

Support Material

Walking Through History: World War II and Civic Memory in Budapest



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General Information



Primary Themes:

Historical memory, Democracy and responsibility, Exclusion and solidarity



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



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



City / Country: Budapest / Hungary



Starting location: Dohány Street Synagogue



Distance: approx. 2.2 - 2.6 km



Estimated Duration: around 2 hours



Materials needed: smartphones with internet access, earphones or headphones for audio, notebook and pen for reflection, printed booklet



Accessibility: Easy-medium (flat route, emotionally demanding content)

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Learning Objectives

This tour explores World War II in Budapest through everyday urban spaces, focusing on how political decisions affected ordinary people's lives. Rather than presenting a chronological or military history, the tour emphasises moral choices, social dynamics, and the role of individuals within broader systems.

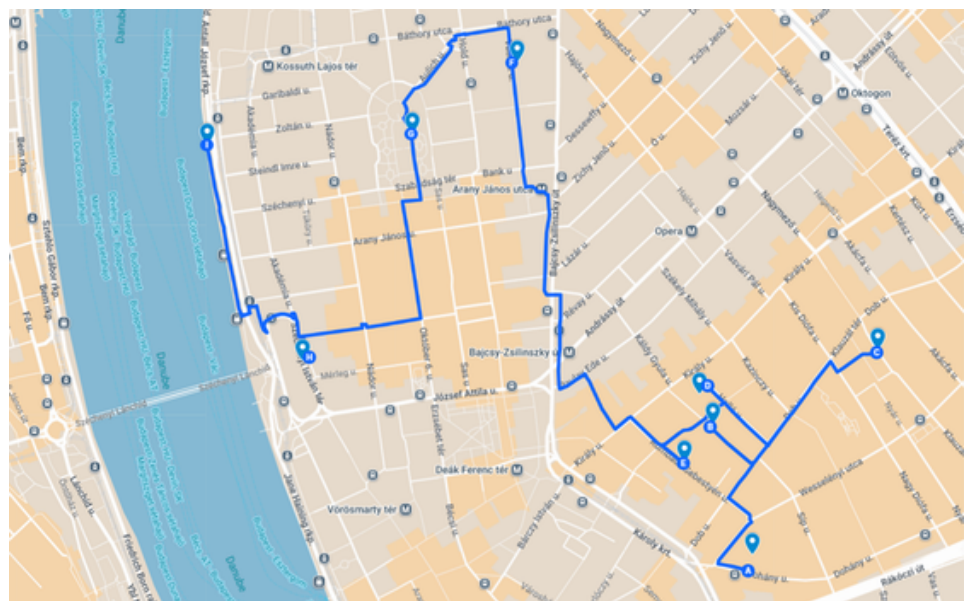
Participants are encouraged to explore how cultural heritage, public spaces, and memorials shape the ways societies remember and interpret the past. The experience connects historical events to present-day questions about democracy, responsibility, and civic engagement.

Objectives

The tour is designed to:

- encourage critical reflection rather than passive learning
- connect historical events to contemporary civic issues
- highlight the role of individual and collective responsibility
- create a 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	Dohány Street Synagogue	Dohány utca 2.	Yes	Interactive scenario on gradual exclusion + reflection	7 min.
2	Gozsdu Courtyard	Király utca 13. – Dob utca 16.	No	Observation + spatial imagination + reflection	6 min.
3	Klauzál Square	Klauzál tér	Yes	Memorial search + digital historical context + reflection	8 min.
4	Ghetto Wall Fragment	Király utca 15, inner courtyard	Yes	Historical map exploration + comparison with the present-day city	7 min.
5	Rumbach Street Synagogue	Rumbach Sebestyén utca 11–13.	No	Observation + reflection on community and its disruption	6 min.
6	Glass House	Vadász utca 29.	Yes	Interactive exploration of diplomatic protection and individual action	8 min.
7	Liberty Square	Szabadság tér	No	Monument comparison + observation + discussion	8 min.
8	Chain Bridge	Pest bridgehead, Széchenyi István tér	Yes	Historical visual comparison: the bridge before and after destruction	7 min.
9	Shoes on the Danube Bank	Id. Antall József rakpart, near the Parliament	No	Silent observation + individual reflection	10 min.

