

# Why Everyone Should Visit The House of Terror in Budapest

By Abi King | Western Europe

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02

20



I stand in the queue, a man turns me back.

I stand in another queue. Alone, in silence. Paperwork in one hand, a heap of clothing in the other, limp yet heavy like the body of a sleeping child. It's cold outside.

I wait.

I queue.

I hand over my camera.

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## Number 60 Andrassy Street, The House of Terror

Number 60 Andrassy Street has credentials that would wither estate agents into anthrax-laden dust. And they're enough to make the rest of us weep and

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Hi, I'm Abi and Inside the Travel Lab is a luxury travel and lifestyle blog for thoughtful travellers.

\* No 1 Independent Luxury Travel blog UK (Vuelio 2019)\*

\* Best Luxury Travel Blog in the World - Lonely Planet - 2019\*

I'm a doctor turned writer who's worked with Lonely Planet, the BBC, Nat Geo Traveller, UNESCO and more and travelled to over

drop to our knees, wondering whether to just give up on this whole thing called the human race.

Number 60 Andrassy Street was once the Hungarian Headquarters for the Nazis. After their defeat at the end of WWII, it became the headquarters for the secret police of the totalitarian communist state. Now, finally, this former mansion on the Champs-Élysées-like boulevard functions as a museum, albeit one that draws criticism for its biased interpretation of crimes on Hungarian soil.

I wait in the queue and hear an old man sobbing, sobbing and sobbing, again and again on a video loop while receptionists chat to each other and horror sound effects filter down from another floor.

It's a queasy, conflicted feeling I first experienced on a muddy hilltop on the outskirts of Krakow, shoes soaked in melting snow. The site of a former concentration camp (the one shown in Schindler's List,) this hill was also the viewpoint for a bland international shopping centre, a splodge of simplistic yellows and reds amidst grey and grit-lined car parks.

A few teens used it as a shortcut and an older woman strode past, walking her dog. My presence there seemed absurd and I shivered back to my hotel, numbed in more ways than one.

The following day, [I visited Auschwitz](#), where history hadn't been cleared away; it hadn't been reconstructed. It just stood. As it was. As it had been.

Here at 60 Andrassy Street, things are different. A lot of effort has been expended creating a multimedia experience that tries to fill in the gaps: the aching, inexplicable voids that history has left.

And it's not interested in nuance. Nor self-reflection.

Hungary's history during the 20<sup>th</sup> century does not make for pleasant reading. Part of the [Habsburg's Austro-Hungarian empire at the start of the century](#), its defeat in World War One stripped it of territory and, by the look of things in this museum, an enormous amount of pride.

When World War Two broke out, a democratic Hungary sided with Hitler and the Axis powers before entering into years of complex diplomacy within the maelstrom of the world's deadliest conflict. Siding with Hitler yet trying to negotiate peace with the UK and US. Passing anti-semitic laws yet keeping Jews from the concentration camps. Aggression against Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia

60 countries.

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and the Soviet Union, yet trying to keep the war from its doors.

It's a fascinating, terrifying, deadly memoir of conflict and survival amid the howling storm of contrasting – and ultimately catastrophic – ideologies on both sides.



## It was doomed to fail.

And it was doomed to fail. On learning of Hungary's negotiations with the West in 1944, Hitler sent in his own troops, transported over 600 000 to the concentration camps and fought to the end against the Soviets in the siege of Budapest.

The whole period raises questions about the fight for freedom, appeasement, coercion, diplomacy, national pride, borders, identity and more...yet the museum itself addresses none of these. In fact, it barely mentions Hungary's role throughout those years, only its losses.

But those losses, Hungary's losses, were staggering. Ten percent of the population dead – and occupation by the Soviet Red Army.

Within two years, democracy had gone. So had the leaders of the opposition.

The House of Terror launches a scathing account of the Stalinist years. Reconstructed interrogation rooms. Twisted agricultural policy. Deportation accounts. Old uniforms. The gulag. Bread shortages. Old photographs. Paranoia. Betrayal. The disruption of religious life.

