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Youth Bridges
Budapest

WALKING THROUGH HISTORY

**Jewish Life, the Holocaust,
and Civic Memory in
Budapest**

**A self-guided urban walk through memory,
exclusion, and civic responsibility**

CITIES REMEMBER DIFFERENTLY

Imagine arriving in Budapest for the first time...



You leave the metro, cross a busy square, pass cafés and shops, and continue through streets filled with people. Nothing immediately suggests that these places were once connected to some of the darkest events in the city's history.

Yet cities are full of layers.

The buildings around you have witnessed generations of lives, decisions, conflicts, and transformations. Some stories are visible through monuments and memorials. Others survive only in photographs, documents, or personal memories. Many remain almost invisible unless someone points them out.

Less than a century ago, these same streets formed part of a city where exclusion gradually became normal. Political decisions influenced where people could live, work, study, and move. Neighbours found themselves separated by new rules and restrictions. Public spaces took on new meanings. **Familiar places became sites of uncertainty, survival, and loss.**

This transformation did not happen overnight. It emerged through a series of decisions, regulations, and compromises that slowly reshaped everyday life.



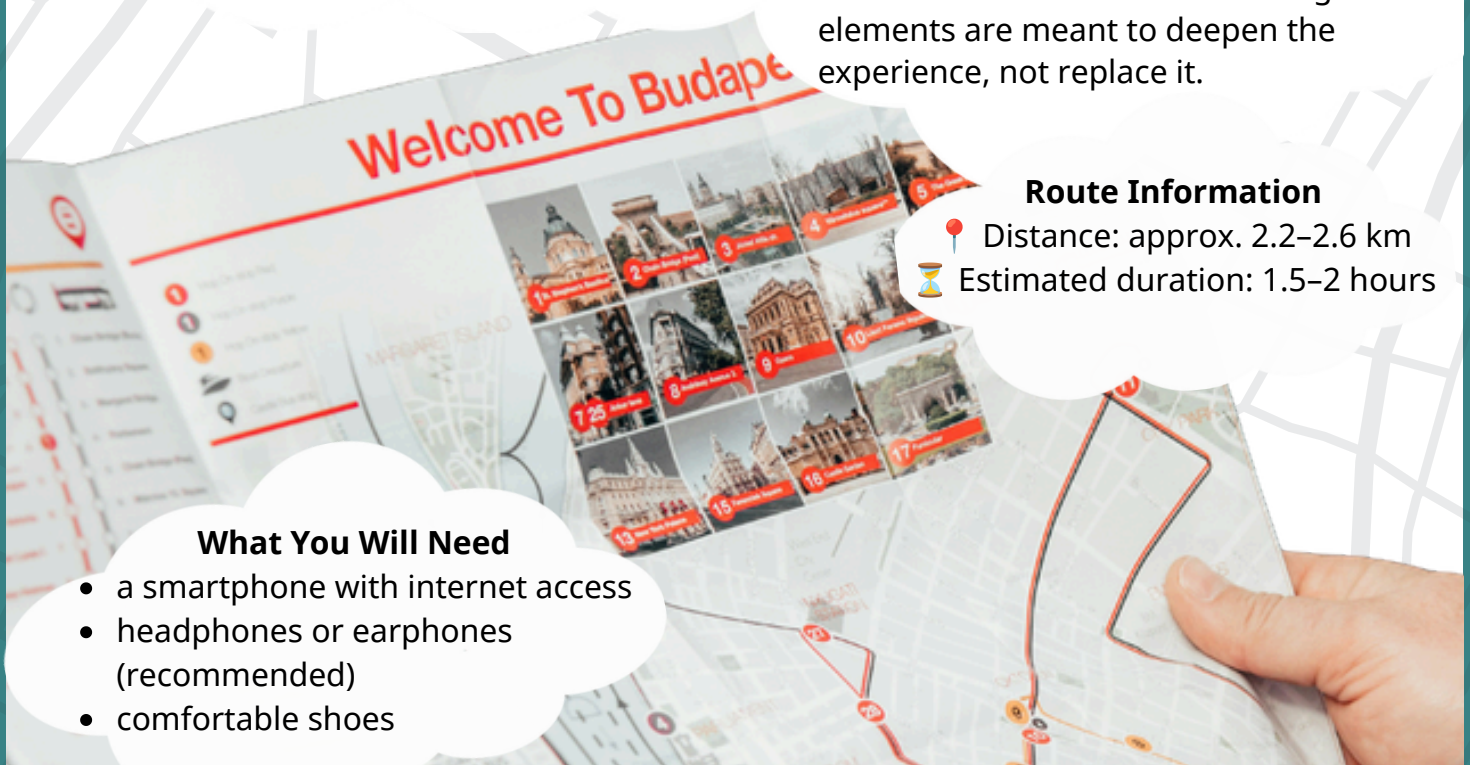
This walk invites you to explore Budapest through those layers. Along the route, you will encounter places connected to community life, confinement, rescue efforts, public memory, and remembrance. Some sites still display clear traces of the past. Others appear completely ordinary.

