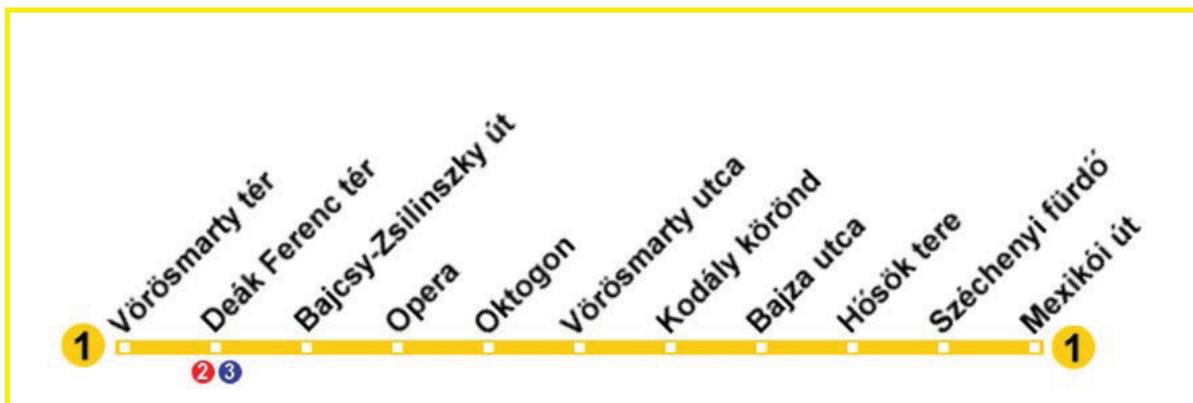




EXPLORE BUDAPEST BY METRO – PART 2

Retro metro has great sights all down the line

Riding Budapest's iconic Line One – or Millennium Line – will, on its own, take you to many of the most popular attractions in the entire city. Yet a ride through these whimsical and historic stations is enough to merit a trip in own right.



Suggested Route: Vörösmarty tér – Deak Ferenc tér – Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út – Opera – Oktogon – Hősök tere – Széchenyi Fürdő

Highlights: Széchenyi Baths, St. Stephen's Basilica, Heroes' Square, Hungarian State Opera House, Andrassy Ave., House of Terror, Vajdahunyad Castle, City Park and its Ice Rink, and Budapest Zoo (including Vidám Amusement Park).

Line One (or the Yellow Line) is the second-oldest metro system in the world, the oldest on mainland Europe, the first to be electrified, and the world's only metro system to be classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The line was constructed in 1896 to mark the centennial celebrations of when the Magyars first came to Hungary. Developers of the UNESCO-recognised Andrassy Avenue along which Line One runs wanted to keep the street free from traffic.

The line has operated more or less much the same as when it opened, with the exception of a line extension in 1973. It was renovated in 1996, restoring much of its original Austro-Hungarian grandeur and leading to UNESCO recognition in 2002.

It is a must-see on any first-time visit to Budapest and will take you to many of the most popular attractions the city has to offer. All you need is your metro pass, this handy guide from The Budapest Times, and enough time to experience the best of Budapest.

Talk like a local: Budapesters refer to Line One simply as "The Underground", whereas Lines Two, Three and Four are known as "The Metro"

Basilicas and Museums and Opera Houses, Oh My! Downtown Budapest

The tour begins right in the heart of Budapest in Vörösmarty tér. This

downtown public square marks the start (or end) of Váci utca – one of the main pedestrian thoroughfares and famous streets in all of Budapest. The area is a shopper's paradise, with several marquis brand stores and quaint cafes dotting this quintessential European boulevard.

A must-see stop is the famed Café Gerbaud – among the oldest cafes in Budapest, it predates Line One by over 40 years. This elegant café, built in Grunderzeit style with its stucco, grand chandeliers and opulent French furnishings, is renowned as much for its coffee as it is for its pastries.

After you have your fill of hot coffee and tasty sweets, get on the metro at Vörösmarty tér and head one stop down to Deak Ferenc tér. The busiest station in Budapest, this is the city's main met-

ro hub and will allow you to transfer to either Line Two or Line Three.

If you have some time, stop by to see the Underground Railway Museum, located right inside the metro. This unique museum, open every day except Mondays, is a great way to start your Budapest Metro tour. Ticket prices are 350 HUF, with discounts for students and seniors.

After your visit, which should take less than an hour, head back underground and go to the next stop – Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út. Head outside here and you'll be at one of the most photographed spots in all of Budapest – St. Stephen's Basilica.

