

Only in Budapest: All reviews

www.welovebudapest.com:

Travel writer, historian, photographer and author Duncan J.D. Smith has been prowling the planet to explore urban destinations and point globetrotters to sites often found off the beaten track. In these “Only In” Guides, Smith uncovers hidden urban sights across Europe from London to Paris and Berlin. For Budapest, the Englishman visited the city’s often-forgotten landmarks in all its 23 districts, including the huge metal statue of the Turul Bird beside the Royal Palace, Buda’s Bauhaus buildings, the subterranean Szemlő-hegyi cave system, and Pest’s secret courtyards. The book also introduces Hungarian cuisine and classic hangouts to try it. With extensive historical explanations and clearly marked maps, it is a good pick for people with a keen desire to learn about Budapest beyond its obvious attractions.

www.talkingcities.co.uk:

For a city we know well, it’s often a tall order to find a guidebook on Budapest that provides any new, groundbreaking material. That’s why Duncan J. D. Smith’s new “Only in Budapest” guide (a follow-up to his similarly titled Vienna offering) is such a breath of fresh air. Beautifully written and accompanied by the author’s own excellent photographs, it had us quickly questioning just how well we really knew Budapest. With little known (and rarely found) wonders inspiring us to make immediate trips to far flung districts, not since Bob Dent’s “Blue Guide to Budapest” have we had such an enjoyable read. Truly indispensable.

Bob Dent, author of the “Blue Guide to Budapest”, Budapest Times (2008):

There is an infectious enthusiasm which shines through this well-written and therefore easy-to-read book. In his search for the unusual, the author takes us to eighty four locations in Budapest. He describes, sometimes in great detail and often with a sharp eye, what is to be observed in terms of statues and the people they portray, buildings and the architecture they represent, areas and what they reveal about the city, as well as museums and their multifarious contents. Excellent photographs accompany the texts and two very clear and useful maps identify each location. The strength of the work lies in its descriptions of what can be seen. In particular, the accounts of what can be found in Budapest’s many and varied museums are both informative and atmospheric. The author is to be congratulated for bringing to life the Hungarian capital’s rich array of museums and their displays.

Robin Ashenden, travel writer:

I’m a travel writer living and working in Madrid. Can I just say how delighted I am with your book on Budapest – I’ve visited the city six times and was looking for a book which would take me that much further with the city. It is so much what I was looking for. I think it’s great that someone is bothering to write books like this, and I shall look out for your Prague one when it’s published.

Hidden Europe Magazine (Issue 25, Mar-April 2009):

We recently stumbled upon a wonderful book that documents Budapest’s hidden corners. It is “Only in Budapest” by Duncan Smith, published by Vienna-based publisher Christian Brandstätter Verlag. The volume details over eighty sights around

Budapest, recounting their history in prose that is both witty and full of perceptive insight. The text is especially strong in looking at issues of cultural difference.

Jennifer Deborah Walker, copywriter:

I came across your Budapest guide a couple of months ago in one of the local museums and I have to say it's one of the best guides to the city I've read. I've lived here for many years and still found places I didn't know about. Definitely a valuable resource.

www.amazon.com:

If you are interested in learning more about the history, culture, and people of Budapest, this is an excellent choice. It's not going to give you the run-of-the-mill lists of hotels, restaurants, museums, etc. (you will need other resources to find out about the practical aspects of Budapest). However, it will give you one to two page blurbs on about 100 interesting and unusual places to go and see. These do a great job of giving a feel for the atmosphere, culture, and overall vibe of the city. If you care to learn why Budapest is the way it is and to understand its culture, this is a great book.

A reader:

I came across your Budapest guide while in the city recently, and would like to congratulate you on an excellently researched and written book. I thought I knew the city quite well, but I was surprised by how much I didn't know or hadn't discovered yet. It definitely helped to make the trip that much more interesting - the Museum of Photography and the Children's Railway in particular are great recommendations.