It's a stifling amount of information that's difficult to sift through in one go. And it's certainly the most damning view of life behind the iron curtain I've seen so far during my [#ironroute journey](#).

A guard directs me to a lift.

The doors slam, the lights go out, and the machine screeches slowly towards the basement. In the shadows, a prisoner is led along an underground corridor, his final footsteps before his state execution.

The doors open into clawing darkness and a stench of urine. It's the same corridor, the same cells, the same short walk to the scaffold.

I begin to feel sick.

Later, back in daylight and pacing along the frosted pavement, surrounded by

leafy beauty and resplendent buildings, my mind feels uneasy again.

It hovers on the power of place and reality in trying to come to terms with the crimes of the past. It hovers on freedom of speech, capital punishment, genocide and fear. It realises for the first time that a part of me is grateful for our current Prime Minister. And even the tabloid press. And even the ill-informed criticisms about my own work.

Disturbing thoughts indeed.

I'm out of breath by the time I reach the Hungarian Parliament Building.

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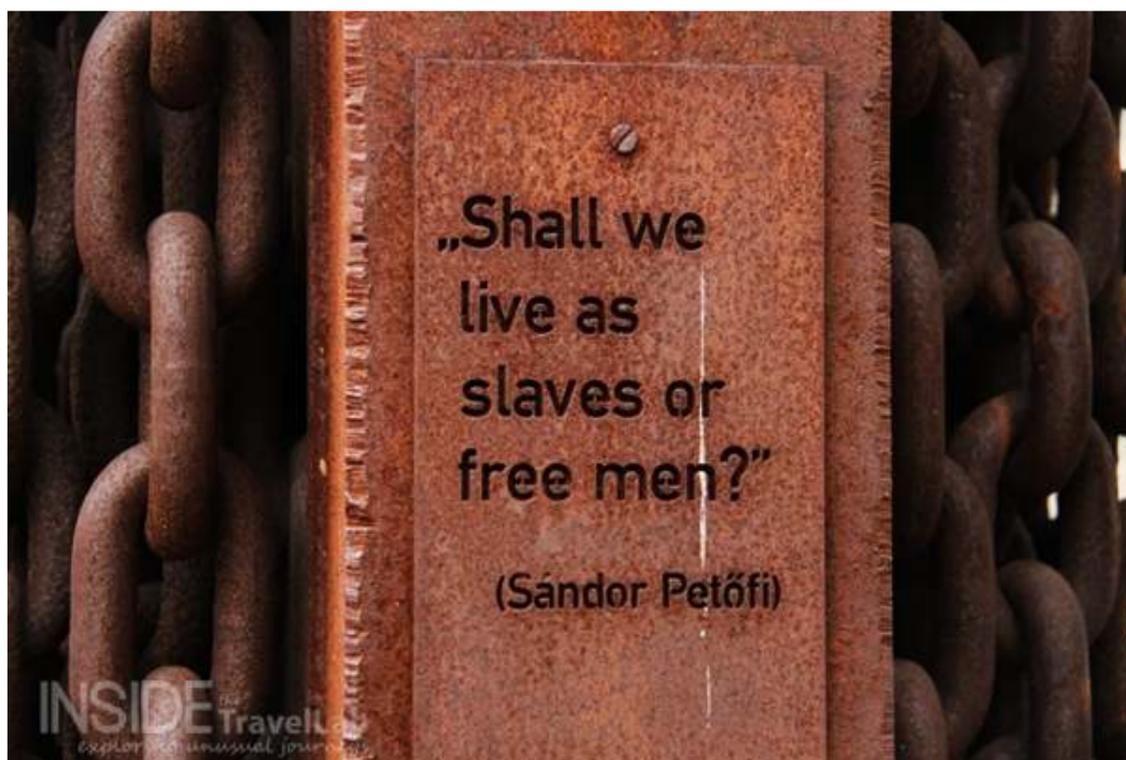
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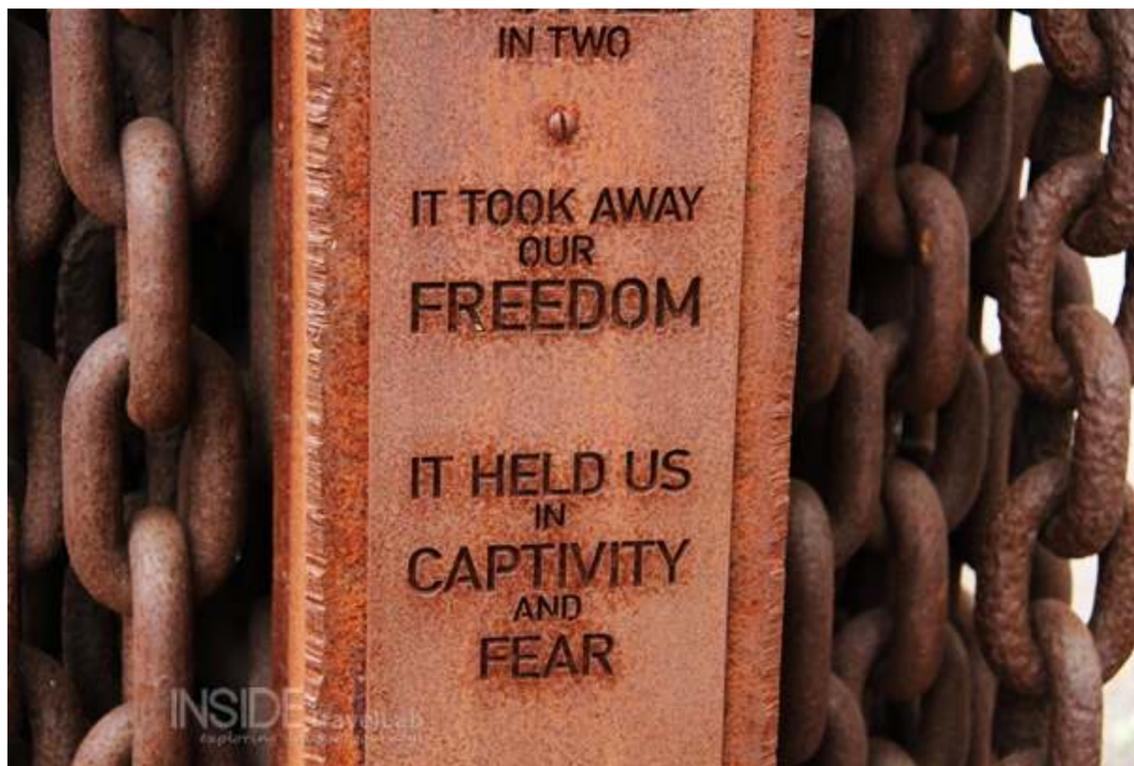
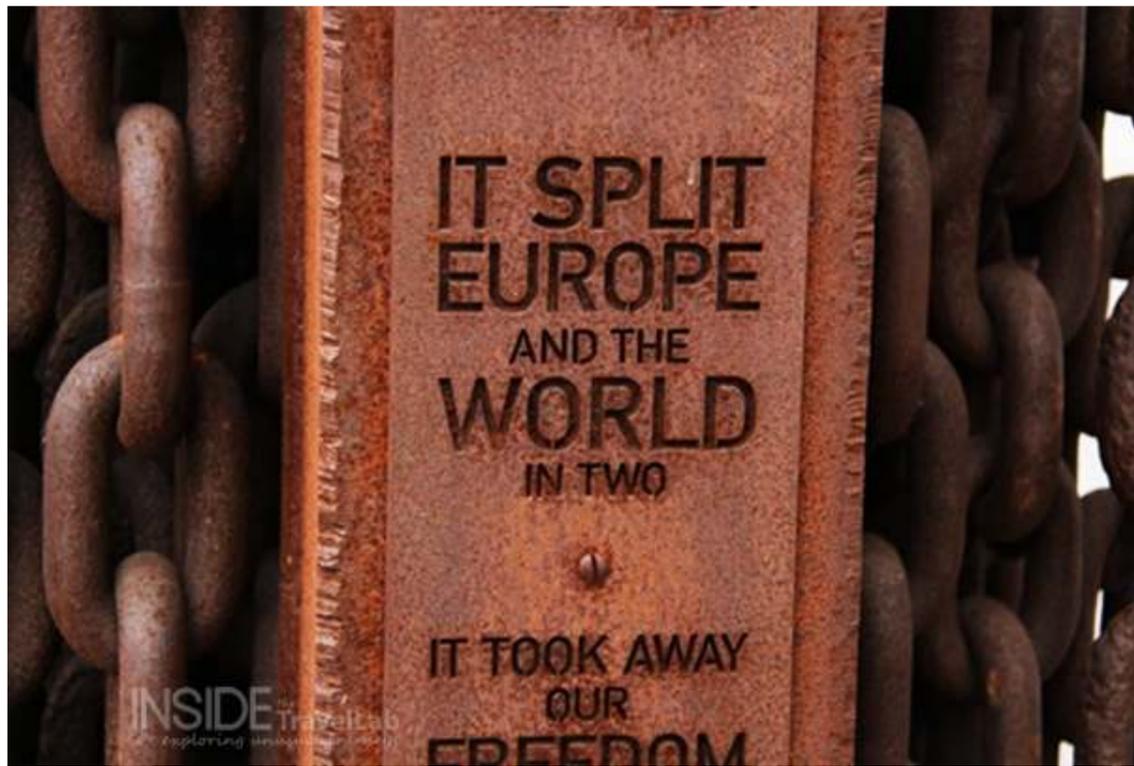
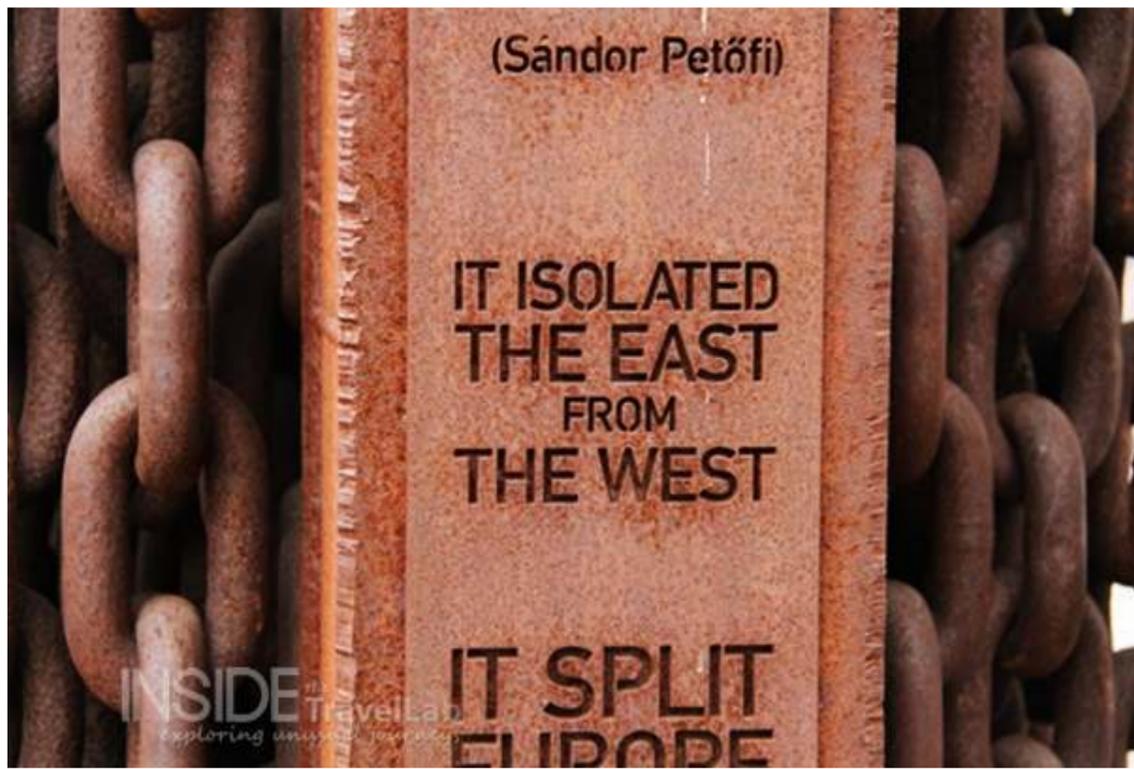
I hand over my camera.

