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Youth Bridges
Budapest



ON STAGE

Budapest's Theatre and Entertainment District



**A self-guided urban walk through culture,
creativity, and urban heritage**

CULTURE IN THE CITY

This walk takes you through one of Budapest's historic theatre and entertainment districts.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, this part of the city became especially active. Theatres, cafés, music venues, department stores, photography studios, nightlife spaces, and residential buildings existed close to one another. People came here to watch performances, meet others, work, study, shop, or simply be part of city life.

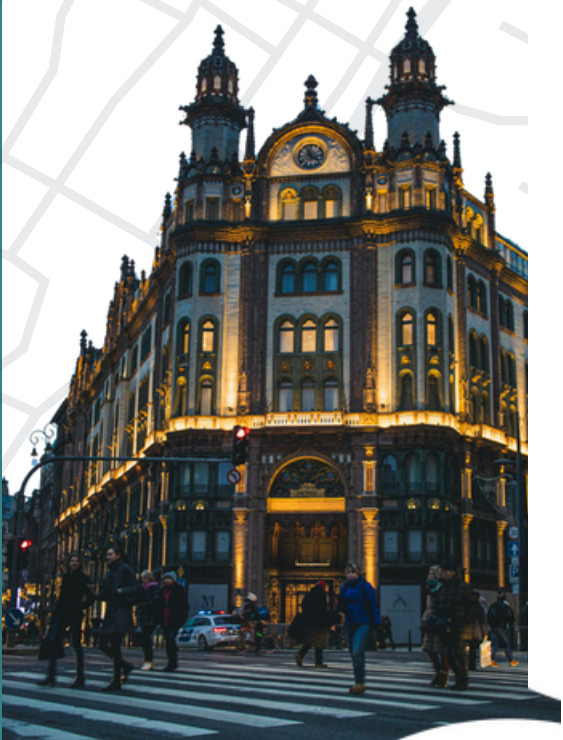
The tour is not only about famous buildings or well-known artists. It also looks at the wider urban world that made cultural life possible: workers behind the scenes, café networks, education, business, audiences, housing, and everyday routines.

Culture shaped this neighbourhood in visible ways. It influenced how streets were planned, which buildings became prestigious, where people gathered, and how the city presented itself as modern and ambitious. At the same time, access to cultural life was never equal. Some people had more opportunities to learn, perform, meet influential people, or be seen in public spaces. Others supported the same cultural world through work that often remained less visible.

Many of the places on the route still exist, although their functions have changed over time. Some continue to serve cultural purposes, while others have been adapted to new uses. Together, they show how cultural heritage is not only found in museums or monuments, but also in everyday urban spaces that continue to shape city life.

As you walk, pay attention to what is visible today: façades, entrances, signs, plaques, courtyards, theatres, and public spaces. These details can tell us a lot about who was represented, who had access, and whose work or presence remained in the background.

This tour invites you to look at culture not only as performance or entertainment, but also as part of urban life, social opportunity, and the way people shape and use the city.



HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET?

This booklet is designed as a **self-guided urban walk** through places connected to culture, entertainment, visibility, and urban life in **Budapest's historic theatre and entertainment district**. Throughout the route, you will encounter QR codes linked to short digital activities, audio materials, or interactive reflections. Simply **scan the QR code** with your phone camera to access the content.

Not every stop includes a digital activity. Some moments are designed for observation, silence, or personal reflection. The booklet itself contains the main narrative of the tour. The digital elements are meant to deepen the experience, not replace it.

