

Budapest

Overview

The towering spires and beautiful buildings of Budapest rise up just beyond the Buda hills, on the banks of the Danube River. Widely regarded as one of the most gorgeous cities in Central Europe, Budapest with its elegant air has plenty to boast about.

For culture vultures the city's streets are adorned with some fabulous baroque, neoclassical and eclectic architecture whilst its rich history is illustrated by a number of magical museums. With its burgeoning contemporary creative scene, art lovers can find their fix with a trip to the city's galleries and studio spaces and when weary wallow in one of Budapest's famed bathouses.

Souvenir seekers should head down to one of the city's many markets that are filled with trinkets, tasty treats and an array of Hungarian handicrafts. The monthly WAMP market held in the capital's central square is a must see and showcases cutting edge fashion, furniture and fixtures designed by the best of emerging talent.

Budapest brims with a range of cosmopolitan eateries, but anyone who desires a true taste of local living should kick back at one of the city's cool kerts or garden cafes. Often open-air and located in the grounds of disused buildings, kerts offer the adventurous the ultimate bohemian hangout and a quirky alternative to the brightly lit bars that line the main tourist drags. Finding them can be half the fun, so be sure to keep your eyes peeled when exploring the cobbled streets of the Jewish quarter where kert life is most common.

Budapest enjoys a range of accommodation options to suit all budgets, from simple hostels and family run guesthouses to more luxurious hotels. If you are willing to splurge on something sophisticated then head down to Art'Otel. Nestled on the river banks, the hotel is widely regarded as one of Budapest's most beautiful places to stay. Constructed from four adjoining 17th century baroque buildings, the hotel features a collection of works by American Modernist Donald Sultan and gives the impression of staying in an innovative art gallery. Alternatively those that want to sample the glitz and glamour of the roaring twenties should hot foot it down to The Cotton House. This quirky hotel doesn't shirk on vintage style and features movie star themed rooms packed with marvelous music and memorabilia.

Budapest has a temperate climate that features very cold winters and warm summers. May to September is the most popular time to visit, when temperatures hover around 25°C and skies are clear and sunny. Weather in the city and throughout Hungary is very changeable so be prepared for rain showers or sudden winds throughout the year. Winters are cold (January the coldest month) with temperatures falling to below 0°C most days.

Budapest has all the modern facilities needed to guarantee an easy trip, including numerous ATM machines, car rental companies and a tourist information office situated on Sütő Street. Foreign currency can be exchanged at the airport on arrival or from one of the many exchange booths in the city – better rates than those found at money changers are available from banks. The currency used is the Hungarian Forint.

Hungary's second largest city - Debrecen is only 220km from Budapest and as such, is certainly worth a visit for those who have the luxury of spending a few days in the country.