The Roman Catholic basilica is the most important church in Hungary, as well as one of the largest. Built in Neo-Classical style, the picturesque front façade is framed by two enormous bell towers that still ring on special occasions. Along with the Hungarian Parliament building, it is the highest building in Budapest. If you get the chance, be sure to catch one of the wonderful concerts that are offered in the beautiful building.

Next on our tour we head to the Hungarian State Opera House, located at the eponymous Opera metro station. The largest opera house in Hungary, this extravagant Neo-Renaissance building is one of the finest examples of 19th-century Hungarian architecture and another magnet for amateur photographers.

The building, which was fully restored in 1984 to mark its centenary, has regularly attracted some of Europe's finest operas, concerts and galas for over 100 years. One of the major events on the calendar is the Budapest Opera Ball (aka The Faust Ball), when the hall is transformed into an enormous ballroom for a black-tie event for high society.

Interesting fact: The oldest underground in continental Europe (and 2nd-oldest in the world) is the only underground in the world recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

After catching an event (or at least getting some photographs) here, hop

back on to the underground and head one stop further to Oktogon. This station is located at the junction of Grand Boulevard and Andrásy Avenue and features several theatres, a major shopping centre with an indoor ice-skating rink, and an important transportation hub that connects the metro with the convenient 24-hour 4 and 6 tram lines that run along the Grand Boulevard.

Discover Hungary's history and Budapest's beauty: Andrásy Avenue

The next stop on your tour will take you to Vörösmarty utca. One of Budapest's most popular and interesting museums – the House of Terror – is here. This harrowing tour, available in English as an audio tour, gives visitors a stark reminder of the horrors of Hungary's relationship both to fascist Germany and communist Russia.

Set up as a memorial to those who suffered, the museum's basement features an exhibit that takes visitors into the cells formerly used by Hungary's version of the KGB to break down prisoners' wills.



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Kulcsár Noémi Tellabor
Macbeth

After taking in this demoralising yet fascinating museum, a walk down the UNESCO-recognised Andrásy Avenue might be in order. This wide boulevard, originally constructed as a no-traffic area, features plenty of universities, cafes, theatres and high-end shopping. It'll take you about half an hour to walk, or you can hop back on the underground and head to Hősök tere (Heroes' Square – pictured).

Interesting fact: In continuous operation since 1896, not a single person in the world today was alive when the Millennium Line carried its first passengers, including Austro-Hungarian Emperor Franz Joseph (Ferenc József).

One of the premier tourist areas in Budapest, this square at the end of Andrásy Avenue features such must-see sites as the Museum of Fine Arts, City Park (and its world-famous outdoor ice rink), the Hall of Art and Heroes' Square itself. The square is framed by the two impressive 100-plus-year-old art museums and features Hungary's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, as well as a monument dedicated to the Seven Chieftains of the Magyars – the leaders of the seven tribes that founded Hungary over 1100 years ago.

The site, along with the underground, was completed to honour Hungary's millennium celebrations in 1896. Behind the square you can find City Park, including Europe's largest



outdoor ice rink that sits in front of the Vajdahunyad Castle, also completed for the Millennium celebrations.

While you can get back on the metro and head one stop further to Széchenyi Fürdő, by the time you get to the park it is just as easy to walk. City Park, known to locals as Városliget Park, is home of the world-famous Széchenyi Thermal Baths – the largest in Europe and one of Budapest's most popular thermal baths.

The now 100-plus-year-old Neo-Baroque building features three outdoor and 15 indoor pools for you to relax in. Noted for its medicinal benefits, you can find old men playing chess in the water during the day or a techno / laser light “sparty” there on the weekend. Lines can be long on holidays and during tourist season, so be sure to show up early.

The park is also home to one of the oldest zoos in the world – the Budapest Zoo and Botanical Gardens. Over 1000 different animal species live there and Budapest Card owners receive a 25% discount.

Summer visitors will also be able to find the Budapest Amusement Park (Vidám Park) here, with its century-old carousel and Hullámvasút rollercoaster. Built in 1922, it is one of only 10 side friction rollercoasters remaining in the world.

The metro used to end here in the park, at an above-ground station called Állatkert (Zoo), but that was removed when the line was extended in 1973. While there is one more station on the line, most visitors will want to head back downtown to Deák Ferenc tér to begin the second leg of the Budapest Metro Tour. Join us next week when we look at Line Two.

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