Welcome To Budapest

Route Information

Distance: approx. 1.5 km

Estimated duration: 90-100 mins

What You Will Need

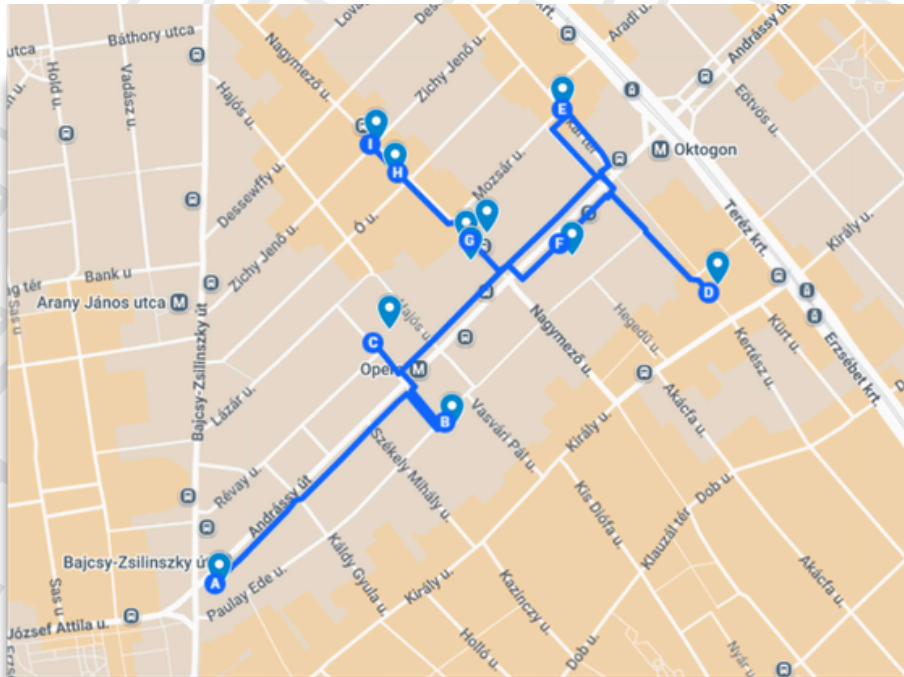
- a smartphone with internet access
- headphones or earphones (recommended)
- comfortable shoes

Icon Guide

-  Audio: Listen to short historical narration or sound-based content
-  Observation: Look closely at the surrounding space, architecture, or memorials
-  Reflection: Pause and think about a question or personal reaction
-  Interactive stop: Scan the QR code to access digital content or activities

Take your time during the walk. Some places are highly visible. Others are easy to overlook. The goal is not only to learn historical facts, but to notice how memory exists — or disappears — in the city today.

ROUTE OVERVIEW



This tour explores Budapest's historic theatre and entertainment district, an area that developed rapidly around the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Here, theatres, music venues, cafés, and cultural institutions appeared side by side with residential buildings and later real-estate investments. The tour focuses on culture as a civic space: how entertainment and the arts created visibility, opportunity, and prestige — but also reinforced social boundaries.

Scan for following the
route on your phone



ANDRÁSSY AVENUE GATEWAY

Modern City Planning, Prestige, and Visibility



You are standing at the symbolic entrance to Andrassy Avenue, one of Budapest's most important urban boulevards.

By the late nineteenth century, Budapest was growing quickly. After the unification of Buda, Pest, and Óbuda in 1873, the city wanted to present itself as a modern European capital. Its population was rising, trade was expanding, and more people were moving through the centre every day.

But the older streets of Pest were often narrow, crowded, and not designed for a fast-growing city.

City leaders wanted more than a practical traffic solution. They wanted to reshape the image of Budapest. A new boulevard would connect the city centre with Városliget, the large public park where exhibitions and public events were held. It would make movement easier, attract investment, open new areas for development, and create an elegant route lined with prestigious buildings.

Construction began in the 1870s and continued for years. Older houses were removed, land was reorganised, and a completely new urban axis was created.

Andrassy Avenue became one of the clearest symbols of Budapest's modernisation after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. It connected transport, housing, culture, business, and prestige in one planned corridor. Today, it is part of Budapest's UNESCO World Heritage area.

Observation

Before scanning the QR code, look along the avenue. What details make this street feel planned, formal, or prestigious?

