



# The Wayfarer

*By Dawn M. Wayand*

## Budapest - A City Divided



My experience between Hungary and the rest of the European countries that I had traveled to was quite a shock at first. I knew to expect the people of Hungary to speak mostly Hungarian and that I'd be lucky to find someone who spoke any English at all, but didn't realize that getting around would be quite as hard as it was - even with a map. It was a little scary when I first arrived in Budapest because the train station was very busy and full of people - many vagrants and few tourists.

Hungary hadn't adopted the Euro so I had to exchange my Euros for Forints upon arrival. Be forewarned that some people will try to sell you counterfeit Forints outside the money exchange. Don't fall for the trap because you can't get your money back and there are signs posted in Hungarian warning as such.

Buying a metro ticket was stressful because the ticket vendor didn't understand English and I didn't understand

Hungarian and there was a long line of people behind me waiting to purchase a ticket.

It took me over a half an hour to find my hostel from the metro, because I couldn't get a grasp of the map directions or the street names. Instantly, for the first time ever, I hated being in a city where I absolutely had no concept of the language and it wasn't English-friendly. I didn't feel welcome, but this was only my initial feeling. Luckily, (and I highly recommend this): I was staying in a hostel. I made friends right away with people who were sharing my dorm room and we inevitably got a chance to learn the city over the next few days together.

The city of Budapest is divided into two parts: "Buda" and "Pest" and is separated by the Danube River. Pest is the big city, crawling with lots of



public transportation, shopping, and eateries, etc. Buda is moreso: the countryside. The river between Buda and Pest is crossable by nine bridges, the most notable being the Szechenyi Ianchid (or "Chain Bridge" shown above.)

In Buda, there is the Citadel, located high on a hill which is accessible by tram or a series of stairs and dirt paths. (I took the latter.) From the Citadel, you can get a lot of great pictures of the city. North of the Citadel is the



Royal Palace, which is located up on Castle Hill. Also located on Castle Hill is Halaszasty a/k/a Fisherman's Bastion (image left) which includes the Matthias Church. The multi-leveled terrace offers a very nice panorama of the Pest bank of the Danube and the Buda Hills.

In Pest, starting from the inner city, some of the cool sites to see are the Opera House - located at the Opera metro stop, the Jewish Synagogue, located near the Astoria metro stop and St. Stephen's Basilica located just east of the Chain Bridge. A little farther to the north along the river is Parliament, also accessible by the Kossuth ter metro stop.



If nothing else while in Budapest, do not miss going to see the area of Varosliget in north Pest. If you get off at the Hosok tere metro stop, you can walk through Hero's Square, which is a war monument preceding the Varosliget Castle, which is also home to the Hungarian Fine Arts Museum. On my winter trip, just before the entrance to the Castle was a large ice skating rink full of ice skaters. Around the huge castle is a large park with walking trails.

Although Budapest had its faults that had initially soured my impression upon arrival as a first time ignorant traveler to Hungary, it turned out to be a place I'd visit and want to explore again just because it's very different and there are such amazing things to do and see there, plus the food is unbelievable!

### Destination Facts

**Language:** Hungarian

**Currency:** Forint

**Food Known For:** Goulash

### Travel Planning Tips - European Vacation Tip Series Part II - Booking Your Flight

Now that you are ready to commit to your plan and take that big trip, the first thing you need to do before making any other arrangements is to purchase your airline ticket so that you have the foundation of when and where you will arrive and depart in Europe.

As previously noted, Paris and London are usually the cheapest places to fly in and out of, however, that is not the absolute. Keep in mind, your flight is going to be between 7 to 9 hours for London and Paris respectively, meaning, you will probably sleep on your flight. Unless you're willing to shell out a pretty penny to get an actual bed on a flight, most flights are going to be about the same to just fall asleep on so just seek out the least expensive.

I currently use Orbitz or Travelocity when booking any airline tickets since they compare the prices of all airlines for particular dates and times I am interested in booking.

You can save money on your ticket by:

1. Booking ahead. I generally book my airline ticket four months in advance.

2. Leaving on a Thursday rather than a Friday.  
Leaving on a weekday can sometimes save you \$100 or more as it did for me last year.

Don't book your hotel and transportation yet. First of all, you probably won't be staying only in your arrival city. Second, unless you're looking to stay in a 5-star hotel, you can find less expensive accommodations and I'll cover that in later articles..

Next month, we'll continue with Part III of this series: **Making Transportation Arrangements.**

## Lodging Pick



Out of every hostel that I have ever stayed in Europe, the Marco Polo Hostel in Budapest tops the list. I can't say much for the smaller rooms, but I stayed in a dormitory with eleven other guests (which I usually would never do because I like my privacy but I was very pleased with my experience!) In the dormitories, there are six sets of bunk beds lined in a long row down the room. There's a wall between each two with a long curtain that gives privacy for each set of bunks. The hall in front of the bunks houses oversized lockers where guests can securely store their belongings. I have never seen a hostel with such generous locker sizes. The dorm bathrooms are shared ensuite per room. The best part of this hostel was the basement's restaurant/bar, open 24 hours. With the exception of the breakfast hour (breakfast included in your stay), the hostel bar pretty much serves alcohol all day and I found it one of the best ways to find and meet other travelers.

### **Marco Polo Hostel**

Nyar utca 6

1072 Budapest VII

(36-1) 413-2555

<http://www.marcopolohostel.com>