

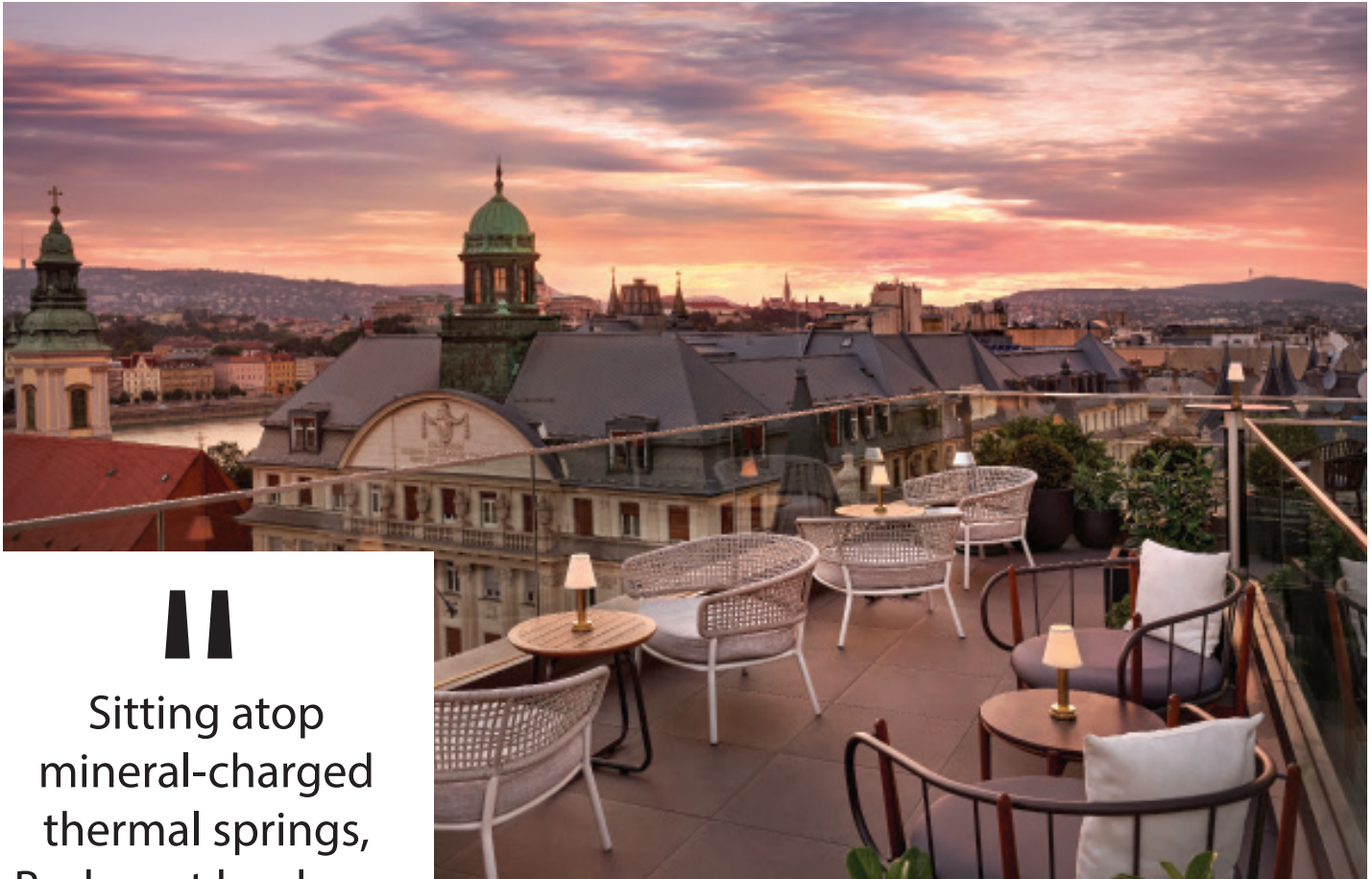


With thermal  
bathhouses, torte-filled  
grand cafés, and  
architectural jewels  
strung along the River  
Danube, Budapest  
makes for a charmed  
winter escape

Words by Nicole Trilivas

# THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOLIDAY





Sitting atop mineral-charged thermal springs, Budapest has been called the 'city of spas' since the 1930s.





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akes and spas – that’s what first attracted me to Budapest. Admittedly, I didn’t know much about the Hungarian capital

besides its fame for opulent cafés and history-rich bathhouses, but that was enough to book a trip. After visiting, I can say with confidence that it delivers on both fronts.