Interactive stop

Scan the QR code to explore how Andrassy Avenue was designed in different sections.



➔ Next stop

Now turn right into Paulay Ede Street. Behind the grand boulevard, another side of the district was at work. Continue walking to the **former Parisiana Mulató (today Új Színház)**.

Walk and Talk Audio

Scan the QR code and listen as you walk to the next stop.

PARISIANA MULATÓ / ÚJ SZÍNHÁZ

Entertainment, Reinvention, and Access

You are standing in front of one of the most unusual entertainment buildings in Budapest.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, this address became home to the Parisiana Mulató, a fashionable nightlife venue created for dancing, variety performances, cabaret, and spectacle.

Its founder was Adolf Friedmann, nicknamed “Red Friedmann” because of his beard. After spending time in Paris, America, and London, he returned to Hungary with a complicated reputation. He entered Budapest’s entertainment world and quickly understood what the city’s audiences were looking for: novelty, glamour and a place to experience modern nightlife.

In 1906, he purchased the earlier building on this site and planned to create one of the most exclusive dance venues of the period. After lengthy licensing disputes, the new Parisiana opened in 1909 in a striking building designed by Béla Lajta.

Until midnight, audiences watched variety shows and cabaret. Later, international dance attractions entertained the crowd into the night.

But the success did not last long. Only months after opening, Friedmann was forced to close the venue because of creditors’ claims.

The building survived. Its first owner’s dream did not.

 **The story behind Parisiana**



 **Interactive timeline**

 **Reflection**

What helps a cultural venue survive: keeping its original identity, or adapting to new audiences and new times?

➔ Next stop

Walk back toward Andrásy Avenue and continue to the **Hungarian State Opera House**. As you walk, think about the contrast between nightlife entertainment and official cultural prestige.

HUNGARIAN STATE OPERA HOUSE

Prestige, Urban Transformation, and Selective Memory

You are standing in front of one of Budapest's grandest cultural landmarks.

The Hungarian State Opera House was built between 1875 and 1884, based on the designs of architect Miklós Ybl. When it opened, it became one of the most prestigious buildings on the new Andrásy Avenue, symbolising culture, confidence, and national ambition.



Its location was not accidental. Andrásy Avenue was designed to present Budapest as a modern European capital, and the Opera House became one of the clearest expressions of that ambition. It brought together architecture, music, public life, and urban prestige in one highly visible place.

But this plot was not easy to develop.

For years, the site delayed the completion of the grand boulevard. It was one of the last areas to be cleared and reorganised before the avenue could fully take shape. Before the Opera House stood here, this space had a very different reputation.

The area was known as Hermina Square. Instead of marble staircases, chandeliers, and official cultural prestige, it was associated with a poorly regarded tavern, informal trade, and a flea market used by poorer residents of Pest.

This contrast is important. The Opera House represents cultural achievement, but it also shows how cities create prestige by transforming existing urban spaces. When a city builds a grand new image, older uses and lower-status histories can disappear behind the new façade.

This stop asks you to look at the Opera House not only as a monument of music and architecture, but also as part of a wider process of urban change.

Archive story



Interactive stop Quick test - Scan the QR code



➔ Next stop

Continue walking along Andrásy Avenue toward Oktogon.

Your next stop is: Liszt Ferenc tér 8, Budapest – **The Music Academy**

LISZT ACADEMY OF MUSIC

Talent, Education, and Opportunity



You are standing in front of one of Budapest's most respected cultural institutions.

The Liszt Academy was founded in the nineteenth century and moved into this landmark Art Nouveau building in 1907. For generations, it has represented musical excellence, discipline, and prestige. Great performers, composers, teachers, and students have passed through these halls.

But institutions like this tell more than one story.

