



Budapest: A Cultural History (Cityscapes)

Bob Dent

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The views of Budapest by the River Danube are unparalleled in Europe. On one side the Buda Hills reach almost to the riverside, with Castle Hill and Gellért Hill offering outstanding panoramas. Pest, linked to Buda by a series of imposing bridges, with its mixture of late nineteenth-century Historicist and early twentieth-century Art Nouveau architecture, is still very much a "turn-of-the-century" city.

For more than fifty years prior to the Second World War, Budapest was one of the outstanding cultural capitals of Central Europe, on a par with, and in some ways ahead of, Vienna and Prague. Now no longer "hidden" behind the Iron Curtain, much of that old atmosphere has returned. With its rich and often turbulent history, its unique thermal baths, its excellent public transport system, its street cafés and broad-ranging cultural scene, Budapest is a captivating metropolis, currently being rediscovered as one of the liveliest cities in the region.

* City on the Danube: Straddling the majestic river, Budapest's setting is unique; bridges and baths, cafes and squares; an architecture that recalls the pre-1914 era.

* City of fusions: Bartók and Kodály fused folk and classical; the tradition continues with Budapest's vibrant mixture of live folk, gypsy, klezmer and jazz.

* City of the unknown: Breaking through the barrier of the Hungarian language, often described as impenetrable, presented here are writers and poets deserving international recognition.

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