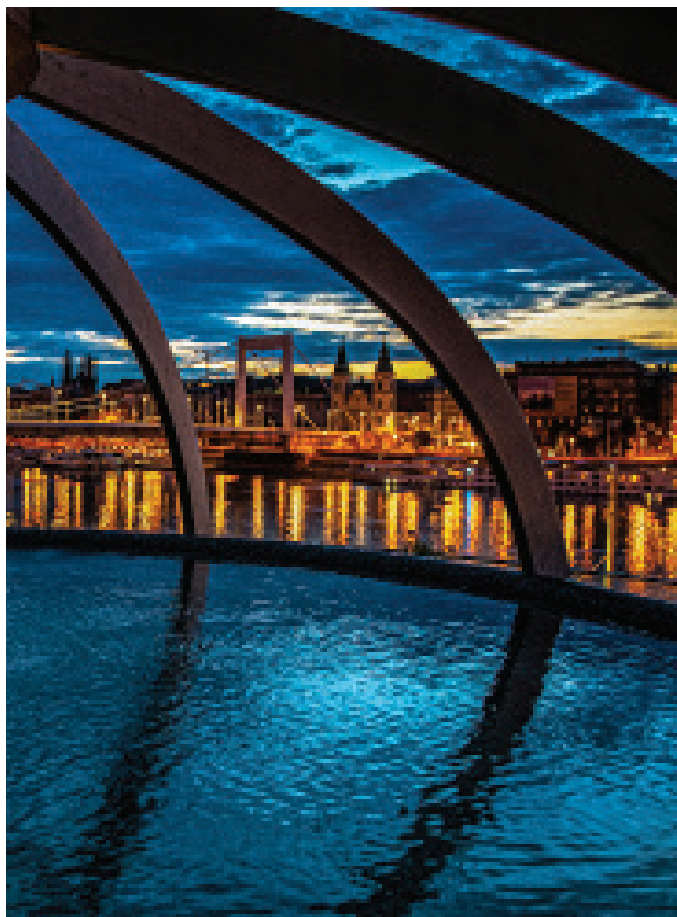
Sitting atop mineral-charged thermal springs, Budapest has been called the ‘city of spas’ since the 1930s, but its bathhouse traditions go back further, first to the Romans and later, to the Ottomans, with some of the city’s top bathhouses – like Rudas – dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

While many of the oldest bathhouses in the city are visually impressive, they have a more clinical air than your typical luxury spa experience. With a columned and domed Turkish

bath and panoramic rooftop thermal pool with views over the Danube, Rudas is one of the best options, but don’t expect five-star service. Instead, be prepared for some crowds and to rent (or bring your own) towels and slippers. Still, it’s a one-of-a-kind experience.

For something slightly less authentic but decidedly more upscale, try the hotel spa at Corinthia Budapest, former thermal bathhouse dating back to the 1880s.

Awarded Hungary’s Best Hotel Spa in 2023 by the World Spa Awards, this steamy, art deco sanctuary no longer has natural thermal waters, but it is set up like a traditional bathhouse with a 15-meter swimming pool overlooked by a balcony, bubbly hot tubs, a steam room, two saunas (one salt, one Finnish), plus a

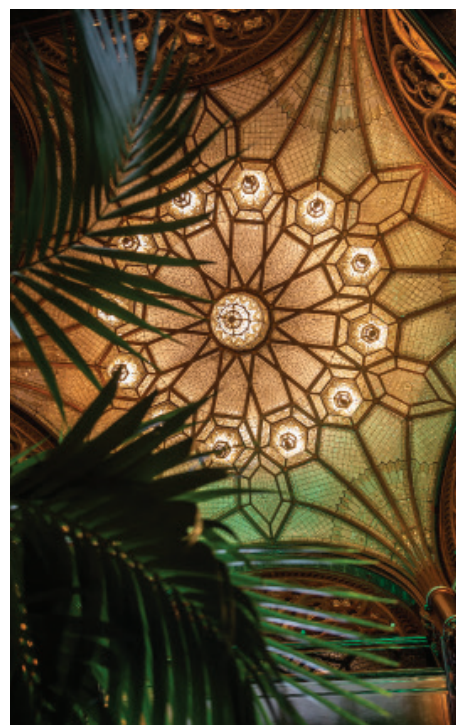
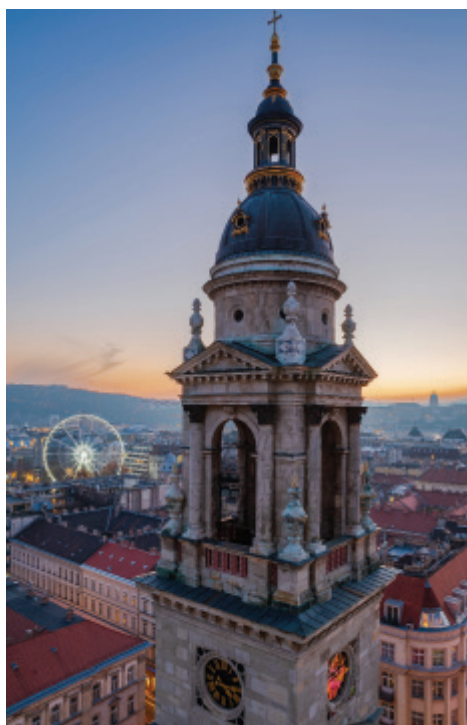


