



TRAVEL

Beautiful Budapest



By Richard Levy

This past summer, I had the opportunity to spend a few days in Budapest, the capital city of Hungary and the birthplace of my mother.

Hungary has had a tumultuous history, ruled through the centuries variously by the Turks, the Habsburgs and the Nazis. The country was liberated by Russian troops at the end of World War II, only to spend the next 40 years under a brutal communist regime. Hungary did not become a free republic until 1989, –just 29 years ago.

The Nazis exterminated an

estimated 450,000 Jews over the course of WW II, nearly 70% of the pre-war Jewish population; my cousins among them. Though they came to America in the 1920s and worked alongside my grandfather in his bakery, my cousins missed their home and were caught up in the tumult of the war, upon their return.

For me, the most moving monument in the city was the melancholy “Shoes on the Danube,” conceptualized by film director Can Togay and created by sculptor Gyula Pauer. The installation commemorates the World War II execution of thousands of Jews who were lined up on the east bank of the river, ordered to take off their shoes and

then shot by the infamous Arrow Cross Brigade; their lifeless bodies washed away in the Danube.

Despite occupations and the terror Hungarians have endured, they are a very jovial, fun-loving and welcoming people. In Budapest, wherever you eat, shop, drink or play you’ll always be treated like family.

Budapest is made of two very distinctive neighborhoods, hilly, upscale Buda and Pest, the older, more colorful part of town which includes the old Jewish section, separated by the Danube. There are numerous bridges in Budapest – but do not miss the views from the lovely Liberty Bridge which you can walk across. I suggest taking the Hop On & Off bus tour to orient yourself to the city’s major attractions and then go back to visit the places that interest you the most.

Spend a couple of hours in the Old Jewish section of Pest, stopping by Mazel Tov, an interesting cultural hall with a huge open kitchen, great local drinks and spontaneous events. Afterwards, be sure to spend an hour in the spectacular Grand Synagogue, built in 1859. This incredibly impressive synagogue has both Romantic and Moorish architectural influences and it is the second largest synagogue in the world; the largest is Manhattan’s Temple Emanuel on Fifth Avenue.

For great views, visit the Fisherman’s Bastion in Buda, a terrace studded with medieval turreted towers overlooking the Danube, and also the St. Matthias Church, with its beautiful multi-colored roof. Spend an hour at the huge Central Market, the largest in Europe. The Market’s two floors are filled with hundreds of interesting booths offering fresh produce, meat, cakes, local open kitchens and it’s the best place to purchase little pouches of fresh Hungarian paprika. Stop by The First Strudel House, an old-style farmhouse where you can try your hand at strudel-making –fun and delicious! For a taste of Budapest’s totalitarian past, visit the House of Terror Museum located in the former headquarters of the secret police.

Budapest’s nightlife will not disappoint you. My favorite place was Fogaskert, which houses a concert stage, spontaneous entertainment, a theater, colorful bars and restaurants in a festive surreal maze-like house. Or head over to the spectacular A38Ship club on the



Illuminated Parliament building.

Danube, for concerts and dancing till dawn, which Lonely Planet calls “the best club in the world.”

My favorite place for people watching is the Paulaner’s Platz restaurant. Their terrace is directly across from the spectacular St. Stephen’s Basilica, Budapest’s most famous landmark, dedicated to the first King of Hungary. This neo-classical cathedral was built over the course of half a century, from 1851 to 1931. To the right of the main altar is the basilica’s major attraction: The Holy Right Chapel, containing the Holy Right Hand – the mummified right hand of St. Stephen and an object of great devotion. It was restored to Hungary by Habsburg Empress, Maria Theresa in 1771, after being discovered in a monastery in Bosnia. Like the Crown of St. Stephen, it was snatched by the Nazis during WW II but returned after the war.

Hungarians live to eat. I should know! Growing up, my mom stuffed me with her amazing stuffed cabbage, everything paprikash and her apricot-walnut strudel. Local Budapest restaurants come pretty close, but there’s always something I miss. The food everywhere in Budapest is sensational and ridiculously affordable. Their flavorful national dish is a thick goulash soup. Another popular dish is pancakes stuffed with spicy chicken and potatoes. Hungary is known around the world for its decadent chocolate desserts.

