

The best bookshops in Budapest

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseviewofbooks/2014/06/15/academics-must-visit-these-bookshops-in-budapest/

2014-6-15

Diana Vonnak studied philosophy and religious studies at Eötvös University, **Budapest**, and in this piece she takes us through the beautiful city streets on a tour of Budapest's finest bookshops. If there's a bookshop that you think other students and academics should visit when they're undertaking research or visiting a city for a conference, find more information about contributing below.

Budapest – with its art nouveau architecture, antiquarian bookshops, and *fin de siècle* style coffee shops – is definitely a place that encourages visitors to explore its Continental European intellectual chic. Academics and students will not be disappointed by its beauty and history. The city buzzes with students of all disciplines and nationalities throughout the year, and, after visiting the bookshops below, visitors might want to take an afternoon to tour some of the more stunning university buildings, such as those at [Corvinus University](#), where a Marx statue in the main hall reminds us of the socialist era.



Budapest panorama. Credit: [Alex](#) CC BY-NC 2.0

A great starting point for book lovers is a stretch of one of the main thoroughfares through Budapest. [Múzeum körút](#) is filled with innumerable second hand bookshops, from which it would be difficult to select just one. Heading north, close to [Deák square](#) it is easy to miss [Atlantisz Könyvsziget](#), an elegant two-storey shop specialising in the humanities and social sciences. The shop features books released by the publishing house of the same name, a collection of mostly philosophy and political science in Hungarian translation. They have a decent English, French, and German collection too and the staff are happy to help. A particularly nice aspect of the shop is the attentiveness of the interior decorations: green library lamps, lithographies of the 'bookworm', and its very own dragon statue.



Chess in the Budapest Baths. Credit: [Alex Proimos](#) CC BY-NC 2.0

[Bestsellers Bookshop](#) in [Október 6. street](#) might fool us with its name, but its popularity reaches only as far as the Hungarian academic community. Bestsellers opened soon after the Iron Curtain fell and have functioned as a haven for English, German, and French books and journals ever since. Academic titles comprise about half their stock of over 10,000 books, so students and researchers are in good hands here. It is worth taking some time to chat with the staff, as all of them are fellow book-lovers happy to share advice.



Credit: [RachelH_](#) CC BY-NC 2.0

There is a silent consensus about the unmatched position of [Írók Boltja](#) among the lovers of literature in Budapest. The bookshop, close to [Oktagon](#), features less international stock compared to those above, but arguably you can buy any Hungarian book worth reading and it functions as a hub for poetry nights, author-audience meetups, and book-signing sessions. You can find journals of regional relevance here as well, such as [The Hungarian Review](#).

Finally, a tiny second hand bookshop and café [hidden close to the Jewish Quarter](#), [Massolit](#) is a must-see for academic visitors. Apart from a quiet garden full of fig trees and the excellent home-made cakes, Massolit offers a good selection of books in the social sciences, literary theory, and gender studies, as well as fiction and Hungarian literature in translation. The majority of the collection is English but there is a smaller German, Russian and Polish stock too. The place is a favourite of international students and it is certainly tempting to sit down there with newly purchased books and soak up the atmosphere.



A bookstore occupies the first two floors of the former "Paris Department Store" (formerly Divatcsarnok). The building was once the site of the Terézváros Casino, built in 1885 in neo-Renaissance style. Credit: [jaime silva](#) CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Diana Vonnak studied philosophy and religious studies at Eötvös University, Budapest and subsequently graduated from Durham University with an MA in social anthropology. She is interested in the post-socialist societies, the built environment, environmental issues and the intersection thereof. She will start a PhD researching the anthropology of urban heritage in October 2014. Diana tweets [@diavonnak](#).

Do you have a favourite bookshop? If there's a bookshop that you think other students and academics should visit when they're undertaking research or visiting a city for a conference, then now's your chance to tell us all about it.

As part of a new weekly feature on LSE Review of Books, we're asking academics and students to recommend their favourite two or three bookshops in a particular city, with the aim of building an exciting online series for our book-loving community of readers the world over.

Bookshops could be academic, alternative, foreign language, hobby-based, secret or underground institutions, second hand outlets, or connected to a university. We'd like to cover all world regions too.

If something comes to mind, we're looking for around 100 words per bookshop, detailing why this place is a must-see. Our editorial team can then find suitable photos and links to accompany the piece, though you're welcome to supply these too. We only ask that you focus on just one city or region, and two or three bookshops within it.

Email us now if you'd like to contribute: lsereviewofbooks@lse.ac.uk

- Copyright 2013 LSE Review of Books

