

Arts & Architecture ■

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Arts & Architecture

The arts in Budapest have been both starved and nourished by the pivotal events in the nation's history. King Stephen's conversion to Catholicism brought Romanesque and Gothic art and architecture, while the Turkish occupation nipped most of Budapest's Renaissance in the bud. The Habsburgs opened the doors to baroque influences. The arts thrived under the Dual Monarchy, through truncation and even under fascism. The early days of communism brought socialist-realist art celebrating wheat sheaves and muscle-bound steelworkers to a less-than-impressed populace, but much money was spent on music and 'correct art' such as classical theatre.

While the artistic, cultural and literary hypertrophy of Budapest is indisputable, it would be foolish to ignore folk art when discussing urban (and urbane) fine arts here. The two have been inextricably linked for several centuries and have greatly influenced one another. The music of Béla Bartók and the ceramic sculptures of Margit Kovács are deeply rooted in traditional Hungarian culture. Even the architecture of the Secession (p20) incorporated many folk elements. The best place in Budapest to see this type of art is the Ethnography Museum (p64).

MUSIC & DANCE

Hungary has made many contributions to the world of classical music, but one person stands head and shoulders above the rest: Franz – or Ferenc – Liszt. Liszt (1811–86), who established the Academy of Music in Budapest and lived in a four-room 1st-floor apartment on VI Vörösmarty utca (p71) from 1881 until his death. Liszt liked to describe himself as 'part Gypsy', and some of his works, notably the 20 *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, do in fact echo the traditional music of the Rom.

Ferenc Erkel (1810–93), who taught at the Academy of Music from 1879 to 1886 and was the State Opera House's first musical director, is the father of Hungarian opera. Two of his works – the stirring nationalistic *Bánk Bán*, based on József Katona's play of that name, and *László Hunyadi* – are standards at the State Opera House. Erkel also composed the music for the Hungarian national anthem, *Himnusz*.

Béla Bartók (1881–1945) and Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967), were both long-term residents of Budapest (their former residences are now museums; see p61 and p72), made the first systematic study of Hungarian folk music, travelling and recording throughout the Magyar linguistic region during 1906. Both integrated some of their findings into their own compositions – Bartók in *Bluebeard's Castle*, for example, and Kodály in his *Peacock Variations*.

Away from classical music, it is important to distinguish between 'Gypsy' music and Hungarian folk music. Gypsy music as it is known and heard in Hungarian restaurants from

TOP FIVE CDS

- *The Prisoner's Song* – Some say this is the best CD produced by Muzsikás with Marta Sebestyén and includes her song 'Szerelem, Szerelem' (Love, Love), made famous in the film *The English Patient* (Anthony Minghella, 1996).
- *Romano Trip: Gypsy Grooves from Eastern Europe* – This CD from the incomparable Romano Drom is where Roma folk meets world music, with an electronic twist.
- *Lechajem Rebbe* – This is the latest effort from the Budapest Klezmer Band, arguably the best ensemble anywhere playing traditional Jewish music.
- *Hungarian Astronaut* – Anima Sound System mixes Western beats with East European tonal flavours.
- *With the Gypsy Violin around the World: Sándor Déki Lakatos & His Gypsy Band* – No-one's Hungarian musical education is complete without this compilation, the epitome of *saccharine csárdás* music played in fancy hotel restaurants across Budapest.

Budapest to Boston is urban schmaltz and based on recruiting tunes called *verbunkos*, played during the Rákóczi independence wars. At least two fiddles, a bass and a cymbalom (a curious stringed instrument played with sticks) are *de rigueur*.

To confuse matters, real Roma – as opposed to Gypsy – music traditionally does not use instruments but is sung a cappella (though sometimes it is backed with percussion and even guitar). Two of the best-known modern Roma groups are Kalyi Jag (Black Fire), from northeastern Hungary and led by Gusztav Varga, and Romano Drom.

Hungarian folk musicians play violins, zithers, hurdy-gurdies, bagpipes and lutes on a five-tone diatonic scale. There are lots of different performers, but watch out for Muzsikás (with the inimitable Marta Sebestyén or on her own); Ghymes, a Hungarian folk band from Slovakia; the Hungarian group Vujicsics, which mixes elements of South Slav music; and the energetic fiddler Félix Lajkoa from the Magyar-speaking area of northern Serbia. Attending a *táncház* (literally 'dance house'; p131) is an excellent way to hear Hungarian folk music and even to learn to dance.

Traditional Yiddish music is not as well known as the Gypsy and Roma varieties but it is of similar origin, having once been closely associated with central European folk music. Until WWI, *klezmer* dance bands were led by the violin and cymbalom, but the influence of Yiddish theatre and the first wax recordings inspired a switch to the clarinet, which is the predominant instrument in this type of music today. *Klezmer* music is currently going through something of a renaissance in Budapest.

There are two ballet companies based in Budapest, though the best in the country is the Győr Ballet from Western Transdanubia. For modern dance, however, the capital is *the* centre (p134). Among the finest orchestral companies are the Budapest Festival Orchestra and the Hungarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, which uses the name Budapest Symphony Orchestra on certain domestic and all of its foreign recordings.

ARCHITECTURE

You won't find as much Romanesque and Gothic architecture in Budapest as you will in, say, Prague – the Mongols, Turks and Habsburgs destroyed most of it – but the Royal Palace incorporates many Gothic features and the sedile (niches with seats) in the Castle District, most notably on I Üri utca and I Országház utca, are pure Gothic. The chapels in the Inner Town Parish Church (p64) have some fine Gothic and Renaissance tabernacles, and you can't miss the Renaissance stonework – along with the Gothic wooden sculptures and panel paintings and late-Gothic triptychs – at the Hungarian National Gallery (p54).

Baroque architecture abounds in Budapest; you'll see examples of it everywhere. St Anne's Church (p58) on I Batthyány tér in Buda and the Óbuda Parish Church (Map pp226–7) on III Flórián tér are fine examples of ecclesiastical baroque while the Citadella (p56) on Gellért Hill in Buda and the municipal council office (Map p224) on V Városház utca in Pest are baroque in its civic or secular form.

While modern architecture in Budapest is almost completely forgettable – with the one notable exception of Imre Makovecz, who has developed his own 'organic' style using unusual materials like tree trunks and turf and whose work can be seen at the office building at VIII Szentkirályi utca 18 (Map p222) and the spectacular funerary chapel with its reverse vaulted ceiling at the Farkasréti Cemetery (Map p216) located in

THIS IMAGE
NOT AVAILABLE
IN PICK & MIX

UNCOVERING BUDAPEST'S ART NOUVEAU TREASURES

One of the joys of exploring the 'Queen of the Danube' is that you'll find elements of Art Nouveau and Secessionism in the oddest places; keep your eyes open and you'll spot bits and pieces everywhere.

Some people go out of their way for another glimpse of such 'hidden' favourites near City Park as the **Geology Institute** (Map pp218–19; XIV Stefánia út 14), designed by Lechner in 1899, and Sándor Baumgarten's **National Institute for the Blind** (Map pp218–19; XIV Ajtósi Dürer sor 39) dating from 1904, or the **Philanthia** (Map p224; V Váci utca 9), a flower shop with an exquisite Art Nouveau interior (Kálmán Albert Körössy; 1906) in the Inner Town.

Other buildings worth a detour are the former **Török Bank House** (Map p224; V Szerzvitka tér 3), designed by Henrik Böhm and Ármin Hegedűs in 1906 and sporting a wonderful Secessionist mosaic by Róth in the upper gable called *Patrona Hungariae*, depicting Hungaria surrounded by great Hungarians of the past; Ármin Hegedűs' **primary school** (Map p222; VII Dob utca 85), built in the same year and with mosaics depicting contemporary children's games; and the delightful **City Park Calvinist church** (Map pp218–19; VII Városligeti fasor 7), a stunning example of late Art Nouveau architecture by Aladár Arkay (1913), with carved wooden gates, stained glass and ceramic tiles on the façade. **Bedő House** (Map p222; V Honvéd utca 3), an apartment block by Emil Vidor and completed in 1903, is one of the most intact Art Nouveau structures in the city. It contains some striking interior features and the exterior (ironwork gate, majolica flowers, faces) has been renovated.

The style was hardly restricted to public buildings in Budapest, and the affluent districts to the west of City Park are happy hunting grounds for some of the best examples of private residences built in the Art Nouveau/Secessionist style. The cream-coloured **Egger Villa** (Map pp218–19; VII Városligeti fasor 24), designed by Emil Vidor in 1902, is among the purest – and most extravagant – examples of Art Nouveau in the city. On the other side of the road, the green **Vidor Villa** (Map pp218–19; VII Városligeti fasor 33) with the curious turret was designed by Vidor for his father in 1905 and incorporates any number of European styles in vogue at the time, including French Art Nouveau and Japanese-style motifs. Other interesting buildings in this area are **Lédere Mansion** (Map p222; VI Bajza utca 42), a block with mosaics built by Zoltán Bálint and Lajos Jámbor in 1902, and **Sonnenberg Mansion** (Map pp218–19; VI Munkácsy Mihály utca 23). Designed by Albert Körössy in 1903, it is now the headquarters of the MDF political party.

district XII – that is not the case with the unique style of architecture that arrived in Budapest at the end of the 19th and the start of the 20th centuries.

Art Nouveau architecture and its Viennese variant, Secessionism, abound here, and examples can be seen throughout the city; it is Budapest's signature style. Its sinuous curves, flowing, asymmetrical forms, colourful Zsolnay tiles and other decorative elements stand out like beacons in a sea of refined and elegant baroque and mannered, geometric neoclassical buildings.

Art Nouveau was both an architectural style and an art form that flourished in Europe and the USA from about 1890 to 1910. It began in Britain as the Arts and Crafts Movement founded by William Morris (1834–96), which stressed the importance of manual processes over machines and attempted to create a new organic style in direct opposition to the imitative banalities spawned by the Industrial Revolution. It soon spread to Europe, where it took on distinctly local and/or national characteristics. In France it became known as Art Nouveau or Style 1900, in Germany as *Jugendstil* and in Italy as Stile Liberty.

In Vienna a group of artists called the Secessionists lent its name to the more geometric local style of Art Nouveau architecture: *Sezessionstil* (Hungarian: *Szecesszió*). In Budapest, the use of traditional façades with allegorical and historical figures and scenes, folk motifs and Zsolnay ceramics and other local materials led to an eclectic style. Though working within an Art Nouveau/Secessionist framework, this style emerged as something that was uniquely Hungarian.

Fashion and styles changed as whimsically and rapidly at the start of the 20th century as they do a century later, and by the end of the first decade Art Nouveau and its variations were considered limited, passé, even tacky. Fortunately for the good citizens of Budapest and us, the economic and political torpor of the prewar period and the 40-year 'big sleep' after WWII left many Art Nouveau/Secessionist buildings here beaten but standing – many more, in fact, than remain in such important Art Nouveau/*Jugendstil* centres as Paris, Brussels and Vienna.

The first Hungarian architect to look to Art Nouveau for inspiration was Frigyes Spiegel, with his exotic and symbolic ornamentation. At the northern end of VI Izabella utca at

No 94 is the restored Lindenbaum apartment block (Map p222), the first in Hungary to use Art Nouveau ornamentation – suns, stars, peacocks, shells and long-tressed nudes.

The master of the style, however, was Ödön Lechner (1845–1914), and his most ambitious work in Budapest is the Applied Arts Museum (p69). Purpose-built as a museum and completed in time for the millenary exhibition in 1896, it was faced and roofed in a variety of Zsolnay ceramic tiles, and its turrets, domes and ornamental figures lend it an 'Eastern' or 'Indian' feel. However, his crowning glory is the sumptuous former Royal Postal Savings Bank (Map p222) at V Hold utca 4, a Secessionist extravaganza of floral mosaics, folk motifs and ceramic figures just off Szabadság tér in Lipótváros and dating from 1901. The bull's head atop the central tower symbolises the nomadic past of the Magyars while the ceramic bees scurrying up the semi-pillars towards their hives represent organisation, industry and economy.

The Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music (p131), designed by Kálmán Giergl and Flóris Korb in 1907, is not so interesting for its exterior as for its decorative elements within. There's a dazzling Art Nouveau mosaic called *Art Is the Source of Life* by Aladár Körösfői Kriesch, a leader of the seminal Gödöllő Artists' Colony, and some fine stained glass by master craftsman Miksa Róth, whose home and workshop is now a museum (p69). Also note the grid of laurel leaves below the ceiling, which mimics the ironwork dome of the Secession Building (1897–1908) in Vienna, and the large sapphire-blue Zsolnay ball finials on the stair balusters.

Some buildings have got (or are getting) face-lifts and are being used for different purposes, including the gem-like Gresham Palace (Map p224) at V Roosevelt tér 5-6, designed by Zsigmond Quittner (1907) and now housing a five-star hotel (p159).

PAINTING & SCULPTURE

Distinctly Hungarian art didn't come into its own until the mid-19th century when Mihály Pollack, József Hild and Miklós Ybl began changing the face of Budapest. The romantic nationalist school of heroic paintings, best exemplified by Bertalan Székely (1835–1910), who painted much of the interior of Matthias Church (p55), and Gyula Benczúr (1844–1920), gratefully gave way to the realism of Mihály Munkácsy (1844–1900), who received a state funeral in Hősök tere. But the greatest painters from this period were Kosztká Tivadar Csondváry (1853–1919) and József Rippl-Rónai (1861–1927), both habitués of Café Japan (see boxed text, p126), whose works are on display at the Hungarian National Gallery (p54).

The 20th-century painter Victor Vasarely (1908–97), the so-called 'father of op art', has his own museum (p60) in Óbuda as does the contemporary sculptor Imre Varga (p60).

A turning point for modern art in Hungary came in 2005 when the Ludwig Museum of Contemporary Art (p70) moved from Castle Hill to its new (and purpose-built) premises in the Palace of Arts opposite the National Theatre on the Danube.

LITERATURE

Sándor Petőfi (1823–49), who led the Youth of March through the streets of Pest in 1848, is Hungary's most celebrated and accessible poet, and a line from his work *National Song* became the rallying cry for the 1848–49 War of Independence, in which Petőfi fought and died. A deeply philosophical play called *The Tragedy of Man* by his colleague, Imre Madách (1823–64), published a decade after Hungary's defeat in the War of Independence, is still considered to be the country's greatest classical drama. Madách did not participate in the war due to illness but was imprisoned in Pest for assisting Lajos Kossuth's secretary in 1852.

The defeat in 1849 led many writers to look to Romanticism for inspiration and solace: heroes, winners, and knights in shining armour became popular subjects. Petőfi's comrade-in-arms, János Arany (1817–82), whose name is synonymous with impeccable Hungarian and who edited two Pest literary journals in the 1860s, wrote epic poetry (including the *Toldi Trilogy*) and ballads.

Another friend of Petőfi, the prolific novelist Mór Jókai (1825–1904), who divided his time between his villa in XII Költő utca in Buda and his summer retreat at Balatonfüred on Lake

Balaton, wrote of heroism and honesty in such wonderful works as *The Man with the Golden Touch* and *Black Diamonds*. This 'Hungarian Dickens' still enjoys widespread popularity. Another perennial favourite, Kálmán Mikszáth (1847–1910), wrote satirical tales such as *The Good Palóc People* and *St Peter's Umbrella* in which he poked fun at the declining gentry. Apparently the former US president Theodore Roosevelt enjoyed the latter work so much that he insisted on visiting the ageing novelist in Budapest during a European tour in 1910.

Zsigmond Móricz (1879–1942), one of the cofounders of the influential literary magazine *Nyugat* (West; 1908) was a very different type of writer. His works, in the tradition of the French naturalist Émile Zola (1840–1902), examined the harsh reality of peasant life in late-19th-century Hungary. His contemporary, Mihály Babits (1883–1941), poet and the editor of *Nyugat*, made the rejuvenation of Hungarian literature his lifelong work.

Two other important names of this period are the poet and short-story writer Dezső Kosztolányi (1885–1936), who met his lifelong friend Babits at university in Pest, and the

RUBIK CUBES, BIROS, VITAMIN C & ZSA ZSA

It is not enough to be Hungarian – one must also have talent.

Slogan spotted in a Toronto employment office in the early 1960s

The contributions made by Hungarians in any number of fields – from films and toys to science and fine art – both at home and abroad have been enormous, especially when you consider the nation's size and relatively small population. The following is a list of people whom you may not have known were Hungarian or of Hungarian ancestry. Should you want the list expanded on, get a hold of *Eminent Hungarians* by Ray Keenoy, a 'light-hearted look' at the phenomenon, or check out www.webenetics.com/hungary/famous.htm.

Biro, Leslie (Bíró József László; 1899–1985) Inventor of the ballpoint pen, which he patented in 1938.

Brassai (Halász Gyula; 1899–1984) Hungarian-born French poet, draftsman, sculptor and photographer, known for his dramatic photographs of Paris by night.

Capa, Robert (Friedmann Endre Ernő; 1913–54) One of the greatest war photographers and photojournalists of the 20th century.

Cukor, George (Cukor György; 1899–1983) Legendary American film producer/director (*The Philadelphia Story*, 1940).

Curtis, Tony (Bernard Schwartz; 1925–) Evergreen American actor (*Spartacus*, 1960).

Eszterhas, Joe (Eszterhás József; 1944–) American scriptwriter (*Basic Instinct*, 1989).

Gabor, Eva (1919–95) American actress chiefly remembered for her starring role as a New York city socialite making her comical life on a farm in the 1960s TV series *Green Acres*: younger sister of Zsa Zsa.

Gabor, Zsa Zsa (1917?–) Ageless-ish American starlet of grade BBB films and older sister of Eva.

Houdini, Harry (Weisz Erich; 1874–1926) American magician and celebrated escape artist.

Howard, Leslie (Steiner László; 1893–1943) Quintessential English actor most famous for his role in *Gone with the Wind* (1939).

Lauder, Estée (Josephine Esther Mentzer; 1908–2004) American fragrance and cosmetics baroness.

Liszt, Franz (Liszt Ferenc; 1811–86) Piano virtuoso and composer.

Lugosi, Béla (Blaskó Béla Ferenc Dezső; 1882–1956) The film world's only real Dracula – and minister of culture under the Béla Kun regime (p45).

Rubik, Ernő (1944–) Inventor of the hottest toy of the 1980 Christmas season – an infuriating plastic cube with 54 small squares that when twisted out of its original arrangement has 43 quintillion variations.

Soros, George (Soros György; 1930–) Billionaire financier and philanthropist.

Szent-Györgyi, Dr Albert (1893–1986) Nobel Prize-winning biochemist who discovered vitamin C.

Vasarely, Victor (Vásárhelyi Győző; 1908–97) Hungarian-born French painter of geometric abstractions and the 'father of op art'.

Wilder, Billy (Wilder Samuel; 1906–2002) American film director and producer (*Some Like It Hot*, 1959).

TOP FIVE BUDAPEST BOOKS

- *Under the Frog* (Tibor Fischer, 2001). Amusing account of the antics of two members of Hungary's elite national basketball team in Budapest from WWII through to the 1956 Uprising.
- *Homage to the Eighth District* (Giorgio and Nicola Pressburger, 1990) Poignant account of life in what was a Jewish working-class section of Budapest during and after WWII by twin brothers who emigrated to Italy in 1956.
- *Liquidation* (Imre Kertész, 2003) Set in Budapest in the aftermath of the fall of communism, *Liquidation* is the story of a book editor coping with the suicide of a friend.
- *Memoir of Hungary: 1944–1948* (Sándor Márai, 2001) Remembrances, including the war-time destruction of Budapest and the Red Army's arrival and occupation, of the celebrated playwright and author of *Embers*, performed in London during 2006, who fled Budapest in 1948 to escape communist persecution.
- *Prague* (Arthur Phillips, 2002) Cleverly titled debut novel – it takes place in Budapest and the title supposedly refers to the desire by many of the book's characters to live in the 'more' bohemian paradise of the Czech capital – by a young expat American that focuses on life in Budapest in the first years after the changes from a communist past.

novelist Gyula Krúdy (1878–1933), who lived in Óbuda and liked the bone marrow on toast as served at Kéhli (p96) so much that he included a description of it in his *The Adventures of Sinbad*.

Two 20th-century poets are unsurpassed in Hungarian letters. Endre Ady (1877–1919), who is sometimes described as the successor to Petőfi, was a reformer who ruthlessly attacked the complacency and materialism of Hungary at that time, provoking a storm of protest from right-wing nationalists. He died in his flat on V Veres Pálné utca in Pest at the age of 42. The work of the socialist poet Attila József (1905–1937), who was raised in the slums of Ferencváros, expressed the alienation felt by individuals in the modern age; *By the Danube* is brilliant even in English translation.

A recent 'rediscovery' is the late Sándor Márai (1900–89), whose crisp, spare style has single-handedly encouraged worldwide interest in Hungarian literature.

Among Hungary's most important contemporary writers are Imre Kertész (1929–), György Konrád (1933–), Péter Nádas (1942–), Péter Esterházy (1950–) and Magda Szabó (1917–), the most prominent female author writing in Hungary today. Konrád's *A Feast in the Garden* (1985) is an almost autobiographical account of the fate of the Jewish community in a small eastern Hungarian town. *A Book of Memoirs* by Nádas concerns the decline of communism in the style of Thomas Mann. In his *The End of a Family Story*, he uses a child narrator as a filter for the adult experience of 1950s communist Hungary. Esterházy's *Celestial Harmonies* (2000) is a partly autobiographical novel that paints a favourable portrait of the protagonist's father. His subsequent *Revised Edition* (2002) is based on documents revealing his father to have been a government informer during the communist regime. Whoops. Szabó's *The Door* (1987) is the compelling story of a woman writer and the symbiotic relationship she has with her housekeeper.

In 2002 novelist and Auschwitz survivor Kertész was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the first time a Hungarian has ever gained that distinction. Of his eight novels, only three – *Fateless* (1975), *Kaddish for a Child Not Born* (1990) and *Liquidation* (2003) – have been translated into English.

CINEMA

The scarcity of government grants has limited the production of quality Hungarian films to less than 20 in recent years, but a handful of good (and even great) ones still get produced. For classics, look out for anything by the Oscar-winning István Szabó (*Sweet Emma*, *Dear Bóbe*, *The Taste of Sunshine*), Miklós Jancsó (*Outlaws*) and Péter Bacsó (*The Witness*, *Live Show*).

Other favourites are *Simon Mágus*, the surrealistic epic tale of two magicians and a young woman in Paris directed by Ildikó Enyedi, and her more recent *Tender Interface*, which deals with the brain-drain from Hungary after WWII.

TOP FIVE BUDAPEST FILMS

- *Kontroll* (Inspection; Hungary, 2003) Hungarian-American director Nimród Antal's high-speed romantic thriller set almost entirely in the Budapest metro in which assorted outcasts, lovers and dreamers meet and interact.
- *Evita* (USA, 1996) You'd never know it, but that Buenos Aires cathedral in Alan Parker's opus is the Basilica of St Stephen, the grand, tree-lined boulevard is Andrásy út and the swarthy horse guards belong to the Hungarian cavalry.
- *Ein Lied von Liebe und Tod* (Gloomy Sunday; Germany/Hungary, 1999) German director Rolf Schübel's romantic drama set in a Budapest restaurant just before the Nazi invasion and revolving around the famously depressing tune 'Gloomy Sunday' (p11).
- *Amerikai Rapszódia* (American Rhapsody; Hungary, 2001) Film by Éva Gárdos with Nastassja Kinski and a very young Scarlett Johansson, involving a Budapest couple's escape from communist Hungary and their daughter's later search for identity.
- *Napoléon* (France, 2002) Yves Simoneau's epic film about the French emperor's life starring Gérard Dépardieu, Isabella Rossellini and John Malkovich was filmed in Budapest and is the most expensive European production to date.

