

D E S T I N A T I O N S P E C I A L I S T

European Culture and Heritage

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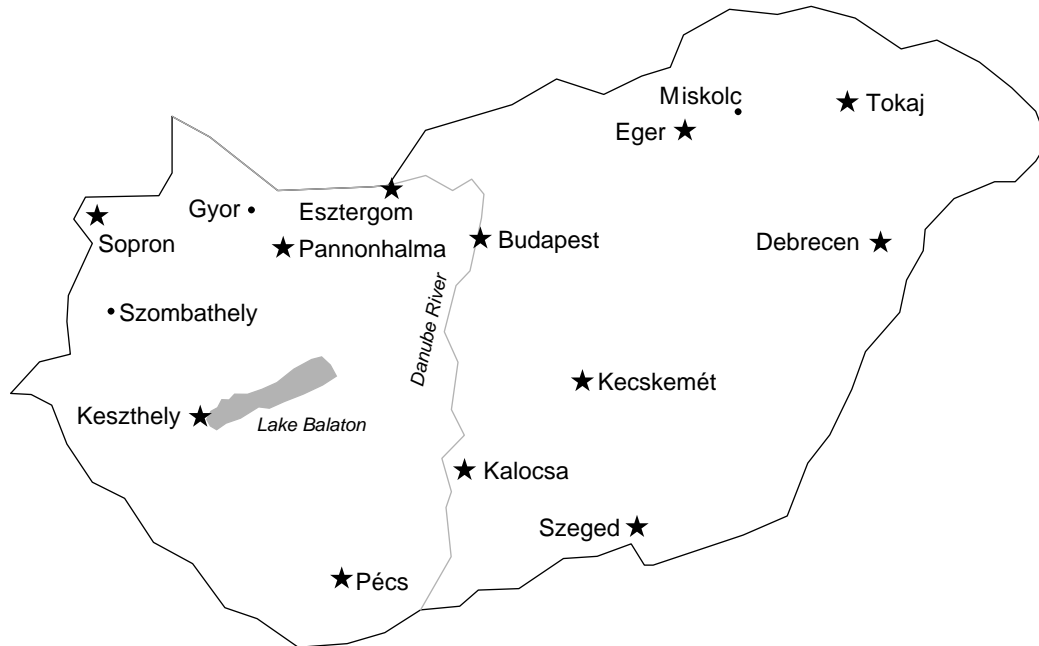
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Hungary

Situated in the heart of Central Europe, Hungary is bordered by Slovakia, Austria, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, and Ukraine. Its boundaries have changed over the centuries, and now it is but a shadow of the once vast Austro-Hungarian empire that extended over much of Central Europe and took in Austria, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, as well as parts of Poland and a number of other countries.

Hungary is a surprise to visitors who expect an austere, former Eastern Bloc country but instead find a vibrant, complex, and beautiful nation. Visitors return with tales of strolling through beautiful, old, and charming cities along the famous Danube River, enjoying leisurely meals in good restaurants, and viewing wonderful museums. Despite the Holocaust during World War II, there is a thriving Jewish community—the largest in Central Europe—with historic synagogues. Hungary's central location has long made it a gateway within Europe, even when it was a communist country.

Hungary is a country of elegant medieval towns, a large inland lake, and a modern, thriving capital city with fine baroque buildings and broad avenues. On the Great Hungarian Plain, or *puszta*, traditionally dressed cowboys still herd horses in a wild, dust-raising gallop. Hungary is also a land with a history of art, poetry, and music. It is home to classical composers Franz Liszt and Béla Bartók, as well as one of the lands of Gypsy music. Today's tourists enjoy its fine wines, fiery Hungarian paprika, theater, and colorful folklore.

Some 90 percent of Hungarians are Magyars, and their language is also called Magyar, which means Hungarian. Despite the number and diversity of countries at Hungary's border, Magyar is not related to any of the languages used by its neighboring countries. Instead, it is distantly related to Finnish and Estonian. Since few Europeans speak Magyar, many Hungarians speak other languages, such as German.

