

May 31, 2014 (Budapest, Hungary)

We get up a little before 5:30 AM as our train leaves to Budapest at 7:39 AM. We get showered and our things packed to be out of the hotel by 6:20 AM. We walk down the street and catch the metro to the main train station, arriving around 7 AM.

We have to wait for the track number is given for our train. As I still have a little Czech money



he's already printed them out. I refuse to accept them. He reluctantly rips up the seat reservations, deletes the reservations on the system and gives me 2 seat reservations that are together. I probably should have realized



number for our train to Budapest. Immediately, the hoard of people in the train station all make a beeline for Track 4. We get up to the platform a couple of minutes before the train arrives. We're not sure which end of the platform is 1st class and of



remaining, I decide to buy reserved seats to Budapest, just in case the train is crowded and to save us the hassle of needing to rush to get a seat. I watch the buy punch in the 2 seats to reserve and they're not even together, even though the 1st class train car is 80% free. I stop him and request 2 seats together. He says he can't change our seat reservations because



at this point that the 1st class car was mostly empty and that I could save 168Kč (\$8.40) by not making a reservation. Oh well, there's nowhere else to spend this Czech money as we're getting ready to leave the country.

At 7:20 AM the board displays the track



course guess wrong. We run to the other end of the train (the front) and board the 1st class car and find our seats. There was really no hurry as the train remains at the platform for about 10 minutes. Soon we depart for Budapest.



The train car is about 1/3rd full as evidently others don't have a seat reservation. We're able to stretch out over several seats to be



more comfortable. A group of older Australians are in the other part of the car. Soon the train attendant comes to check our ticket and give us each a bottle of water.



Travel through the Czech Republic is pretty boring... just a bunch of farms. There is a major stop at Brno in which many people get off and some more get back on. It appears to be a relatively large city. Besides Brno there are a few more small, quick stops.

It becomes obvious that we've crossed the border into Slovakia (country #69) when another train attendant is on board after a quick stop to look at our tickets again. We have several quick stops and also a big stop at Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. Again, the countryside is farms.



I'm trying to figure out when we cross into Hungary. I was expecting that we'd cross soon after Bratislava, but we make another stop at a small town and it's obvious that it's still Slovakia based on the license plates I can see on cars parked next to the train station.

Finally, after a small stop a train attendant comes to check our tickets again. We're definitely in Hungary (country #70) now. He studies our Eurail Pass more carefully than any of the other train attendants and then flips to where the pamphlet folds out and requests that

I fill out the long form. Well, the long form is a survey form that the company in Utah who sold us the Eurail Pass requests that we complete and send to them. I'm confused. So, I fill in the form, but he never comes back. I guess he just felt the need to assert his importance in some way.

This last hour on the train through Hungary is the most scenic portion of the 6 ½ hour train ride. For awhile the train parallels a large river. At one point, on the high ridge opposite on the far bank of the river sits what appears to be a large castle.

At 2:30 PM we arrive in the main Budapest station. Rather than have my wife follow me and we carry our bags everywhere, we find a place for her to sit with our bags while I go hunt for an ATM to get some Hungarian money and



see what we need to do to take the metro to our hotel. For Budapest being a major city, the train station is a bit out-dated. Plenty of money changing places, but not a single ATM. I end up leaving the train station and going across the street to a bank to use an ATM and get 25,000Ft (\$113). Meanwhile, I've determined that taking the metro is easy as they have an information center right at the train station. I go back and get my wife and we go there together where I buy 2

metro tickets (350Ft each, \$1.50). It fortunate that we stopped here because my guidebook is several years old and the station that is near our hotel has been renamed.

We take the metro with ease to the correct station. I have the latitude/longitude coordinates of the hotel from Google Earth on my GPS and see that it's only 0.22 miles away... But 0.22 miles away UPHILL. I'm really hoping Google Earth gave me the correct coordinates for this hotel as it failed for our hotels in Berlin and Prague. When we think we're close, I stop a man on the street and he tells me it's ahead just on the next street. He's right and my GPS coordinates were spot on.



For the same price we paid in Copenhagen and Prague, we have a 4-star hotel here in Budapest. At least it has 4-stars by its name out front. They wouldn't dare lie about that, would they? We get our room and my wife is overjoyed. The room has a king-size bed, a refrigerator, a hot water maker and a balcony outside. Oh, and free wifi, the most important thing.

We cool off a bit from our work getting up the hill with our bags. We try to determine what to do with the rest of our day. It's already 4 PM. My wife really wants to visit one of the thermal baths in Budapest. We choose to visit the Széchenyi Baths because it's one of the few ones that is open to men and women at all times and requires swimsuits. Evidently, most of the thermal baths according to my guidebook have only male-only and female-only times and require no swimsuit.

But before we go to the thermal baths, we're both very hungry, having only eaten the meager foods (bread, pastries and apples) we brought with us on the train. In the park we find a kiosk that sells real hamburgers with all the fixings. This hamburger place would do very well in the U.S. as the hamburgers were that good. One little twist is that coleslaw was on our burgers. I don't like coleslaw, but it actually fit very well within the hamburger.



The Széchenyi Baths are located next to a large public park where there is also the Budapest zoo. The baths are very popular, probably because it's late Saturday afternoon. It takes a little time to figure out where to pay and such. The price has really gone up since my older guidebook was printed. It costs 9,100Ft (\$41) for both of us. Fortunately my guidebook was incorrect about the preparation for the thermal baths. My guidebook describes communal showers without swimsuits with attendants

strictly monitoring that everyone is bathing properly. But we find that there are private shower rooms for doing the required showering in private. And whereas they do expect everyone to use soap and shampoo with their showers, we didn't bring any so we just wet ourselves real good. Plus, we notice many people getting in the pool area completely dry, hair and all, so it appears some people skip the shower completely. There seems to be no enforcement.



The thermal baths are in a large palace setting in the large courtyard of a yellow ornate building. There are 3 pools... 38°C, 34°C and a middle pool from swimming laps at 26°C. The outside air temperature is probably 55°F, so it feels very good to get in the water. I'm disappointed with the water temperature because in the warmest pool, it's cooler than the temperature I take showers. I seriously doubt it's 38°C (100°F). It feels good, but it does nothing to my skin. Plus, the water seems to be just chlorinated swimming pool water and not mineral water. Despite these disappointments, we stay in the water almost 90 minutes. There are some jets of water shooting down in a couple of places and standing under them and letting the water hit my back feels like a nice massage. There are a lot of people in the thermal baths, mostly young adults to old people, probably 60% male.

After getting out of the pool, which is the hardest part because of the cool air, we get our regular clothes back on and take the metro back to our hotel. It's 8:30 PM and we spend the rest of the evening just getting our things together and catching up on email.