

# Budapest



There's no other city in Hungary like Budapest in terms of size and importance. Home to almost 20% of the national population, Hungary's capital (*főváros*, or 'main city') is the administrative, business and cultural centre; everything of importance starts or ends here.

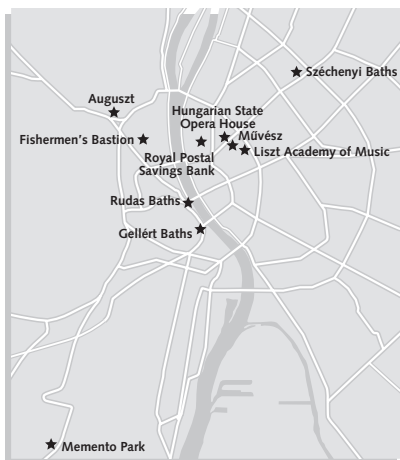
But it is the beauty of Budapest – both natural and manmade – that makes it stand apart. Straddling a gentle curve in the Danube, it is flanked by the Buda Hills on the west bank and what is the start of the Great Plain to the east. Architecturally, it is a gem, with enough baroque, neoclassical, Eclectic and Art Nouveau (Secessionist) to satisfy anyone.

In recent years Budapest has taken on the role of the region's party town, especially in the warmer months when outdoor entertainment areas called *kertek* (literally 'gardens') are heaving with party-makers or during the world-class Sziget Music Festival in August. And you need not venture out for fun: the city's scores of new hostels offer not just some of the best facilities and prices in Europe, but company too.

Budapest does have its 'ugly' side, with organised crime, pollution, international fast-food eateries at every corner and mindless graffiti covering much of all that gorgeous architecture. But come spring (or summer, or a brisk autumn day, or dusk), cross the Danube on foot and see why unique, passionate, vibrant Budapest remains unmissable.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Taking in the views of the Danube and the rest of the city from **Fishermen's Bastion** (p90) on Castle Hill
- Soaking the afternoon away in a thermal bath – Turkish-style (**Rudas**, p103), in an Art Nouveau 'cathedral' (**Gellért**, p103) or in the park (**Széchenyi**, p104)
- Oglng the sinuous curves and asymmetrical forms of the city's incomparable Art Nouveau architecture, such as that of the **Royal Postal Savings Bank** (p97)
- Enjoying a slice of something sweet at a traditional cafe like **Művés** (p121) in Pest or **Augustz** (p117) in Buda
- Taking in an evening of music at the **Hungarian State Opera House** (p101) or the **Liszt Academy of Music** (p127)
- Sizing up the monumental socialist mistakes on display at **Memento Park** (p136), a well-manicured trash heap of history that now includes Stalin's truncated boots



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 1

■ POPULATION: 1.67 MILLION

■ AREA: 525 SQ KM

## HISTORY

The story of Budapest begins – strictly speaking – only in 1873, when hilly, largely residential Buda and historic Óbuda on the western bank of the Danube merged with flat, industrial Pest on the eastern side to form what was at first called Pest-Buda.

The Romans had an important colony here called Aquincum until the mid-5th century, when they were forced to flee by the Huns. The Magyars arrived five centuries later, but Buda and Pest were no more than villages until the 12th century, when foreign merchants and tradespeople settled. In the late 13th century King Béla IV built a fortress in Buda, but it was King Charles Robert (Károly Róbert) who moved the court from Visegrád to Buda 50 years later.

The Mongols burned Buda and Pest to the ground in 1241, and thus began a pattern of destruction and rebuilding that would last until the mid-20th century. Under the Turks, the two towns lost most of their populations, and when they were defeated by the Habsburgs in the late 17th century, Buda Castle was in ruins. The 1848–49 revolution, WWII and the 1956 Uprising all took their toll.

## ORIENTATION

Budapest lies in the north-central part of Hungary. The Danube River, the city's historical artery, is crossed by nine bridges that link hilly, historic Buda with bustling, commercial and very flat Pest.

It's a large, sprawling city but, with few exceptions (the Buda Hills, City Park and some excursions), the areas beyond the Nagykörút (literally 'Big Ring Road') in Pest and west of Moszkva tér in Buda are of little interest to visitors. It is a well-laid-out city and difficult to get lost in.

The Nagykörút and the semicircular Kiskörút (Little Ring Road) more or less link all of the most important bridges across the Danube and define central Pest. The Nagykörút consists of Szent István körút, Teréz körút, Erzsébet körút, József körút and Ferenc körút. The Kiskörút comprises Károly körút, Múzeum körút and Vármű körút. Important boulevards such as Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út, Andrássy út and Rákóczi út fan out from the ring roads.

Buda is dominated by Castle and Gellért Hills. Important roads on this side are Margit körút (the only part of either ring

road to cross the river), Fő utca and Attila utca on either side of Castle Hill, and Hegyalja út and Bartók Béla út running to the west and southwest. Its busiest square is Moszkva tér.

Budapest is divided into 23 *kerület* (districts), which usually also have traditional names, such as Lipótváros (Leopold Town) in district V and Viziváros (Watertown) in district I. The Roman numeral appearing before each street address indicates the district.

Travellers can reach the city centre from Budapest's Ferihegy International Airport, 24km southeast of the city centre, by bus and metro, train, minibus or taxi. For details, see p131.

## Maps

The best folding maps of Budapest are Cartographia's 1:22,000 (770Ft) and 1:28,000 (640Ft) ones. There's also a waterproof 1:30,000 map, which costs 1490Ft. If you plan to explore the city thoroughly, the *Budapest Atlas*, also from Cartographia, is indispensable. It comes in the same scale (1:20,000), in two sizes: a smaller format (2190Ft) and a larger one (4300Ft). There is also a 1:25,000 pocket atlas of the Inner Town available for 1400Ft.

Many bookshops, including Libri Könyvpalota (below), stock a wide variety of maps. **Cartographia** (Map p84; ☎ 312 6001; www.cartographia.hu; VI Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út 37; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri; ☎ M3 Arany János utca) has its own outlet in Budapest. An even better bet is **Térképkiadó** (Map King; Map p84; ☎ 472 0505; www.mapking.hu; VI Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út 23; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, to 1pm Sat; ☎ M3 Arany János utca), which also has a **Buda branch** (Map pp80–1; ☎ 315 2729; I Margit körút 1; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, to 1pm Sat; ☎ 4 or 6).

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

**Bestsellers** (Map p86; ☎ 312 1295; www.bestsellers.hu; V Október 6 utca 11; ☎ 9am–6.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–5pm Sat, 10am–4pm Sun; ☎ M1/2/3 Deák Ferenc tér) Probably the best English-language bookshop in town, with fiction, travel guides and lots of Hungarica, as well as a large selection of newspapers and magazines, and helpful staff.

**Írók Boltja** (Writers' Bookshop; Map p84; ☎ 322 1645; www.irokboltja.hu, in Hungarian; VI Andrássy út 45; ☎ 10am–7pm Mon–Fri, to 1pm Sat; ☎ M1 Oktogon) Excellent for Hungarian authors in translation.