Hungarian music reflects the varied influences of peoples as diverse as the Magyars, the Turks, the Gypsies, and the Austrians. Franz Liszt, a 19th-century composer whose music is known throughout the world, was fascinated by Gypsy music and even wrote a book on the subject. Liszt also is known as the inventor of the symphonic poem and was considered one of Europe's greatest piano virtuosos. Ferenc Erkel,

another 19th-century composer, tried to transform Italian opera into a Hungarian style using *verbunkos*, a Gypsy dance based on Western dance music. Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály collected folk music in remote villages, integrating the melodies into their own compositions.

Traditional Hungarian folk music often is played on bagpipes, tamboura (lute), flute, and zither. In the past, poor Hungarian villages often used bagpipes in churches instead of organs. Gypsies long have held an honored place in the national musical life of Hungary. They comprise about 5 percent of the population and speak their own language called Roma. Some restaurants have Gypsy musicians, but often the music they play is 19th-century ballads and songs written by Hungarian nobles.

Folk art is one of the most vibrant traditions in Hungary. It has been protected over the years, and there are collections of recorded music, dances, photographs, and crafts—especially textiles and pottery. One of the major folk craft fairs is held annually around August 20, the national holiday, in the castle district. It hosts artisans, dancers, and musicians from all over the country and is truly a festive and crowded occasion.

Cultural Highlights and Traditions

Hungarian culture is one that is romanticized throughout the world. Descendants of that culture have done well to preserve it through their many festivals and celebrations. Entire villages spend a full year preparing for their own festival. Hungarian festivals are colorful displays of ancient and new costumes, many influenced by the Magyars, many dedicated to the season, and others directly related to the arts.

The most well-known music festival is the world-famous Spring Festival in March, when musicians and audiences alike congregate in Budapest. Music festivals can be classical in nature, like the summer Gyor Music Festival, which presents the nation's best performances of classical symphony, or the Beethoven Concerts in Martonvásár, also a summer event. Music more modern and global is performed during March at the Dreher Bohemian Ragtime and Jazz Festival, or in May at the Salgotarjan Dixieland Festival. Traditional Hungarian music is played at village festivals throughout the country.

Also in summer, the town of Szentendre holds its annual Theater Performances, while Nyirbator holds its Street Theater Gathering around the same time.

One of the most authentic celebrations is the Visegrád Palace Games, held mid-summer along the Danube in the ruins of a 14th-century castle.



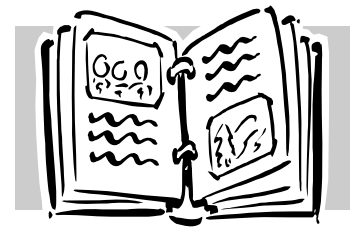
Food and Drink

Probably the best known of Hungary's contributions to food is Hungarian paprika, a powder made from red peppers. Growers around Kalocsa produce innocent-looking, lighter-colored, but very hot, peppers. Around Szeged they grow brilliant red, but are milder. The peppers are handpicked, then hung to dry from the rafters outside the harvesters' homes. That means that come October, the buildings are draped in clumps of red peppers. Once dried, the peppers are processed. It takes about three pounds of peppers to make one pound of ground paprika. Not all of the peppers are *eros* (hot). Some *édes* (sweet) ones are added to soups, stews, and salads or they are eaten raw. One dish benefiting from paprika is the well-known Hungarian goulash, a thick soup made of potatoes, beef, and paprika, and named for the *gulya*, or cowherds, who originated the soup. Hungary also is famous for its spicy sausages, which it exports, as well as Hungarian-made Pick salami, made in Szeged.

Hungarian wines are well known and considered quite good. The best known is Egri Bikaver or Eger Bull's Blood, which is made in Eger. The story is told that the women of Eger brought pitchers of the wine to men defending the walls of the city from the attacking Turks who, when they heard the men were drinking "bull's blood," fled in terror. The finest Hungarian wines are produced from grapes grown in the volcanic soils of Badacsony, Eger, Sopron, and Tokaj, as well as in southern Hungary (Pécs, Villány, and Szekszárd). Louis XIV of France is reported to have called the Tokaj Aszú wine "the king of wines and the wine of kings." In any case, it is a sweet golden-white wine of an almost liqueur-like density. Apricot, cherry, or plum *pálinka* (brandies) are good. Unicum, a bitter liqueur made from natural herbs, roots, and spices, has been considered a national drink since 1790. Although Hungary produces good local beer, Hungarians generally prefer wine to beer.

