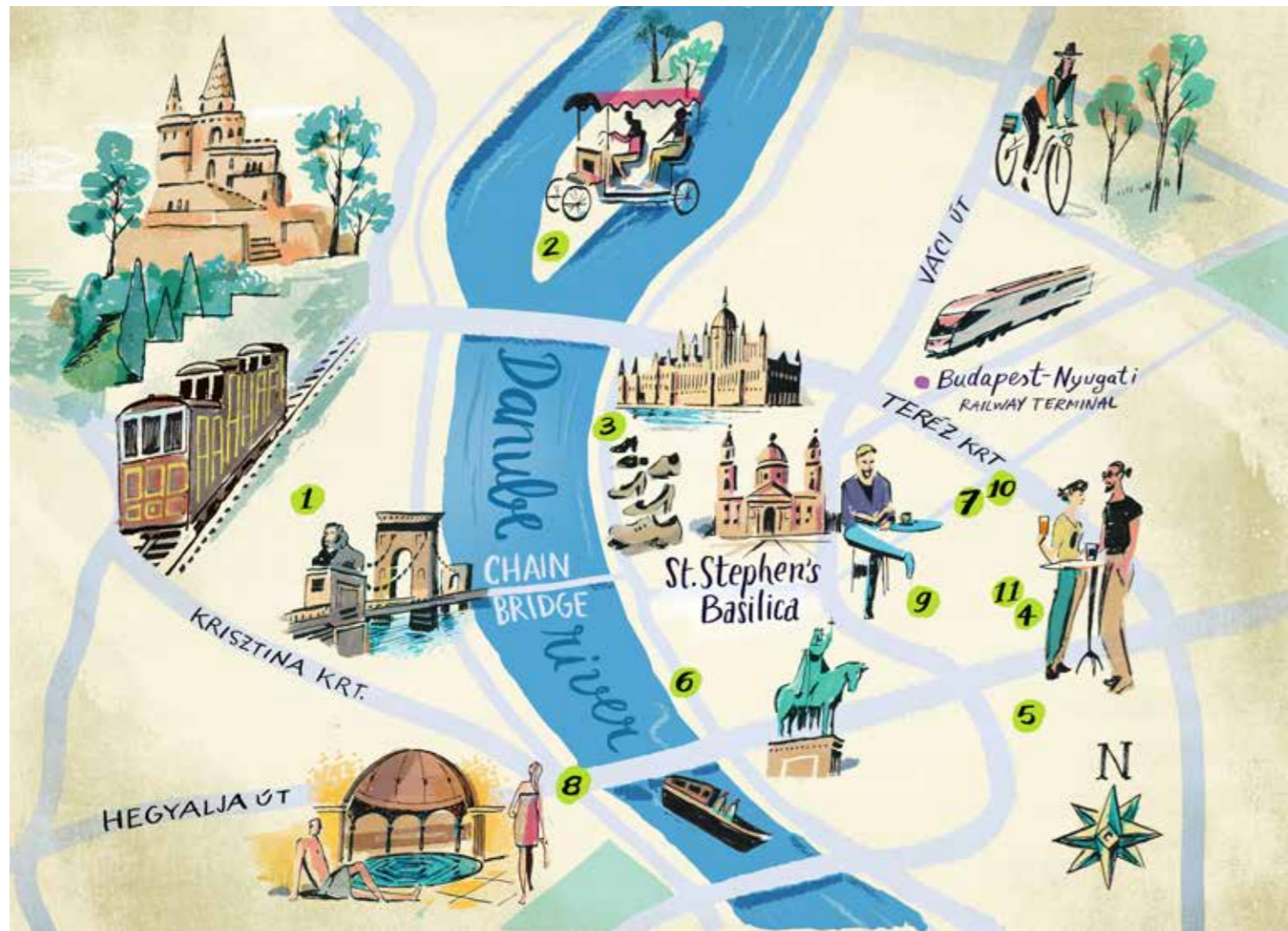


The Perfect Weekend

B U D A P E S T

Take a couple of days to explore the atmospheric streets of Hungary's capital, finding tumbledown pubs, thermal baths and contemporary design shops nudging against grand civic buildings and the gloriously blue Danube. Wandering through, fill up on old Magyar favourites in a Soviet-style canteen or local produce from a farmers' market