Péter Timár's *Csinibaba* is a satirical look at life – and film production quality – during the communist regime. *Zimmer Feri*, set on Lake Balaton, pits a young practical joker against a bunch of loud German tourists; the typo in the title is deliberate. Timár's *6:3* takes viewers back to 1953 to that glorious moment when Hungary defeated England in football (p140). Gábor Herendi's *Something America* is the comic tale of a filmmaking team trying to profit from an expatriate Hungarian who pretends to be a rich producer.

If you're looking for something really different, don't miss *Hukkle* by György Pálfi, a curious film in which dialogue has been replaced with a bizarre cacophony of hiccups, belches, buzzing and grunting. Classic, sinister David Lynch-like film or lad's movie? You decide.

Food & Drink

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A lot has been written about Hungarian food. Some of it has been true, an equal amount downright false, including our all-time favourite told to us by, of course, a Hungarian: 'The world has three essential cuisines – Chinese, French and Hungarian'. Even the 'truisms' of Hungarian cuisine beg qualification. It has had many outside influences but has changed relatively little over the centuries compared with many other styles of cooking. And while cooks here make great use of paprika, that spice's hottest variety (called *csipős*) is pretty tame stuff; a taco with salsa or chicken vindaloo from the corner takeaway will taste a lot more 'fiery' to you.

HISTORY

Budapest's reputation as a food capital of the world dates largely from the late 19th century and, bizarrely, to a certain degree from the chilly days of communism. During the heady period following the promulgation of the Dual Monarchy in 1867 and right up until WWII, food became a passion among well-to-do Budapesters, and writers and poets were generous in their praise of it. This was the 'gilded age' of the famous chef Károly Gundel and the confectioner József Dobos, and of Gypsy violinists such as Jancsi Rigo and Gyula Benczi, when nothing was too extravagant. The world took note and Hungarian restaurants sprouted up in cities across the world – including a 'Café Budapest' in Boston, Massachusetts – complete with their imported Gypsy bands and waiters who sounded like Bela Lugosi.

After WWII, Budapest's gastronomic reputation lived on – most notably because everything that was offered in the other capital cities of the region was so bad. Food here was, as one observer noted, 'a bright spot in a culinary black hole'. But most of the best chefs, including Gundel himself, had voted with their feet and left the country in the 1950s, and restaurants were put under state control. The reputation and the reality of food in Budapest had diverged.

CULTURE

Although still relatively inexpensive by European standards and served in huge portions, Hungarian food today remains heavy and, at times, can be unhealthy. Meat, sour cream and fat – usually pork – abound and, except in season, *saláta* (salad) means a plate of pickled vegetables. Things are changing, however, in the Hungarian capital with more vegetarian and international choices available (see p92).

ETIQUETTE

People in Budapest tend to meet their friends and entertain outside of their homes at cafés and restaurants. Drinking is an important part of social life in the capital of a country that has produced wine and fruit brandies for thousands of years. Consumption is high; only the Luxembourgish and Irish drink more alcohol per capita in Europe than the Hungarians. Alcoholism in Hungary is not as visible to the outsider as it is, say, in Poland or Russia, but it's there nonetheless; official figures suggest that as much as 9% of the population are fully fledged alcoholics. There is little pressure for others (particularly women) to drink, however, so if you really don't want that glass of apricot brandy that your host has handed you, refuse politely.

It is said that Hungarians don't clink glasses when drinking beer because that's how the Habsburgs celebrated the defeat of Lajos Kossuth in the 1848–49 War of Independence (p43), but most Magyars say that's codswallop.

HOW BUDAPESTERS EAT

Hungarians are for the most part not big eaters of *reggeli* (breakfast), preferring a cup of tea or coffee with an unadorned bread roll at the kitchen table or on the way to work. As it is a meal at which most Magyars hardly excel, expect the worst of hotel breakfasts – ersatz coffee, weak tea, unsweetened lemon water for 'juice', tiny triangles of processed 'cheese' and stale bread. You may be pleasantly surprised, however.

Ebéd (lunch), eaten at around 1pm, was once the main meal of the day and might still consist of two or even three courses. *Vacsora* (dinner or supper) is less substantial when eaten at home, often just sliced meats, cheese and some pickled vegetables.

It's important to know the different styles of eateries to be found in Budapest. An *étterem* is a restaurant with a wide-ranging menu, sometimes including international dishes. A *vendéglő* or *kisvendéglő* is smaller and is supposed to serve inexpensive regional dishes or 'home cooking'. But the name has become 'cute' enough for a lot of large places to use it indiscriminately. An *étkezde* is something like a *vendéglő* but cheaper, smaller and often has counter seating. The term *csárda* originally signified a country inn with a rustic atmosphere, Gypsy music and hearty local dishes. Now any place that hangs up a couple of painted plates and strings a few strands of dry paprika on the wall is a *csárda*.

A *bisztró* is a much cheaper sit-down place that is often *önkiszolgáló* (self-service). A *büfé* is cheaper still with a very limited menu. Here you eat while standing at counters.

Hentesáru bolt (butcher shops) in Budapest sometimes have a *büfé* selling cooked *kolbász* (sausage), *wirli* (frankfurters), *hurka* (blood sausage or liverwurst), roast chicken, bread and pickled vegetables. Point to what you want; the staff will weigh it all and hand you a slip of paper with the price. You usually pay at the *pénztár* (cashier) and hand the stamped receipt back to the staff for your food. You pay for everything here, including a slice of rye bread and a dollop of mustard for your *kolbász*.

Food stalls, known as a *Laci konyha* (Larry's kitchen) or *pecsenyesütő* (snack ovens) are often near markets or train stations. One of the more popular traditional snacks is *lángos*, deep-fried dough with various toppings (usually cheese and sour cream).

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

BREAD & NOODLES

It is said that people here will 'eat bread with bread' and *kenyér* (leftover bread) has been used to thicken soups and stews since at least the reign of medieval king Matthias – or so contemporary reports would have us believe – and *kifli* (crescent rolls) gained popularity

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during the Turkish occupation. But, frankly, bread available commercially in Budapest is not as memorable as the flour-based *galuska* dumplings and the *tarhonya* (egg barley pasta) served with *pörkölt*, *paprikás* and *tokány* (see below) dishes.

SOUPS

Most Hungarian meals start with *leves* (soup). As a starter this is usually something relatively light like *gombaleves* (mushroom soup) or *húsgombócleves* (meat-filled dumplings in consommé), but more substantial varieties are beef *gulyásleves* (below) and *bableves*, a thick bean soup usually made with meat, which are sometimes eaten as a main course. Another favourite is *halászlé* (fisherman's soup), a rich soup of poached carp, fish stock, tomatoes, green peppers and paprika.

MEAT & FISH

People here eat an astonishing amount of meat, and 'meat-stuffed meat' is a dish commonly found on Budapest's menus. Pork, beef, veal and poultry are the meats most often encountered and they can be breaded and fried, baked, turned into some paprika-flavoured concoction or simmered in *lecsó*, a tasty mix of peppers, tomatoes and onions (and one of the few sauces here that does not include paprika). Goose livers and legs and turkey breasts – though not much else of either bird – make it on to most menus. A typical menu will have up to 10 pork and beef dishes, a couple of fish ones and usually only one poultry dish. Lamb and mutton are rarely eaten here.

Freshwater fish, such as the indigenous *fogas* (great pike-perch) and the smaller *siüllő* from Lake Balaton, and *ponty* (carp) from the nation's rivers and streams, is plentiful but can be expensive in Budapest.

PAPRIKA

Many dishes are seasoned with paprika, a spice as Magyar as St Stephen's right hand (p64); indeed, not only is it used in cooking but it also appears on restaurant tables as a condiment beside the salt and pepper shakers. It's generally quite a mild spice and is used predominantly with sour cream or in *rántás*, a heavy roux of pork lard and flour added to cooked vegetables. *Töltött*, things stuffed with meat and/or rice, such as cabbage or peppers, are cooked in *rántás* as well as in tomato sauce or sour cream.

There are four major types of meat dishes that use paprika. The most famous is *gulyás* (or *gulyásleves*), a thick beef soup cooked with onions, cubed potatoes and paprika and usually eaten as a main course. *Pörkölt*, or 'stew', is closer to what foreigners call 'goulash'; the addition of sour cream, less paprika and white meat such as chicken makes the dish *paprikás*. *Tokány* is similar to *pörkölt* and *paprikás* except that the meat is not cubed but

is cut into strips, black pepper is on equal footing with the paprika, and bacon, sausage or mushroom are added as flavouring agents.

VEGETABLES

A main course served in a restaurant usually comes with some sort of starch and a little garnish. Vegetables and salads must be ordered separately.

Fresh salad as it's usually known around the world is called *vitamin saláta* here and is generally available when lettuces are in season; almost everything else is *savanyúság* (literally 'sourness'), which can be anything from mildly sour-sweet cucumbers, pickled peppers and almost acid-tasting sauerkraut. It may seem an acquired taste, but such things actually go very well with heavy meat dishes.

Zöldség (boiled vegetables), when they are available, are *angolos zöldség* ('English-style'). The traditional way of preparing vegetables – real Hungarian 'comfort food' and enjoying a major comeback at 'retro-style' eateries across the city – is in *főzelék*, in which peas, green beans, lentils or marrow are fried or boiled and then mixed into a roux with milk and topped with a few slices of meat.

DESSERTS

Budapesters love sweets and consume them with gusto – though more intricate pastries such as *Dobos torta*, a layered chocolate and cream cake with a caramelised brown sugar top, and the wonderful *rétes* (strudel) filled with poppy seeds or cherry preserves, are usually consumed midafternoon in one of Budapest's ubiquitous *cukrászdák* (cake shops or pâtisseries). Desserts more commonly found on restaurant menus include *somlói galuska*, sponge cake with chocolate and whipped cream, and *Gundel palacsinta*, flambéed pancake with chocolate and nuts.

DRINKS

A *kávéház* is literally a 'coffee house' – ie a *café* (see boxed text, p126) – and the best place to stop if you just want something hot or soft and cold. An *eszpresszó*, along with being a type of coffee, is essentially a coffee house too, but it usually also sells alcoholic drinks and light snacks. A *cukrászda* serves cakes, pastries and ice cream as well as hot and cold drinks.

To sample some local brew or vintage try visiting the *sörözők*, pubs with *csapolt sör* (draught beer) available on tap; *borozók*, establishments (usually dives) serving wine; and *pincék*, which can be either beer or wine cellars but are usually the latter and also called *bor pincék*.

NONALCOHOLIC DRINKS

Most international soft drink brands are available in Budapest, but *ásvány víz* (mineral water) seems to be the most popular libation for teetotalers in *café*s, pubs and bars. Fruit juice is usually canned or boxed fruit 'drink' with lots of sugar added, though some us are addicted to the cherry variety.

TOP FIVE FOOD & WINE BOOKS

- *The Cuisine of Hungary* (George Lang, 1985) Celebrated restaurateur and *bon vivant* Lang offers a comprehensive history of Magyar cooking and examination of its regional differences. His subsequent autobiography, *Nobody Knows the Truffles I've Seen* (1998), is worth purchasing for the title alone.
- *Culinaria Hungary* (Aniko Gegely et al, 2000) This is a beautifully illustrated 320-page tome on all things involving Hungarian food, from soup to nuts and more, and is as prized for its recipes as the history and traditions it describes.
- *The Hungarian Cookbook* (Susan Derecsky, 1987) If you don't need pictures but you do need simple, easy-to-follow recipes for Hungarian comfort food, this practical book is for you.
- *Terra Benedicta: Tokaj and Beyond* (Gábor Rohály et al, 2004) This attractive tome is both a useful source book and a richly illustrated record of Hungarian wine, with regional, illustrative photographs and lots of detail on wineries.
- *The Wines of Hungary* (Alex Liddell, 2003) For a look not just at the wines themselves but the whole picture, this no-nonsense guide is ideal.

