

# SOME THINGS TO ENJOY IN BUDAPEST

## A guide to Budapest's thermal baths



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Budapest sits on a patchwork of almost 125 thermal springs, and 'taking the waters' has been a part of everyday life here since people walked in togas. No baths still operating date back to Roman times but some are a legacy of the Turkish occupation, others are Art Nouveau marvels and there are even spic-and-span modern establishments boasting all the mod cons.

Which bath you choose is a matter of taste and what exactly you're looking for – be it fun, a hangover cure or relief for something more serious. Here are the essential tips to keep in mind when planning a visit to Budapest's baths, and our selection of the best of them.

Know before you go

Opening times and who is welcome when depend on the day of the week and the time. Many baths now open at night during the weekend. Fewer and fewer baths have male- and female-only days, so pack a bathing suit or be prepared to rent one.

Admission charges start at 2400Ft, which in theory allows you to stay for two hours on weekdays and one hour and a half at weekends (a rule seldom enforced nowadays).

Some of the baths (eg the Király) look a little rough around the edges, but they are clean and the water is changed constantly. However, you might

consider taking along a pair of plastic sandals or flip-flops (also, the floors can get very slippery).

A look inside

The layout of most of Budapest's baths is similar: a series of indoor thermal pools, where temperatures range from warm to hot, with steam rooms, saunas, ice-cold plunge pool and rooms for massage. Some have outdoor pools with fountains, sprays and whirlpools. Being thermal, some are open year-round.

Depending on the time and the day of the week, baths can be for men or women only. However, there are usually mixed days and some baths – the Széchenyi Baths in City Park, for example – are always open for men and women together. On single-sex days or in same-sex sections, men are usually handed drawstring loincloths and women apron-like garments to wear, though the use of bathing suits is on the increase even on single-sex days. You must wear a bathing suit on mixed-sex days; these are available for hire (1200Ft) if you don't have your own. Some pools require even men to use a bathing cap; bring your own or wear the disposable plastic one provided or sold for about 200Ft. Most pools also rent towels (1000Ft), though you are provided with a less-than-absorbent 'sheet' as you enter the rest area.

Most of the baths offer a full range of serious medical treatments plus more indulgent services such as massage (3800/5000Ft per 20/30 minutes), pedicure (3500Ft) and the intriguing red-wine bath (8900Ft). Specify what

### Taking the plunge

The procedure for getting out of your clothes and into the water requires some explanation. All baths and pools have cabins and/or lockers. In most of the baths nowadays you are given an electronic bracelet which directs you to and then opens the locker or cabin door. Some places – the Gellért Baths, for example – still use the old, more personal method. Find a free locker or cabin yourself (it's visual flight rules here). After getting changed in (or beside) it, seek out an attendant (usually wearing a white coat or smock and holding a large bunch of keys), who will lock it for you and hand you a numbered tag to tie on your costume or 'apron'. Commit your locker number to memory; in order to prevent theft should you lose or misplace the tag, the number on it is not the same as the one for the locker.

Decisions, decisions

Which bath you decide to visit is really a matter of choice, but you should certainly consider the following.

**Rudas Baths** The renovated Rudas Baths, with an octagonal pool, are mostly men-only during the week but have mixed nights on weekends. *Vibe: Most famous of the Turkish baths*

**Gellért Baths** The Art Nouveau Gellért Baths, now open to both men and women at all times, have the most beautiful indoor swimming pools in the city. *Vibe: Get wet in a cathedral*

**Széchenyi Baths** The gigantic and lavish Széchenyi Baths boast 15 thermal baths and three swimming pools; the water temperature is up to 38°C. *Vibe: Hot water in a wedding-cake building*

**Veli Bej Baths** This venerable Turkish bath, renovated in 2011, has five thermal pools and original clay pipes for pumping in the water. *Vibe: Something old and something new*

**Király Baths** The four pools at Ottoman-era Király Baths are very authentic though in need of renovation; they are open to both men and women on all days. *Vibe: Ancient and very Turkish*

**Lukács Baths** The waters of the Lukács Baths are meant to cure just about everything — from spinal deformation and vertebral dislocation to calcium deficiency. *Vibe: For serious spa fans only*

**Danubius Health Spa Margitsziget** The facilities at the Danubius Health Spa Margitsziget on Margaret Island are rather soulless but modern, and the choice of special treatments is epic. *Vibe: Pampering and preening*