John Wyver (www.illuminationsmedia.co.uk):

Immensely enjoyable and very entertaining...enhanced enormously my sense of the city...“Only in Budapest” by Duncan J. D. Smith describes itself as “A Guide to Hidden Corners, Little-known Places and Unusual Objects”. Eighty-four neatly illustrated essays prompt you to explore all sorts of areas of the city that would be less rewarding for you if you wandered through them without Smith's promptings. It was Smith's book that took me on the suburban railway to Csepel Island south of the main city. From the late nineteenth century this was an intensely industrial area, with arms manufacturers, an Anglo-Dutch Shell Company oil refinery in the 1930s, and Soviet-backed heavy machinery plants after the war. One of the gates to the factory complex, called "Csepel Muvek" (Csepel Works), is still in place – and it was here that a statue of Lenin was installed in 1958 at Khrushchev's suggestion. Beyond the gate...there is still a strong sense of the grim landscape of those years.

E. A. Kallenborn (a reader):

Just to say ‘thank you’ for your book “Only in Budapest”. We walked for four days through the city, (and) the last afternoon I bought your book, reading it now at home. All the things we saw I can place them now against the background of your survey of Hungarian history throughout the book.

Hidden Europe Magazine (Issue 26, May-June 2009):

In a world where places seem to become ever more similar, it was an absolute joy to stumble on the “Only in...” series of guidebooks written by Duncan J. D. Smith. Each guide identifies 84 distinctive sights within a particular city. Duncan Smith brings to the “Only in...” series the gaze of the enquiring outsider. His approach to places and

history appeals to us a lot. The “Only in...” series is a refreshing antidote to the prevailing tide of uniformity favoured by too many travel guides.

Graham Turner, www.amazon.co.uk:

Spot on!

As someone married to a Hungarian, and a visitor to Budapest for more than 30 years, I thought I knew a lot about the city. Having read this book I realise that I most certainly don't! Eighty four 'sights' of Budapest are covered, each with 2-3 pages of background/history/why it's there/why it survived/how to get there, etc. Anyone reading the whole book will have a reasonable knowledge of Hungarian history and culture by the end of its 244 pages, certainly more than enough to make a most enjoyable - and informed - visit to the city.

A reader:

Just bought your Budapest guide and am very impressed. Great information, obviously a lot of research done, and great photos and layout. My husband and I have a house close to Kaposvar and we have been to Budapest many times. This guide is just what we missed.

Nicky Gardner and Susanne Kries, www.eurocheapo.com:

Essential Reading: Maps and travel guides.

A guide to hidden corners, little-known places and unusual objects, says the blurb, nicely summarizing the emphasis of a series of guidebooks which we have recently discovered. “Only in Budapest” was published in 2006, with author Duncan J. D. Smith adeptly reviewing 84 offbeat and eclectic curiosities around the Hungarian capital. Now Smith has followed his Budapest debut with a trio of new titles. “Only in Berlin”, “Only in Vienna” and “Only in Prague” bring a bit of Duncan Smith's distinctive style to three more central European cities, with in each case 84 hidden gems being unveiled. Clearly there is some magic to the number 84 to which we are not privy.

Monster water lilies and Turkish cannonballs.

We learned that a mosque not far from our Berlin home is the oldest in Germany, discovered monster water lilies in Prague and found out about old Turkish cannonballs embedded in the stonework of Vienna buildings.

The Internet may have revolutionized our travel planning, but decent maps and first rate guidebooks are still a must. Yet the latter are often not written with an eye for detail, and that's where the “Only in...” series really appeals to us. The author reveals the entire history of a city and its hinterland through 84 detailed snapshots of the urban landscape, every one of them well worth a visit.

In a way, Duncan Smith's approach is similar to our efforts with “Hidden Europe” magazine gently trying to get beneath the skin of a place and identifying spots that are genuinely offbeat and not on the regular tourist circuit. And all the better as almost all the sights mapped out by Duncan Smith in his guidebooks come with no admission charges.

Trip Advisor:

As a 30+ years visitor to Hungary, I have seen quite a few guidebooks, and don't see much to distinguish between them. However, a couple of days ago I took delivery of a new guidebook, which I am happy to recommend to any prospective visitor.

The book is called “Only in Budapest”, and is written by a bloke called Duncan J D Smith, who is apparently from Sheffield in Yorkshire (both of which he has also written about).