The legendary Gundel is my very

favorite Budapest restaurant. Opened in 1894, this beautiful temple of gastronomic delights is frequented by movie stars and world leaders. Make reservations for a Tuesday night and select their fabulous Folklore Menu, featuring five courses of traditional Hungarian delicacies, for which they’ve become famous and have received just about every culinary award. It’s very expensive but absolutely worth it.

We also loved the Aszu restaurant, offering delicious, inventive food that is artistically plated. The salad was presented in a small terrarium and the confit of duck leg was amazing. Aszu’s thick and flavorful goulash is the best in Budapest and almost as wonderful as my mom’s.

Another restaurant I absolutely adored was the atmospheric Spinoza Restaurant in the old Jewish Quarter. On Friday nights they offer a 3 course goose dinner (\$60/pp) which includes an hour-long “Klezmer” band concert. Klezmer is traditional Jewish folk music featuring a mournful clarinet, accordion, trumpet and an inspirational singer.

A great place for seafood lovers is the informal Bigfish Seafood Bistro. You choose your fish, shrimp or crab; they simply roast it and you wash it down with an affordable Hungarian white wine. Many Budapest restaurants feature roving gypsy bands, creating an authentic Hungarian atmosphere.

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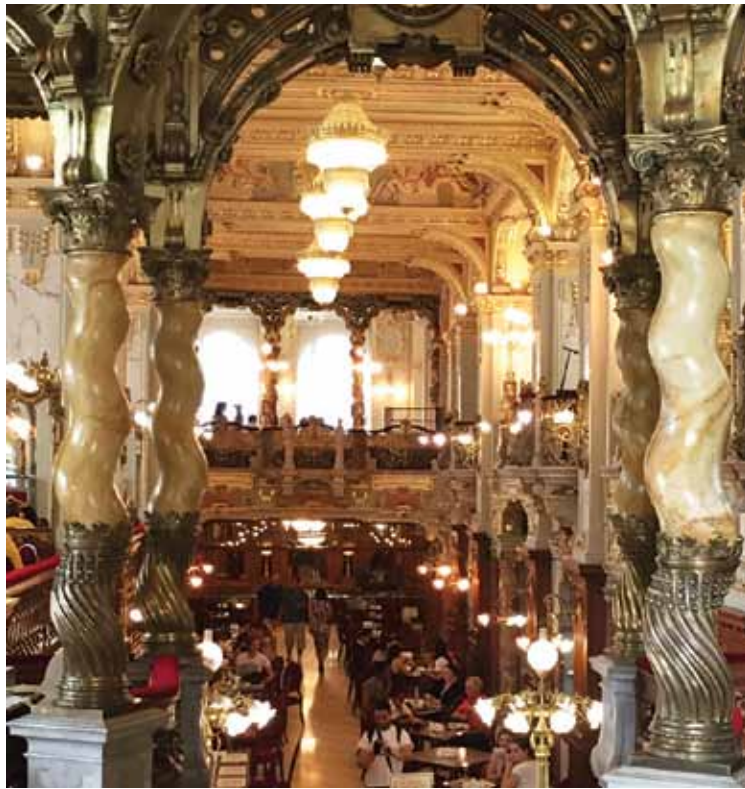
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Just a few doors up from St. Stephen's is the fabulous Gelartorosa ice cream shop where the top of every ice cream is decorated with a beautiful two-flavored rose, sculpted from their homemade ice cream. Be sure to visit Café Gerbeard, opened in 1884 and the most famous café in Budapest. Order one of their famous chocolate desserts. You must also visit the New York Café House, located in the elegant Hotel Boscolo, widely considered the most beautiful café in the world.

You can't leave Budapest without taking a fabulous harbor night cruise



Sculpted Rose Ice Cream Cone from Gelartorosa



The New York Café House at Hotel Boscolo

to see the entire city and shoreline illuminated. One day, you absolutely must spend a few hours at the Gellert Baths, set in a gorgeous old art nouveau palace. Budapest has over a hundred thermal pools that are renowned for curing pain in the joints, arthritis, blood circulation and just making you feel better all over.