# Castle Hill Budapest

**Why visit:** walks, history, panorama, architecture, [Matthias Church](#), [Fishermen's Bastion](#), art, cafés and pastries

## A Brief History of Castle Hill

The first citizens arrived to Castle Hill in the 13th century after the Mongolian invasion, seeking protection in the hills of Buda. The first royal castle was built around this time. The golden age of Castle Hill was in the 15th century, following the marriage of King Matthias Corvinus and Beatrix of Naples in 1476. Many Italian artists and craftsmen accompanied the new queen, and Buda became an important European city. After the Turkish occupation, Buda was in ruins. A Baroque city was built, and Castle Hill soon became the district of government. During World War II, Buda was bombed to the ground and had to be rebuilt again.

Today, Castle Hill is recognized as a World Heritage Site, and has many must-see attractions, Gothic arches, eighteenth-century Baroque houses and cobblestone streets. Though Castle Hill has changed much since building began in the 13th century, its main streets still follow their medieval paths. Some houses date back to the 14th and 15th centuries, giving us an idea of what the Castle District may have looked like back then. Practically every house has a plaque indicating the century in which it was built, and providing details of its history. A surprising number of the buildings are still private homes, as Castle Hill is also a residential area. Cars have been banned - only people who live and work here are allowed to drive; however, public transportation is available.

Buda Castle Hill is also home to a large interconnected cellar system that consists of natural caves created by thermal waters and man-made passageways. Inhabitants have used the caverns for centuries for storage and shelter. The earliest traces of human life found here are 500,000 years old. Part of the cellar system can be toured at the [Buda Castle Labyrinth](#) and at the [Hospital in the Rock Museum](#).

## Things to Do and See on Castle Hill

Your best option is to walk along the cobblestone streets and discover Castle Hill at your own pace. Take your time, as there is a lot to see and do, and exploring Castle Hill can take an entire day. If you don't have much time, visit Trinity Square, [Matthias Church](#) (Mátyás templom) and [Fishermen's Bastion](#) (Halászbástya). Various events are held at Castle Hill year round. Our [Castle Hill walking tour](#) includes all the major sights, as well as recommended cafés and restaurants to stop for some refreshments. To get an insider's look into historic landmarks and learn about the past while strolling along (and beneath) the cobblestone streets sign up for the [Mysteries of Castle District Tour](#).

**Getting to Castle Hill:** Take the [Funicular](#) from [Chain Bridge](#); the public bus, called Várbusz, from Széll Kálmán tér (formerly Moszkva tér) or one of the many paths leading up to Castle Hill

## Ecseri flea market

Before you pack up and leave the city for an exciting day of treasure hunt at the Ecseri flea market you should read our latest article and find out more about this rattletrap paradise. Is it just a huge clear-out or is it more of a place where you can find real bargains? We can't really tell. One thing is for sure though; if you don't have anything special in mind for a lazy Sunday then this is the right place for you! Of course you shouldn't take the items and the prices too seriously.

## Appraisers or sons of a gun?

We had quite an unusual – if not shocking – experience at the very beginning of our journey. We asked a nice old lady if she had any enamel bowls. *'Enamel bowls? Are you kidding? This is not such a place. We can't pay the renting fees by selling enamel bowls.'* Ironically the lady was selling ugly yellow pots, like the ones you can easily find at florists on Nagykörút for a couple of hundreds of forints.

## Crap or pieces of art?

The other surprising thing was the frame on the picture above. We couldn't ask the owner if the 5500 forint frame is decorated with real **Swarovski** gems or if the picture of the little girl comes with the frame but let's just not go into such details. The real question is what would a style and fashion police do with items like that and with people who sell stuff like that? They would probably arrest the owners for extremely bad taste. Of course there are other vendors who take things more seriously and who specialize in certain areas: folk art, street signs, and coloured glass items for example. Make sure you check these out!

## Ecseri gastro

[ECSERI MARKET](#)

**1194, Budapest, Nagykörösi út 156.**

**+36 1 348 3200**

The buffets of a typical market have a very specific romantic sort of mood. Our favourites for example include the soup bar of the **Chinese market** and the bars of the market hall on **Fehérvári Street**. Unfortunately things are quite different at Ecseri market. If you are planning to go on a day-long treasure hunt you should take some food with you. Unless of course you want to pay fortunes for a bowl of beef stew.

