



*Excellent performances can be enjoyed in the State Opera House*



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### INTRODUCTION

Budapest – because of its unique location – is one of the most spectacular capitals in the world. The city lies on the two sides of the River Danube: one part is covered by the delectable, green Buda hills, the other half is stretched over the peaceful Pest plain. Castles and palaces, interesting museums and baroque churches, turn-of-the-century buildings and little 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century houses attract the visitors. After

the sightseeing it is good to relax in the charming parks, or on the deck of a boat on the river, but there's nothing better than the hot water pools in one of the famous thermal baths! In the evening an amusing play can be enjoyed in the theatres, or an opera in the imposing State Opera House. We can also visit a jazz club or a classical concert, and finally the beautiful panorama of the city can be admired at night from a cosy restaurant's window.

Our sightseeing trip begins with the tranquil **Várhegy** (Castle Hill) with the royal palace on the top. The hill is about 50–60 metres high, and it has been inhabited since the Bronze Age. The royal court moved here during the reign of king Béla IV in 1247. Since 1987 Buda Castle has been part of the UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Advance from the **Bécsi kapu** (Viennese Gate) which was erected in the medieval period. In the following centuries the gate was transformed many times. What can be seen now is the result of the 1936 restoration. Opposite the gate we find the **Budavári evangélikus templom** (Lutheran church, opening times vary, call: 356-9736, free entry), which was erected in 1895. In the main nave of the eclectic style church the altar painting is Bertalan Székely's masterpiece.

Around Bécsi kapu tér (square) there are many beautifully renovated **houses** from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, some of

### → USEFUL INFORMATION

There are excellent religious concerts in the Budavári Lutheran church (usually free).

them with Copf (a type of Baroque) style façade (e.g. No 5, 6, 7 and 8). On the square the massive **Magyar Országos Levéltár** (National Archives of Hungary) catches our attention, which was built in 1920 in Neo-Romanesque style. Con-

*Listed buildings  
in the Castle  
district, with  
the Lutheran  
church in the  
background*



tinuing on **Fortuna utca** (street) we pass by some houses which have historic features: under No. 14 we can still see some of the original Gothic remains. The house at No. 10 has an early medieval barrel vault archway, the Baroque building was owned by the Order of the Knights of Malta. No. 9 was probably built in the 1700's in Baroque style; the statue on the façade represents goddess who Fortuna protects the house. The statue is from 1921.

**Szentháromság tér** (Holy Trinity square) was named after the statue of the Holy Trinity. The column was erected after the plague in 1691, and in 1709 they replaced it with a taller but similar statue.

One of the city's most popular tourist attractions is the **Nagyboldogasz - szony-** or **Mátyás-templom** (Our Lady or Matthias church, open M-F 9-5pm, Sa 9-12, Su 1pm-5pm, entrance fee) standing on this square. The first church was founded by King Saint Stephen I. After the Mongol invasion King Béla IV erected an early Gothic basilica on this site to give thanks to Our Lady who saved the country. During King Zsigmond's and Mátyás' reign the edifice was extended. The taller tower dates back to this period.

The main façade was decorated with a statue of the Madonna with Child; above there is a fine example of a late



*The Gothic tower of Matthias church is 72 metres high*

medieval rose-window. The massive lower tower was named after King Béla. The higher, 72 metres tall tower was named after King Mátyás. Inside the basilica the walls and the columns are painted in medieval style. The stained glass windows and some of the vivid frescoes were made by Károly Lotz and Bertalan Székely. They represent the saints of the House of Árpád, the dynasty of Hungarian kings and queens. The military flags are from the Austro-Hungarian emperor, Franz Joseph's time. In the Loreto chapel stands the famous statue of the Virgin Mary which was



*The statue of the Holy Trinity*



*King Saint Stephen I statue in front of Matthias church*



*Details of Matthias church*

made in 1515. During the Ottoman invasion the Madonna was walled in. Later in 1686 when the Ottoman army lost the battle of Buda, the statue appeared intact after a severe gun-



powder detonation. The Christian troops considered it a sign of the coming victory. On the lower level of the Béla tower some medieval carvings are still visible. King Béla III. and his wife's marble sarcophagus is on display in the Holy Trinity chapel. The Gothic main altar of the church was designed by Frigyes Schulek. Don't miss the ecclesiastical exhibition in the crypt and the royal oratory (currently under renovation). Next to the

*Detail of a street in the Castle District*

Mátyás church the concrete and glass monstrosity, the Hilton Hotel is a bit of an eyesore.

## → DON'T MISS

In the Matthias church there are popular choir concerts and organ recitals. Every Sunday during the 10 o'clock mass the choir sings Gregorian chants.

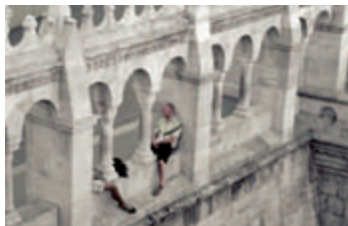
Behind the Mátyás-templom the white, fairytale-like **Halászbástya** (Fishermen's Bastion) runs along the hilltop. The bastion is decorated with ornate, lace-like stonework. From this lookout point we can see the most spectacular panorama of the capital city (open mid-March–mid-Oct daily 9–11pm, entrance fee). The bastion was rebuilt according to Frigyes Schulek's plans in Neo-Romanesque style in 1902.

