

## Soaking in the Culture: The Baths of Budapest

Light dances and sparkles through the stained glass, sending magical beams of colour down through the misty air and illuminating the warm wafts of swirling steam before coming to rest atop the surface of the pool; where soothing minerals, pumped up from natural springs, soak into the skin of the patrons of the Gellert Baths, slowly massaging away all the aches and pains of everyday life. Around them, marble columns tower, and lion fountains slowly trickle more water. Artistic sculptures and mosaics and Art-Nouveau furnishings stand alongside ancient Ottoman architecture, aesthetically pleasing the eye and relaxing the body further. Welcome to Budapest, relaxation capital of the world.

The Gellert baths - built upon the site of a medieval hospital, where the benefits of the 'healing waters' of the underground springs have been recorded as early as the 13th century - are perhaps the most beautiful baths in Budapest; but they are only one example of an extensive and varied culture of relaxation that this beautiful European capital has embraced. A rather different approach to bath-time is the more family-orientated Szechenyi Furdo, the largest medicinal baths in Europe, which has hot and cold pools and steam rooms that combine exquisite Baroque architecture with the more light-hearted – like the older regulars who float around, sipping beer and playing floating chess.

The baths of Budapest, though definitely a must-do, are far from all that Hungary's beautiful capital has to offer, and really serves as the perfect break from sightseeing. Budapest is a city steeped in history and shaped by culture, and much of this can be seen in the national galleries and museums – though prime examples can also be found dotted around the city itself. Budapest is home to various buildings and sites of historical, religious and aesthetic value, including the Great Synagogue, the second largest of its kind in the whole of world. Its two 'Moorish' domes make it one of Budapest's most distinguishable sights, as does its Garden of Remembrance, where Imre Varga's weeping willow stands as a memorial to Budapest's Jewish population killed in World War II.

Another must see area is Castle Hill, a UNESCO world heritage site and host to some of the most intriguing attractions to tourists, such as the Royal Palace, Fisherman's Bastion and Matthias Church. As well as the obvious attraction of these landmark buildings, the entire area is full of charm, be it in the winding cobbled streets, the small friendly cafes, the baroque houses, or some of the finest [hotels in Budapest](#).

Other areas of interest are the Basilica of St. Stephen, a stunning building whose history is one plagued with problems, of faulted plans and allied bombings – but which today stands as a monument to Hungarian perseverance and pride – and Heroes Square, a fabulous symbol of 19th century Hungarian Nationalism, which is also home to the Szépművészeti Múzeum (Museum of Fine Arts) and the Múcsarnok (Palace of Art).

Budapest, one of the most beautiful cities in the world, offers so much to see and experience, it would be a shame to spend the whole time in the warm, undulating waters of the baths.

### About the Author

Victoria Cochrane is a freelance writer for both online and print media. She lives with her husband and son, and enjoys travelling when not writing.

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