

On Stage:

Budapest's Theatre and Entertainment District



Co-funded by
the European Union

General Information



Primary Themes:

Culture as public space, Visibility, inequality, and representation, Urban life



Target Audience: Young people aged 16-25, no prior knowledge needed



Languages: English, French, German, Hungarian, Polish, Serbian



City / Country: Budapest / Hungary



Starting location: Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út - Andrásy út corner (near Deák Ferenc tér)



Distance: approx. 1.5 km



Estimated Duration: around 90-100 minutes



Materials needed: smartphones with internet access, earphones or headphones for audio, printed booklet



Accessibility Level: Easy (flat, central urban route, short distances between stops)

Support Material

Learning Objectives

This tour explores Budapest's theatre and entertainment district as a social and cultural system, focusing on how culture shapes urban life beyond performance itself. Rather than presenting a history of institutions or artistic achievements, the tour examines how spaces of culture are also spaces of power, access, visibility, and inequality.

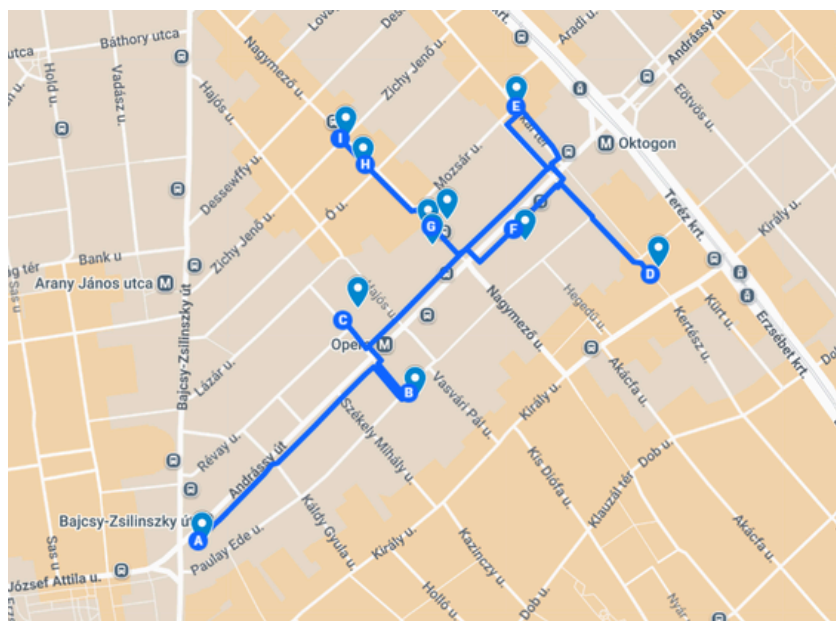
Participants are encouraged to reflect on how cultural life is produced through networks, labour, consumption, and representation, and how different groups experience the same spaces in different ways. The tour connects historical examples to present-day questions about who participates in culture, who is visible, and how urban environments influence everyday life.

Objectives

The tour is designed to:

- encourage critical reflection rather than passive learning
- explore culture as a social and economic system, not only as artistic production
- highlight inequalities in access, visibility, and participation
- connect historical urban spaces to contemporary experiences
- create space for discussion, multiple perspectives, and uncertainty

Practical Information



MAP of the Tour

Route Overview

Stop #	Location Name	Address	Interactive?	Type of Activity	Estimated time
1	Andrássy Avenue Gateway	Andrássy út 1 / Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út–Andrássy út corner	Yes	Observation + clickable matching activity	6 min.
2	Parisiana / Újszínház	Paulay Ede utca 35	Yes	Short story + timeline ordering	8 min.
3	Hungarian State Opera House	Andrássy út 22	Yes	Historical contrast + reflection	8 min.
4	Liszt Academy of Music	Liszt Ferenc tér 8	No	Booklet narrative + social reflection	7-8 min.
5	Coffee Houses on Andrássy	Andrássy út 45–49 / Jókai tér area	Yes	Flipcards	7-8 min.
6	Párisi Nagy Áruház	Andrássy út 39	No	Observation + historical interpretation	5 min.
7	Nagymező Cultural Cluster	Nagymező utca 17 and the surrounding theatre area	Yes	Observation + operetta audio excerpt + reflection	9 min.
8	Mai Manó House	Nagymező utca 20	Yes – optional	Observation + visual analysis + optional digital source or visit	7 min.
9	Cabaret / Nightlife Zone	Nagymező utca 38	No	Narrative + individual reflection	6 min.
10	Courtyard House	Zichy Jenő utca, near Nagymező utca	Yes	Interactive cutaway: hotspots + matching task	8 min.