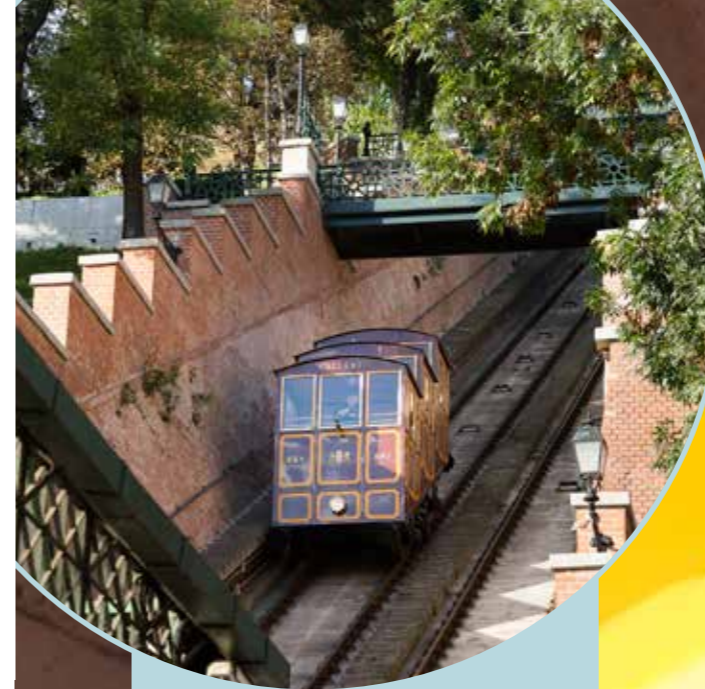
WORDS AMANDA CANNING @amandacanning PHOTOGAPHS SARAH COGHILL @SarahCoghill1



- 1 The journey: Budavári Sikló
- 2 The excursion: Margitsziget island
- 3 The sight: Hungarian Parliament
- 4 The night out: Kazinczy utca
- 5 The hotel: Brody House
- 6 The boat trip: Dunarama
- 7 The coffee: Lots Terem
- 8 The swimmer: Rudas Baths
- 9 The shop: Printo
- 10 The meal: Menza
- 11 The local's tip: Szimpla Kert

TRAVEL ESSENTIALS BA, easyJet, Jet2.com, Norwegian Air Shuttle, Ryanair and Wizz Air fly to Budapest from the UK (from £70; wizzair.com). Budapest's historic centre is easily walkable, but the city also has an excellent public transport system, including the metro, streetcars and trolley buses – a three-day travelcard costs £10 (bkk.hu).

MAP ILLUSTRATION: NIK NEVES



The journey

The doors of *Margit* are pulled shut, its passengers huddled within, and the tiered, wooden funicular is hoisted up Castle Hill, clanking beneath two wrought-iron pedestrian bridges on its 95-metre journey. Opened in 1870, the Budavári Sikló funicular still exerts a particular pull on visitors to Budapest: you can't come and not ride at least once in its burgundy carriages. Emerging at the top, people soon disperse – some stopping to take photos with the armed sentries guarding the presidential palace, others rummaging for lace in an antiques shop or stopping for a Borsodi beer on a cobbled square. All will end up at Fisherman's Bastion, a fanciful, Neo-Gothic terrace, complete with turrets, and dragons hiding in the stonework. It's worth jostling past the inevitable crowds to peer through the bastion's open windows at the Danube and Parliament far below, before diving back into the quieter streets of Castle Hill and making your own discoveries.

● Return journey on funicular £4 →

Fisherman's Bastion, built in the early 20th century – it is named after a guild of fishermen who defended the city walls in the Middle Ages. ABOVE Budavári Sikló on its way up Castle Hill

The excursion

Okay, it's not really an excursion: Margitsziget is very much part of Budapest. Hop across to the island plopped in the Danube though, and thoughts of the city fade very quickly. Home to religious building from the 12th century, it saw a change of purpose in the 20th century: this is now holiday land, Hungarian style. Families and friends hop on to all manner of contraptions – electric scooters, go-karts, canopied bicycles – and whizz through the parks, pausing to watch the dancing fountains, play a game of ping-pong or lick ice cream in the shade of a ruined convent. The daytime shrieks of kids careering down the water slides of Palatinus Strand are replaced at dusk by the drifting strains of tango: couples, frowning in concentration, dance beneath the chandeliers at Holdudvar hall. Dance finished, it's time for one last beer before heading back to the city.