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Accessibility

- The tour follows mostly flat, walkable urban routes, but some sections may be crowded or require longer walking
- Inform participants in advance about duration, distance, and pacing
- Content is available in multiple formats (short texts, visuals, optional audio)
- Participation is flexible:
 - participants can engage through speaking, observing, or silent reflection
 - no one should feel pressure to share
- Allow participants to move at their own pace when possible
- Accept that some may skip certain activities. At Stop 3 (Klauzál Square), Stop 6 (Glass House), Stop 7 (Liberty Square), and especially Stop 9 (Shoes on the Danube Bank), participants may remain silent, observe from a short distance, or step away briefly if the content feels emotionally difficult.
- Be attentive to individual needs and adjust:
 - timing
 - group dynamics
 - level of interaction

Safety

- The tour includes sensitive topics:
 - persecution
 - violence
 - moral dilemmas
 - genocide and mass killings
 - contested public memory
- 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 emotional intensity at key stops (e.g. memorial sites)
- Allow space and silence where needed
- Ensure basic physical safety:
 - monitor traffic and crossings
 - keep group cohesion
 - be aware of crowded public areas
- Avoid dramatizing content
- The aim is reflection, not emotional overload

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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 already know about WWII in Budapest
 - how history is remembered in their own communities
- set expectations:
 - there will be questions without clear answers
 - participation can take different forms (speaking, observing, reflecting).

This tour deals with sensitive historical content, including persecution, violence, and moral dilemmas. Facilitators should:

- create a safe and respectful environment
- allow participants to opt out of sharing personal reflections
- be attentive to emotional reactions, especially at key memorial sites.

The goal is not to provide definitive answers, but to support thoughtful engagement.

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

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During the Tour

Stop 1 : Dohány Street Synagogue



Facilitation Tips:

- Allow participants time to observe the building before introducing historical context.
- Encourage participants to think about the synagogue not only as a religious site, but also as part of the everyday urban life of Budapest.
- Avoid presenting exclusion as something that appeared suddenly; emphasise gradual change.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- Completed in 1859, the Dohány Street Synagogue is the largest synagogue in Europe. Its scale reflects the growth and increasing visibility of Pest's Jewish community in the nineteenth century.
- The surrounding neighbourhood included homes, shops, workshops, cafés, publishing houses, and other businesses operated by Jewish and non-Jewish residents.
- The anti-Jewish laws introduced from the late 1930s gradually restricted access to employment, education, and public life before the German occupation of Hungary in 1944.



Solutions:

- There is no single correct answer to the reflection question.
- The aim is to explore different perspectives on belonging and inclusion.

Stop 2 : Gozsdu Courtyard



Facilitation Tips:

- Ask participants to first observe how the courtyards are used today.
- Encourage them to compare the present atmosphere with the restricted and overcrowded conditions described in the booklet.
- Avoid asking participants to imagine themselves as victims. Focus instead on how the function of the space changed.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- Gozsdu Courtyard was built at the beginning of the twentieth century as a residential and commercial complex connecting several streets.
- Many Jewish families, traders, craftspeople, and professionals lived or worked in and around the complex.
- In late 1944, the area became part of the Budapest Ghetto. Apartments intended for individual households had to accommodate far more people, while food shortages and disease affected daily life.
- Its present use as an entertainment district can make its earlier residential and wartime history difficult to recognise.

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During the Tour

Stop 3 : Klauzál Square



Facilitation Tips:

- Allow participants to locate and observe the memorial independently before discussing it.
- Encourage careful observation rather than immediate interpretation.
- Give participants time to explore the digital content and reflect individually.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- Klauzál Square was one of the few open spaces within the Budapest Ghetto.
- People passed through the square while searching for food, exchanging information, or trying to locate relatives.
- It also provided temporary relief from overcrowded apartments, although conditions in the square became increasingly difficult.
- Today, the memorial is located within an active neighbourhood park. Its position raises questions about how visible difficult history should be in everyday public space.

Stop 4 : Ghetto Wall Fragment



Facilitation Tips:

- Allow participants to compare the historical boundary with the contemporary cityscape.
- Encourage them to consider how ordinary streets can acquire different meanings under different political circumstances.
- After the map activity, clarify that the ghetto boundary was not one continuous wall.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- The Budapest Ghetto was established in November 1944, and more than 70,000 people were confined within a relatively small area.
- Its boundary was created using existing buildings, courtyards, fences, gates, and temporary barriers.
- Entry and exit were controlled, and only a limited number of people were permitted to cross the boundary.
- The site shows that exclusion can be created through regulations and control of movement, without the construction of a permanent monumental barrier.

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During the Tour

Stop 5 : Rumbach Street Synagogue



Facilitation Tips:

- Allow participants to observe both the synagogue and the surrounding streets.
- Ask what traces of community life they can still identify in the neighbourhood.
- Keep the discussion focused on the difference between preserving a building and preserving the community connected to it.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- The synagogue was completed in 1872 in one of Budapest's most active Jewish neighbourhoods.
- It formed part of a wider community network that included families, religious organisations, schools, businesses, and social institutions.
- During the late 1930s and early 1940s, restrictions increasingly disrupted these networks.
- The building survived the war but remained largely unused for decades. Its later restoration preserved the site, but not the community life that had originally given it meaning.