The book consists of 84 2 or 3-page articles about places of interest in Budapest, including some in places like Kobanya and Budafok, areas off the beaten track and rarely visited by tourists. There are also quite a few places in Obuda, few people being aware that Budapest was formed from Buda, Pest AND Obuda.

Naturally the main sites – the Var, Citadel, Basilica, Statue Park etc. – are included, plus regulars like the Gellert and Szechenyi baths, the Zoo and the House of Terror, but there are also quite a few oddities, such as the Foundry Museum.

Each article contains some historical background – anyone reading all 84 will have a reasonable grasp of Hungarian history by the end – plus details of how to get there by public transport, and a list of any other attractions nearby.

As I said at the start, I have been visiting Budapest for 30+ years, but I learned a heck of a lot from this book, as did my wife, a native of the city.

Derek McBryde, UK:

There is an excellent book about Budapest that’s worth reading. It’s called “Only in Budapest” by Duncan J. D Smith. Even if you never visit Budapest it’s a great read.

Zoltán Csepiga, Budapest tour guide:

I’m Hungarian and a freelance tour guide. Duncan J. D. Smith could almost surpass me in both roles with his “Only in Budapest” book. It is more than a book, it’s an encyclopedia. Let me prove it in three remarks.

(1) He summarized brilliantly the history of the Hungarians, pinpointing the gaps in the ancient history of ‘Magyars’, who had been concealed by legends and historical misinterpretations. I couldn’t have better summarised our own history.

(2) Now, for the Hungarian words with those special accents and spellings! There are no mistakes in the book. It might be difficult to read these words and names for foreigners but it helps to orientate, while walking around in Budapest. Duncan deserves the title of Honorary Magyar!

(3) Being a practical tour guide he questioned me about secret places and unknown corners of the Hungarian capital. I made a list but he already knew all of them and had more. He won!

I’m enthusiastic about this book. It is like a collection of best stories, thus it can be read any time and almost everywhere. It gives a sample of the taste of the city and pretty well seduces one to give it a try.

John Farago, Budapest guesthouse proprietor:

What a wonderful book! “Only in Budapest” by Duncan J. D. Smith is filled with interesting information in bite-sized chapters about specific sights and locales (many of them off the radar of the other guidebooks). The book came to our attention through the recommendation of a guest from Germany, and we’ve read it cover to cover and traipsed down some of the streets that were unfamiliar to us; it’s a great intro to the city and we purchased several copies for our apartments and guests.

Adrian Phillips, Bradt Guides:

I found “Only in Budapest” particularly interesting, both because it’s an excellent read and because of my own writing about the country.

S. J. Hunt, UK:

This book is a real treasure. Well-written and nicely presented, it's a lovely guide for travellers wishing to see more than just the obvious tourist sights. Budapest is a beautiful and fascinating city, and well worth exploring properly. I lived there for eight years and know the place very well, but even I discovered some new things in this book. Friends who go on holiday to Hungary are always asking for advice on what to do and where to go, so in future I shall just recommend this book and let them get on with it!

Julian Takács, Budapest:

I loved it! I always imagined that I knew the city pretty well, but I found myself constantly saying to my wife (who is Hungarian) "Did you know that..?" So, I think that's a good indicator of how useful I found it! I think guides like Time Out are useful to a point, but I do prefer travel writing that is more than just the nuts-and-bolts as it were. And certainly, your guide is the only one that I've really enjoyed since reading the Blue Guide by Bob Dent (and that was about seven years ago).

John C. Stalker, USA:

We used "Only in Budapest" last year and loved it.

www.gowander.com:

I've just returned from my second visit to the wonderful city of Budapest. For this visit I thought I'd get out and discover some of the gems that are hidden in every city. The source of this discovery was an Internet book site where I came across a fascinating book called "Only in Budapest: A Guide to Hidden Corners, Little-known Places and Unusual Objects" by Duncan J. D. Smith. In my five-day visit I managed to get to a half dozen or so of the 80 sites to be seen, such as riding on the brilliant Children's Railway up into the Buda Hills. The only adults working the railway are the driver and one guard at each station, the rest are children, looking to be aged between twelve and sixteen. There are eight stations to get off at, one at which you can climb to the highest viewpoint in the hills for a stunning view of the city in the far distance.

