

TRAVEL

Where in the World is Kristi Kelly?

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Contributor

Budapest - which is actually Buda (the city to the right) and Pest (the lower city to the left) kinda grouped together... was quite the adventure, and fair warning, I am about to explain what was my first completely and utterly awful experience throughout my travels, so you may sense some bitterness! Looking back I still grind my teeth when I think back to parts of that trip - mind you, overall the city redeemed itself but man oh man... where to begin!

So, after a long day of train travel and some pleasant banter with two other Canadians and two Aussies we met on the way, we finally arrived in Budapest. It was already late at night, dark, chilly and we had no sweet clue how to get to our hostel. FUUUUUN! Considering we had lots of travel and little sleep over the past few days... I wasn't exactly in the most cheery of moods and the fun-loving characters in the train station, frankly, weren't looking all that fun loving. (Note to any travelers out there: Safety in numbers!!) We made it out of the train station in one piece and with hostel directions in hand, we headed right for the subway. Seeing as it was fast, and efficient it was our best option at such an hour... however, we noticed something quite strange... all the ticket terminals were closed for the night. Not one open! Being the honest travelers that we all

were, we decided to approach the nearest security guard - and in broken Hungarian (and a variety of animated hand gestures and facial expressions) we managed to communicate our dilemma. He smiled a big toothless smile and reassured us that we would have "na probo" and that we could pay tomorrow morning. Feeling relieved and grateful, we all piled on the subway excited to be that much closer to our final destination.

Then it happened. As hundreds of people poured out at our stop... a firm and boney grip wrapped painfully around my upper left arm as I attempted to make my way to the exit escalator. Now, if you are traveling and somebody randomly grabs you, your first instinct is to protect yourself and your belongings. Instinct I suppose. I am not typically an angry or violent person - however, at that moment, I had never been more willing or ready to punch someone in all of my life. As I whipped around, I came to face to face with this short, ugly old lady loudly bitching at me in a language I obviously could not understand. Then I noticed it... the security badge on her arm that looked vaguely familiar... she wanted to see my subway ticket. Ummm, yeah, the one I DIDN'T HAVE. Out of the hundreds of people streaming out of the subway that night she pegged us - the obvious travelers of the group, and stopped no one else. There is nothing more frustrating than trying to reason



Hungary is famous for their Turkish thermal baths.

with someone that speaks absolutely no English and after much frustration and a threat to call the police - all six of us travelers were issued a freaking fine, oh yes... monetary at that! BAHHHHH!!! Fair enough, we didn't have a ticket. Stupid toothless security guard... nothing was making sense, he wouldn't lie to us!? I mean, that would be down right dirty!!? Confused, huffing and cursing, we made it to the hostel. Out of pure frustration I turned to a trusted source - Trip Advisor.com. Sure enough, after a few choice key words, as I had suspected article after article popped up noting similar experiences when traveling via the Hungarian subway systems. The whole thing turn out to be one big scam! As commissions can be made off of "fine issuing" those without tickets, travelers, much like ourselves have been "set up" in the exact same situation in an attempt to capitalize on perhaps the most naive... pretty pathetic if you ask me. When you are millions of miles away from home, broke and tired... there is no worse feeling than knowing that there are people out there, trying to screw you over. Day 1 in Budapest... not impressed.

Day 2 brought a brand new outlook - any frustration had passed and I was now looking forward to exploring what such a historically influential city had to offer. To tell you the truth... the only real reason I wanted to visit Hungary was for their famous "Turkish thermal baths" (muwahaha)!

So, what exactly is a thermal bath you may be asking?? Well, consider it like a swimming pool (both indoor and outdoor types with different depths) but a heck of a lot warmer (different pools are different temperatures but they range from 30 to 40 degrees) and the water itself, instead of chlorine, apparently, is mineralized in a way that can be

deemed as "healing". Yes, bathing suits are required - and thousands of tourists and locals alike flock to these baths in search of relaxation, meditation - and in my case, to play! After an "interesting demonstration" from a local regular on how to properly use the pressure taps in one of the baths (fully included were a variety of bizarre positions and awkward noises) I realized that these are in fact, a true refuge! (Please note, I have no idea whether or not these baths are actually healing or hygienic for that matter, I tried not to think into it that much for my sanity's sake... I mean, I am sure there must be regulations on these type things...)

Anyways, no joke, I spend a whole day frolicking between the different pools... man, one even was designed as a whirl pool, every 10 minutes the waters would begin to spin in its recognizable circle and all those in its path were swept up in its powerful tide. Besides the mild motion sickness it caused, I loved it - giggling like a 5 year old and attempting to fight its direction!! Ahhhh, the simple pleasures in life...

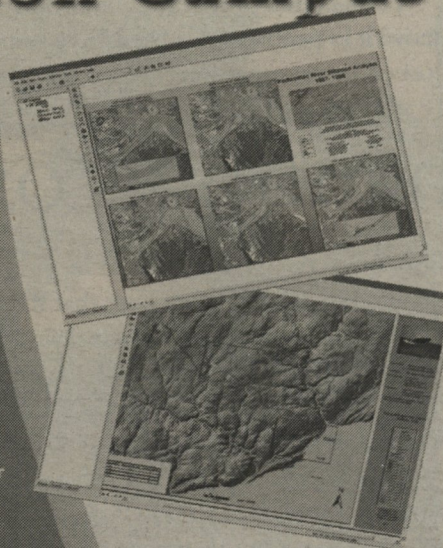
Losing track of time, and with pruned skin to boot - I literally had to drag myself away from this "oasis". Thank goodness they don't have anything like that here or I would never do anything productive, I would end up just lounging around in the warmest of waters contemplating life's vast mysteries...

Obviously there is more to see in Budapest than just these baths... the food, the language and the history are all remarkable areas to explore and I took advantage of the possibility of doing so while there!! I could write ten more pages... but I think I will leave it here for this issue! Welcome back to class everyone, Happy New Year and bring on the adventures!!

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