Stop 6 : Glass House



Facilitation Tips:

- Allow participants to explore the interactive content individually or in pairs before discussing it.
- Avoid presenting Carl Lutz as acting alone.
- Use the reflection question to discuss what individuals can do when working within restrictive institutions.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- The Glass House was originally an industrial building before becoming a centre of rescue activity in 1944.
- Carl Lutz and his colleagues used it to issue Swiss protective documents and organise shelter and assistance.
- Much of the rescue work involved administrative processes: lists, stamps, signatures, negotiations, and the interpretation of diplomatic authority.
- Clerks, assistants, diplomats, local volunteers, and ordinary citizens also contributed to the work carried out here.
- The site demonstrates how administrative decisions could have direct consequences for people's survival.

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During the Tour

Stop 7 : Liberty Square



Facilitation Tips:

- Encourage participants to spend time observing both monuments before discussing them.
- Avoid suggesting that one interpretation is the "correct" one.
- Support respectful discussion, but distinguish personal interpretation from established historical facts.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- The Soviet Liberation Memorial commemorates Soviet soldiers who died during the Battle of Budapest. During the socialist period, it supported the official narrative of the Soviet Union as Hungary's liberator from Nazi rule.
- The Memorial to the Victims of the German Occupation was inaugurated in 2014 and depicts Hungary as an angel attacked by a German eagle.
- Historians, survivors, and civic groups criticised the 2014 monument for presenting Hungary mainly as a passive victim and giving insufficient attention to the role of Hungarian authorities in the persecution and deportation of Hungarian Jews.
- The monuments show how public memory is influenced by the political context in which memorials are created.

Stop 8 : Chain Bridge



Facilitation Tips:

- Encourage participants to compare the bridge's current appearance with the historical image.
- Help participants connect physical destruction with its effects on everyday movement and communication.
- Briefly clarify the reconstruction timeline if participants ask about it.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- Opened in 1849, the Chain Bridge was the first permanent bridge connecting Buda and Pest.
- Retreating German troops destroyed it on 18 January 1945, together with the other major bridges across the Danube.
- Its destruction made travel, communication, access to resources, and contact between the two sides of the city much more difficult.
- The bridge reopened in November 1949, almost five years later. Its reconstruction restored an essential transport connection and became a symbol of Budapest's post-war recovery.

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During the Tour

Stop 9 : Shoes on the Danube Bank



Facilitation Tips:

- Minimise facilitation at this stop.
- Allow participants to spend time with the memorial at their own pace.
- Respect silence and individual reactions.
- Do not require a final discussion at the memorial itself.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- The memorial commemorates Jewish people murdered by members of the Arrow Cross militia along the Danube in late 1944 and early 1945.
- Victims were often ordered to remove their shoes before being shot because shoes were valuable and could be reused or sold.
- Created by Can Togay and Gyula Pauer, the memorial uses different styles and sizes of shoes to suggest individual lives rather than representing victims as a single anonymous group.
- Most of the shoes are not connected to specific names. This absence reflects how many personal stories were lost or never fully recorded.
- Its location places the memory of the murders within one of Budapest's most familiar and frequently visited public spaces.

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After the Tour

After completing the tour, allow participants a few quiet minutes before starting the closing activity. The final stop may have prompted strong or personal reactions, so do not move immediately into discussion.

Participation should remain flexible. Participants may speak, write, listen, or choose not to share personal responses.

Optional Follow-up Activity: From Place to Message

Estimated duration: 25–30 minutes

Format: individual reflection, small-group discussion, and short group sharing

Materials: paper and pens, or participants' phones

1. Individual Reflection, 5 minutes

- Ask each participant to choose one stop from the tour that stayed with them most.
- They write one short sentence:
- This place matters because...
- The sentence may refer to a historical fact, a personal reaction, a question, or something they noticed during the walk.

2. Small-Group Discussion, 10 minutes

- Participants form groups of three or four and share their sentences.
- Each group then chooses one stop or one common theme that appeared in their discussion. They prepare one short message that summarises what they took away from the tour.
- The group does not need to agree on every point. The aim is to identify one idea they consider important.

3. Group Sharing. 10 minutes

Each group shares: the stop or theme they selected and their short message.

The facilitator may briefly note recurring themes, such as exclusion, responsibility, rescue, public memory, or the difference between what is visible and what remains hidden in the city.

Factual misunderstandings should be clarified, but personal reactions and interpretations do not need to be corrected.

Closing

The aim of the follow-up is to help participants identify one clear takeaway from the tour and connect it to the way history is remembered in everyday public spaces.

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References

Historical context & institutions

Holocaust Memorial Center Budapest

Mazsihisz

Budapest-specific context

PestBuda

Budapest Info

Zsido.com

Hetedik.hu

Budapest100

Shoes on the Danube Bank Memorial official sources

Carl Lutz Foundation / Glass House resources

Visual sources

Fortepan

Hungarian National Digital Archive (MaNDA)

Europeana

Personal stories & testimonies

Centropa

USC Shoah Foundation

Maps & spatial references

Google Maps

Arcanum Maps



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Contact

Hidak Ifjúsági Alapítvány
info@youthbridgesbudapest.org

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