

Star-struck by Budapest

By Ron Bauman

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There is no safe place to rest your eyes in Budapest. Just when you think you have seen the city in all its glory, you turn your head to be struck by another jaw-dropping sight.

[Budapest](#), the nation's capital, is a city that pulsates to a relaxing, rhythmic beat.

Composed of 23 districts and more than 80 thermal springs, Budapest is a cohesion of cultures of the centuries that citizens have called this place home. Over 12 million tourists visit annually for its architecture, history, cuisines and recreation.

My husband, Phil, and I, made Budapest a priority to visit after our first trip to Europe. We first fell in love with it when watching [The Amazing Race 6](#) from 2004. There is a reason it is used as a backdrop to [hundreds of other films and television shows](#): you are practically stepping into an award winning movie set. The buildings, the scenery, the people all feel part of a surreal experience to a world only to be dreamt up. But it is real, and it is there to ogle at without shame.



Fisherman's Bastion, in the Buda district

From *The Amazing Race* we sought out attractions like the [Buda Castle Labyrinth](#), an underground series of tunnels that is believed to have once held Vlad the Impaler. It was the site of Lori and Bolo drinking pigs blood to earn a Fast Forward (skip all the remaining tasks) to the pit stop at [Fisherman's Bastion](#) by drinking pigs blood. While being underground is not my idea of a relaxing experience, the ominous and moody dark caves add to the dynamism possessed throughout Budapest.

Time may stand still in Budapest, but there is no rest for the wanderer. The city is 525 square kilometres with no end of activity. Budapest hosts one of Europe's oldest subway systems and tram lines, which makes public transit a breeze. You are connected to the

many popular thermal baths like [Széchenyi](#), [Rudas](#) or [Gellért](#). We found sanctuary along the way, resting in the warm, medicinal waters.

Transportation options get you in any direction you want to go. Climb up to Buda Castle with [the funicular](#), or ride [The Gyermekvasút](#), or the Children's Railway, to the top of Buda Hill for unparalleled views of the city. *Travel Man* made ride on this railway so appealing, and it harkens to a time of immense respect for traditions. The children continue the roles as ticket takers and conductors from their predecessors of the last 75 years.

A [dinner cruise along the Danube River](#) hosts dinner cruises is a feast for the eyes, heart and their stomachs. On what was Thanksgiving Day in Canada, we dined on roasted goose, apple strudel and regional wines. Hungarian folk dances keep the night festive as we sail down the river. On the top deck, you get a surreal 360-degree view of the city, with the brilliance of the [Hungarian Parliament Building](#) capturing the attention of passersby. My jaw was on the floor, my eyes bulging out like a cartoon animal in love. Like a heartthrob's poster on your bedroom wall, when you see this celebrated figure in front of you, words escape your lips. I stood stunned, sailing on my very own dreamboat.



The Hungarian Parliament Building, from the top deck of a river cruise ship.

There is no shortage of delicacies to fuel you up. Traditional dishes like goulash or chimney cakes are every few feet from each other. The cakes come in all sorts of flavours, sweet and savory for every pallet. A visit to the [Central Market Hall](#) will have you drooling over its three floors of mouth-watering surprises. Do not make the same mistake I did and accidentally order a half-kilo of cheese. Fortunately, the people of Budapest have a sense of humour and are kind towards visitors. They want you to enjoy their home and make it your own while there.

Budapest stole my heart, and I will forever be a fan. Like your favourite television show with new twists each episode, there is no end to the stories Budapest can tell.