One story is about talent, dedication, and artistic achievement. The other is about access. Talent matters, but it rarely develops on its own. A young musician also needs time to practise, instruments, teachers, family support, confidence, and often the right social networks.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, these conditions were not equally available to everyone. Some young people could receive private lessons, attend concerts, learn foreign languages, and grow up in families where artistic education was encouraged. Others may have had ability, but far fewer opportunities to develop it.

This does not make cultural achievement less valuable. It simply reminds us that artistic success is shaped not only by individual effort, but also by the conditions surrounding a person.

The square around you is also part of the story. Liszt Ferenc Square has long connected formal culture with everyday city life: cafés, students, audiences, teachers, passers-by, and conversations. Culture was not created only inside the concert hall. It also developed through meetings, lessons, rehearsals, networks, and public life around it.

Today, the building still functions as a major cultural institution. Its façade reflects the prestige of early twentieth-century Budapest, while its role reminds us that cultural heritage is also about education, access, and the development of talent.

➡ Next stop

Walk across Liszt Ferenc Square towards Andrásy Avenue, then turn right and continue a short distance to the former café zone around Andrásy út 45–49 / Jókai tér.

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COFFEE HOUSES ON ANDRÁSSY

Ideas, status, and who gets heard

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Budapest was one of Europe's greatest café cities. Cafés were not simply places to drink coffee—they were extensions of everyday urban life. People came to read newspapers, write, hold meetings, discuss politics, look for work, or simply spend time in the company of others.

Several cafés along Andrásy Avenue became famous gathering places for artists, writers, journalists, architects, and politicians. Venues such as Japán, Abbázia, Miramar, and Magyar Korona helped shape Budapest's intellectual and cultural life. Ideas were exchanged, newspapers were debated, literary journals were planned, and professional connections were formed around café tables.

Yet these spaces also reflected the inequalities of the city. Although cafés appeared to be public places, not everyone could benefit from them equally. Taking part in café life often required money, education, free time, confidence, and access to influential social circles. For many people, the opportunity to be noticed depended as much on who they knew as on their own talent.



Reflection

As you explore the historic cafés nearby, consider questionS that remains relevant today:

- *Where do opportunities begin?*
- *How do informal meeting places help shape careers, communities, and cultural life?*



Interactive stop

Scan the QR code



➔ Next stop

Walk back along Andrásy Avenue towards the city centre until you reach **Párisi Nagy Áruház**. Approximate walking time: 2–3 minutes.

PÁRISI NAGY ÁRUHÁZ

Consumer Culture, Modernity, and Urban Leisure

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a new kind of urban experience appeared in Budapest: one that combined architecture, technology, commerce, and everyday life.

The Párisi Nagy Áruház opened here in 1911 and quickly became one of the city's most modern department stores. Behind its historic façade, it introduced advanced engineering for its time, including a reinforced concrete structure, glass-walled lifts, electric lighting, and its own generator in case of power failure. The building was also equipped with an early sprinkler system, making it unusually modern and safe.

One of its most interesting features was hidden above the shopping floors. The building still contained a former ballroom, richly decorated with frescoes by Károly Lotz and Árpád Feszty. Instead of demolishing it, the new department store was built around this older space. A room once connected to elite social life became part of a modern commercial environment.

The store also introduced new habits. Visitors did not necessarily come only to buy. They walked through departments, looked at displays, compared goods, observed other customers, and spent time in a carefully designed setting. Shopping became part of urban leisure and identity.

Its business model reflected modern thinking as well. Owner Sámuel Goldberger applied the principle of "small profit, large turnover," aiming to attract more customers through lower prices. The store also offered catalogues and delivery services, an early form of shopping from a distance.

At the same time, this apparent openness had limits. The doors may have been physically open, but full participation still depended on money, confidence, and social position. A department store could feel public, but not everyone experienced it in the same way.

In the socialist period, the building continued to function as the Divatcsarnok, one of Budapest's well-known fashion stores. Today, the former department store operates mainly as an office building and mixed-use space. Although the famous Lotz Hall was once open to visitors, in recent years the building has primarily hosted office tenants.