A Brief History

Many Hungarian cities, such as Esztergom and Győr, began as Roman encampments. However, the group most responsible for the country's origins were the Magyars, who entered the region during the 9th century. Described as fearsome warriors who were able to ride backwards and shoot their bows and arrows standing on their horses, they easily conquered the tribes in the Danube Valley and continued westward. By A.D. 924 they had vanquished peoples as far as Champagne in what is now France. Their expansion finally stopped in A.D. 955, but not before they had raided Burgundy and even Italy.



In the year 1000, Stephen was crowned Hungary's first king. Stephen soon abolished the tribal system and set up a centralized government. He encouraged foreigners to serve in his court but insisted that the native Magyar language be spoken. After his death, Stephen was canonized and became the patron saint of Hungary. His feast day is August 20, and the symbol of the country now is St. Stephen's crown. The king never wore the crown so named for him, which was made 100 years after his death. During the last days of World War II, Hungarian refugees took the crown to the United States, where it remained protected at Fort Knox until 1978 when it was returned to Hungary.

Ogadai, son of Genghis Khan, and his "Golden Horde" of Mongols invaded Hungary in 1231. For two years the Mongols rampaged through the region. Poems from this era say that after the Mongols left, barely a stone stood upon a stone. The Hungarian King Béla IV barely escaped alive with his family. He returned later and began to rebuild the kingdom, in part by granting a charter to the new trading town of Pest on the Danube's east bank. He also began fortifying Buda Hill, a project that continued in one form or another until the middle of the 19th century. At the same time Hungary became increasingly powerful and expanded into neighboring countries.

Bela was so successful in rebuilding that Hungary became powerful once again. Rulers from other countries often sent their children to study in the Hungarian court because it was known for its intellectual achievements. Its location on the trade routes between the Baltic Sea on the north and the Black Sea on the south secured its important economic position.

The Hapsburg Period

Under the Hapsburg's in the 18th century and much of the 19th century, Hungary grew economically and culturally, particularly in Budapest. In 1740, Austria's Maria Theresa became Queen of Hungary. She built schools and universities, thereby earning the enmity of the Hungarian nobles who feared an educated populace. These nobles succeeded in blocking many of the reforms put forth at the time, thus keeping Hungary primarily an agricultural nation. When word of the French Revolution reached Hungary in the early 1800s, unrest grew and many peasants became outlaws.

Leaders such as Count István Széchenyi emerged from this chaotic period. Széchenyi spawned many political, cultural, and economic reforms, but he angered the country's wealthy. He shocked his fellow nobles by pledging a year's income to set up an academy of arts and sciences. Then, while speaking to the Hungarian Diet (the Parliament

permitted by the Austrians), he used the Magyar language instead of the official court language of Latin. He invited Adam Clark, a famous Scottish engineer, to build the Széchenyi Railroad Bridge across the Danube River between Buda and Pest.

The Industrial Revolution

The industrial revolution overtook Hungary in the 1870s, and peasants flocked to the cities seeking work. In 1873 the cities of Buda, Pest, and Óbuda were united into the present-day Budapest. It became a center for construction, commerce, and art. The population divided into a few rich and many poor, and the religious minority—the Jews—became part of the small middle class. They became doctors, teachers, shopkeepers, bankers, and lawyers. They were patriotic, active financial supporters of the War for Freedom and, by the early 1900s, some of the wealthiest people in the nation.

In 1896, Hungary celebrated its 1,000th anniversary with fireworks and festivals. During that year, major cultural and economic developments were made, such as the construction of the first underground in Continental Europe and the building of Heroes Square (the Millennium) with a Museum of Fine Arts and Art Gallery. A Golden Age ensued during which the arts, science, and industry blossomed. A reform movement under the leadership of the Society of Social Sciences began. It was spearheaded by the leading intellectuals of the day and it appealed to a wide variety of political views. That all came to a crashing halt when Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, the heir to the Austrian and Hungarian thrones, was assassinated on June 28, 1914, at Sarajevo: the spark that ignited World War I. Hungary, tied as it was to Austria, allied itself with the Austrians and the Germans. More than 380,000 Hungarians died in the war, and Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory as a result of the Treaty of Trianon.