## Opening hours

The market is open on weekdays too but they are not operating with full throttle. Owners suggest coming on weekends. Well, we took a little trip on Sunday morning but half of the vendors were not opened by that time. On **weekdays** the market is open from 8am till 4pm, on **Saturdays** they are open till 3pm and last but not least on **Sundays** they are open till 1pm.

## Why choose Ecseri instead of Ikea?

The main reason is that prices are quite flexible at **Ecseri**. The outcome and the final price depend on you and your talent of bargaining (see our tips below). You can find real rarities here as well. You can be sure that your flat won't look like a typical European or American apartment if you get your stuff from here. You can find all sorts of great painting rollers for example. These are probably one of the greatest inventions of the last century but unfortunately **Hungary** stopped manufacturing them a few years ago. Luckily you can still find them here.

## Tips on how to make real bargains

First you have to be very kind and polite. Then, you should perform a long monologue and you should trick the vendors. After that you should surprise them with a few technical terms that they probably never heard before. Praise the stuff of the other vendors as well, go into raptures over the quality of the other items then carefully get right back to the bargain. Tell the vendor that the product he's selling is not that great and make him feel lucky that you are willing to buy it for a lower price.

## Not much conclusion

If you have foreigner guests you should take them out to a trip to Ecseri. If you don't have time to look for vintage pieces of clothing and you don't have time to check through **Iguana** or **Szputnyik shop** you should also go to Ecseri. If you have special interest in painting rollers, in siphon-bottles, in street signs, in enamel items or in gypsy folk art you should go to, yepp

you guessed it, to Ecseri. In every other case you should just search through the piles of trash on the streets when it's a clear out. Wake up early however, if you would like to grab your hands on real treasures before the vendors get their own hands on them!

## Szentendre City of Living Art

The **picturesque town** of **Szentendre** sits at the foot of the **Pilis Hill**, on the **Danube bank** north of Budapest.

Its closeness to the Hungarian capital makes it an ideal day trip destination for visitors coming to Budapest.

Tip: During summer flocks of tourists flood Szentendre so if you don't like crowds plan your visit during autumn or spring although you'll love this town even in winter.



*The cobblestone Main Square of Szentendre with the Plague Cross in the middle*

## Getting to Szentendre

### By car

From Budapest No. 11 Motorway takes you to Szentendre.

### By Suburban railway (HÉV)

The suburban railway service departs from Batthyány Square in Budapest (M2 red metro line) and takes you to Szentendre in 40 minutes. Trains depart around every 10-15 minutes in at peak times.

### By bus

Buses depart in the direction of Szentendre and Esztergom from Árpád Bridge coach station. The journey takes about 30 minutes.

### By ship

Mahart, the Hungarian Shipping Company operates boat services between Budapest and Szentendre every day in the tourist season (30th April-30th Sept). See the timetable and ticket prices here.

### By bike

A bicycle route runs along No. 11 motorway.

## Main Attractions of Szentendre

In Szentendre you'll experience a **Mediterranean atmosphere** that few other Hungarian settlements can offer you. No wonder that lots of **artists** come to find inspiration and work here. Let this unique aura enchant you too.



*You can explore the town by horse carriage (it's the best option if you hate walking on cobbled streets wearing high heels)*

#### A Bit of Szentendre History

Szentendre was part of the Eastern frontier of the **Roman Empire** under the name **Ulcisia Castra** from the 2nd century AD.

The Mongols in the 13th century then the Turks in the 15-16th centuries destroyed the town. It was **rebuilt** in the Baroque style in the **17th century** and has preserved its townscape since then. After the Turks left mainly **Serbian** refugees settled down then **Hungarians, Slovaks, Germans, Greeks** and **Romanians**. Each ethnic group had established its own town part adding a versatility to the townscape.



Szentendre boasts a well-preserved **18th century Baroque townscape**. Start your exploration from the **Main Square (Fő tér)** where the Baroque **cross** was erected in 1763 to commemorate the lucky fact that plague avoided the town.

Winding streets lead off from the Main Square packed with **architectural masterpieces**, museums, restaurants, cafes and souvenir shops.



Old but well-kept **merchant houses** encircle Main Square like the block on the eastern side of the square (2-5. Fő tér) that was rebuilt under the same roof after a fire.