As you walk, pay attention not only to what happened here, but also to what remains visible today and what does not.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET?

This booklet is designed as a **self-guided urban walk** through places connected to **World War II, the Holocaust**, and public memory in Budapest. 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.



Route Information

- Distance: approx. 2.2–2.6 km
- Estimated duration: 1.5–2 hours

What You Will Need

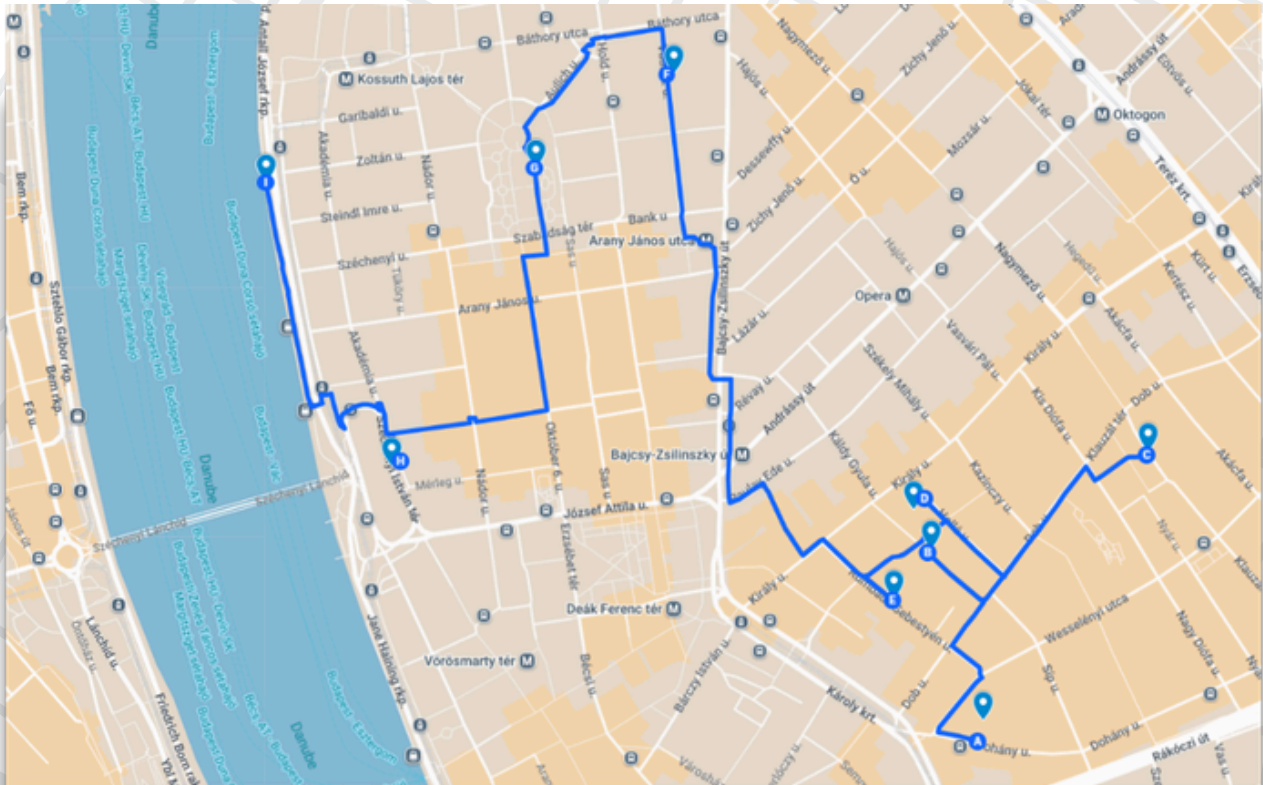
- a smartphone with internet access
- headphones or earphones (recommended)
- comfortable shoes