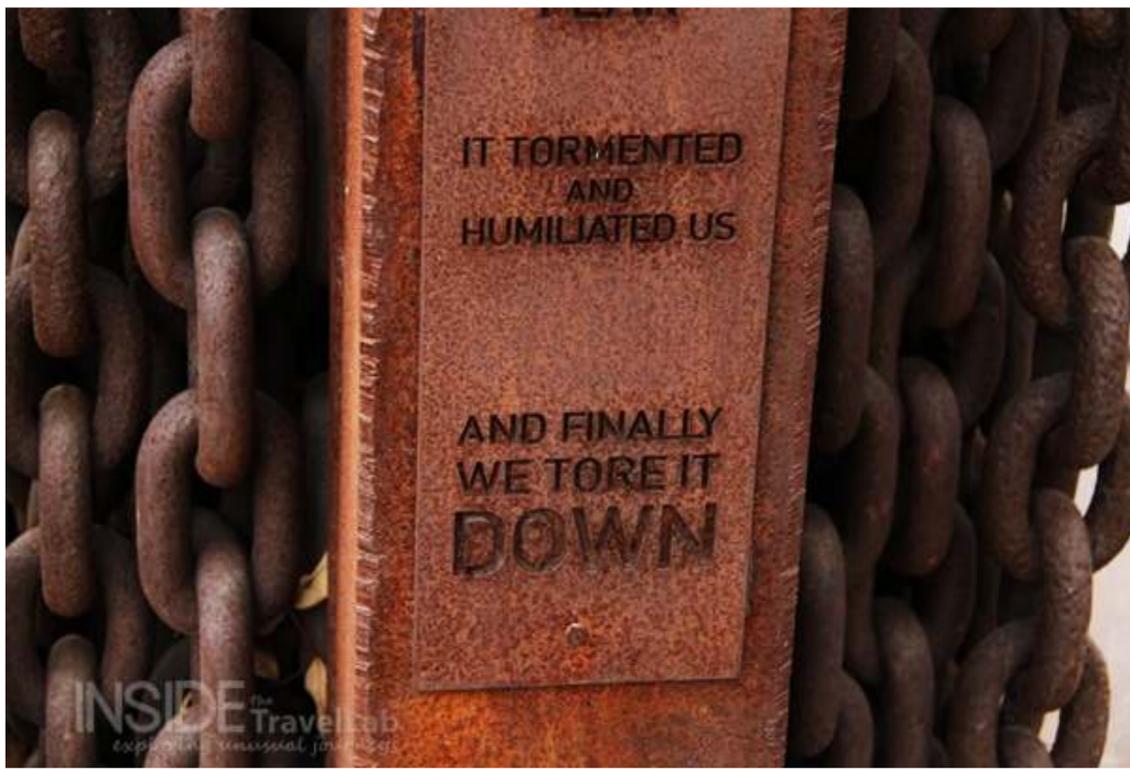
I get to keep it. They hand it back.

*Photos of the Parliament Building to follow.*

This post forms part of the [#ironroute](#) journey from Istanbul to Berlin by train with InterRail.







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Hi, I'm Abi, a doctor turned writer who's worked with Lonely Planet, the BBC, UNESCO and more. Let's travel more and think more.

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