Support Material

Accessibility

The tour follows a mostly flat, walkable urban route in central Budapest. Some sections may be busy, especially around Andrásy Avenue and Nagymező Street, so participants should be informed in advance about the overall duration, distance, and pacing.

Content is presented in multiple formats, including short texts, visual elements, optional audio, QR-based activities, and external source links. Facilitators should avoid relying on a single format for essential information and remain flexible in how content is delivered.

Participation is designed to be adaptable. Participants may engage through speaking, observing, or silent reflection, and no one should feel pressured to contribute verbally.

The tour includes themes such as inequality, visibility, and social roles. While not emotionally intense, these topics may still invite personal reflection. Participants should be free to engage at their own level.

Facilitators should remain attentive to individual needs and be ready to adjust timing, group dynamics, and the level of interaction accordingly.

Safety

- The tour addresses social themes such as inequality, visibility, gender roles, and working conditions in cultural spaces. While these topics are not explicitly traumatic, they may still prompt personal reflection or discomfort for some participants.
- Emotional reactions may vary:
 - create a respectful, supportive environment
 - do not force participation in discussions
- Always allow participants to step back
 - from sharing
 - from specific activities
- Pay attention to moments that may feel more sensitive, particularly when discussing:
 - exclusion and inequality
 - gender dynamics and nightlife
 - hidden forms of labour
- Allow space and silence where needed
- Ensure basic physical safety:
 - monitor traffic and crossings
 - keep group cohesion
 - be aware of crowded public areas
- Avoid overloading participants with information or dramatizing content.
- The goal is reflection and understanding, not intensity.

Support Material



Before the Tour

Before starting the tour, facilitators may:

- briefly introduce the purpose of the walk (reflection, not just information)
- invite participants to think about:
 - what they associate with culture in a city
 - what kinds of places they connect to culture (e.g. theatres, cafés, music institutions, photography studios, nightlife spaces, department stores, residential buildings, and public spaces)
 - who they think these spaces are designed for
- set expectations:
 - there will be questions without clear answers
 - participation can take different forms (speaking, observing, reflecting).

This tour explores social themes such as inequality, visibility, gender roles, and access to culture. Facilitators should:

- create a respectful and open environment
- allow participants to opt out of sharing personal reflections
- be attentive to different comfort levels, especially during more reflective discussions.

The goal is not to provide definitive answers, but to support critical thinking about how culture and urban life interact.

General facilitation tips

- keep instructions short and clear
- allow time for individual exploration before group discussion
- avoid over-explaining; let participants discover elements themselves
- use open questions rather than giving interpretations.
- Facilitators should adapt the depth of explanation and level of interaction based on group engagement. Not all stops require full discussion; pacing and flexibility are key to maintaining attention and interest.

Support Material



During the Tour

Stop 1 : Andrassy Avenue Gateway



Facilitation Tips:

- Encourage participants to observe the scale, layout, and uniformity of the street.
- Ask simple observation questions before adding context.
- After the interactive activity, briefly review the matches and ask participants what the different sections suggest about how the avenue was planned and used.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- Andrassy Avenue was planned in the nineteenth century to connect the city centre with City Park and to present Budapest as a modern European capital.
- Its character changes along the route: the inner section is more commercial and urban, while the outer sections gradually become more residential and spacious.
- These differences also reflected social hierarchy. The location, size, and type of buildings influenced who lived, worked, and spent time in each section.