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 route follows central Pest through places connected to Jewish life before and during World War II, the Budapest Ghetto, rescue efforts, and public memory today. Some stops are well-known public places, while others are easier to overlook. The aim is not to present tourist landmarks, but to examine how familiar urban spaces carry difficult histories and contested memories.

Scan for following the
route on your phone



DOHÁNY STREET SYNAGOGUE

Jewish Life, Exclusion, and Belonging



Today, the **Dohány Street Synagogue** is one of Budapest's most visited landmarks and the largest synagogue in Europe. Its size alone tells an important story. When it was completed in 1859, the Jewish community of Pest was growing rapidly and playing an increasingly important role in the city's economic, cultural and intellectual life.

The neighbourhood surrounding the synagogue became one of the most vibrant parts of Budapest. Jewish families lived here alongside non-Jewish neighbours, running shops, workshops, cafés, publishing houses and businesses. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Jewish citizens were deeply integrated into the life of the Hungarian capital.

Standing here today, it can be difficult to imagine how dramatically life changed within a few decades.

The rise of antisemitism in the 1930s gradually restricted the rights and opportunities of Jewish citizens. New laws affected employment, education and everyday life. What had once seemed permanent—the idea that Budapest's Jewish population was an inseparable part of the city—became increasingly uncertain.

By 1944, following the German occupation of Hungary, the situation deteriorated rapidly. Within months, persecution intensified, thousands were deported, and this neighbourhood became one of the centres of a struggle for survival.

Interactive stop

Explore how exclusion entered everyday life gradually.

Scan to explore:

- Jewish life before WWII
- gradual exclusion
- everyday changes under anti-Jewish laws



 **Reflection:** What makes someone feel that they belong in a city?

➔ Next stop

Walk towards **Gozsdu Udvar** through Kazinczy Street. Stand in the central courtyard of Gozdsu Udvar, roughly halfway between Király Street and Dob Street.

Approximate walking time: 5 minutes.

GOZSDU COURTYARD

Everyday Life and Its Disruption

Today, the **Gozsdu Courtyard** is one of Budapest's busiest entertainment districts. Restaurants, bars and cafés fill the passageways, and thousands of visitors walk through the complex every week. Yet the buildings around you were not originally designed for tourism or nightlife.

The courtyard was built at the beginning of the twentieth century as a residential and commercial complex connecting several streets through a series of interconnected passages.

Many Jewish families lived and worked in this area. The surrounding neighbourhood was filled with small businesses, craftsmen, traders and professionals.

Everything changed during the final months of the Second World War. In late 1944, this area became part of the **Budapest Ghetto**. Thousands of people were forced into overcrowded conditions within a relatively small area. Apartments designed for individual families suddenly housed many more people than they had ever been intended to accommodate. Food became scarce, disease spread easily, and uncertainty dominated everyday life.

After the war, the neighbourhood slowly changed again. Decades later, many buildings were renovated and repurposed, eventually becoming part of the city's growing nightlife district. Today, visitors often pass through these courtyards without realising how many different stories the walls have witnessed.

Observation

Take a moment to look around the courtyards.

What details make this space feel open, social, and connected today?
Now imagine the same place under restriction, overcrowding, and fear.

Reflection:

How quickly can an everyday space change when people lose freedom of movement?