Budapesters drink a tremendous amount of *kávé* (coffee) – as a *feketes* (single black), a *dupla* (double) or *tejes kávé* (with milk). Most cafés now serve some variation of cappuccino. Decaffeinated coffee is *koffeinmentes kávé*.

Black tea (tea; pronounced ‘*tay-ah*’) is not as popular as coffee in Budapest; in fact, it can often be difficult to find ‘English’ tea in small grocery stores, though you’ll always be able to choose from a wide range of herbal teas and fruit tisanes. People here never add milk to tea, preferring lemon, honey or even rum.

ALCOHOLIC DRINKS

Hungarians are big drinkers and enjoy a tippie at the drop of a hat (or a forint or a glass). Beer, especially lager, is extremely popular with the young, older folk drink homemade fruit-flavoured brandies and wine is drunk by everyone.

Beer

Hungary produces a number of its own beers for national distribution, and the most common ones are Dreher, Kőbányai and Arany Ászok, all brewed in or near Budapest. Bottled Austrian, German and Czech beers are readily available. Locally brewed and imported beer here is almost always lager, though occasionally you’ll come across Dreher Barna, a ‘brown’ or stout.

At a pub, beer is served in a *pohár* (0.3L) or a *korsó* (0.4L or 0.5L). In an old-fashioned wine bar, the wine is ladled out by the *deci* (decilitre, 0.1L), but in more modern places it comes by the ill-defined *pohár* (glass).

Brandy & Liqueur

Pálinka is a strong (about 40% alcohol) brandy or *eau de vie* distilled from a variety of fruits but most commonly from apricots or plums. There are many different types and qualities, but among our favourites is *Óbarack*, the double-distilled ‘Old Apricot’, the kind made with *málna* (raspberry) and anything with *kóser* (kosher) on the label.

Hungarian liqueurs are usually unbearably sweet and artificial tasting, though Zwack (p70) is reliable. Zwack also produces Unicum, a bitter aperitif that has been around since 1790. Habsburg emperor Joseph II supposedly named it when he first tasted it, exclaiming ‘Das ist ein Unikum!’ (This is a unique drink!).

Wine

Wine has been produced in Hungary for thousands of years, and it remains very important both economically and socially. You’ll find it available by the glass or bottle everywhere in Budapest – at very basic wine bars, food stalls, restaurants, supermarkets and 24-hour grocery stores – usually at reasonable prices. If you’re seriously into wine, visit the speciality wine shops on both sides of the Danube and reviewed in the Shopping chapter.

Before WWII Hungarian wine was much in demand throughout Europe, but with the advent of socialism and mass production, quality went down the drain. Most of what wasn’t consumed at home went to the Soviet Union where, frankly, they were prepared to drink anything. Political and economic circumstances provided little incentive to upgrade antiquated standards of wine-making. All of that has changed over the past decade and

MENU READER

Restaurant menus are often translated into German and English, with mixed degrees of success. The following is a sample menu as it would appear in many restaurants in Budapest. It’s far from complete, but it gives a good idea of what to expect. The main categories on a menu include those below; *készételek* are ready-made dishes that are just heated up while *frissensültek* are made to order. Other words you might encounter are *halételek* or *halak* (fish dishes), *szárnyasok* (poultry dishes), *édességek* (another word for ‘dessert’) and *sajtok* (cheeses).

Élőételek (Starters)

hortobágyi palacsinta – meat-filled pancakes with paprika sauce
libamájpástétom – goose-liver pâté
rántott gombafejek – breaded, fried mushrooms

Levesek (Soups)

bableves – bean soup
csontleves – consommé
gombaleves – mushroom soup
húsgombócleves – meat-filled dumplings in consommé
jókai bableves – bean soup with meat
meggyleves – cold sour-cherry soup (in summer)
újházi tyúkhúsleves – chicken broth with noodles

Saláták (Salads)

cékla saláta – pickled beetroot salad
ecetes almapaprika – pickled peppers
paradicsom saláta – tomato salad
uborka saláta – sliced pickled-cucumber salad
vegyes saláta – mixed salad of pickles
vitamin saláta – seasonal mixed salad

Zöldség (Vegetables)

gomba – mushroom
káposzta – cabbage
karfiol – cauliflower
sárgarépa – carrot
spárga – asparagus
spenót – spinach
zöldbab – string (green) bean
zöldborsó – pea

Köreték (Side Dishes)

főzelék – Hungarian-style vegetables
galuska – dumplings
rizi-bizi – rice with peas
sült hasábburgonya – chips (French fries)

Készételek (Ready-Made Dishes)

csirke paprikás – paprika chicken
gulyás – beef goulash soup
halászlé – spicy fish soup
pörkölt – stew (many types)
töltött paprika/káposzta – stuffed peppers/cabbage

Frissensültek (Dishes Made to Order)

bécsiszelet – Wiener schnitzel
brassói aprópecsenye – braised pork Braşov-style
cigánypescenye – roast pork Gypsy-style
csülök – smoked pork knuckle
fogas – Balaton pike-perch
rántott hátszínselet – breaded, fried rump steak
rántott ponty – breaded, fried carp
rántott pulykamell – breaded, fried turkey breast
sertésborda – pork chop
sült csirkecomb – roast chicken thigh
sült libamáj – fried goose liver

Édességek (Desserts)

Dobos torta – multilayered ‘Dobos’ chocolate and cream cake with caramelised brown sugar top
Gundel palacsinta – ‘Gundel’ flambéed pancake with chocolate and nuts
rétes – strudel
somlói galuska – Somló-style sponge cake with chocolate and whipped cream

Gyümölcs (Fruit)

alma – apple
cseresznye – sweet cherry
(földi)eper – strawberry
körte – pear
málna – raspberry
meggy – sour (Morello) cherry
narancs – orange
őszibarack – peach
sárgabarack – apricot
szilva – plum
szőlő – grape

Cooking Methods

főtt or *főve* – boiled
főzelék – frying or boiling vegetables, then mixing into a roux with cream
füstölt – smoked
pirított – braised
rántva or *rántott* – breaded and fried
roston – grilled
sült or *sütve* – fried or roasted

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a half. Small- to medium-sized family-owned wineries such as Tiffán, Bock, Szeremley, Thummerer and Szepsy are now producing very fine wines indeed.

When choosing a Hungarian wine, look for the words *minőségi bor* (quality wine) or *különleges minőségű bor* (premium quality wine), Hungary's version of the French quality regulation *appellation contrôlée*. Generally speaking, *évjárat* (vintage) has become important only recently so should not be much of a concern just yet.

The first word of the name on the label of a wine bottle indicates where the wine comes from while the second word is the grape variety (eg Villányi Kékfrankos) or the type or brand of wine (eg Tokaji Aszú, Szekszárdi Bikavér). Other important words that you'll see include: *édes* (sweet), *fehér* (white), *félédes* (semisweet), *félszáraz* (semidry or medium), *pezsgő* (sparkling), *száraz* (dry) and *vörös* (red).

Hungary now counts 22 distinct wine-growing areas in Transdanubia, the Balaton region, the Northern Uplands and on the Great Plain. They range in size from tiny Somló (essentially just one hill) in Western Transdanubia, to the vast vineyards of the Kunság on the Southern Plain, with its sandy soil nurturing more than a third of all the grapevines growing in the country.

Of course it's all a matter of taste, but the most distinctive red wines come from Villány and Szekszárd in Southern Transdanubia and the best whites are produced around Lake Balaton and in Somló. The reds from Eger and sweet whites from Tokaj are much better known abroad, however, and these two regions are the most dynamic when it comes to wine production.

CELEBRATING WITH FOOD

Traditional culture, particularly where it involves food, is not exactly thriving in Hungary, though a popular event for Budapesters with tenuous ties to the countryside is the *disznótor*, the slaughtering of a pig followed by an orgy of feasting and drinking. (The butchering, gratefully, is done somewhere out the back by an able-bodied peasant.) The celebration can even boast its own dish: *disznótoros káposzta*, which is stuffed cabbage served with freshly made sausages. Wine festivals, now mostly commercial events with rock bands and the like, occur during the harvest in September and October and are always a good excuse for getting sloshed (see p10).

It's traditional to eat *csirke paprikás* (paprika chicken) and *sajtos rétes* (strudel) at name-day feasts (see p12).

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THE RECENT PAST

THE REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY REBORN

It may come as a surprise to some, but Budapest has only been the capital of the Republic of Hungary for just over a decade and a half – since 23 October 1989, the 33rd anniversary of the 1956 Uprising. For some four decades before this, it had been the chief city of the socialist People’s Republic of Hungary.

At its party congress in February 1989, the ruling Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party – having seen the handwriting on the wall – changed its name to the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and later in the year ‘generously’ agreed to surrender its monopoly on power and to hold elections. Its new programme advocated not jailing dissidents or shooting people who attempted to flee across the border but social democracy and a free-market economy. Most voters saw them as evil, two-faced despots who had just changed their outfit; hollow promises were not enough to shake off the stigma of four decades of autocratic rule.

The 1990 election was instead won by the centrist Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), which advocated a gradual transition to capitalism and was led by a softly spoken former museum curator, Jozsef Antall. The social-democratic Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), which had called for much faster change, came in a distant second with 18% of the vote. As Gorbachev looked on, Hungary changed political systems as if it were clothing and the last Soviet troops left Hungarian soil in June 1991. Street names in Budapest such as Lenin körút and Marx tér ended up on the rubbish tip of history and monuments to ‘glorious workers’ and ‘esteemed leaders’ were packed off to a socialist-realist zoo called Statue Park (p62).

In coalition with two smaller parties – the Independent Smallholders (FKgP) and the Christian Democrats (KDNP) – the MDF provided Hungary with sound government during its painful transition to a full market economy. Those years saw Hungary’s northern (Czechoslovakia) and southern (Yugoslavia) neighbours split along ethnic lines; Prime Minister Antall did little to improve Hungary’s relations with Slovakia, Romania or Yugoslavia by claiming to be the ‘emotional and spiritual’ prime minister of the large Magyar minorities in those countries. It was also a relatively lawless period so fittingly described in Julian Rubenstein’s *Ballad of the Whiskey Robber* (see p41).

Despite initial successes in curbing inflation and lowering interest rates, a host of economic problems slowed the pace of development, and the government’s laissez-faire policies did not help. Like most people in the region, Hungarians had unrealistically expected a much faster improvement in their living standards.

In the May 1994 elections the MSZP, led by Gyula Horn, won an absolute majority in parliament. This in no way implied a return to the past, and Horn was quick to point out that it was in fact his party that had initiated the whole reform process in the first place. (As foreign minister in 1989, Horn had played a key role in opening the border with Austria; see p48) The following year, Árpád Göncz of the SZDSZ was elected for a second five-year term as president of the republic.

THE ROAD TO EUROPE

After its dire results in the 1994 elections, the Federation of Young Democrats (Fidesz) – which until 1993 limited membership to those aged under 35 in order to emphasise a past untainted by communism, privilege and corruption – moved to the right and added ‘MPP’

(Hungarian Civic Party) to its name to attract the support of the burgeoning middle class. In the elections of 1998, during which it campaigned for closer integration with Europe, Fidesz-MPP won government by forming a coalition with the MDF and the agrarian and conservative FKgP. The party’s youthful leader, Viktor Orbán, was named prime minister.

Despite the astonishing economic growth and other gains made by the coalition government, the electorate grew hostile to Fidesz-MPP’s – and Orbán’s – strongly nationalistic rhetoric and perceived arrogance. In April 2002 the largest turnout of voters in Hungarian history unseated the government in the country’s most closely fought election ever and returned the MSZP, now allied with the SZDSZ, to power under Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy, a free-market advocate who had served as finance minister in the early Horn government. In August 2004, amid revelations that he had served as a counterintelligence officer in the late 1970s and early 1980s while working in the finance ministry, Medgyessy resigned, the first collapse of a government in Hungary’s postcommunist history. Sports Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány of the MSZP was named in his place. In April 2006 the MSZP-SZDSZ coalition became the first government to win consecutive general elections since 1989.