● margitsziget.info; water slides £6.50; en.palatinusstrand.hu; holdudvar.net



BELOW Bringo carts are a popular way to explore Margitsziget's 238 acres of quiet, landscaped parks and medieval buildings

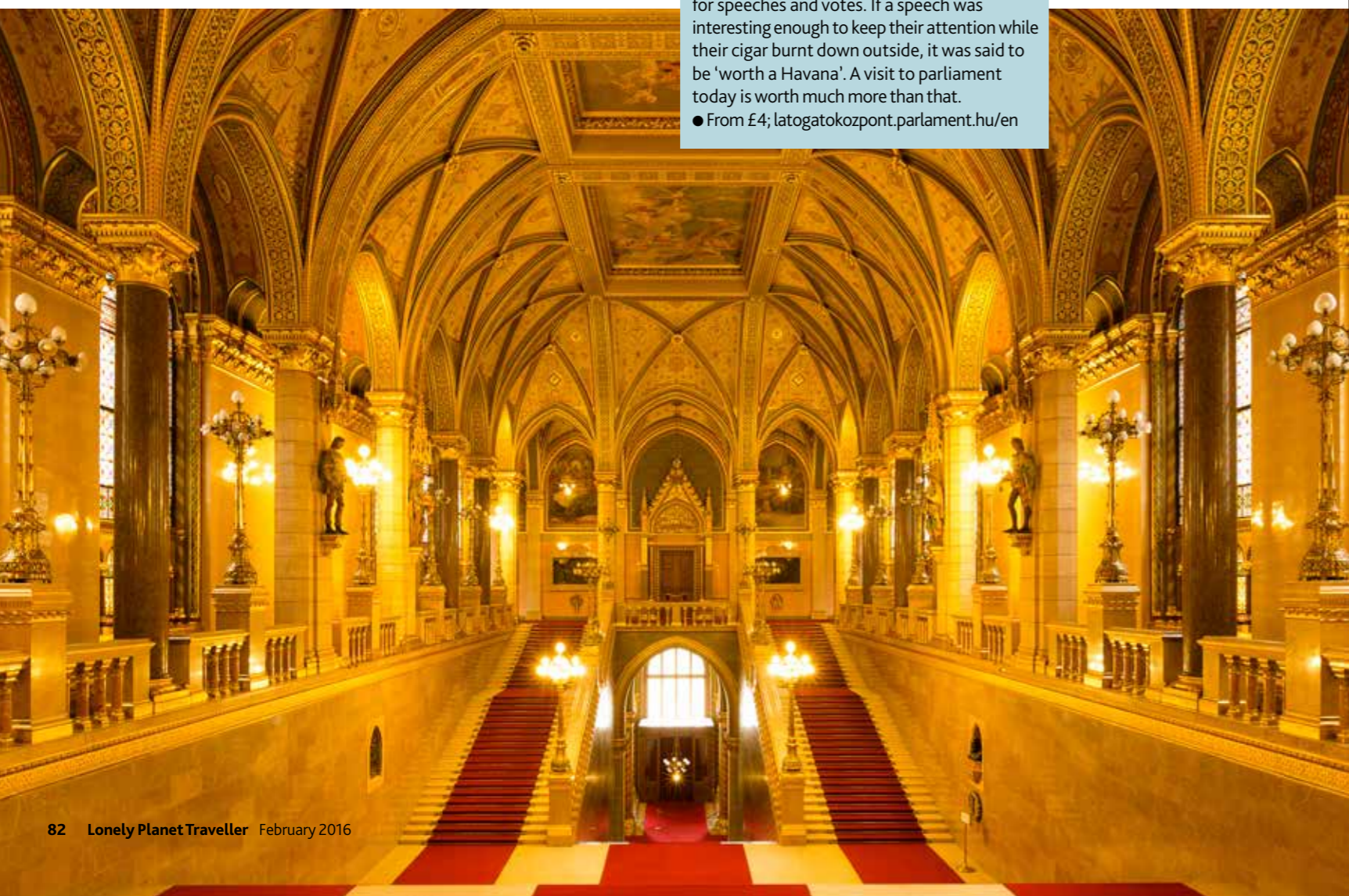
The sight

The Holy Crown of Hungary, which perched atop the heads of its monarchs for more than 900 years, sits on a red velvet cushion in a glass case, protected by sabre-twirling guards and watched over by statues of the country's most celebrated kings, queens and princes. Around it, visitors swirl, gazing into the case, up at the stained glass in the double-domed ceiling, and back out towards the grand staircase, a gilded Baroque wonder too ornate to absorb in a single glance. In Budapest's parliament, it's very hard to know where to look next. The building was years ahead of its time when it opened in 1904. It had electric lighting, air-conditioning, lifts and ventilation, and, in a typically egalitarian move, statues representing all the professions of Hungary at the time, from saddle-makers to shepherds (all of them elaborately moustachioed). There are more idiosyncratic designs in here too. In every corridor, brass holders are built into the walls, ready to clutch the lit cigars of members while they disappeared into the assembly hall for speeches and votes. If a speech was interesting enough to keep their attention while their cigar burnt down outside, it was said to be 'worth a Havana'. A visit to parliament today is worth much more than that.

● From £4; latogatokozpont.parlament.hu/en



ABOVE The Gothic Revival-style Hungarian Parliament on the bank of the Danube – it is the country's largest building. **BELOW** Parliament's ornamental Grand Staircase, complete with frescoes and royal statues



Enjoy a drink aboard a rowing boat in Mika Tivadar Mulato's garden. **INSET** One of AnKERT's open connecting courtyards

The night out