Observation

Look at the façade and entrance.

Does the building feel more like a shop, a palace, an office building, or something in between?

➔ **Next stop: Nagymező Cultural Cluster (Operetta Theatre area)**

As you arrive, take a moment to look around before starting the next part: many elements of this stop are visible in the surrounding space.

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NAGYMEZŐ CULTURAL CLUSTER

Performance, visibility, and hidden labour

You are standing in one of Budapest's best-known cultural streets, often referred to as "**Pest Broadway**".

From the late nineteenth century, this area became a dense network of theatres, cabarets and nightlife spaces. Audiences could move easily from one venue to another, while nearby side streets, service spaces, and businesses supported the entire cultural ecosystem.

Places like the **Operetta Theatre** grew out of earlier entertainment forms such as the cabaret, and variety shows. These venues did not offer culture only as a formal performance. They created a complete urban experience: music, humour, lights, food, drink and social display.

This district was therefore not only about art. It was also about business, visibility, and city life. It created work for performers, musicians, stage workers, ticket sellers and many others. Some people came here to enjoy themselves, others came to be seen, and many came because this was where they earned their living.

The street still carries traces of that role today. Theatre buildings, plaques, statues, façades all remind us that cultural life is not limited to what happens on stage. It also includes the streets around the venues and the people who keep those places active.

At the same time, entertainment districts are full of contrasts. What feels like leisure for an audience can mean pressure, competition, or unstable work for those performing or working behind the scenes. The glamour of cultural life often depends on labour that remains less visible.

This stop invites you to look at Nagymező Street not only as a place of performance, but as a cultural cluster: a neighbourhood where entertainment and public life overlap.

Observation

Take a moment to observe this corner.

Look for:

- *theatre buildings*
- *names or plaques in the pavement*
- *statues or references to performers*
- *signs of cultural life*

Interactive stop



Operetta excerpt

Scan the QR code and listen to a short operetta excerpt.

As you listen, think about the atmosphere it creates. What kind of audience experience was this music designed for.

➔ Next stop

Just continue on the street and find **Mai Manó Ház** on the left.

MAI MANÓ HÁZ

Photography, memory, and who gets seen

You are standing in front of Mai Manó House, one of the most distinctive buildings on Nagymező Street.

The house was built in the 1890s for Mai Manó, a well-known photographer of his time. It was designed not only as a home, but also as a professional photography studio. This already makes it different from many other buildings on the route: it was created specifically for image-making.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, photography became an increasingly important part of urban culture. Portraits, theatre images, family photographs, postcards, and press photos helped shape how people were seen and remembered. A photograph could preserve status, support a public career, document a performance, or create a carefully staged version of someone's identity.

But photography was never completely neutral. Not everyone had the same chance to be photographed, published, collected, or preserved in archives. Some people became highly visible through portraits and publicity images. Others appeared only rarely, anonymously, or not at all.

This stop connects closely to the surrounding theatre and entertainment district. Performers, artists, and public figures depended on images, just as theatres depended on posters, reviews, and publicity. Photography helped create cultural memory: not only what happened, but also who was remembered.

Today, Mai Manó House continues to work with photography, exhibitions, and visual culture. Its changing role reminds us that cultural heritage is not only about preserving old buildings, but also about continuing the practices connected to them.

Observation

Look at the façade and windows of the building.

What suggests that this was once connected to photography, representation, or public image?

External source

Scan the QR code to visit the official Mai Manó House page and learn more about the history of the building.

Optional: *if the building is open and you have time, step inside briefly and look at how the interior connects to the history of photography.*



➔ Next stop

Continue along Nagymező Street towards Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út until you reach Nagymező utca 38, the area of the next stop.

CABARET / NIGHTLIFE ZONE

Women, Reputation, and the Performance Economy



When the theatre performance ended, the evening did not.