Stop 2 : Parisiana Mulató



Facilitation Tips:

- Present the story in three short stages: the original idea behind the venue, the difficulties it faced, and its later changes.
- Pause between the stages and ask participants what they think may have happened next.
- Let participants react to the narrative before adding interpretation or checking the timeline.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- Entertainment venues such as the Parisiana were cultural spaces but also commercial businesses.
- Their survival depended on ticket sales, investors, management decisions, changing audience preferences, and competition from other venues.
- A successful opening did not guarantee long-term stability. Venues often changed their programme, name, ownership, or function when financial or social conditions changed.
- The history of the building shows that cultural heritage is not always linked to one continuous use.



Solutions:

- Use the correct sequence provided in the Genially timeline and clarify only the stages that caused difficulty.

Support Material



During the Tour

Stop 3 : Opera House



Facilitation Tips:

- Encourage participants to notice the contrast between the building and its earlier context.
- Use questions rather than direct explanation.
- Ask participants which details of the building communicate prestige or importance.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- The Opera House opened in the late nineteenth century, when Budapest was expanding rapidly and investing in major public and cultural institutions.
- It served not only as a performance venue but also as a symbol of the city's cultural ambition and political status.
- Its monumental façade, decorative interiors, and formal organisation shaped the experience of visitors before a performance even began.
- Institutions of this kind could strengthen national and urban identity, but they were not equally accessible to all social groups.

Stop 4 : Music Academy



Facilitation Tips:

- Allow space for discussion; this stop may generate personal reflections.
- Avoid framing answers as "correct".
- If needed, suggest factors such as training, money, time, family support, access to instruments, and professional contacts.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- The Music Academy was established as a centre for advanced musical education and professional training.
- Formal education gave students access not only to technical knowledge but also to recognised teachers, performance opportunities, professional contacts, and institutional prestige.
- Talent alone was rarely enough to build a professional career. Students also needed time, financial support, preparation, and access to the right networks.
- Similar barriers still influence access to artistic education and cultural careers today.

Support Material



During the Tour

Stop 5 : Coffee Houses on Andrásy



Facilitation Tips:

- Keep interaction light and quick.
- Encourage participants to connect the topic to their own experiences.
- Let participants explore the flipcards before starting the group discussion.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- Budapest cafés served as meeting places, informal offices, reading rooms, and centres for exchanging news and ideas.
- Writers, journalists, artists, politicians, and businesspeople used them to maintain professional and social networks.
- Newspapers and letters could often be received at cafés, and some regular guests worked there for several hours each day.
- These spaces were public, but access was not equal. Participation required money, free time, confidence, education, and knowledge of the right people.

Stop 6 : Párisi Nagy Áruház



Facilitation Tips:

- Treat this as a slower, observational stop.
- Avoid overloading participants with information.
- Ask participants what features of the building may have attracted customers or encouraged them to enter.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- Department stores introduced a new form of urban shopping by bringing many products, services, and displays together in one building.
- Large windows, decorative interiors, electric lighting, advertising, and new technologies helped turn shopping into a public experience and a form of leisure.
- Visitors could observe new products, fashions, and lifestyles even when they could not afford to buy them.
- Department stores appeared open to everyone, but differences in income still shaped how people could participate in this new consumer culture.

Support Material



During the Tour

Stop 7 : Nagymező Cultural Cluster



Facilitation Tips:

- Encourage participants to look around before engaging with the content.
- Ask them to identify the different cultural venues and related businesses in the area.
- Allow time for the audio experience without interruption.
- If the audio cannot be played, use a transcript or briefly describe the role and atmosphere of operetta.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- Nagymező Street developed into a cultural and entertainment district because several theatres, cafés, studios, restaurants, and nightlife venues operated close to one another.
- These venues shared audiences, workers, suppliers, publicity, and the reputation of the district.
- Performances created work not only for visible artists but also for musicians, technicians, costume makers, administrative staff, cleaners, and hospitality workers.
- Entertainment could offer audiences escape and emotional relief while also functioning as a commercial industry.