There are more than 400 places to get drunk in the Jewish district, and Kazinczy utca is the place to get to grips with them. The street is home to the warren of rooms that is Szimpla Kert, Budapest's original ruin pub – abandoned buildings taken over by artists early in the 21st century, and turned into unofficial galleries and bars. The concept has come a long way since, and is now used rather liberally to denote any sort of pub adopting a slightly dishevelled look. Further down the road is Mika Tivadar Mulato, with street art splashed across the walls of the surrounding buildings, and the garden haphazardly strung with fairy lights. The prime seat in the house is within a row boat beached in the yard. AnKERT raises the design bar. Tables sit beneath canopies of sails, with lanterns and neon artwork hanging over the cobbled courtyard of the old factory complex. Beneath the bar, an enormous sign proclaims: FINALLY ARRIVED. With a cold pint of Dreher and a jalapeño burger on the way, it's hard to disagree.

● szimpla.hu; facebook.com/ankestbar; mikativadarmulato.hu

The hotel

When William Clothier and Peter Grundberg bought the mansion at No 10 Bródy Sándor, it had been in a state of disrepair for more than 50 years. The former doctor's house, built in Budapest's golden age at the end of the 19th century, had survived WWII and the Hungarian Uprising – but not decades of Soviet rule. The two friends lived within its dilapidated walls, hosting dinner parties and cultural gatherings, before transforming it into Brody House, Budapest's most creative guesthouse. It retains the feel of a private home, whose guests wander around in a state of enchantment, not quite believing their luck in scoring an invite to stay. Artful disrepair is still the name of the game: upcycled furniture on the parquet floors, the works of local artists on the distressed walls, and an air of friendly bohemian ease, as if someone might at any moment jump up to recite a poem over a glass of wine from the honesty bar in the lounge.

● From £50; brodyhouse.com →

The Print Suite at Brody House – art comes from the adjoining Brody Artyard print studio and gallery