World War II to the Present

During the next 25 years, Hungary was aligned with Germany. When World War II broke out, Hungary sided with the Nazis on the promise that it could regain its lost territory. But in March 1944, the Nazis took control of Hungary. By April 1945, the Soviet Union, opposing Germany in Eastern Europe, had completely occupied Hungary and the country was in ruins. Western films and books were banned, not to mention deportations, or show trials, or other limits on personal freedom.

With the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, a succession of various leaders came to power, and in 1956 the Hungarian people revolted against the oppressive Soviet domination. The Revolution lasted 12 days, during

• which time the Soviets withdrew from Hungary, and the Hungarian
• government declared neutrality and its withdrawal from the Warsaw
• Pact. However, the Soviets crushed the Revolution, and an estimated
• 20,000–30,000 Hungarians died and 200,000 escaped to the West.
• The world watched the events with great interest, and many still associ-
• ate Hungary with its heroic Revolution of 1956. After 1956, the
• Communist system adopted a more “Hungarian” character, which was
• less oppressive than the Stalinist years. In 1968, Hungary changed from
• strict central economic planning and control toward a limited market
• system based on incentives and efficiency.

• During the 1970s and 1980s, the government continued to support
• Soviet foreign policy, while at the same time moving more toward a
• market economy. Hungary declared itself a democracy on October 23,
• 1989, the 33rd anniversary of the Revolution of 1956. In 1990, the
• first democratic elections since 1947 took place and a multi-party par-
• liamentary democracy was created. The Soviet army left Hungary in
• 1991. In 1999, Hungary became a full member of the North Atlantic
• Treaty Organization (NATO).

• Areas and Points of Interest

• Budapest

• Visitors to Budapest call it the “Paris of Eastern Europe.” The historic
• architecture of Budapest is a blend of Roman and Turkish influences, as
• well as the pomp and circumstance of the Hapsburg court. In the early
• 20th century it was considered the cultural center of East and Central
• Europe, but it has been Hungary’s capital for centuries. There is a
• wealth of history in Budapest, much of it preserved in museums and
• historic areas. The walled “Castle District” contains some of Budapest’s
• most important monuments and museums.

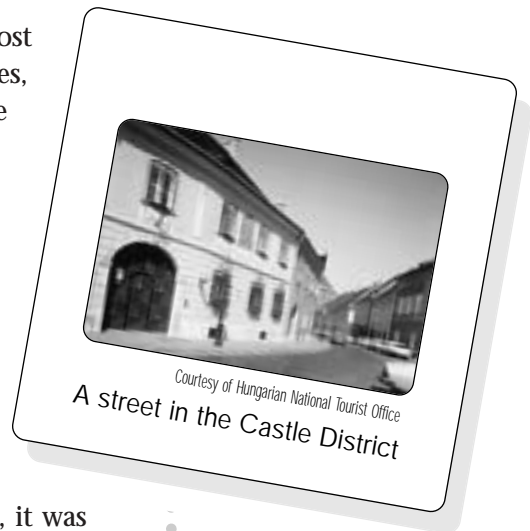
• Budapest originally was three cities: Buda, Óbuda, and Pest, which
• were united into one city in 1873. Buda is the city on the western hills
• overlooking the Danube; Pest is the flatland that eventually links the
• capital to the Western Plains.

• On the hills of Buda are some of the area’s earliest historic markers, par-
• ticularly in Óbuda, which is full of ancient Roman ruins and museums,
• including Aquincum, the most complete ruins of a Roman town in
• Hungary. The outlines of the homes, fountains, public baths, a market
• area, and a temple to the sun god Mithras can still be seen. The settle-
• ment had 40,000 inhabitants in its heyday, and the museum contains
• utensils, weapons, cultic articles, and ornaments from the city.