Another of the hidden treasures I explored was the labyrinth of tunnels under Castle Hill, which was used in Ottoman times for military purposes, so the defending army could appear much bigger by popping up out of the secret entrances to attack, then retreating.

The book is a must for any second visit to Budapest, or if you're going again to Prague, Berlin or Vienna, there are volumes for these cities too.

www.beyondbudapest.hu:

If you live in Budapest, or if you plan to visit the Hungarian capital this year, there is one thing you will certainly need: the guidebook "Only in Budapest".

I am Hungarian and have lived in Budapest for twenty seven years. I work as a guide and yet still the book gives me new clues to understanding Budapest.

You surely know the average guidebooks, which tell you the exact dates, details and stories about buildings in a perfect yet perfectly boring way? Well, "Only in Budapest" is just the opposite. It puts every story and date in a context, with an understandable background. And this approach involves much more than just describing a sight.

“Only in Budapest” talks not only about the famous sights but also looks for the more adventurous and less popular ones. I feel the book gives a realistic and colourful picture of Budapest. This is the human-faced Budapest rather than the shiny, for tourists only, Budapest.

I love the book, and if I were a tourist in a foreign city, then I would choose this way to look around. And the book is beautiful, too, with amazing pictures. A quality work!

Abhinav Saraswat, Birmingham, UK:

Although there are a lot of travel guides about Budapest, this is the one that I particularly like. It’s not only a guide to all the usual places but also to all the hidden treasures of Budapest and how to get to them plus there are colour photos on almost every page! The sights are divided into the Buda, Óbuda and Pest districts, and places of interest nearby are also mentioned to save time and effort. The other fantastic thing about this book is that it has the history of the buildings and places mentioned, as well as that of the country. I went to Budapest in July for a week; now it’s December and I still flick through the book because it’s a great read. I recommend it to anyone going to Budapest for the first time or revisiting it.

CORDEE travel & adventure bookshop, UK:

This comprehensive illustrated guide to more than 80 fascinating and unusual locations in Budapest is recommended for the increasing number of independent and adventurous travellers wishing to discover the Hungarian capital off-the-beaten-track. Written by self-styled 'Urban Explorer' Duncan J. D. Smith, “Only in Budapest” is unique in focussing on the city's less well-known sights: Roman ruins, Turkish tombs, secret courtyards, hidden caves, eccentric museums, hillside railways and forgotten cemeteries. The book contains two fold-out maps showing clearly each location together with a list of addresses and opening times at the back. It is illustrated with 160 superb colour photographs, making “Only in Budapest” perfect both as a practical guide and as a treat for the armchair traveller.

Martin Dawes, The Sheffield Star (21.08.06):

The Urban Explorer leads a frugal lifestyle. For his new guidebook to Budapest, travel writer Duncan J. D. Smith holed up for a month literally in the Hungarian capital. Not for him a lavish 5-star hotel but a tiny room in a 19th century apartment block. “It had one light bulb and no heating, still with the bullet holes from the 1956 uprising in the walls. But I did meet a lot of interesting Hungarians on the stairs”. His is not quite the conventional approach but armed with notebook, pen and camera – and a map he wanders around cities reaching the parts off the tourist routes that other guidebooks do not reach. So in Budapest he finds a former Communist railway run entirely by children (except for the driver), Islam’s most northerly holy site, Europe’s longest wooden roller-coaster, and obscure museums like one devoted to bibles, flags and electricity.

Despite only speaking English Duncan, who styles himself an ‘Urban Explorer’, gets more than nicely by. He tends to get picked up by friendly locals, taken to flats down dark alleys and fed plum cake and home-made wine while playing cards. Or shown around museums personally by curators anxious to show off their English and their exhibits.

And he charms the residents too. The Budapest Sun enthused: “A fascinating read for all Budapest dwellers looking for some adventure and discovery”, noting that

Budapest is also the city of Harry Houdini, continental Europe's oldest underground railway, and has more thermal springs than any other world capital.

Dr. James Dickinson, Rider University, USA:

I have been dipping into your latest ("Only in Budapest")...very enjoyable...each entry is like a mini history essay.

