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BASKING IN BUDAPEST

With family history rooted in Budapest, Hungary, Suzanne Rogers has an intimate connection to the central European nation.

Budapest holds a very special place in my heart. As the child of Hungarian immigrant parents, I spent all of my summer vacations in the country's capital, visiting family. It became my second home, and by age 12 I could navigate the city on my own.

Now, whenever I return, I feel more Hungarian than Canadian.

I carefully follow local culture and politics, and have enormous respect and admiration for [the city's] people; one reason being for their bravery. More than a half-century has passed since the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, and amid tremendous struggles and hard-won victories, these people have remained strong and unified, with a tremendous joie de vivre that has never wavered.

You can feel it strolling through the cobblestone streets, savouring the wonderful gypsy music as it wafts through sidewalk café windows.

And there are many cafés to be explored. One of the best-known spots, is Café Gerbeaud, which predates the revolution by a century, and back in the 1940s and '50s, attracted Europe's most famous artists, writers, and philosophers. Upon entering the Gerbeaud, with its Art Deco furnishings, deep red carpets, and thick velvet drapes, you're immediately transported to Budapest's glorious past.

Other itinerary essentials for me include the iconic Széchenyi Chain Bridge, the seven other magnificent bridges that divide Buda (the western side) and Pest (the east), Fisherman's Bastion, the stately Parliament buildings dotted along the Danube River, and, of course, exquisite thermal spas (the best in Europe). My favourite, the Gellért Thermal Baths, are nestled inside of the stately Danubius Hotel Gellért—a treasured site for me, as my parents were wed here.

The other thing about Hungarians that I admire, is their beauty. The women are known for having exceptional skin, and devoting a remarkable amount of energy to their health, wellbeing, and appearance (which I learned firsthand from my grandmother). For her, a weekly facial was just as essential as grocery shopping, they were easy to indulge in regularly, with “cosmetics” offering quick facial treatments on nearly every street corner. Remarkably, facials at these little shops still only cost around \$30 today.

Fashion here has always fascinated me, too. Hungarian women were not exposed to Parisian or American style during the Cold War. Under communism, fashion magazines were deemed corruptive and banned from newsstands, so local women developed their own style. Influenced by what little they gleaned from Westerners, the looks these women created were unique, charming and elegant.

Now, it's interesting to watch how classic Hungarian folk dress is being revived in modern-day fashion design. Thick and colourful intricate embroidery, headdresses, and vibrant pattern mixing in traditional Hungarian style are evident in Valentino's latest runway collection. Folk embroidery also remains integral to the ever-popular boho look, particularly in blouses and handbags. Such embroidery also shows up in the collections of leading Eastern European designers like Olga Vilshenko, Vika Gazinskaya, and Yuliya Magdych. These gifted young artists are brilliantly adding modern twists to grand, traditional looks. True to my Hungarian roots, I applaud their stunning ingenuity, as I do with all of the cultural elements in this beautiful country. Visit sstylemag.com for photos of Suzanne's favourite Hungarian places. ♦