



# GRAND OLD BUDAPEST

LIFE'S NOT LIKE THE MOVIES. UNLESS THAT IS, YOU FIND YOURSELF IN BUDAPEST. JUST LIKE THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL, CORINTHIA HOTEL BUDAPEST, FORMERLY GRAND HOTEL ROYAL, HAS ENTERTAINED THE GREAT AND THE GOOD. [GISELLE WHITEAKER](#) IS THE NEXT IN LINE.

**T**he Hungarian Capital of Budapest is undeniably one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. The city's extensive World Heritage Site includes the banks of the Danube River, the Buda Castle Quarter, Andrassy Avenue, Heroes' Square and the Millennium Underground Railway, the second-oldest metro line in the world. Besides this, it features around 80 geothermal springs, the world's largest thermal water cave system, the second-largest synagogue, and third-largest Parliament building. There's much to be admired on a stroll through both Buda and Pest, divided by the Danube. The city attracts about 4.4 million visitors a year, and I'm one of them.

Catching a glimpse of the Neo-classical façade of The Corinthia Hotel Budapest, I'm immediately transported into an era of historical glamour that befits a city with such a stunning architectural heritage. The hotel sits regally on the Grand Boulevard, the main artery of the Hungarian capital, a site it has commanded since 1896 albeit under the name Grand Hotel Royal. The interior, however, is of another era altogether. Reconstructed in 1956 after a fire destroyed the roof, and reinvented by Corinthia after falling into disrepair, Corinthia Hotel Budapest re-emerged in 2003 like a phoenix rising resplendent from the ashes.

Above: The Hungarian Parliament building.  
Below left: The lobby of Corinthia Hotel Budapest.  
Below Right: One of Corinthia Hotel Budapest's impressive suites.  
Opposite Page: The swimming pool at The Royal Spa.



Since reopening, the Grande Dame of a hotel has attracted the stars, who wallow in the luxury of its palatial Ferenc Liszt Presidential Suite. A trawl through the hotel's guest book is like dipping into a 'Who's Who' of music, movies, fashion and sport, from burlesque performer Josephine Baker to Ella Fitzgerald and Sean Connery. On entrance, it's easy to see why the hotel draws the rich and famous. The understated opulence of the 1930s styled lobby is just the start. A glass atrium allows natural light to filter in to the gleaming white space, and the staff is quick to welcome guests into the embrace of the hotel. I'm immediately whisked to the executive floor and handed the keys to one of the signature suites, adjacent to the presidential suite. I may not be royalty, but I'm certainly made to feel special in this expansive space, with its luxurious Super King size bed, separate living room, dining room, kitchen and glorious marble bathroom.

As gorgeous as it all is, I have a city to explore, so I tear myself away from comfort and exit the hotel for a stroll down to the Danube. It takes a while to arrive at the river – not because it's a lengthy walk, but rather, because there are so many sights to take in on the way. I wander by the Moorish Revival-style Dohány Street Synagogue and admire St. Stephen's Basilica, where crowds of visitors in the cobbled square wave their cameras at the picturesque church building. I amble through green spaces, where groups of people congregate in the sun, dawdling as I admire the immense buildings lining Liberty Square. Budapest is a city made for walking. It's busy, but not crowded, and it feels safe and welcoming.

Close to the river, it's the 1904 Hungarian Parliament Building that takes my breath away. The largest building in Hungary and the equal-highest building in Budapest – along with St Stephens Basilica – the

multi-spired Gothic Revival edifice has a symmetrical façade and a central dome that overlooks the water. The ornate structure looks like it has been plucked from a fairytale, and pleasure boats and river cruisers chug slowly past its immensity, passengers crowded on the decks to admire the view. To appreciate the structure in its entirety I'm going to have to cross the river.

Following the gentle curve of the riverbank, I collide with a memorial honouring the Jews killed by fascist Arrow Cross militiamen in Budapest during World War II. In remembrance of those who were ordered to take off their shoes before they were shot at the edge of the water, a line of 60 pairs of cast iron shoes sit on the verge. Tea candles flicker in some, others sport a single red flower. It's a powerful reminder of a tragic moment in history, conceived by film director Can Togay and sculptor Gyula Pauer.

Lost in the moment, I quietly wander to the Széchenyi Chain Bridge, which spans the Danube, allowing crossing from Pest to Buda, on the western side. Designed by British engineer William Tierney Clark, this was the first permanent bridge across the Danube in Hungary, and was opened in 1849, although it has been reinforced since. Stone lions guard the cast iron suspension bridge in all its magnificence and the views along the river are spectacular.