➡ Next stop

Exit Gozsdu Courtyard towards Dob Street and continue to **Klauzál Square**.

Approximate walking time: 3–4 minutes.

KLAUZÁL SQUARE

Overcrowding, Survival and Loss

At first glance, **Klauzál Square** looks like a typical neighbourhood square. Children play on the playground, local residents cross the park on their way home, and people sit on benches or meet friends. Nothing immediately suggests that this was once one of the most significant locations within the **Budapest Ghetto**.

Klauzál Square was one of the few open spaces within the ghetto. People passed through it while searching for food, exchanging information, looking for relatives, or simply trying to escape the crowded buildings for a few moments. Although conditions became increasingly difficult, life continued here in whatever form it could. People still queued, talked, waited, worried, and tried to maintain some sense of normality.

Today, the square has returned to its role as a public gathering place. Yet traces of its wartime history remain hidden within the landscape.



Observation

Before continuing, try to find the memorial dedicated to the victims of the Budapest Ghetto. Take a moment to observe it closely.

What details did the designers choose to include? How visible is it within the everyday life of the square?

Interactive stop

Once you have found the memorial, learn why this particular place became one of the most important memorial sites connected to the ghetto.

Scan the QR code



Reflection

Before finding the memorial, would you have guessed what happened here?

Next stop

Leave Klauzál Square and walk towards **Király Street**.

Walking time: approximately 4–5 minutes.

4

GHETTO WALL FRAGMENT

Boundaries in the Middle of the City

As you walk through these streets today, it is difficult to imagine that this area once stood at the edge of a closed and heavily controlled zone.



In November 1944, the **Budapest Ghetto** was established in the **Jewish district**. More than 70.000 people were confined within a relatively small area of the city. Streets that had once been open to everyone suddenly became part of a restricted space separated from the rest of Budapest.

Unlike some historical walls that were built as continuous stone structures, the boundary of the ghetto was created using the city itself. Existing buildings, courtyards, fences, gates, and temporary barriers were combined to form a system of controlled entry points. Guards monitored movement, and only a limited number of people were allowed to cross the boundary.

The ghetto existed for only a few months, yet it fundamentally changed the lives of tens of thousands of people.

After the war, the barriers disappeared. Streets reopened, traffic returned, and everyday life gradually resumed. Today, most visitors pass through the area without realising that they are crossing what was once one of the most significant boundaries in wartime Budapest.

This makes places like this particularly important. They remind us that systems of exclusion are not always marked by monumental architecture. Sometimes they are created through administrative decisions, temporary barriers, and rules that reshape how people move through familiar spaces.

Map Exploration

Compare the city you see today with the boundaries that existed here in 1944.

Scan the QR code



Reflection

After viewing the map, look around again.

Without historical knowledge, would anything in the surrounding streets suggest that this was once the edge of a closed and controlled area?

➔ Next stop

Continue through the former ghetto area towards **Rumbach Sebestyén Street**.

Walking time: approximately 3–4 minutes.

RUMBACH STREET SYNAGOGUE

Community Disruption and Transformation

The Rumbach Street Synagogue stands in the middle of what was once one of Budapest's most vibrant Jewish neighbourhoods. When it was completed in 1872, the surrounding streets were home to a growing community that contributed strongly to the city's economic, cultural, and social life.

The synagogue was more than a religious building. It was part of a wider network of families, neighbours, organisations, routines, and shared traditions that helped people feel connected to one another.

During the **late 1930s and early 1940s**, this world came under increasing pressure. New restrictions affected where Jewish citizens could work, study, travel, and participate in public life. In late 1944, when the district became part of the Budapest Ghetto, everyday life became focused on overcrowding, uncertainty, and survival. The synagogue survived the war, but many of the people who had given meaning to the building did not. For decades it stood largely unused, reflecting the profound changes that had affected the neighbourhood around it.

Today, the restored building is once again part of Budapest's cultural landscape. It reminds us that communities are more than physical spaces. Buildings can survive for centuries, but the relationships and routines that bring them to life are far more fragile.