snow machine and relaxation area. The spa offers day passes, or you can use the facilities for free if you book a treatment.

Corinthia Budapest has a partnership with high-end Hungarian skincare brand Omorovicza, which uses all-natural ingredients and mineral-rich thermal waters as a base for all of its skincare products. In addition to trying out a treatment at Corinthia Budapest, it's also worth checking out their flagship spa, the Omorovicza Budapest Institute, an ethereal, calming space with three treatment rooms for face

alongside another prized dessert destination, Vienna. The city is still filled with old-fashioned, centuries-old cafés like social-media-hotspot New York Café, Café Gerbaud with a terrace overlooking the very Parisian Vörösmarty Square, the high-ceilinged Művész Coffee House, and the quaint Ruszwurm.

Visitors must try the six-layered Dobos torte, the chocolate mousse cake, Rigó Jancsi, vanilla custard krémes, flaky Hungarian strudel filled with poppyseed or apricots... I could go on and on. For more modern desserts, try the offerings at



and body therapies, plus a shop offering the full product line.

Go for the indulgent 90-minute Andrassy Skin Therapy Session, as it's completely tailored to your skin. And a fun bonus – after the facial, you get 50 per cent of your treatment's value to spend on products. My favourites – the Deep Cleansing Mask made with Hungarian Moor mud from Lake Hévíz, the refreshing Queen of Hungary Mist, and anything from the Gold Collection, which uses colloidal gold and biomimetic peptides to leave you glowing like an empress.

While we have Budapest's geology to thank for its spa culture (as well as the Romans and Ottomans), Budapest's famed cakes hit a highpoint during the opulent days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, of which Budapest was the dual capital

the exquisite glass atrium Párisi Passage Restaurant.

It's worth visiting for the lavish architecture alone, drawing to mind the visual excess of Milan's Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II.

Don't miss the fondant-topped Esterházy torte from the award-winning pastry chef at the Four Seasons Gresham Palace. While the hotel is the undisputed best in town, the crowd veers towards the business set, so for those looking for a more 21<sup>st</sup>-century brand of luxury, the new Matild Palace – a transformed UNESCO site located in front of the gleaming white Elisabeth Bridge off the River Danube – makes for an indulgent alternative. Don't expect the same white-gloved hospitality as Gresham, where the staff send chocolates to





Must-see sights  
and activities  
include a  
picturesque river  
cruise down  
the Danube.



your room with handwritten notes and greet you by name. Still, rooms and suites are impeccable, and the very definition of a modern classic, with gold-and-cobalt tiled bathrooms, tall ceilings, and throw pillows swirled in Art Nouveau flourishes. Book a room facing the Danube for the best sunset views over the green hills of Buda. The hotel also has the best rooftop lounge in town, called the Duchess, with dazzling vistas, especially at night.

For a cooler crowd, there's the new W Budapest on the so-called Hungarian Champs Élysées, Andrassy Avenue, which boasts all the best shopping. The vibe is very Wes Anderson, with theatrical proportions, black-and-white tiled bathrooms, and a gold-lit subterranean spa with rib-vaulted ceilings.

It's also right across the street from The Hungarian State Opera, a neo-renaissance icon decked in marble and red velvet, which dates back to 1884 and is open for daily tours and performances. Other must-see sights and activities include a picturesque river cruise down the Danube.

The one to try is the charming wooden paddle steamers from Duna Cruises – choose an evening cruise to see all of the dreamy floodlit landmarks like the Parliament, Fisherman's Bastion, and Chain Bridge. To get around with ease while in the city, purchase a Budapest Card online, which grants unlimited transportation, plus other perks.

In the end, the city is as much a feast for the eyes as it beautifully offers up much to soothe the soul.