

The 2 Idiots Travel Blog
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Ultimate Kid-Friendly Itinerary In Driving From Zagreb to Budapest

Why The 2 Idiots recommend driving from Zagreb to Budapest?

Less than four hours apart, there is a lot to see between the quaint and historic Croatian Zagreb and Hungary's capital of Budapest. Oftentimes, train or plane travel will have you missing some of a country's most beautiful sites, and with such a short drive, we found spending a full day exploring gave us a chance to check out the ancient city of Varazdin and sampled a traditional Hungarian thermal spa in Heviz, Hungary. Both aren't on-the-radar spots of Americans, and we would have missed them if we didn't take the driving route.

CREATING AN IDEAL ITINERARY

We left Zagreb at 9 a.m. and arrived in Budapest at 7:30 p.m., which makes for a long day but we saw some really cool places and enjoyed some pretty cool experiences.

It's just over an hour from Zagreb to Varazdin, the ancient capital of Croatia filled with cobbled streets, an old castle, and a historic district. Spend two hours touring the city, then enjoy lunch before driving 1.5 hours to Heviz, Hungary, and spend time at its thermal lake. Spend a few hours here, and be sure to have an afternoon snack before the two-hour final drive to Budapest.

Logistics

Renting a car one-way between Zagreb and Budapest seemed super expensive because you are renting the car in one country, and returning it in another. Renting a bus can cost €50 to €60 Euro per person and you don't get to stop or control your trip. We discovered renting a private driver using Daytrip.com cost us €300, which was €100 Euro per person, and we could arrange stops at our convenience. We could select our route and number of stops to find a price and trip that worked best for us.

Stop	Itinerary
Varazdin (10 a.m. – 1 p.m.)	Old Castle - Stari Grad (25 kronas) Main Square Walk around town Grab lunch
Thermal Lake of Heviz (2:30 p.m. – 6 p.m.)	Hotel Spa Heviz (starting at 87 Huf)

Visiting Varazdin's Old Town

An hour from Zagreb is Varazdin in northern Croatia. We began our day with breakfast in Zagreb and hitting the road by 9 a.m. You'll arrive in Varazdin around 10 a.m. and can spend a couple hours exploring.

Dating back to the 1100s and the former capital city, Varazdin's Old Town, known as Stari Grad, is filled with baroque architecture and a castle fortress with beautiful gardens. It's a very cool town with a truly comfortable vibe, and you can stroll through the medieval fortress, cathedrals and palaces, and spend a lot of time walking about the gardens, where your children are free to roam. (Although there are many areas with cobblestones, so it could make for a bumpy stroller ride.) The town's cemetery, dating back to 1773, is a beautiful park-like environment with trees and areas to be explored easily with a child in a stroller.

Stari Grad is filled with shops and restaurants, so when you have spent a couple of hours taking in the charming town, find a spot for lunch, overlooking the sites and people watching. You'll want to be on the road again by 1 to make it to your next stop, over the border in Hungary.

Hanging in Heviz's Hungarian Spa

Hungarian thermal spas are renowned, so we decided a stop at the second-largest thermal lake in the world would be the perfect way to spend the afternoon. Located in the town of Heviz, you'll head to Hotel Spa Heviz, which sits on a stunning thermal lake and offers indoor and outdoor thermal bath options, as well as more traditional spa offerings. And yes, this is a family-friendly excursion -- the people of Hungary take to the baths with kids in tow. With both

thermal hot waters from underground and cool water running from an underground cave spring, the water stays at a lovely 75 degrees in its coolest months.

Arriving at Hotel Spa Heviz can be a bit frustrating, as there is a lot of walking throughout the entire hotel to find the actual spa. Once inside, we were surprised to discover the co-ed changing rooms -- perhaps the family-friendliness baths are so routine they don't need male and female changing rooms. Thankfully, there are private rooms for changing!

For our stop, we didn't get as much time as we liked because we arrived late, having taken too much time in Varazdin, struggling to find the spa, and exchanging currency. Since you will be coming from Croatia, you'll need Hungarian currency and the spa works on cash only. Thankfully, they have an ATM at the spa, but if you can grab cash before your arrival, it will save you time. By time we were settled in the spa, we ended up having only an hour. We really wish we had timed it better to fully enjoy the full spa experience. The hotel resort features slides for kids to play on, a café, and a full-service spa with very inexpensive massages and services. Take turns with your children to allow each of you to enjoy the spa services -- and then write and tell us what we missed!

You'll leave Heviz at 6 p.m. and travel two hours to Budapest. This means arriving and getting to your accommodations late, and having a late dinner. Definitely have a snack before you leave Heviz, or if 8 p.m. is too late for dinner, consider dining at the hotel or in Heviz before you continue on to Budapest.

KID-FRIENDLY TIPS

- Take a stroller in Varazdin; there is a decent amount of walking.
- Walking around the castle gardens can be hard because you can't use a stroller. Keep this in mind, if you choose to visit.
- Make sure to have swim clothes and puddle jumper accessible for your child.

OTHER TIPS

- Make sure you have your ATM card. The spa only takes cash in Hungarian currency (Hungarian Forint). The hotel has an ATM and we recommend having at least \$100 worth of Hungarian Forint.
- You can rent noodles and towels for your family, also cash only.
- If you give yourself enough time, you can get a massage or facial at the spa. These are typically hour-long services, so arrive early and check for services before enjoying the baths.
- The spa has a cafe for snacks and drinks.