Stop 8 : Mai Manó House



Facilitation Tips:

- Encourage participants to observe the façade and identify details that suggest both a private residence and a professional workplace.
- Ask them to consider why people commissioned studio portraits and how they wanted to be represented.
- The stop should work from outside; entering the building or opening the external digital source should remain optional.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- Mai Manó House combined residential spaces with a professional photography studio.
- Early studio photography required specialised equipment, carefully arranged interiors, and access to natural light.
- Portraits were usually staged through clothing, posture, furniture, and background. They showed not only what a person looked like but also how they wanted to be seen.
- Professional portraits were more accessible to people with money and social status. As a result, historical photographic collections do not represent all groups equally.

Support Material



During the Tour

Stop 9 : Cabaret and Nightlife



Facilitation Tips:

- Do not force discussion; allow silent reflection.
- Be attentive to group reactions.
- Encourage participants to first observe how the area is used today.
- Personal sharing about nightlife, gender, or safety should remain optional.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- Cabaret combined music, theatre, humour, political commentary, food, drink, and social interaction.
- Nightlife venues depended on many forms of work beyond the performers on stage, including serving, cleaning, technical work, management, security, and preparation.
- Gender, money, social status, and professional role influenced who was visible, who controlled the space, and who could participate safely.
- The same venue could represent freedom and entertainment for one person while being demanding or exclusionary for another.

Stop 10 : Courtyard House



Facilitation Tips:

- Encourage participants to actively observe entrances, windows, floors, staircases, and the layout of the courtyard.
- Allow time for the visual task.
- Ask participants to explain their choices based on light, space, privacy, access, and location within the building.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- Budapest courtyard houses often contained residents from different social backgrounds within the same building.
- Street-facing apartments were generally larger, lighter, quieter, and more prestigious.
- Courtyard apartments usually received less natural light and offered less privacy.
- Basements, attics, rear rooms, and service areas were used for storage, maintenance, workshops, domestic work, and sometimes lower-status accommodation.
- Separate staircases and entrances could organise movement according to social role, distinguishing residents and visitors from servants, workers, and deliveries.
- The building therefore brought different groups close together without providing equal living conditions.

Support Material



After the Tour

After completing the tour, facilitators may invite participants to reflect on their experience.

Possible approaches:

- a short open question:
 - What stayed with you the most?
- optional sharing in pairs or small groups
- or silent reflection (e.g. writing one thought or takeaway)

Facilitators should avoid summarising the “correct meaning” of the tour. Instead, they can highlight that:

- different interpretations are valid
- the aim was to explore how culture, space, and society are connected
- experiences of the same places can differ depending on perspective

If appropriate, participants can be invited to think about:

- how cultural and urban spaces shape their perception of a city
- who is visible and who remains less visible in public space
- what role they personally have in engaging with or questioning these dynamics today.

The closing should remain open-ended, supporting reflection rather than providing conclusions.

Support Material



References

Historical context & institutions

- Budapest Operetta Theatre archives and historical materials
- Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute
- Mai Manó House – House of Hungarian Photography
- Hungarian National Museum (urban and cultural history collections)

Budapest-specific context

- PestBuda (urban history articles and research)
- Budapest100 (urban heritage and residential architecture)
- WeLoveBudapest (local history and cultural context articles)
- Urban studies publications (e.g. BME – Budapest housing and urban development research)

Architecture & urban development

- BME Urban Studies – The Golden Age of Budapest Tenement Construction
- Budapest courtyard house and housing history research materials (previously provided sources)

Visual sources

- Fortepan (historical photographs)
- Hungarian National Digital Archive (MaNDA)
- Europeana Collections

Social and cultural history sources

- Articles on Budapest café culture, nightlife, and entertainment districts (previously provided materials)
- Historical press excerpts and urban narratives (e.g. cabaret, theatre, and early 20th century nightlife)

Maps & spatial references

- Google Maps
- Arcanum Maps



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This support material for facilitators of the walking tour was created by Youth Bridges Budapest as part of the project Empower Youth Explore Stories (EYES).

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