Observation

Look at the synagogue and the surrounding streets.

Apart from the building itself, what traces of community life can you still identify in the neighbourhood today?

Reflection

What makes a community strong? Buildings, institutions, traditions or the relationships between people?

➡ Next stop

Continue towards **Liberty Square** and the **Glass House** area.

Approximate walking time: 10–12 minutes.

6

GLASS HOUSE

Individual Action and Responsibility

The building known today as the Glass House was originally an industrial property. During the final months of the Second World War, however, it became one of the most important centres of rescue activity in Budapest.

After the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, persecution intensified rapidly. Thousands of Jewish people searched for any form of protection that might help them avoid deportation, forced labour, or violence. The Glass House became one of the places where that protection could sometimes be found.

Swiss diplomat Carl Lutz and his colleagues used the building to issue protective documents and organise assistance for people seeking refuge. Through diplomacy, legal creativity, and personal courage, they expanded Swiss protection far beyond what had originally been authorised.

Much of the rescue work involved paperwork, lists, stamps, signatures, and negotiations. Yet these administrative processes could determine whether someone lived or died. A document issued in the right office, bearing the right stamp, might be enough to protect a person from deportation.

The building soon became crowded with people hoping to obtain documents or shelter. Conditions were difficult, but the Glass House continued to operate as a centre of protection until the end of the war.

Carl Lutz is often remembered for his courage, but the story also involved many others: local volunteers, clerks, assistants, diplomats, and ordinary citizens.

The Glass House reminds us that history is not shaped only by political leaders and military commanders. Sometimes it is also influenced by people working within institutions who choose to use the limited power available to them to help others.

Interactive stop

Explore how diplomatic protection worked inside a system of persecution.

Scan the QR code



Reflection

Can individual actions still make a difference inside an unjust system?

➔ Next stop

Continue towards **Liberty Square**.

Approximate walking time: 8–10 minutes.

LIBERTY SQUARE

Memory, Interpretation, and Public Space

Liberty Square is one of the most unusual public spaces in Budapest. At first glance, it appears to be a pleasant urban park surrounded by impressive buildings. People walk their dogs, sit on benches, cross the square on their way to work, or stop for a coffee nearby.

Yet this square is also one of the city's most debated memory landscapes. Unlike many memorial sites that focus on a single event or historical period, Liberty Square brings together monuments created at different moments and for different political purposes. As a result, several interpretations of history exist side by side in the same space.

Two monuments are particularly important for understanding these debates. The **Soviet Liberation Memorial** was erected shortly after the Second World War and commemorates the Soviet soldiers who died during the Battle of Budapest. For decades, it reflected the official interpretation promoted during the socialist period: the Soviet Union as the liberator of Hungary from Nazi rule.

A short walk away stands the **Memorial to the Victims of the German Occupation**, inaugurated in 2014. The monument depicts Hungary as an angel attacked by a German eagle. Its creators intended it as a memorial to those who suffered during the German occupation of Hungary.

However, many historians, survivors, and civic groups criticised the monument. They argued that it presents Hungary primarily as a passive victim and does not adequately acknowledge the role played by Hungarian authorities in the persecution and deportation of Hungarian Jews.

These debates remind us that monuments do more than preserve history. They interpret it. Every monument highlights certain aspects of the past while leaving others in the background.

Liberty Square therefore invites us to think not only about historical events themselves, but also about who tells their stories, how they are represented, and why different interpretations sometimes coexist in the same place.

Observation

Find the following two monuments in the square:

- the Soviet Liberation Memorial
- the Memorial to the Victims of the German Occupation

Take a moment to look at both.
What do they show?
How are they different?

➔ **Next stop**

Walk towards the Danube and continue to the Chain Bridge.

Walking time: approximately 5–6 minutes.



CHAIN BRIDGE

Destruction, Division, and Reconstruction

Today, the **Chain Bridge** is one of Budapest's most recognisable landmarks. When it opened in 1849, it was the first permanent bridge connecting Buda and Pest, helping to transform two separate urban centres into one city.