Florian Müller, Radio Augustin, Vienna:

I appreciate this book very much because it is something that needed publishing since nothing comparative exists. I'm not lying in saying that the book made our stay in Budapest very enjoyable, especially because we already knew Budapest and wanted to discover something new.

Eszter Balázs, The Budapest Sun (June 22-28, 2006):

If you already know the Fishermen's Bastion, have visited the Castle and Parliament, been to shop in the Fovám tér market hall, walked along Váci utca and are still interested in Budapest, then Duncan J. D. Smith's book on the town's hidden points of interest is for you. This inspiring volume lists 84 not-so-evident sights, but also tells immeasurably more stories about Hungarian history.

"Only in Budapest" is the second volume of the "Only in..." series, presently consisting of a volume on Vienna, while another on Prague is in the making by Smith. It is not a typical guidebook either in its presentation, being printed in colour on fine quality glossy paper, or in content, as it deliberately disregards the paths lain out in publications for first time visitors. Instead, Smith offers us the dessert after the meal, places like the Mulberry Garden, Red Csepel, forgotten Jewish cemeteries, and Budapest's answer to Coney Island.

In two or three pages he tells about the Gaudí of Budapest, the coffee-house revolutionaries, the mineral water millionaire, and the much-loved empress. While he explains the story of bullet holes on the city's buildings, he also tells the reader about Hungary's role in the Second World War. When he guides you among the graves of the Farkasréti Cemetery, you can also learn about Székely woodcarvings along the way. Thus, Smith's book is an excellent source of information for curious people.

You never know what extra piece of knowledge you will gather whilst on these tours to Budapest's "hidden corners, little-known places and unusual objects". As an author Smith remains precise and logical making "Only in Budapest" very easy to follow, with the sights organised according to different areas of the city. On the inside cover the area names of the city are listed by district, a feature I have not come across in any other guidebooks, but which makes understanding Budapesters much easier.

Angyalföld? Of course, you mean District XIII! Complimented by the author's own photographs, which in this case is not a polite reference to poor quality, along with interesting short notes about anything that Smith thought was relevant to the topic, the book is a fascinating read for all Budapest dwellers looking for some adventure and discovery.

László Paszternák, Budapest Tourist Information Office:

A very important guidebook to Budapest.

Benedek Varga, Semmelweis Museum:

Congratulations. I could not put it down. You have done a great job. You seem to be a rare bird: one who is able to feel the spirit of the place, and the atmosphere of that which the locals love in Budapest.

Ashley Mancini, www.amazon.co.uk:

An Excellent Guidebook.

If you considering going to Budapest, definitely go. It's an amazing place, so many sights and sounds to experience and enjoy. If you have a sense of adventure and love exploration, definitely purchase a copy of this guide by Duncan Smith, who will help guide you through this amazing place. Buy it before you go, lose yourself within its covers, and have the most incredible time there. You will not regret it.

Zoltán Farkas and Judit Sos, JEL-KEP Kiadó (Co-publisher of "Only in Budapest"):

We have read your manuscript with great pleasure during the Christmas holiday and we enjoyed it a lot. We are pretty sure that the book will be a great success with visitors to Budapest.

Brigitte Hilzensauer, translator of the German edition:

I really enjoyed translating your book...the text is more narrative, quite story-like sometimes. And I like the way you express your sympathies-never importunate, never didactic, sometimes a little ironic.

Zoltán Csepiga, Budapest:

I am reading your Budapest book. It is amazing. You know so much about this city that is incredible. What is astonishing is the first chapter about the proto-Hungarians. I am currently reading a book on the subject and your summary seems correct and is a perfect zip through a thousand years.

Trevor A. D. Smith, proof-reader:

Your oeuvre is impressively informative and very well written. What is particularly good about your Budapest is that you've so obviously been there, seen and done it - the hard way!

Tricia Ware, UK:

Thank you so much for providing us with fascinating snippets of information, wonderful walking tours and introductions to restaurants and coffee shops.

Tibor Frank, Canada:

This is a great book, showing places that even for me, as a former tour guide, hold surprises. I keep it on my desk and look at it regularly.

Jordi Faus, Barcelona:

I am a traveller, who has enjoyed your books on Vienna and Budapest very much. I think your approach to explaining sites by mixing history, art, daily life and anecdotes is great.