Major Attractions

- **Castle District**—This is a large historic area, visible from most parts of the city and full of quaint cobblestoned streets, cafes, shops, and museums located in the Royal Palace. The castle district has the Matthias church, which is a gothic-style church named after King Matthias, its main donor, who was married there. It also features the Fishermen's Bastion, a viewing platform built in 1905 and named after the fishermen's guild responsible for defending this stretch of city wall during the Middle Ages. There are seven turrets, representing the original seven Magyar tribes, and a statue of St. Stephen on horseback.
- **Royal Palace**—This structure has been destroyed and rebuilt over the last seven centuries. During World War II, it was gutted but it has been restored. During the restoration, workers found several parts of a medieval royal palace. It is home to the Hungarian National Gallery, the Budapest History Museum, the National Széchenyi Library, and the Museum of Contemporary Art. The Castle Theatre, an outlet of the National Theatre, is in an adjoining building. Castle Cave is a portion of a labyrinth of cave systems in use since medieval times. Portions are open to the public and include wells, former storerooms, and the remains of combat stations used by the Germans during World War II.
- **Chain Bridge**—The first permanent bridge over the Danube took 10 years to build (from 1839 to 1849). The first carriage to use the bridge while it was under construction carried the Hungarian crown from Buda to Debrecen during the War of Independence. The bridge was blown up in World War II but was rebuilt and reopened in 1949.
- **Gellert Hotel and Medicinal Bath**—There are mineral baths in Hungary that allegedly will cure whatever ails you, and the Gellert Hotel and Medicinal Bath is one of the more famous. A bath since Turkish times, the current hotel and bath were built when Budapest's major bath policy was instituted between 1912 and 1918. Budapest was named the international spa city in 1934 and was the site of the first International Bath Congress in 1937.
- **Hungarian State Opera House**—Music lovers will enjoy this neo-Renaissance building that took nine years to build and opened in 1884. The Academy of Music, built in Art Nouveau style, was founded in 1875 with renowned composer Franz Liszt as its first president. Known as the Franz Liszt Academy of Music, the present building was completed in 1907. Both its grand hall, seating 1,200 people, and its small hall, seating 400, are a visual feast.





Courtesy of Hungarian National Tourist Office
Dohány Street Synagogue

- St. Stephen's Basilica—This cathedral, located downtown in the Pest quarter, is the city's largest church. Its chapel contains the Holy Right Hand of Hungary's first king, St. Stephen. Sculptures, paintings, and stained-glass windows of Hungarian saints, medieval fathers of the church, apostles, and evangelists by famous artists can be found in this basilica.
- Dohány Street Synagogue—The second-largest synagogue in the world was renovated in 1996 in beautiful Moorish style. The Jewish Museum is in the courtyard, which also includes an exhibit in remembrance of the 400,000 Jews killed in the Holocaust. Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, was born in Budapest.

Major Attractions Outside Budapest

Godollo

In Godollo, accessible by suburban train from Budapest (HÉV), one can visit the Grassalkovich mansion, built in "Hungarian Baroque" style in the 18th century. The Austro-Hungarian monarchy's ruling couple, Emperor Franz Joseph and his wife, Queen Elizabeth (affectionately known by the Hungarians as Sissi), frequently stayed there.

The Danube Bend

This is the resort area to the north of Budapest formed as the Danube River turns south. People say it rivals the Rhine Valley in terms of beauty. Many significant chapters in medieval Hungarian history were played out over the estates of the Hungarian Royal House, while many rich historical, cultural, and architectural treasures have been preserved for posterity in the region.

Szentendre is the most visited tourist center in this area. It is a small town situated on the banks of the Danube with winding streets, church towers, colorful houses, narrow alleyways, and a Mediterranean mood. There are dozens of museums, famed restaurants, cafes, confectioneries, small shops, and handicraft stalls as well. The Margit Kovács museum, one of the country's most popular, is in this town. Szentendre has been a home to many artists' colonies, and there are still plenty of them thriving today. Hungary's largest ethnographical collection is embodied in the open-air Ethnographical Museum (two miles from the center), to where representative folk architectural structures from ten regions have been moved.

Visegrád is home to the King Matthias Museum, which contains traces of the past glory of King Matthias Palace, one of the 15th century's

most splendid royal residences. One can find the 13th-century Solomon's Tower as well, one of Central Europe's biggest and best-preserved Romanesque keeps.