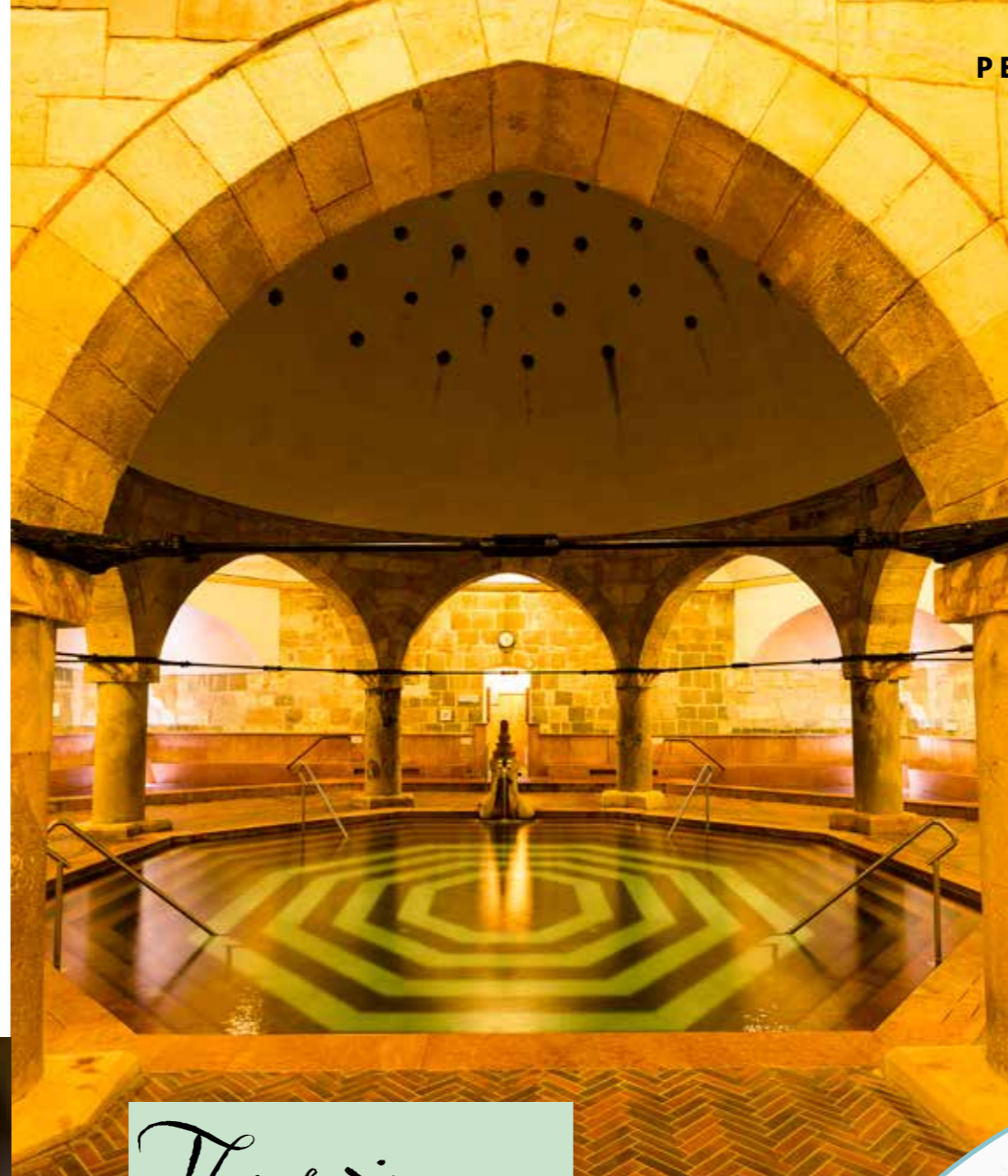


LEFT A Dunarama Italian-inspired boat cruise along the Danube towards the Hungarian Parliament Building

The boat trip

It's the classic Venetian scene: crew in blue-and-white-striped T-shirts help passengers into a mahogany speedboat, and off they skim across the water, glasses of sparkling wine in hand, the sound of classical music drifting across the waves. But this is not the Grand Canal, and we are not in Italy. Inspired by a trip to Venice, Botond Eöry decided to bring a similar style of Riva boat to Budapest. Built in Hungary, his Dunarama fleet now plies the Danube on sightseeing trips, taking passengers down river, past the monastery and produce market to the edge of the city, with the promise of the Black Sea far beyond. Here, Strauss is abruptly switched for AC/DC, the boat spins, and then thunders back, bouncing over the water towards the Parliament Building and Margitsziget. The captain weaves between long tourist cruisers and cargo ships bound for Germany, at every spin of the wheel, obliging passengers to follow the international seafarer's law of waving to other people also on boats.

● Boat trip from £15; dunarama.hu



The shop

It takes a fair bit of squinting to work out what the coloured dots make up – a giant Rubik's Cube, painted on the side of a building on Rumbach Sebastyén street. Opposite, another source of national pride is celebrated in an even larger artwork: Hungary's 6-3 thrashing of England in the infamous 1953 football match. The street lies deep within Budapest's creative quarter, Erzsébetváros, more commonly known as the Jewish district. A few doors down from the murals, design shop Printa is right at home in these surroundings. Within, young locals perch at white bar stools drinking flat whites and tea, deciding which geometric necklace or leather bag to buy. Prints hang from crocodile clips on clothes rails, and ceramics are arranged like museum pieces on the low shelves. Much of the more graphic art, printed on tote bags and T-shirts, as well as the more customary paper, is produced in the workshop at the back – among them, our favourite souvenir from the city, a screenprinted Pest Collection map of the very district in which it was produced.