Hungary joined NATO in 1999 and, with nine other ‘accession’ countries, was admitted into the EU in May 2004. In June 2005 parliament elected László Sólyom, a law professor and founding member of the MDF, as the third president of the republic to succeed Ferenc Mádli.

FROM THE BEGINNING

Budapest has been called ‘the Janus-faced city’ because it looks in opposing directions. It is at the same time one of the oldest and one of the youngest cities in Europe. The Romans settled here early in the 1st century AD and built what would eventually become one of their most thriving metropolises. At the other end of the spectrum, the story of modern Budapest only begins in 1873 when hilly, residential Buda and historic Óbuda on the western bank of the Danube (Duna) River merged with flat, industrial Pest on the eastern side to form what was at first called Pest-Buda. But, of course, a whole lot more happened here before then.

EARLY INHABITANTS

The Carpathian Basin, in which Hungary lies, has been populated for hundreds of thousands of years. Bone fragments found and exhibited at Vértesszőlös near Tata, some 70km northwest of Budapest, in the 1960s, and believed to be half a million years old, suggest that Palaeolithic humans were attracted to the area by its thermal springs and the abundance of mammoth, buffalo and reindeer. The capital may have been something of a slow starter, however; the earliest evidence of human settlement in the greater Budapest area is the remains of a Neanderthal hunting camp in the Érd Valley to the southwest. Complete with tools, cutters and scrapers, the camp is thought to date back 50,000 years.

During the Ice Age, temperatures in the area rarely exceeded 15°C even in the height of summer. During the Neolithic period (around 5000 BC), a warming of the climate forced much of the indigenous wildlife to migrate north. The domestication of animals and the first forms of agriculture appeared, as they did in much of Central Europe. The first permanent settlement in this area – on the Buda side near the Danube – dates from between 4600 and 3900 BC. Remains from this culture, including bone utensils, fishing nets and even a primitive loom, have been unearthed as far north as Békásmegyér and as far south as Nagytétény.

Indo-European tribes from the Balkans stormed the Carpathian Basin from the south in horse-drawn wheeled carts in about 2000 BC, bringing with them copper tools and weapons. After the introduction of more durable bronze, forts were built and a military elite

TIMELINE AD 895–96

Nomadic Magyar tribes enter and settle in the Carpathian Basin

1000

Stephen (István) is crowned ‘Christian King’ of Hungary on Christmas Day

1222

King Andrew II signs the Golden Bull, according the nobility more rights and powers

1241–42

Mongols sweep across the country, killing some 100,000 people in Pest and Óbuda alone

By about 2000 BC, population growth had forced the Finnish-Estonian branch to move west, ultimately reaching the Baltic Sea. The Ugrians moved from the southeastern slopes of the Urals into the valleys of the region, and switched from hunting and fishing to farming and raising livestock, especially horses. Their equestrian skills proved useful half a millennium later when more climatic changes brought drought, forcing them to move north onto the steppes.

On the grasslands, the Ugrians turned to nomadic herding. After 500 BC, by which time the use of iron had become commonplace among the tribes, a group moved west to the area of Bashkiria in Central Asia. Here they lived among Persians and Bulgars and began referring to themselves as Magyars (from the Finno-Ugric words *mon* – to speak – and *er* – man).

After several centuries, another group split away and moved south to the Don River under the control of the Turkic Khazars. Here they lived among different groups under a tribal alliance called *onogur*, or ‘10 peoples’. This is thought to be the origin of the word ‘Hungary’ in English and (more obviously) ‘Ungarn’ in German. The Magyars’ last migration before the so-called *honfoglalás* (conquest) of the Carpathian Basin brought them to what modern Hungarians call the *Etelköz*, the region between the Dnieper and lower Danube Rivers north of the Black Sea.

Nomadic groups of Magyars probably reached the Carpathian Basin as early as the mid-9th century AD, acting as mercenaries for various armies. It is believed that while the men were away during one such campaign in about 889, a fierce people from the Asiatic steppe called the Pechenegs allied themselves with the Bulgars and attacked the *Etelköz* settlements. When they were attacked again in about 895, seven tribes under the leadership of Árpád – the *gyula* or chief military commander – struck out for the Carpathian Basin. They crossed the Verecke Pass in today’s Ukraine sometime between 896 and 898.

Five of the seven tribes settled in the area that is now Budapest and the two principal leaders of the tribes made their bases here. Árpád established his seat on Csepel; according to the chronicler Anonymus, it was Árpád’s overseer, a Turkic Cuman called Csepel, who gave his name to the island. Árpád’s brother, *Kurszán*, the chief *táltos* (shaman), based himself in Óbuda. On *Kurszán*’s death, Árpád took all power for himself and moved his seat to Óbuda; Buda and Pest were no more than small villages.

The Magyars had met almost no resistance in the Carpathian Basin. Being highly skilled at riding and shooting (a common Christian prayer during the Dark Ages was ‘Save us, O Lord, from the arrows of the Hungarians’), they began plundering and pillaging in all directions, taking slaves and amassing booty. Their raids took them as far as Spain, northern Germany and southern Italy, but they were stopped at the Battle of Augsburg by the German king Otto I in 955.

BLAME IT ON THE BIRD

The ancient Magyars were strong believers in magic and celestial intervention, and the *táltos* (shaman) enjoyed an elevated position in their society. Certain animals – for example bears, stags and wolves – were totemic, and it was taboo to mention them directly by name. Thus the wolf was ‘the long-tailed one’ and the stag the ‘large-antlered one’. In other cases the original Magyar for an animal deemed sacred was replaced with a foreign loan word: *medve* for ‘bear’ comes from the Slavic *medved*.

No other ancient totemic animal was more scared than the *turul*, a hawklike bird that supposedly impregnated Emese, the grandmother of Árpád. That legend can be viewed in many ways: as an attempt to foster a sense of common origin and group identity in the ethnically heterogeneous population of the time; as an effort to bestow a sacred origin on the House of Árpád and its rule; or just as a good story – not dissimilar from the one about the Virgin Mary begotten with child by the Holy Spirit anthropomorphised as a dove.

In the recent past, the fearsome-looking *turul* has been used as a symbol by the far right – much to the distress of average Hungarians, who simply look upon it as their heraldic ‘eagle’ or ‘lion’.

developed. The remains of several settlements dating from this time have been uncovered on Csepel Island in the Danube.

Over the next millennium, invaders from the west (Illyrians and Thracians) and the east (Scythians) brought iron, but the metal was not in common use until the Celts arrived in the area in about the 3rd century BC, settling at Békásmegyér and Óbuda, which they called Ak Ink (Ample Water), and erecting one of their signature *oppida* (palisaded settlements) on Gellért Hill. The Celts introduced glass and crafted some of the fine gold jewellery that can still be seen in the Hungarian National Museum (p69).

Around the beginning of the Christian era, the Romans conquered the area west

of the Danube and established the province of Pannonia. Subsequent victories over the Celts extended their domination, and the province was divided into Pannonia Superior and Pannonia Inferior. The Romans brought writing, viticulture and stone architecture to the area, and at the end of the 1st century AD established Aquincum, a key military garrison and trading settlement along the Danube in today’s Óbuda.

Aquincum (p59) became the administrative seat of Pannonia Inferior in AD 106 and a fully fledged colony in 194. A fortress was built at Contra Aquincum in what is now V Március 15 tér (Map p224) in Pest and the proconsul’s palace on a secure island in the Danube (now Óbuda Island; Map pp226–7). Villages nearby, such as Vindonianus (Békásmegyér) and Vicus Basoretensis (Kiscell), were populated by Celts, who were not granted Roman citizenship.

THE GREAT MIGRATIONS

The first of the so-called Great Migrations of nomadic peoples from Asia reached the eastern outposts of the Roman Empire in Dacia (now Romania) late in the 2nd century AD. Within two centuries, the Romans were forced by the Huns, whose short-lived empire was established by Attila, to flee Aquincum and abandon the rest of Pannonia. Aquincum offered little protection to the civilian population; in the late 430s, the Huns razed it.

After the death of Attila in 453, Germanic tribes such as the Ostrogoths, Gepids and Lombards (or Lombards) occupied the region for the next century and a half until the Avars, a powerful Turkic people, gained control of the Carpathian Basin in the late 6th century. At first they settled on the Pest plains, but their chieftains soon established their main base at the northern end of Csepel Island.

The Avars were overcome by Charlemagne in 796 and the area around Budapest and the Danube Bend was incorporated into the Frankish empire. By that time, the Carpathian Basin was virtually unpopulated except for scattered groups of Turkic and Germanic tribes on the plains and Slavs in the northern hills.

THE MAGYARS & THE CONQUEST OF THE CARPATHIAN BASIN

The origin of the Magyars, as the Hungarians call themselves, is a complicated issue, not helped by the similarity (in English, at least) of the words ‘Hun’ and ‘Hungary’, which are *not* related. One thing is certain: Magyars belong to the Finno-Ugric group of peoples, who inhabited the forests somewhere between the middle Volga River and the Ural Mountains in western Siberia as early as 4000 BC.

1458–90

Medieval Hungary enjoys a golden age under the enlightened reign of King Matthias Corvinus

1514

Peasant uprising is crushed, with 70,00 people – including leader György Dózsa – killed

1526

Hungary is defeated at the Battle of Mohács; the Turkish occupation lasting more than a century and a half begins

1541

Buda falls to the Ottomans; Hungary is partitioned and shared by the Turks, the Habsburgs and the Transylvanian princes

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IN PICK & MIX

This and subsequent defeats – raids on Byzantium were ended in 970 – left the Magyar tribes in disarray, and they had to choose between their more powerful neighbours to form an alliance: Byzantium to the south and east or the Holy Roman Empire to the west. Individual Magyar chieftains began acting independently, but in 973 Prince Géza, Árpád's great-grandson, asked the Holy Roman emperor Otto II to send Catholic missionaries to Hungary. Géza was baptised in his capital city, Esztergom, 46km upriver from Budapest, as was his son Vajk, who took the Christian name Stephen (István). When Géza died, Stephen ruled as prince, but three years later was crowned 'Christian King' Stephen I, on Christmas Day in 1000, with a crown sent from Rome by Otto's erstwhile tutor, Pope Sylvester II. Hungary the kingdom and Hungary the nation had been born.

KING STEPHEN I & THE ÁRPÁD DYNASTY

Stephen ruthlessly set about consolidating royal authority by expropriating the land of the clan chieftains and establishing a system of *megyek* (counties) protected by *várok* (fortified castles). Much land was transferred to loyal (mostly Germanic) knights, and the crown began minting coins. Stephen did not find the area of Budapest suitable as a base; he made his seat at Székesfehérvár, 66km to the southwest. Esztergom remained the religious centre.

Shrewdly, Stephen sought the support of the Church and, to hasten the conversion of the populace, he ordered one in every 10 villages to build a church. He also established 10 bishoprics throughout the land. Monasteries staffed by foreign scholars were set up around the country; in Óbuda it was the religious Chapter of Saint Peter. By the time of Stephen's death in 1038 (he was canonised less than 50 years later), Hungary was a nascent Christian nation. But pockets of rebellion remained; in 1046 a Venetian-born bishop named Gerard (Gellért in Hungarian), who had been brought to Hungary by Stephen himself, was hurled to his death from a Buda hilltop in a spiked barrel by pagan Magyars resisting conversion. Gellért Hill (Map p220) now bears the bishop's name.

The next two and a half centuries – the reign of the House of Árpád – would further test the new kingdom. The period was one of relentless struggles between rival pretenders to the throne, which weakened the young nation's defences against its more powerful neighbours. There was a brief hiatus under King Ladislas I (László; r 1077–95), who fended off attacks from Byzantium, and under his successor Koloman the Bookish (Könyves Kálmán), who encouraged literature, art and the writing of chronicles until his death in 1116.