On the ground floor the **Szentendre Gallery** (open: Tue-Sun: 10.00-18.00) provides exhibition opportunities for artists working in the town.



Out of the 9 churches of Szentendre the Baroque-Rococo **Greek-Orthodox Blagovestenska church** is the best known, built in the mid 18th century by settlers living in the Greek quarter next to the church.

Above its wooden gate **frescoes** of St Helene and St Constantine greet you while inside you can admire the remarkable **iconostasis**. The church is open daily during the tourist season.



*Rococo iconostasis by Mihály Zsivkovics inside Blagovestenska church*



*Pozarevacka Serb-Orthodox church*

**The House of Prisoner Ráby (Rab Ráby Ház)** stands on the Rab Ráby Square a centre of the former Dalmatian quarter.

The Austrian Emperor sent Mátyás Ráby to look into local corruption issues. He lived in this modest **Baroque house built in 1768**. He found out tax evasions and other unlawful acts committed by the local noblemen who tried to bribe Ráby. After refusing bribery he was imprisoned. The famous Hungarian writer, **Mór Jókai** wrote an epic about his story.



Stroll down Görög utca from Main Square lined with apartments of Greek families and you'll reach the peaceful promenade on the the Danube bank.



Szentendre contains so many museums that we thought they deserve a separate page. Click to browse our list of museums in Szentendre.

### Shopping in Szentendre

The crooked cobble-stoned streets abound in **shops** (try Bogdányi street for example) offering all sorts of souvenirs, embroidered tablecloths and shirts, pottery, wines, paprika, that you can take home to your loved ones.





For **Hungaricum** (Hungarian food and beverage specialities) pop in the **Paprika Ház** in downtown Szentendre where you can buy Tokaji wine, pálinka (Hungarian fruit brandy), Hungarian paprika powder, and goose liver.

### Where to Eat in Szentendre?

Szentendre, being a very popular tourist destination, boasts very **good value restaurants** and **cafés** that are on par with Budapest's restaurant scene.

#### **Aranysárkány (Golden Dragon) Restaurant**

Address: Alkotmány utca 1/a

Tel: (+36) 26 301 479

Prices: soups: 800 HUF, main dishes: 2500-3000 HUF

Traditional home cooking, attentive staff makes Aranysárkány one of the best places to dine at in Szentendre.

#### **Elisabeth Restaurant & Cafe**

Address: Alkotmány utca 1/a

Tel: (+36) 26 311 175

Prices:

Two air-conditioned rooms in a Baroque building with a nice patio. You can taste both Hungarian and International specialities.



### **Fa Inn Restaurant**

Address: Kossuth Lajos utca 22.  
Tel: 06 20 252 2029, 26 303 388

Prices: soups: 470-600 HUF, main dishes: 1500-2000 HUF

Jazz, blues and piano evenings



### **Régimódi Vendéglő**

Address: Dumtsa Jenő utca 2.  
Tel: (+36) 26 311 105

Prices: soups: 600-1400 Main dishes: 1800-4000 HUF

Some vegetarian dishes, wide choice of fish dishes



### **Labirintus Restaurant in the National Wine Museum**

Address: Bogdányi utca 10.  
Tel: (+36) 26 317 054

You can dine in three different rooms: in the **Tokaji Room** in the cool cellar, in the **Kupa Room** on the ground level, or in the air-

conditioned **Vadász (Hunter's) Room** on the first level. The shed was altered to an idyllic **terrace**

In The 220 year old **cellar system** you can taste fine wines and buy the ones you like in the wine shop.

### **Bárczy Fogadó**

Address: Bogdányi utca 10.

Tel: (+36) 26 310 825

Housed in a 18th century baroque building Bárczy Fogadó offers Hungarian specialities and gypsy music.



### **Chez Nicholas Restaurant**

Address: Kigyó utca 10.

Tel: (+36) 26 311 288

A nice, terraced restaurant with view of the Danube in old Szentendre.



### **Rab Ráby Restaurant**

Address: Kucsera Ferenc utca 1/a.  
Tel: (+36) 26 310 819



Housed in a former 18th century smithy this very popular restaurant offers traditional Hungarian fare. A pleasant dinner in the patio on a summer evening offsets the slightly chaotic interior decoration. For coffee pop in the cozy **Dorothea Café** (Fő tér 15.) opposite Rab Ráby restaurant