Where to stay in Budapest? I suggest the beautiful Aria Hotel, located next to the spectacular St. Stephen's Basilica and only a short walk to most places you'll want to visit. The Aria has

a musical theme running through-out and they even have a Music Director on staff. The interior design is breathtaking, with a huge courtyard in the center, outstanding service and large, luxurious rooms. During the afternoon, guests are treated to an extensive buffet of wine, cheese and fruit while a world-class concert pianist plays nearby. The Aria is also home to Budapest's most popular rooftop restaurant and bar, offering dazzling views of the city and St. Stephen's spires. Surprisingly affordable, most packages also include a buffet



Shoes on the Danube

breakfast. My other favorite place to stay is the classic Hotel Boscolo.

They say the Hungarian language is second hardest to learn after Chinese, but don't worry, just about everyone speaks English! The currency is Forints, with about 275 to \$1 US, but they also take Euros. This past summer, \$100 was equivalent to 89 Euros. Get a credit card with "no European conversion fees" and put your meals and hotel on the card to get the best exchange rate. Look for a card that offers 20-40,000 free advantage miles.

Since there are no non-stop flights from NY to Budapest, I selected Norwegian Air, which offered the lowest fares to Europe and good connections to Budapest. I flew from JFK to Oslo, Norway and two hours later connected with another Norwegian Air flight to Budapest. During my two-hour overlay, I got to devour the freshest

seafood I've ever eaten at Olso Airport's Seafood Bar. Their small plates are filled with mounds of shrimp, mussels, crab and herring that taste like they just jumped out of the North Sea.

Spending a week in Budapest is absolutely fabulous at any time of the year. In fact, it's become one of Europe's most vibrant, interesting and affordable cities to visit. Be sure to bring back lots of little pouches of fresh paprika for yourself and your friends from the fabulous Central Market. I did, and just like my mom used to do when I was growing up, I now find myself sprinkling paprika on everything I cook. Yum! Bon voyage, or the Hungarians say, Jó utat kívánok!.

Photos by Richard Levy.

For more information, go to visitbudapest.com

LOCAL LORE

Annals of Hudson River Valley Brickmaking:

Boom and Bust 2



By Robert Scott

The advantages of ownership of clay lands are reflected in the experience of the Hudson River Brick Company of Verplanck. According to the files of the R.G. Dun Company (later Dun & Bradstreet) now in the archives of the Harvard School of Business, the company was organized in 1868 with a capitalization of \$100,000. Principals were James A. Whitbeck of Verplanck, D.J. Haight of Peekskill, one

of the founding trustees of the Peekskill Savings Bank, and John Morton of Brooklyn. R.G. Dun Company gave them the highest credit ratings.

Their newly formed company purchased more than a hundred acres of clay land and several operating brickyards on Verplanck's Point from John Henry. A former rope manufacturer on Long Island and also a founding trustee of the Peekskill Savings Bank, Mr. Henry and nine other investors had bought Verplanck's Point from Philip Verplanck in 1836 for \$450,000 and

planned a city of wide streets and broad avenues.

When residents failed to flock there, John Henry bought out the other members of the syndicate for \$350,000 and opened several brickyards. His former home on Broadway in Verplanck is now the Orchard Inn.

Instead of developing or operating brickyards on its properties, the Hudson River Brick Company leased them to others. This stratagem was so successful that a scant five years after it

had been formed, the company bought additional brickyards and clay lands on Verplanck's Point and added them to its holdings.

In his History of Verplanck, N.Y., 1609-1914, originally published in the Highland Democrat newspaper of Peekskill between July and November of 1914, author W.J. Kelleher listed some brickmakers who leased lands or brickyards from the Hudson River Brick Company. These included James A. Whitbeck, Stephen Billings, Haight & Southard, Adam Fisher, King & Lynch, McGuire and Wandell, Francis Timoney, O'Brien & Vaughey, B.J. McGuire & Company, W.H. Mackey, and M.E. Mackey & Company.

The Hudson River Brick Company was still in existence when the Kelleher history was published at the start of World War I. By then only two brickyards were operating on Verplanck Point.

The Geography of Hudson Valley Clays

Geologically speaking, the Valley's abundant clay resources were a comparatively recent product of the melting of the vast glaciers that had blanketed the region. Banks of clay were concentrated in two regions on both flanks of the Hudson.

The first, a 15-mile stretch, extended from Tarrytown to Peekskill