In this part of the city, another cultural world began: less formal, less official, and often less visible in heritage narratives. Cabarets, bars, and late-night venues offered music, performance and social contact. Places such as Arizona and Jardin attracted mixed audiences: wealthy guests, curious visitors, and people looking for something beyond the formal theatre experience.

From the outside, this world could appear glamorous. Inside, it was also work.

Women served guests, danced and entertained, and often depended on the attention and spending of the audience. Waitresses moved constantly between tables. Musicians played late into the night. Behind the scenes, there were rehearsals, financial pressures, competition, and unstable working conditions.

For some women, nightlife offered income and a degree of independence. For others, it meant judgement and exploitation. The same space could feel like freedom to one person and constraint to another.

Nightlife also blurred boundaries but society did not judge everyone equally. Male guests could often move through this world with fewer consequences, while women working in nightlife were more likely to be watched, labelled, or morally judged, even when their labour was essential to the experience.

This was not just entertainment. It was an economy built on desire, performance, and inequality.

👁️ Observation

Look around the street.

How close are theatres, restaurants, bars, apartments, and everyday urban spaces to one another?

➡ Next stop

Leave Nagymező Street and continue toward the nearby residential side streets.

As you walk, notice how quickly the atmosphere changes from performance and nightlife to everyday living spaces.

10

COURTYARD HOUSE

One building, many social worlds

At first glance, houses like this may seem elegant, uniform, and orderly. But during Budapest's rapid growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many rental houses were designed to contain very different lives under one roof.

Between the 1870s and the First World War, thousands of apartment buildings were constructed as Budapest expanded into a major European capital. New residents were arriving, the population was growing fast, and investors saw housing as a profitable business. The result was the characteristic Budapest courtyard house: a street façade leading into an inner courtyard, with several floors, multiple apartments, and a dense arrangement of everyday life.

These buildings helped create the modern city, but they were rarely equal inside. Status and living conditions could be shaped by floor level, sunlight, air, privacy, room size, and even which staircase a person used.

Interactive stop

Scan the QR code

Discover the social structure of the courtyard houses



The building brought different people physically close together, but it did not offer the same comfort, privacy, or social status to everyone.

Architecture did not simply house society. It also helped organise it.

Budapest's courtyard houses are therefore an important part of the city's cultural heritage. They are not famous monuments in the usual sense, but they tell us a great deal about how urban society was organised. They show that heritage is not only found in theatres, cafés, or grand public buildings. It is also built into ordinary housing, where social divisions became part of everyday architecture.

Reflection

What does the organisation of this building tell us about inequality?

Discuss your observations briefly with your group.

END OF THE ROUTE

Thank you for taking part in this walk

Throughout the route, you explored a part of Budapest where culture, entertainment, business, education, and everyday life developed side by side. Theatres, cafés, music institutions, department stores, photography studios, nightlife venues, and residential buildings all shaped the character of this neighbourhood in different ways.

The walk was not only about famous buildings or well-known artists. It also looked at the wider urban world behind cultural life: audiences, students, workers, performers, shop visitors, café guests, photographers, tenants, and people whose names are less likely to appear in official histories.

Many of the places you visited still exist today, although their functions have changed over time. Some continue to serve cultural purposes, while others have become offices, shops, hotels, or everyday urban spaces. Their changing roles remind us that cultural heritage is not fixed. It continues to evolve with the city and the people who use it.

This route also raised questions about access and visibility. Who could enter cultural spaces? Who had the opportunity to learn, perform, publish, or be seen? Who worked behind the scenes? And whose stories became part of the city's memory?

There is no single answer to these questions. But looking at the city through them can help us notice more than façades, monuments, and famous names.

As you leave the route, think about the cultural places in your own city or community. Who uses them? Who feels welcome there? What histories do they preserve — and what might still remain hidden?

Thank you for walking, observing, and reflecting with us.



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