For almost a century, the bridge symbolised connection, movement, and modernisation. People used it to work, trade, visit family members, and move through the city. This changed during the final months of the Second World War. On 18 January 1945, retreating German troops blew up the Chain Bridge, along with the other major bridges across the Danube. The structure collapsed into the river, and movement between Buda and Pest became extremely difficult.

The destruction affected everyday life. Families were separated, communication became harder, and the Danube once again became a barrier instead of a link.

The bridge was reopened in November 1949, almost five years later. Its reconstruction became one of the symbols of Budapest's recovery after the war. The bridge you see today is therefore both historic and rebuilt: it preserves the appearance and symbolic role of the original structure, while also reflecting the city's effort to restore connection after destruction.

Looking at the bridge now, it is difficult to imagine the Danube without it. Yet for several years, that was the reality faced by the people of Budapest.

Interactive stop

This bridge looks complete today.
But in 1945, it no longer existed in this form.
See what this place looked like at the end of the war

Scan the QR code



➔ **Next stop**

Continue along the Danube promenade towards the **Shoes on the Danube Bank** memorial. Approximate walking time: 5–7 minutes.

SHOES ON THE DANUBE BANK

Victims and Remembrance

The bronze shoes along the Danube are among Budapest's most recognisable memorials. Unlike many monuments, they do not depict military leaders, political figures or heroic victories. Instead, they focus on ordinary people whose lives were violently interrupted.

The memorial commemorates Jews who were murdered on the banks of the Danube during the final months of the Second World War. In late 1944 and early 1945, members of the Arrow Cross militia carried out executions along the river. Victims were often ordered to remove their shoes before being shot. At the time, shoes were valuable possessions that could be reused or sold. Those who were killed disappeared into the river, leaving behind only the objects they had worn.

The memorial, created by film director Can Togay and sculptor Gyula Pauer, deliberately avoids grand symbolism. Instead of presenting an abstract message, it invites visitors to imagine individual lives. The different styles and sizes of the shoes suggest different ages, occupations and personal stories. Some appear elegant, others practical. Some seem to belong to adults, others to children.

There are no names attached to most of them. This absence is significant. The memorial does not ask visitors to remember a single person. It asks them to reflect on the thousands of lives that were lost and the countless stories that were never fully recorded.

At the same time, the location matters. The Danube is one of Budapest's defining features. It connects different parts of the city and is often associated with beauty, movement and continuity. By placing the memorial here, the creators linked personal tragedy to a space that remains central to everyday life in Budapest. Many visitors leave flowers, candles or small stones among the shoes. Others simply stand quietly and look at the river.

Before ending the tour, take a few moments to observe the memorial in silence. There is no task to complete here and no correct interpretation to reach. Sometimes the most meaningful response is simply to pause, look, and remember.

Observation

*Take a moment to walk slowly along the memorial.
Notice the different shapes and sizes of the shoes.*

Reflection

What makes absence visible in public space?

*There is no next stop.
You may stay here as long as you wish.*



END OF THE ROUTE

Thank you for taking part in this walk.

Throughout the route, you explored World War II not through battlefields or military events, but through the streets, buildings, squares, and public spaces of Budapest. The places you visited showed how political decisions shaped the lives of ordinary people and how large historical events were experienced at a human scale.

The route also highlighted different aspects of cultural heritage. Some sites preserve visible traces of the past through memorials, monuments, or historic buildings. Others appear completely ordinary today, even though they were once connected to important events and experiences. Together, these places form part of the city's shared heritage and help us understand how the past continues to influence the present.

The stories encountered along the way raise questions that remain relevant today. How do societies respond when exclusion becomes normalised? What responsibilities do individuals have within larger systems? How should difficult histories be remembered and represented in public space? And whose voices become part of that memory?

There may not be a single answer to these questions. Different people, communities, and generations often interpret the past in different ways. Yet engaging with these perspectives is an important part of understanding both history and contemporary civic life.

As you leave the route, consider the places that matter in your own community. What stories do they tell? What histories remain visible? And which ones risk being forgotten?

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



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