

# Understand Budapest & Hungary

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Orbán's back in the hot seat, but the economy is growing and it's still all-singin', all-dancin' in Budapest.

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# Budapest & Hungary Today

There have been some good, bad and ugly developments here recently. A national election has returned the old guard with more power than ever. The economy splutters along but there have been some improvements. And the country has unveiled a series of new attractions – from an ambitious contemporary art museum in Debrecen to a restored synagogue in Szeged and mosque in Esztergom. And then there's Budapest's ambitious bid for the 2024 Summer Olympics.

## Best on Film

**Dollybirds** (*Csinibaba*; 1997)

Comedy/satire about a contest to cross over the Iron Curtain.

**Zimmer Feri** (1998) Jokes about German tourists on the Balaton.

**Moszkva tér** (2001) End-of-communism comedy with kids.

**A Kind of America** (*Valami Amerika*; 2002) Flimflam film man from the USA.

**Children of Glory** (*Szabadság, Szerelem*; 2006) The 'blood in the water' water-polo match of 1956.

## Best in Print

**Prague** (Arthur Phillips; 2002) Mixed-up young American does Budapest.

**Ballad of the Whiskey Robber** (Julian Rubenstein; 2005) Hockey-player-cum-bank-robber on the lam.

**Twelve Days: The Story of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution** (Victor Sebestyen; 2007) Day-by-day account of the Uprising.

**The Invisible Bridge** (Julie Orringer; 2010) Epic saga of a Hungarian Jewish family during WWII.

## Enter Stage Right

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was returned to power for a third term in April 2014, garnering just 45% of the vote and 133 seats. But a series of changes in the election laws – including halving the number of MPs and allowing gerrymandering – transformed this into a two-thirds parliamentary mandate. Orbán has morphed from the liberal he was in the 1990s to an authoritarian. 'Viktor' (as he is sometimes called in the opposition press) has been accused at home and abroad – often by EU officials – of excessive nationalism, of politicising the judiciary and the central bank, and of stirring up ethnic tensions and suppressing media freedom.

## Fun & Games

Meanwhile in Budapest's bars and clubs, the band plays on. Clubs – especially the outdoor 'garden' ones – heave throughout the week in summer; 'ruin pubs' (a Budapest phenomenon that has been imitated elsewhere but never feels quite the same) are filled to the brim and everyone wants just one last shot of pálinka (fruit brandy). And the fun and games are not just nocturnal ones. Budapest continues to be the undisputed nerve centre of live 'escape games', an innovative pastime in which teams of players are locked into a set of rooms – often in disused apartment blocks – and attempt to set themselves free by working through a series of complex riddles. The choice of venues is amazing – now well over 100 – and there's a wealth of different games on offer.

## The Economy: Good News at Last

There's good news on the economic front. Until a few years ago, one of the biggest headaches for Hungarian homeowners (and the economy) was that a large