Tension flared again when the Byzantine emperor made a grab for Hungary's provinces in Dalmatia and Croatia, which it had acquired by the early 12th century. He was stopped by Béla III (r 1172–96), who had a permanent residence built at Esztergom (by then an alternative royal seat to Székesfehérvár), but was headquartered at Óbuda. Béla's son Andrew II (András; r 1205–35), however, weakened the crown when he gave in to local barons' demands for more land in order to fund his crusades. This led to the Golden Bull, a kind of Magna Carta signed at Székesfehérvár in 1222, which limited some of the king's powers in favour of the nobility, recognised the 'Hungarian nation' and allowed for a diet, or assembly, of nobles to meet regularly in a meadow in Pest. It was during Andrew's reign that Óbuda grew from just a centrally located town to a royal and military seat.

When Béla IV (r 1235–70) tried to regain the estates that Andrew had forfeited, the barons were able to oppose him on equal terms. Fearing Mongol expansion and realising he could not count on local help, Béla looked to the west and brought in German and Slovak settlers. In March 1241 Béla amassed his troops at Óbuda and crossed over into Pest. But his efforts were in vain. The Mongols, who had raced through the country as easily as the Magyars had conquered the Carpathian Basin some 2½ centuries before, attacked from every direction. By the end of the final attack in January 1242, Pest and Óbuda had been burned to the ground and some 100,000 people killed.

To rebuild the nascent royal capital as quickly as possible after the Mongol retreat, Béla, known as the 'second founding father', again encouraged Germans and Saxons to settle

here. He also ordered those still living in Pest and Óbuda to relocate to Castle Hill and build a fortified town there. Béla proclaimed Buda a municipality by royal charter in 1244 and bestowed civic rights on the citizens of Pest in 1255; another century would go by before Óbuda's citizens won the same rights. By the start of the 14th century, all three had begun to develop into major towns.

But Béla did not always play his cards right. In a bid to appease the lesser nobility, he handed over large tracts of land to the barons. This enhanced their position and bids for more independence even further. At the time of Béla's death in 1270, anarchy ruled. The Árpád line died out with the death of the heirless Andrew III in 1301.

MEDIEVAL BUDAPEST

The struggle for the Hungarian throne after the death of Andrew III involved several European dynasties, but it was Charles Robert (Károly Róbert) of the French House of Anjou who finally won out (with the pope's blessing) in 1307 and was crowned in Buda a year later. He didn't stay there long though; until his death in 1342, Charles Robert ruled from a palace he had built on the Danube at Visegrád, 42km to the northwest. Buda would not play a leading role in Hungarian history for another five decades, but after that it would never look back. In the meantime, Pest had started to develop as a town of wealthy and independent burghers; by 1406 it had its own royal charter and full independence from Buda.

Under Charles Robert's son and successor, Louis the Great (Nagy Lajos; r 1342–82), the kingdom returned to a policy of conquest. A brilliant military strategist, Louis acquired territory in the Balkans as far as Dalmatia and Romania and, through an alliance, as far north as Poland. But his successes were short-lived and the menace of the Ottoman Turks increased.

As Louis had no sons, one of his daughters, Mary (Mária), succeeded him. This was deemed to be unacceptable by the barons, who rose up against the 'petticoat throne'. Within a short time, Mary's husband, Sigismund (Zsigmond; r 1387–1437) of Luxembourg, was crowned king. Sigismund's long reign brought peace at home, and there was a great flowering of Gothic art and architecture. Sigismund enlarged the Royal Palace on Castle Hill, founded a university at Óbuda (1389), oversaw the construction of the first pontoon bridge over the Danube (until then the only way to cross the river was by ferry) and set national standards of measurement, including the 'Buda pound' (490g) for weight and the 'Buda *icce*'

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1686

Austrian and Hungarian forces liberate Buda from the Turks with the help of the Polish army

1699

Last Turks are driven from Hungarian soil by Eugene of Savoy

1703–11

Ferenc Rákóczi II fights and loses a war of independence against the Habsburgs

1848–49

War of Independence: Lajos Batthyány and 13 of his generals are executed for their role

(about 0.85L) for liquids. But despite these advances and his enthronement as Holy Roman emperor in 1433, he was unable to stop the march of the Turks up through the Balkans.

A Transylvanian general born of a Wallachian (Romanian) soldier, János Hunyadi began his career at the court of Sigismund. When Vladislav I (Úlászló) of the Polish Jagiellon dynasty was killed fighting the Turks at Varna (now Bulgaria), Hunyadi was declared regent. His victory over the Turks at Belgrade (Hungarian: Nándorfehérvár) in 1456 checked the Ottoman advance into Hungary for 70 years and assured the coronation of his son Matthias (Mátyás), the greatest ruler of medieval Hungary.

Matthias, nicknamed 'the Raven' (Corvinus) from his coat of arms, ruled from 1458 to 1490. Wisely, he maintained a mercenary force of up to 10,000 soldiers through taxation of the nobility, and this 'Black Army' (one of the first standing armies in Europe) conquered Moravia, Bohemia and even parts of Austria. Not only did Matthias Corvinus make Hungary one of Central Europe's leading powers, but under his rule Buda enjoyed something of a golden age and for the first time became the true focus of the nation. His second wife, Beatrice, the daughter of the king of Naples, brought artisans from Italy who completely rebuilt, extended and fortified the Royal Palace; the beauty and sheer size of the residence astonished visitors, and its royal library of more than 2000 codices and incunabula became a major cultural and artistic centre of Renaissance Europe.

But while Matthias busied himself with centralising power for the crown in the capital, he ignored the growing Turkish threat. His successor Vladislav II (Úlászló; r 1490–1516) was unable to maintain even royal authority as the members of the diet, which met to approve royal decrees, squandered royal funds, sold off the royal library and expropriated land. In May 1514, what had begun as a crusade organised by the power-hungry archbishop of Esztergom, Tamás Bakócz, turned into an uprising against the landlords by peasants who rallied near Pest under their leader, György Dózsa.

The revolt was brutally repressed, some 70,000 peasants were tortured and executed, and Dózsa himself was fried alive on a red-hot iron throne. The retrograde Tripartitum Law that followed in 1522 codified the rights and privileges of the barons and nobles, reduced the peasants to perpetual serfdom and banned them from bearing arms. By the time Louis II (Lajos) took the throne in 1516 at the tender age of nine, he couldn't rely on either side.

THE BATTLE OF MOHÁCS & TURKISH OCCUPATION

The defeat of Louis' ragtag army by the Ottoman Turks at Mohács in 1526 is a watershed in Hungarian history. On the battlefield near this small town in Southern Transdanubia, some 195km south of Budapest, a relatively prosperous and independent Hungary died, sending the nation into a tailspin of partition, foreign domination and despair that in some respects can still be felt today.

It would be unfair to put all the blame on the weak and indecisive boy-king Louis or on his commander-in-chief Pál Tomori, the archbishop of Kalocsa. Bickering among the nobility and the brutal crackdown of the Dózsa uprising a dozen years earlier had severely weakened Hungary's military power, and there was virtually nothing left in the royal coffers. By 1526, Ottoman sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (r 1520–66) had taken much of the Balkans, including Belgrade, and was poised to march on Buda with a force of some 80,000 men.

Unable – or unwilling – to wait for reinforcements from Transylvania under the command of his rival John Szapolyai (Zápolyai János), Louis rushed from Buda with a motley army of 26,000 men of mixed nationalities to battle the Turks and was soundly thrashed in less than two hours. Along with bishops, nobles and an estimated 20,000 soldiers, the king himself was killed – crushed by his horse while trying to retreat across a stream.

The Turks then turned north, sacking and burning Buda before retreating. John Szapolyai, who had sat out the battle in the castle at Tokaj, was crowned king three months later but, despite grovelling before the Turks, he was never able to exploit the power he

TOP FIVE HISTORY BOOKS

- *An Illustrated History of Budapest* (Géza Buzinkay, 1998) This large, illustrated and somewhat lightweight tome is an easy entry to the complicated history of the Hungarian capital.
- *Budapest 1900: A Historical Portrait of a City and Its Culture* (John Lukacs, 1990) This classic is an illustrated social history of the capital at the height of its *fin-de-siècle* glory.
- *The Siege of Budapest: 100 Days in WWII* (Krisztián Ungváry, 2005) Ungváry examines the battle to capture a major European capital often overlooked in favour of Warsaw or Berlin.
- *In the Name of the Working Class: The Inside Story of the Hungarian Revolution* (Sándor Kopácsi, 1987) Though hard to find, this is a very readable account of the events leading to the 1956 Uprising revolution by Budapest's then chief of police, Sándor Kopácsi, who was imprisoned, given amnesty in 1963 and emigrated to Canada in 1975.
- *Ballad of the Whiskey Robber* (Julian Rubinstein, 2005) A rollicking rollercoaster ride of a read, telling the almost unbelievable story of one Attila Ambrus, who takes up bank robbing when not playing professional ice hockey. It's a true-to-life portrait of what was (and we experienced) the 'Wild East' of Budapest in the early 1990s.

had so desperately sought. As would be the case as late as the mid-20th century, greed, self-interest and over-ambition had led Hungary to defeat itself.

After the Turks returned and occupied Buda in 1541, Hungary was divided into three parts. The central section, with Buda – Budun to the Turks – as the provincial seat, went to the Ottomans while parts of Transdanubia and what is now Slovakia were governed by the Austrian House of Habsburg and assisted by the Hungarian nobility based at Bratislava (Hungarian: Pozsony). The principality of Transylvania east of the Tisza River prospered as a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire. This division of the country would remain in place for almost a century and a half.

The Turkish occupation was marked by constant fighting among the three divisions: Catholic 'Royal Hungary' was pitted not only against the Muslim Turks but the Protestant Transylvanian princes as well. Although Habsburg Hungary enjoyed something of a cultural renaissance during this period, the Turkish-occupied part and Buda itself suffered greatly, with many people fleeing the town to Pest, where some churches remained. The Turks did little building in Buda apart from a few bathhouses, dervish monasteries and tombs and city walls; for the most part, they used existing civic buildings for administration and converted churches into mosques. Matthias Church (p55) on Castle Hill, for example, was hastily converted into the Büyük Cami, or 'Great Mosque', and the heart of the Royal Palace became a gunpowder store and magazine. In 1578 lightning struck and much of the Danube wing was reduced to rubble.

Turkish power began to wane in the 17th century, and with the help of the Polish army, some 45,000 Austrian and Hungarian forces advanced down both banks of the Danube from Štúrovo (Hungarian: Párkány), now in Slovakia, to liberate Buda in 1686. An imperial army under Eugene of Savoy wiped out the last Turkish army in Hungary at the Battle of Zenta (now Senta in Serbia) 11 years later. Peace was signed with the Turks at Karlowitz (Serbia) in 1699.

HABSBURG RULE

The expulsion of the Turks did not result in a free and independent Hungary. Buda and the rest of the country were under military occupation and governed from Bratislava, and the policies of the Catholic Habsburgs' Counter-Reformation and heavy taxation further alienated the nobility. In 1703 – the very year in which both Buda and Pest regained their privileges as royal free towns – the Transylvanian prince Ferenc Rákóczi II raised an army of *kuruc* (Hungarian mercenaries) against the Habsburgs. The war dragged on for eight years, during which time the rebels 'deposed' the Austrians as rulers of Hungary. But superior imperial forces and lack of funds forced the *kuruc* forces to negotiate a separate peace with

1867

Act of Compromise creates Dual Monarchy of Austria (the empire), based in Vienna, and Hungary (the kingdom), seat in Budapest

1896

Millennium of the Magyar conquest of the Carpathian Basin is marked by a six-month exhibition in City Park

1918

Austria-Hungary loses WWI in November and the political system collapses; Hungary declares itself a republic

1920

Treaty of Trianon carves up much of central Europe, reducing historical Hungary by almost two-thirds

COUNT OF ALL KNOWLEDGE

The contributions that Count István Széchenyi made to Hungary were enormous and extremely varied. In his seminal 1830 work *Hitel* (meaning 'credit' and based on *hit*, or 'trust'), he advocated sweeping economic reforms and the abolition of serfdom (he himself had distributed the bulk of his property to landless peasants two years earlier). The Chain Bridge, the design of which Széchenyi helped push through parliament, was the first permanent link between Buda and Pest and for the first time everyone – nobles included – had to pay a toll.

