

SECRETS OF BUDAPEST – THE PARK OF FALLEN STATUES

The fabric of Budapest bears few tangible reminders of Communism. The occasional downbeat Soviet-era shopfront can be seen along Király utca. There are the trolleybuses too, introduced in 1949 to honour Stalin's seventieth birthday, explaining why they are numbered 70 upwards. Most evocative are the few remaining backstreet bars known as *presszó*, with their 1960s fixtures and round-the-clock clientele.

The reason for this is that Hungary's democratic elections in 1990 demanded the removal of Communist street propaganda. First to go were street names (Marx Square, Lenin Boulevard) and "symbols of tyranny" such as the red star. The most prominent features, namely the oversized statues of Soviet greats, presented more of a problem.

Enter a young historian and an architect, concerned that the statues' destruction would rob future generations of the chance to see how life under Communism looked. In December 1991, with government backing, they oversaw the removal of Budapest's militant politicians, heroic fighters, and proud workers out to a farmer's field in District XXII (Budatétény). One of Europe's most unusual sculpture parks was born.

Statue Park (Szoborpark) at the corner of Balatoni út and Szabadkai utca can be reached by bus and tram from Deák Ferenc tér. Open daily from 10am until sunset it



is an important collection of monuments in the Socialist Realism style, the Stalinist art form and propaganda tool used to remind people of their masters.

The park's gateway is inscribed with Gyula Illyés's poem *One Sentence on Tyranny* ("Where there is tyranny, Everyone is a link in the chain"). Nearby are huge granite statues of Marx and Engels that once graced Communist Party Headquarters at Széchenyi rakpart 19. Inside, and similarly overbearing, is a Russian soldier that previously adorned the Freedom Monument (Szabadságszobor) on Gellért Hill. Nearby is the 'running man' statue entitled *Stand to!* by István Kiss, removed from its original position on Dózsa György út.

Visitors to Statue Park might be unaware that Hungary had an earlier brush with Communism, recalled in Imre Varga's monument to Béla Kun, which stood before on Vérmező út. After the Great War Hungary declared independence from Austria but faced losing much land under the Treaty of Trianon. The government of the newly independent First Hungarian Republic resigned and handed power to the Social Democrats, who made a coalition with Béla Kun's Hungarian Communist Party, in an attempt to woo Soviet support against the dictates of the West. Support from Moscow was not forthcoming and former Habsburg Admiral Miklós Horthy seized power as regent. Hungary had begun its fateful slide from short-lived Communism towards a pro-Fascist regime.

On leaving Statue Park visit the gift shop selling kitsch souvenirs, including Lenin candles, model Trabants, and CDs of proletariat marching anthems.

Adapted from the book *Only in Budapest: A Guide to Hidden Corners, Little-Known Places and Unusual Objects* by Duncan J. D. Smith (JEL-KÉP Kiadó, 2008)

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