● printa.hu

BELOW Printa uses eco-friendly materials to create fashion items and silk-screen prints

The coffee

Grandeur is found in the least likely places in Budapest. On a street also home to discount perfume shops and ropey fashion stores, round the corner from a Hooters bar, is the Parisi Nagy Aruhaz, five glorious floors of books discretely announced by an Art Deco façade. Up the escalators to the first floor is another discovery: one of the finest cafés in a city not short on fine cafés. Indeed, to call Lotz Terem a café feels something of an insult; its Neo-Renaissance interior is more palace than coffee shop. Customers, from students to elderly friends, sit beneath the arched ceiling, sipping on espressos as gargoyles gurn overhead and angels spin in the clouds of a mural painted by Hungarian artist Károly Lotz. Most visitors spend their coffee break lost in their surroundings, finding new details in the enormous chandeliers or the frescoes that fill every patch of wall that isn't covered in gold. A trip to the pastry cabinet provides respite from a cricked neck: the blueberry cheesecake is just as distracting as all that gilding.

● Espresso £1.50; lotzterem.hu



Blueberry cheesecake at Lotz Terem café. **LEFT** The murals of Károly Lotz also feature in the Hungarian State Opera House and Hungarian National Museum



The swim

The Ottomans cleared out of Hungary some 300 years ago, but they left one very important part of themselves in the capital: the Turkish bath. The Rudas Baths dates from the very early days of their occupation, and has been added to almost every century since. Bathers emerge from wooden changing cubicles, flip-flops slapping on the tiled floor as they make their way to the very oldest section, the 16th-century thermal bath. Light streams in from tinted stars in the domed ceiling, creating coloured ripples on the walls of the octagonal chamber. People sit at the sides, chatting to their friends or reading a book, and plunge into the warm water to float on their backs, eyes shut. A stroll around the rooms leading off the central pool reveals saunas, steam rooms and the stern dispensation of various treatments by fierce-looking men clad in towels. Many visitors bypass the two-tiered 19th-century pool, and the new wellness section, and head straight to the roof. An afternoon at the baths is best rounded off here in the outdoor hot tub, watching boats slowly chug past on the Danube below.

● From £5.50; women only Tue, men only Mon, Wed-Fri, mixed weekends; rudasfurdo.hu →

ABOVE The recently restored Rudas Baths' octagonal, domed Ottoman pool





The meal

Twenty-eight years after the collapse of communism in Hungary, there's a certain Soviet-tinted nostalgia brewing in the capital. Entrepreneur Vidák László brought back the Tisza trainers – the Adidas of footwear behind the Iron Curtain in the 1970s – that now encircle the feet of every discerning young local, and he's also behind one of Budapest's most inventive restaurants: Menza. Drawing its name and inspiration from Soviet canteens, it takes its design inspiration straight from the '70s, with an orange, green and brown colour scheme, and features involving verneer, formica and brass panels. The food is somewhat more sophisticated; this is very much a modern take on Hungarian cuisine, with tangy cucumber salads, tender beef goulashes packed with flavour, and mulberry soup elevated with red-wine ice cream. Cheerful staff happily share stories of childhood family dinners, along with post-pudding pálinka brandies – if this is Soviet living, we're signing up. ● Mains from £2.75; menzaetterem.hu

ABOVE Thick goulash soup at Menza. **BELOW** The restaurant interior, drawing on 20th-century design



PERFECT WEEKEND BUDAPEST

The local's tip

“There are so many ruin pubs here and I like to share the local side to them.

One of my favourites is Szimpla Kert. In the evenings, Szimpla is very touristy, but every Sunday morning they have a farmers' market with only local produce, from marmalade to sausages – and locals go. I love the atmosphere. I can try the food, buy the food, listen to the live jazz band playing, and just relax.”

ATTILA HÖFLE is from Budapest Flow, a small company that runs inventive, alternative walking tours through the city, including one exploring the ruin pubs, street art and history of the Jewish district
Tours from £14; budapestflow.com



AMANDA CANNING is already planning a return trip to Budapest – there were far too many ruin pubs to sample in a single weekend.