From the bastion we can head in different directions. On Úri utca (street) we can explore the cave system which zigzags through Castle Hill. The **Buda-vári Labirintus** (Castle Hill Labyrinth,





open daily 9.30–7.30pm; guided tours 6–7.30pm and 8.30–10pm, entrance fee) is an exciting experience for those



who are not afraid of narrow underground tunnels.

On the corner of Szentháromság utca (street) the **statue of András Hadik** guards the square. The brave hearted army officer served Empress Maria Theresa, and he fought with the Christian troops against the Ottoman army. Our walk continues along the renovated, listed houses from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (e.g. No. 32, 36, 40, 48–50 and 62). At the end of the street we arrive at **Kapisztrán tér**, which was named after the intrepid grey friar, who fought in the battle

against the Ottomans in János Hunyadi's army. Later he was canonised as a saint for his virtues. On the square we find the ruins of the once mighty **Mária Magdolna-templom** (Mary Magdalene's church, opening times vary, free entry). The tower with its Baroque top is almost intact. The church was built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and it was destroyed by the Ottoman troops and the Second World War bombings.

The **Hadtörténeti Intézet és Múzeum** (War History Museum, open Apr–Sept: Tu–Su 10–6pm; Oct–March: Tu–Su 10–4pm, entrance fee) is a great place to go to with children. The collection also attracts the lovers of weapons, medals and military relics. The museum is housed in the Nádor Barracks, which was built in 1847 in Classicist style. In front of the museum the **Esztergomi rondella** (round tower) tops the hill. From this lookout point there is a stunning view of the Buda Hills. If we have time let's stroll along the **Tóth Árpád sétány** (promenade), which with its shady trees is an ideal



*The panorama from Fishermen's Bastion*

*Tourists resting on Fishermen's Bastion*



*The tower of Mary Magdalene's church*

*Folklore dancers on Tóth Árpád promenade*

*Charming houses in the Castle District*

place to relax. The promenade was named after the meek 20<sup>th</sup> century poet who died at a young age. Either relaxing on the benches or refreshing ourselves with the cool water of the fountains; a feeling of peace is a perfect contrast to the busy capital.

If we look around in Szentháromság utca (street) we can find some nice examples of early medieval, Gothic stalls (e.g. No. 5 and 7). Turn onto Tárnok utca (street), and that will lead us into Dísz tér. On the square under No. 18 the **Patikamúzeum** (Pharmacy museum) is worth a visit (open Tu–Su 10.30–5.30pm, entrance fee). Once the Golden Eagle pharmacy stood here, the façade is decorated with Margit Kovács' charming statue of the Madonna. Just a few steps from the museum is **Dísz tér** which was named after the military parades and celebrations held here. On the square we can see the Baroque **Batthyány palace**, which

*National flags flying on Dísz Square*



was built in 1748 for the palatine of Hungary. In the neighbourhood the bastion of the **Fehérvári rondella** (round tower) guards Castle Hill. Continuing our walk on Színház utca (street) soon we arrive at the **Nemzeti Táncszínház** (National Dance Theatre, for info tel: 365-4085). Close to the theatre on Szent György tér (Saint George's Square) stands the Baroque **Sándor Palace**. The opulent palace was built in 1806, and nowadays this is the home of the President of Hungary. The station of the funicular is near the palace, the cabins carry passengers from the Lánchíd to the Castle. During the slow, peaceful journey we can enjoy the best panorama of the riverside.

Finally we can explore the **Royal Palace**, the home of Hungarian kings and queens. In front of the middle wing of the Royal Palace **Jenő Savoyai's statue**

on horseback salutes the visitor. He was the leader of the allied Christian troops which freed Buda from the Ottoman rule. The Baroque statue was erected in 1900. The Royal palace houses the **Magyar Nemzeti Galéria's** (Hungarian National Gallery, open Tu–Su 10–6pm,



entrance fee) fascinating collection of Hungarian artists: Gothic altars and paintings, Renaissance and Baroque statues and manuscripts are on display. Most of the tourists come here to see the breathtaking monumental paintings from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, which introduce us to the decisive historic events of Hungarian history. Behind the Gallery is the Hunyadi udvar

(courtyard) which was named after the **Mátyás-kút** (fountain) from 1904 which shows the great Renaissance king, the builder of the Royal palace. We can walk through the Oroszlános kapu (Lion Gate) towards the Oroszlános udvar (Lion Courtyard), where the **Országos Széchényi Könyvtár** (Széchényi National Library, open Tu–Sa 10–6pm, M 1pm–6pm, entrance fee for the exhibitions) stands. The enormous library has the largest collection of books, manuscripts and documents in the country. The most fantastic and valuable items are king Mátyás' manuscripts, the *Corvinas*. These books are decorated in beautiful Italian Renaissance style with floral motifs and golden letters. If we arrive at the right time we can see them on display during the exhibitions held here.

In the third wing of the Royal Palace is the **Budapesti Történeti Múzeum**



*Gothic statue in the Vármúzeum*

*Tourist relaxing in front of Matthias' Fountain*

*Gothic statue from the Budavári Palace*