Széchenyi was instrumental in straightening the serpentine Tisza River, which rescued half of Hungary's arable land from flooding and erosion, and his work made the Danube navigable as far as the Iron Gates in Romania. He arranged the financing for Hungary's first train lines from Budapest north and east to Vác and Szolnok and west to Bécsu (now Wiener Neustadt in Austria) and launched the first steam transport on the Danube and Lake Balaton. A lover of all things English, Széchenyi got the upper classes interested in horse racing with the express purpose of improving breeding stock for farming. A large financial contribution made by Széchenyi led to the establishment of the nation's prestigious Academy of Science.

Széchenyi joined the revolutionary government in 1848, but political squabbling and open conflict with Vienna caused him to lose control and he suffered a nervous breakdown. Despite a decade of convalescence in an asylum, Széchenyi never fully recovered and tragically he took his own life in 1860.

For all his accomplishments, Széchenyi's contemporary and fellow reformer, Lajos Kossuth, called him 'the greatest Hungarian'. This dynamic but troubled visionary retains that accolade to this day.

Vienna behind Rákóczi's back. The 1703–11 War of Independence had failed, but Rákóczi was the first leader to unite Hungarians against the Habsburgs.

Though the compromise had brought the fighting to an end, Hungary was now a mere province of the Habsburg empire. Its main cities – Buda, Pest and Óbuda – counted a total of just over 12,000 people. With the ascension of Maria Theresa to the throne in 1740, the Hungarian nobility pledged their 'lives and blood' to her at the diet in Bratislava in exchange for concessions. Thus began the period of enlightened absolutism that would continue under her son, the 'hatted king' (so-called as he was never crowned in Hungary) Joseph II, who ruled for a decade from 1780. By then the population of Buda and Pest had risen to almost 35,000 – a significant number, even in the sprawling Habsburg empire.

Under the reigns of Maria Theresa and Joseph, Hungary took great steps forward economically and culturally, though the first real moves towards integration with Austria had also begun. Buda effectively became the German-speaking town of Ofen and the city's first newspaper – in German, of course – was established in 1730. Funded by the grain and livestock trades, Pest began to develop outside the city walls. In 1749 the foundations for a new palace were laid in Buda, the university was moved from Nagyszombat (now Trnava in Slovakia) to Buda in 1777 and seven years later Joseph ordered the government to move from Bratislava to Buda, the nation's new administrative centre.

Joseph's attempts to modernise society by dissolving the all-powerful (and corrupt) monastic orders, abolishing serfdom and replacing 'neutral' Latin with German as the official language of state administration (1781–85) were opposed by the Hungarian nobility, and the king rescinded some of these reforms on his deathbed, but not the ones pertaining to freedom of religion and the serfs.

Dissenting voices could still be heard, and the ideals of the French Revolution of 1789 began to take root in certain intellectual circles in Budapest. In 1795 Ignác Martonovics, a former Franciscan priest, and six other prorerpublican Jacobins were beheaded at Vérmező (Blood Meadow; Map p220) in Buda for plotting against the crown.

By 1800 Pest, with a population of about 30,000, was the nation's most important commercial centre while Buda, with 24,000 people, remained a royal garrison town and developed under the eye of the monarch. But 90% of the national population worked the land, and it was primarily through agriculture that modernisation would come to Hungary.

Liberalism and social reform found their greatest supporters among certain members of the aristocracy in Pest. A prime example was Count István Széchenyi (1791–1860), a true Renaissance man (see boxed text, opposite) who advocated the abolition of serfdom and returned much of his own land to the peasantry, proposed the first permanent link between Buda and Pest (Chain Bridge) and oversaw the regulation of the Danube as much for commerce and irrigation as for safety; the devastating Danube flood of 1838 had taken a heavy toll, with three-quarters of the homes in Pest washed away and some 150 people drowned.

The proponents of gradual reform were quickly superseded, however, by a more radical faction demanding more immediate action. The group included such men as Miklós Wesselényi, Ferenc Deák and the poet Ferenc Kölcsey, but the predominant figure was Lajos Kossuth (1802–94). It was this dynamic lawyer and journalist who would lead Hungary to its greatest ever confrontation with the Habsburgs.

THE 1848–49 WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

The Habsburg empire began to weaken as Hungarian nationalism increased early in the 19th century. The Hungarians, suspicious of Napoleon's policies, ignored appeals by France to revolt against Vienna, and certain reforms were introduced: the replacement of Latin, the official language of administration, with Hungarian; a law allowing serfs alternative means of discharging their feudal obligations of service; and increased Hungarian representation in the Council of State in Vienna.

The reforms carried out were too limited and far too late, however, and the diet became more defiant in its dealings with the crown. At the same time, the wave of revolution sweeping Europe spurred on the more radical faction. On 3 March 1848 Kossuth, who had been imprisoned by the Habsburgs at I Táncsics Mihály utca 9 (Map p220) on Castle Hill for three years (1837–40), made a fiery speech in parliament demanding an end to feudalism. On 15 March a group calling itself *Márciusi Ifjúság* (Youth of March) led by the poet Sándor Petőfi, who read out his poem *Nemzeti Dal* (National Song) on the steps of the Hungarian National Museum (p69), took to the streets of Pest with hastily printed copies of their Twelve Points to press for radical reforms and even revolution.

The frightened government in Vienna quickly approved plans for a new Hungarian ministry responsible to the diet, led by the liberal Lajos Batthyány and to include Deák, Kossuth and Széchenyi. The Habsburgs also reluctantly agreed to abolish serfdom and proclaim equality under the law. But the diet voted to raise a local army, testing Habsburg patience.

During September 1848, Habsburg forces under the governor of Croatia, Josip Jelačić, launched an attack on Hungary and Batthyány resigned from government. Pest and Buda fell to the Austrian army in the following spring, and the Hungarians hastily formed a national defence commission and moved the government seat from Pest to Debrecen, where Kossuth was elected leader. The parliament declared Hungary's full independence and the 'dethronement' of the Habsburgs for the second time.

The new Habsburg emperor, Franz Joseph (r 1848–1916), was not at all like his feeble-minded predecessor, Ferdinand V, and quickly took action. He sought the assistance of Russian tsar Nicholas I, who obliged with 200,000 troops. Support for the revolution was already crumbling, however, particularly in areas of mixed population where the Magyars were seen as oppressors. Weak and vastly outnumbered, the rebel troops were defeated by August 1849 and martial law was declared.

A series of brutal reprisals ensued. Summary executions of 'spies' (mostly simple army deserters) took place in the gardens of the National Museum. Batthyány was executed in Pest, 13 of his generals (the so-called Martyrs of Arad) were incarcerated and shot in Romania and Kossuth went into exile in Turkey. (Petőfi had been killed in battle.) Habsburg troops then went around the country systematically blowing up castles and fortifications lest they be used by resurgent rebels. What little of medieval Buda and Pest that had remained after the Turks and the 1703–11 War of Independence was now reduced to rubble.

1941

Hungary joins the Axis led by Germany and Italy against the Allies in WWII

1944

Germany invades and occupies Hungary; most Hungarian Jews are deported to Nazi concentration camps

1945

Budapest is liberated by the Soviet army in April, a month before full victory in Europe

1949

Communists are in full control; Hungary is declared a People's Republic

THE DUAL MONARCHY

Hungary was again merged into the Habsburg empire as a vanquished province and 'ne-absolutism' was the order of the day. Hungarian war prisoners were forced to build the Citadella (p56) atop Gellért Hill to 'defend' the city from further insurrection, but by the time it was ready in 1854 the political climate had changed and the fortress had become obsolete. Passive resistance among Hungarians and disastrous military defeats by Prussia in 1859 and 1866 pushed Franz Joseph to the negotiating table with liberal Hungarians under Deák's leadership.

The result was the Compromise of 1867 (Ausgleich in German, which actually means 'balance' or 'reconciliation'), which created the Dual Monarchy of Austria (the empire) and Hungary (the kingdom). It was a federated state of two parliaments and two capitals – Vienna and Budapest (the result of the union of Buda, Pest and Óbuda six years later). Only defence, foreign relations and customs were shared. Hungary was even allowed to raise a small army.

This 'Age of Dualism' would carry on until 1918 and spark an economic, cultural and intellectual rebirth in Budapest – a golden age the likes of which the city has never seen again. Trade and industry boomed, factories were established and the composers Franz (Ferenc) Liszt and Ferenc Erkel were making beautiful music. The middle class – dominated by Germans and Jews in Pest – burgeoned, and the capital entered into a frenzy of building.

Much of what you will see in Budapest today – from the grand boulevards and their Eclectic-style apartment blocks to the Parliament building, State Opera House and Palace

of Art – was built at this time. The apex of this *belle époque* was the six-month exhibition in 1896 in City Park, celebrating the millennium of the Magyar conquest of the Carpathian Basin. A small replica of Vajdahunyad Castle in Transylvania, but with Gothic, Romanesque and baroque wings and additions to reflect architectural styles from all over the country, was built to house the exhibits (it now houses the Hungarian Agricultural Museum; p72). Around four million visitors from Hungary and abroad were transported to the fairground on Continental Europe's first underground railway (now the M1 or 'little yellow' line). By the turn of the 20th century the population of the 'new' capital jumped from about 280,000 at the time of the Compromise to 750,000, Europe's sixth-largest city.

But all was not well in the capital. The city-based working class had almost no rights – and the situation in the countryside was almost as dire as it had been in the Middle Ages. Minorities under Hungarian control – Czechs, Slovaks, Croats and Romanians – were under increased pressure to 'Magyarise' and viewed their new rulers as oppressors. Increasingly they worked to dismember the empire.

WWI & THE REPUBLIC OF COUNCILS

In July 1914, a month to the day after Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Habsburg throne, was assassinated by a Bosnian Serb in Sarajevo, Austria-Hungary entered WWI allied with the German empire. The result of this action was disastrous, with heavy destruction and hundreds of thousands killed on the Russian and Italian fronts. At the Armistice in

November 1918, the fate of the Dual Monarchy (and Hungary as a multinational kingdom) was sealed.

A republic under the leadership of Count Mihály Károlyi was set up in Budapest immediately after the war, and the Habsburg monarchy was dethroned for the third and final time. But the fledgling republic would not last long. Widespread destitution, the occupation of Hungary by the Allies, and the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia had radicalised much of the working class in Budapest.

In March 1919 a group of Hungarian communists under a former Transylvanian journalist called Béla Kun seized power. The so-called *Tanácsköztársaság* (Republic of Councils) set out to nationalise industry and private property and build a fairer society, but mass opposition to the regime unleashed a reign of 'red terror' in Budapest and around the country. In August Romanian troops occupied the capital, and Kun and his comrades (including Minister of Culture Béla Lugosi, later of *Dracula* fame) fled to Vienna. The Romanians camped out at Oktogon, taking whatever they wanted when they wanted it, and left the city in November – just ahead of Admiral Miklós Horthy, the hero of the Battle of Rijeka, mounted on a white stallion and leading 25,000 Hungarian troops into what he called the *bűnös város* (sinful city).

THE HORTHY YEARS & WWII

In the nation's first-ever election by secret ballot (March 1920), parliament chose a kingdom as the form of state and – lacking a king – elected as its 'regent' Horthy, who remained in that position until the penultimate year of WWII. The arrangement confused even US president Franklin D Roosevelt in the early days of the war. After being briefed by an aide on the government and leadership of Hungary, he reportedly said: 'Let me see if I understand you right. Hungary is a kingdom without a king run by a regent who's an admiral without a navy?'

Horthy embarked on a 'white terror' – every bit as brutal as the red one of Béla Kun – that attacked Jews, social democrats and communists for their roles in supporting the Republic of Councils. As the regime was consolidated, it showed itself to be extremely rightist and conservative, advocating the status quo and 'traditional values' – family, State and religion. Though the country had the remnants of a parliamentary system, Horthy was all-powerful, and very few reforms were enacted. On the contrary, the lot of the working class and the peasantry worsened.