There's a short funicular that transports sightseers to Buda Castle, but the long line forces me to walk up the steep incline, giving my thighs a workout. Perched on top of Castle Hill, this area is thronged with visitors and market stalls and I can't resist a keepsake, purchasing a locally-made pendant on my way to the Halászbástya, otherwise known as the Fisherman's Bastion. This neo-Gothic and





Above left, above right and below: Heroes' Square, riverside memorial and Széchenyi Chain Bridge.

neo-Romanesque-style terrace wrapped around Matthias Church offers panoramic views of Budapest, making it the perfect point at dusk, as the city's lights flicker to life. Before long, the Parliament building glows a brilliant gold, reflected back on the inky surface of the river as dusk turns to night.

After a sound sleep and a lengthy breakfast at Corinthia Hotel Budapest – the volume of breakfast choices encourages lingering – I'm ready to tackle the city once more. I catch the Metro to Heroes' Square, with its iconic statue complex featuring the Seven Chieftains of the Magyars and other important national leaders, as well as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. From here, I enter City Park for a stroll around the pond to the gleaming yellow Széchenyi thermal bath, where bathers lounge around heated pools fed by two thermal springs. I consider a dip, but Corinthia Hotel Budapest's Royal Spa is calling, so instead I hasten back to the hotel.

The Royal Spa's 15-metre pool encourages relaxation, and I slip in and out of the surrounding steam baths and sauna before my spa appointment. The deep muscle massage leaves me deliciously limp, the ESPA oils wafting a pleasant scented as I drift back to my suite for an evening at rest.

Before I depart, I have time for lunch at the hotel's Brasserie and Atrium Restaurant, with its soaring glass ceiling. The Caesar Salad Soup has me intrigued, but I can't ignore the duo of grilled asparagus with goat cheese, poached quail eggs and lemon mayonnaise. It's everything it should be and more, the goat cheese ball perched on top of the fresh asparagus stems, drizzled with mayonnaise, and the egg adds a bright burst of yellow when I slice into its tenderness. The main of *mangalica* tenderloin, a Hungarian pork, is cooked sous vide, sealing in the succulent flavours, and is complemented with servings of pickled strawberries, baby fennel and pommes duchesse. I shouldn't have dessert, but I can't resist the milk chocolate caramel slice with salted hazelnut and chocolate sauce. It's worth every creamy mouthful.

As I depart Corinthia Hotel Budapest, weaving my way through the city to the airport, one word lingers in my mind. The city, the architecture, the landmarks, the hotel and the cuisine are intertwined in my mind into one "grand" experience. A *Grand Budapest Hotel* moment indeed. ■

For more information on Corinthia Hotel Budapest, see [www.corinthia.com](http://www.corinthia.com)

## A selection of grand residences in Budapest

### Palazzo Dorotya, District V, Budapest, Hungary

Palazzo Dorotya is a completely restored and refurbished classical building in the heart of downtown Budapest. The unique building comprises four floors of residential apartments, ranging from studios to three-bedroom apartments, one floor of office space let to legal firm Baker McKenzie and headhunters Stanton Chase, and retail units on the ground floor let to Baraka Restaurant.

**Guide Price:** From 210,000€ to 1,225,000€



### 8782 Hungary, Zalacsány, Csány László utca 24

This individual villa with a private swimming pool offers unparalleled luxury. The villa is located on Zala Springs Golf Resort and is located just a minute's walk from the clubhouse. The villa has been constructed with great care, using only the best materials. Zala Springs Golf Resort has an 18-hole championship golf course and a state-of-the-art clubhouse which is set to be complete in August 2015. On the club house terrace area by the 18th green there will be an outside restaurant and bar with beautiful views over the golf course.

**Guide Price:** POA

### Liskay Estate and Vineyards, Monoszlo, Lake Balaton Area, Hungary

In the middle of a beautifully protected National Park, this newly built vineyard estate is situated in the serene Toscana like setting of the Kali Basin, Hungary. As a pinnacle project for the entire country in terms of level of sophistication, elegance and facilities, the estate has maintained the majority of its authentic heritage in shape and form, including an untouched, approximately 275-year-old wine cellar.

**Guide Price:** 4,000,000€



### River Loft, District XIII, Budapest, Hungary

This newly renovated loft-style apartment is a completely unique apartment in Budapest. The apartment was renovated and decorated to the highest New York loft standards with unique furnishings, fixtures and fittings.

**Guide Price:** US\$1,000,000



For enquiries about any of these properties, please email [hungary@fineandcountry.com](mailto:hungary@fineandcountry.com).