

# HOSPITALITY, HUNGARY, HORWATH AND BUDDHA

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**M**y motto is Carpe Diem – Seize the Moment. When a client invited me to attend the Horwath HTL HOTCO Investment Conference in Budapest, it was a mere nanosecond's contemplation before I enthusiastically agreed and was throwing bags and shoes into a suitcase.

Flying out within a few days, I went from the damp Essex weather to the icy and snowy climes of Budapest; it was freezing but inside the Kempinski Corvinus, it was

luxurious and the hospitality was warm.

The event's participants included 70 speakers and 350 delegates from 35 countries. Executives from all hospitality sectors were present with focus on opportunities within the region plus discussion regarding Budapest's bid to host the 2024 Olympics.

The keynote speaker was Chairman Khalaf Ahmad Al Habtoor as his group (Al Habtoor) is a significant investor in the region. He owns the InterContinental Budapest, the Ritz-Carlton Budapest and two office buildings. He spoke positively and persuasively about Hungary and commented: "The return on investment is more lucrative in Hungary than other parts of Europe." His presence certainly elevated the conference and aside his extreme wealth and position, he was humble and approachable.

Marius Gomola, Managing Director of Horwath HTL, Hungary and the conference organizer stated, "We were honoured to have the Chairman speak at our event. His positive words about market conditions in Hungary, as well as his investments, only serve to emphasize the recovery in the region and will give other investors the comfort to follow his lead."

On the second day, five speakers from the guest nation Israel spoke about their domestic hospitality, technology and why Israeli hoteliers are also investing in central Europe. This event was extremely well attended and their presentation included an informative and sometimes light-hearted video



summarising achievements and facts about Israel: Jerusalem was the first city in the world to be completely covered by WIFI. Israel invented the USB stick, the PILLCAM2 (a small camera which can be swallowed and facilitates images from inside the body) and the technology for WHATSAPP, MESSENGER and hands-free computers. Amusing facts included that according to Travellers' Digest, Tel Aviv is in the top 10 for the world's most beautiful men and women.

Budapest is a wonderful city with a rich culture, architecture and history. Yet despite my inclination to just potter about and sightsee whilst taking a brief time-out from the conference, I noticed from the local map, that the famous Gerbeaud coffee house (Gerbeaud.hu) was just around the corner. As a chronic consumer of cakes I had to sample; the delicacies at Gerbeaud are probably the world's finest. Past patrons have included Empress Elizabeth of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Franz Liszt, Princess Diana, Queen Elizabeth II, Madonna and Brad Pitt.

Culture and culinary appetite was truly satisfied but there was one more cuisine temptation before my return to Heathrow: Buddha-Bar Budapest. For those who have ever frequented the restaurants (or even the hotels in Budapest and Prague), this was a sumptuous treat and experience that had to be savoured. In the presence of a large golden Buddha, my colleagues and I sat comfortably around a large round table and dined in an atmosphere of absolute elegance and unrivalled style. (Particularly recommend the chicken salad).

Then the slow, slippery walk along the snowy back streets to Kempinski and to reluctantly pack my bags for the following day's flight.

What a trip. What an experience. Absolutely recommend Budapest. ■

## THE DETAILS

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