One thing everyone agreed on was that the return of the territories lost through the Treaty of Trianon (see boxed text, p46) was essential for national development. Budapest was swollen with ethnic Hungarian refugees from Romania, Czechoslovakia and the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, unemployment skyrocketed and the economy was at a standstill. Hungary obviously could not count on the victors – France, Britain and the USA – to help recoup its land; instead, it would have to seek help from the fascist governments of Germany and Italy.

Hungary's move to the right intensified throughout the 1930s, though it remained silent when WWII broke out in September 1939. Horthy hoped an alliance would not mean actually having to enter the war but, after recovering northern Transylvania and part of Croatia with Germany's help, he was forced to join the Axis in June 1941. The war was just as disastrous for Hungary as the 1914–18 one had been, and hundreds of thousands of Hungarian troops died while retreating from Stalingrad, where they'd been used as cannon fodder. Realising too late that his country was again on the losing side, Horthy began negotiating a separate peace with the Allies.

When Hitler caught wind of this in March 1944 he sent in his army, with Adolf Eichmann in command from the Buda Hills and the Wehrmacht billeted in the Astoria Hotel. Under pressure, Horthy installed Ferenc Szálasi, the leader of the pro-Nazi Arrow Cross Party, as prime minister in October and the regent was deported to Germany and later found exile in Portugal, where he died in 1957.

1956

Hungary is in revolution after riots in October; János Kádár is installed as leader

1958

Imre Nagy and others are executed by the communist regime for their role in the uprising

1968

Plans for a liberalised economy are introduced but rejected as too liberal by conservatives

1988

János Kádár is forced to retire in May after more than three decades in power

THIS IMAGE
NOT AVAILABLE
IN PICK & MIX

'NEM, NEM, SOHA!'

In June 1920, scarcely a year and a half after the Armistice was signed ending WWI, the victorious Allies drew up a postwar settlement under the Treaty of Trianon at Versailles, near Paris, that enlarged some countries, truncated others and created several 'successor states'. As one of the defeated enemy nations and with large numbers of minorities clamouring for independence within its borders, Hungary stood to lose more than most. And so it did. The nation was reduced to 40% of its historical size and, while it was now a largely homogeneous country, for millions of ethnic Hungarians in Romania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, the tables had been turned: they were now in the minority.

'Trianon' became the singularly most hated word in Hungary and *'Nem, Nem, Soha!'* (No, No, Never!) the rallying cry during the interwar years. The *diktátum*s often reviled today as if it were imposed on the nation yesterday. Many of the problems it created remained in place for decades, and it has coloured Hungary's relations with its neighbours for more than 80 years.

The Arrow Cross Party moved quickly to quash any opposition, and thousands of the country's liberal politicians and labour leaders were arrested. At the same time, its puppet government introduced anti-Jewish legislation similar to that in Germany, and Jews, who were relatively safe under Horthy, were rounded up into ghettos by Hungarian pro-Nazis. During the summer of 1944, less than a year – 10 months! – before the war ended, approximately 430,000 Hungarian Jewish men, women and children were deported to Auschwitz and other labour camps in just over eight weeks, where they either starved to death, succumbed to disease or were brutally murdered by the German fascists and their unsayable henchmen. Many of the Jews who did survive owed their lives to Raoul Wallenberg, a Budapest-based Swedish diplomat (p68) and the Swiss consul, Carl Lutz.

Budapest now became an international battleground for the first time since the Turkish occupation, and the bombs began falling everywhere – particularly around Castle Hill and, in Pest, in the northern

and eastern districts of Angyalföld and Zugló, where there were munitions factories. The resistance movement drew support from many sides, including the communists, and by Christmas 1944 the Soviet army had surrounded Budapest. When the Germans and Hungarian Nazis rejected a settlement, the siege of the capital began. By the time the German war machine had surrendered in April 1945, three-quarters of the city's homes, historical buildings and churches had been severely damaged or destroyed. Some 20,000 Hungarian soldiers and 25,000 civilians of Budapest had been killed. As their goodbye gift, the vindictive Germans blew up Buda Castle and knocked out every bridge spanning the Danube.

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

When free parliamentary elections were held in November 1945, the Independent Small-holders' Party received 57% (or 245 seats) of the vote. But Soviet political officers, backed by the occupying Soviet army, forced three other parties – the Communists, Social Democrats and National Peasants – into a coalition. Limited democracy prevailed, and land-reform laws, sponsored by the Communist minister of agriculture, Imre Nagy, were enacted, wiping away the prewar feudal structure. Budapest experienced the worst hyperinflation the world has ever known at this time, with notes worth up to 10,000 trillion pengő issued before the forint was introduced. Still, Independence Bridge, the first of the spans over the Danube to be rebuilt, reopened in 1946.

Within a couple of years, the Communists were ready to take complete control. After a rigged election held under a complicated new electoral law in 1947, they declared their candidate, Mátyás Rákosi, victorious. The Social Democrats were forced to merge with the Communists into the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.

In 1948 Rákosi, a big fan of Stalin, began a process of nationalisation and unfeasibly fast industrialisation at the expense of agriculture. Peasants were forced into collective farms,

and all produce had to be delivered to state warehouses. A network of spies and informers exposed 'class enemies' such as Cardinal József Mindszenty (see p67) to the secret police, the ÁVO (or ÁVH after 1949), who interrogated them at their headquarters at VI Andrassy út 60 (now the House of Terror; p71) in Pest and sent them to trial at the then Military Court of Justice on II Fő utca (Map pp218–19) in Buda. Some were executed; many more were sent into internal exile or condemned to labour camps like the notorious one at Recsk in the Mátra Hills to the east. It is estimated that at some stage during this period a quarter of the adult population of Budapest faced police or judicial proceedings.

Bitter feuding within the party began, and purges and Stalinesque show trials became the order of the day. László Rajk, the Communist minister of the interior (which also controlled the ÁVH), was arrested and later executed for 'Titoism'; his successor János Kádár was jailed and tortured. In August 1949, the nation was proclaimed the 'People's Republic of Hungary'. In the years that followed – among the darkest and bleakest in Budapest's history – apartment blocks, small businesses and retail outlets were expropriated by the state and new cultural and sports facilities, including Népstadion, or People's Stadium (now the Ferenc Puskás Stadium), were built.

After the death of Stalin in March 1953 and Khrushchev's denunciation of him three years later, Rákosi's tenure was up and the terror began to abate. Under pressure from within the party, Rákosi's successor, Ernő Gerő, rehabilitated Rajk posthumously and readmitted Nagy, who had been expelled from the party a year earlier for suggesting reforms. But Gerő was ultimately as much a hardliner as Rákosi had been and, by October 1956 during Rajk's reburial, murmured calls for a real reform of the system – 'Socialism with a human face' – could already be heard.

THE 1956 UPRISING

The nation's greatest tragedy – an event that for a while shook the world, rocked international communism and pitted Hungarian against Hungarian – began in Budapest on 23 October when some 50,000 university students assembled at II Bem József tér (Map pp218–19) in Buda, shouting anti-Soviet slogans and demanding that Nagy be named prime minister. That night a crowd pulled down and sawed into pieces the colossal statue of 'József Sztálin' on Dózsa György út on the edge of Városliget (City Park; Map pp218–19) and shots were fired by ÁVH agents on another group gathering outside the headquarters of Hungarian Radio (Map p222) on VIII Bródy Sándor utca in Pest. In the blink of an eye, Budapest was in revolution.

The next day Nagy formed a government while János Kádár was named president of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Workers' Party. For a short time it appeared that Nagy might be successful in transforming Hungary into a neutral, multiparty state. On 28 October the government offered an amnesty to all those involved in the violence and promised to abolish the ÁVH. On 31 October hundreds of political prisoners were released, and widespread reprisals against ÁVH agents began. The following day Nagy announced that Hungary would leave the Warsaw Pact and decree its neutrality.

At this, Soviet tanks and troops crossed into Hungary and within 72 hours began attacking Budapest and other centres. Kádár, who had slipped away ratlike from Budapest to join the Russian invaders, was installed as leader.

Fierce street fighting continued for several days – fighting was especially heavy in and around the Corvin Film Palace (p133), VIII József körút and the nearby Kilián army barracks opposite on IX Üllői út in Pest, and II Széna tér (Map pp218–19) in Buda – encouraged by Radio Free Europe broadcasts and disingenuous promises of support from the West, which was embroiled in the Suez Canal crisis at the time. When the fighting was over, 25,000 people were dead. Then the reprisals – the worst in the city's history – began. An estimated 20,000 people were arrested and 2000 – including Imre Nagy in 1958 and his associates – were executed. Another 250,000 refugees fled to Austria. The government lost what little

1989

Communist monopoly on power is relinquished; Imre Nagy is reburied in Budapest; Republic of Hungary is declared

1990

Hungarian Democratic Forum wins first free elections in 43 years; Árpád Göncz elected first president and Gábor Demszky as mayor of Budapest

1991

Last Soviet troops leave Hungarian soil in June

1994

Socialists win general election and form a government for the first time since the changes of 1989

credibility it had and the city many of its most competent and talented citizens. As for the physical scars, just look around you in some of the older parts of Pest: the bullet holes and shrapnel damage on the exterior walls still cry out in silent fury.

HUNGARY UNDER KÁDÁR

The transformation of János Kádár from traitor and most hated man in the land to respected reformer is one of the most astonishing *tour de force* of the 20th century. No doubt it will keep historians busy well into the next.

After the revolt, the ruling party was reorganised as the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, and Kádár, now both party president and premier, launched a programme to liberalise the social and economic structure based on compromise. (His most quoted line was 'Whoever is not against us is with us' – a reversal of the Stalinist adage that stated 'Those not with us are against us'.) In 1968 he and the economist Rezső Nyers unveiled the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) to introduce elements of a market to the planned economy. But even this proved too daring for many party conservatives. Nyers was ousted and the NEM whittled back.

Kádár managed to survive that power struggle unscathed and went on to introduce greater consumerism and market socialism. By the mid-1970s Hungary was light years ahead of any other Soviet-bloc country in its standard of living, freedom of movement and opportunities to criticise (softly) the government. Budapesters may have had to wait seven years for a Lada car or 12 for a telephone, but most could at least enjoy access to a second house in the countryside and a decent material life. The 'Hungarian model' attracted much Western attention – and investment.

But things began to sour in the 1980s. The Kádár system of 'goulash socialism', which had seemed 'timeless and everlasting' as one Hungarian writer has put it, was incapable of dealing with such 'unsocialist' problems as unemployment, soaring inflation and the largest per-capita foreign debt in Eastern Europe. Kádár and the 'old guard' refused to hear talk about party reforms. In June 1987 Károly Grósz took over as premier, and in May 1988 Kádár was booted out of the party and forced to retire. He died the following year.

THE END OF AN ERA

A group of reformers – among them Nyers, Imre Pozsgay, Miklós Németh and Gyula Horn – took charge. Party conservatives at first put a lid on any real change by demanding a retreat from political liberalisation in exchange for their support of the new regime's economic policies. But the tide had turned and there was no stopping it.

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1988, new political parties were formed and old ones revived. In January 1989 Pozsgay, second-guessing what was to come as Mikhail Gorbachev kissed babies and launched his reforms in the Soviet Union, announced that the events of 1956 had been a 'popular insurrection' and not the 'counter-revolution' that the regime had always said it was. In June 1989 some 250,000 people attended ceremonies marking the reburial of Imre Nagy and other victims of 1956 in Budapest. Towards the end of the year the communists agreed to give up their monopoly on power, paving the way for free elections in spring 1990.

In July 1989, again at Pozsgay's instigation, Hungary began to demolish the electrified wire fence separating it from Austria. The move released a wave of East Germans holidaying in Hungary into the West and the opening attracted thousands more. The collapse of the communist regimes around the region was now unstoppable. What Hungarians call *az átkos 40 év*, 'the accursed 40 years' of sham, drudgery and broken dreams, had come to a withering, almost feeble, end.

1999

Hungary becomes a fully fledged member of NATO

2004

Hungary is admitted to the EU

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