Esztergom is where King Stephen I, founder of the state, was born. In the 11th century it was the country's first royal seat and ecclesiastical center, while today the Archbishop of the Hungarian Catholic Church has his seat here. The Basilica, rebuilt in Neoclassical style, the country's biggest church and symbol of the city, dominates Castle Hill.

It has one of the largest canvas-based altar paintings in the world. The red marble Bakócz Chapel, 300 years older than the cathedral, is a gem of Hungarian Renaissance construction and of unique interest. Close to the Basilica is the former Royal Palace, one room of which is the Castle Museum. The Christian Museum holds Hungary's most valuable provincial collection.

Northwestern Hungary

Located in the northern part of the former Roman province of Pannonia, the widely known tourist region of Northern Transdanubia covers the area north of Lake Balaton, and from the western border of the country to the Danube. It is characterized by gentle hills, forests rich in wildlife, springs, and bubbling brooks. It also has castles perched atop rocky outcrops, castle ruins, tiny medieval village churches, and towns with a baroque atmosphere.

Major Attractions

Fertod

The 126-room Esterházy mansion, the country's largest and most beautiful baroque mansion ("Hungarian Versailles"), took 46 years to build, starting in 1720, for the nation's wealthiest aristocratic family. It has a marvelous baroque-rococo garden. Austrian court composer Joseph Haydn spent more than a decade in the mansion.

Herend

This town, about a two-hour drive from Budapest near the northern shore of Lake Balaton, is famous internationally for the most beautiful products turned out by its porcelain factory. Herend porcelain was greatly favored by the English and Viennese aristocracy and royalty of the last century. More than 8,000 works of porcelain art are on display in the Museum of the Art of Porcelain Manufacture.

Pannonhalma

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Pannonhalma Abbey, the “most ancient Hungarian House,” has stood on St. Márton hill for more than 1,000 years. Pope John Paul II was invited here to celebrate its millennial anniversary. The Basilica has Gothic vaulting, the Monastery has the country’s only remaining complete medieval Cloisters, and the red marble Porta Speciosa is a marvelous example of Renaissance carving. The Benedictine library, one of the world’s largest, containing over 360,000 volumes; the archives and the scientific and artistic collections are of inestimable value.

Sopron

This town, lying near the Austrian border, surrounded by pine woods and vineyards yielding superb wines, has a subalpine climate. It is Hungary’s wealthiest town in terms of historical monuments. The remains of the Roman Scarbantia, the ancient center, an important station on the Ivy Road cutting through Europe in a north-south direction, can be seen in the Scarbantia Forum archaeological exhibition. The 61-meter-high Fire Tower, with its 360° panorama, stands as a symbol of the town. The Storno House with its Baroque corner balcony has a museum of antiques collected by the dynasty as well as an exhibition of the history of the town. The Fabricius House is one of the most valuable historical monuments in the town. It was a 14th-century apartment that now houses 17th- and 18th-century furnishings, and whose medieval cellar contains a Roman lapidarium with the Trias group of statues from the Roman Capitolium. The Benedictine church (popularly known as the “Goat Church”) with Gothic vaulting and Baroque furnishings was the scene of 17th-century coronations and national assemblies. Nearby, the Holy Trinity statue has been classed as an outstanding work of Hungarian Baroque style from the same period. Taken as a whole, the Orsolyita Church can be rated as one of the past century’s finest neo-gothic constructions.

The Castle District, with its tiny medieval trading houses set on concentric streets and in squares in the inner city, is complemented by today’s elegant shops making for a pleasant area to stroll. The Church of the Holy Spirit, a Gothic masterpiece from the late 14th century, is one of Sopron’s most valuable historical monuments. Among the city’s numerous museums, two are unique in Hungary: the medieval Chapter House, an important 13th-century historical building richly decorated with statues and wall paintings; and the Bakery Museum, a bakery and confectionery with a wine cellar under the house.

Southwestern Hungary

This tourism region is Southern Transdanubia, the southernmost part of the former Roman province of Pannonia, an area bordered by the Danube and the southern border of the River Dráva to the south of Lake Balaton. It comprises a varied landscape of vast untouched forests, wide plains, and valleys tucked away behind gentle slopes. The region has a pleasant climate and clean air, and is rich both in natural attractions and historical monuments.

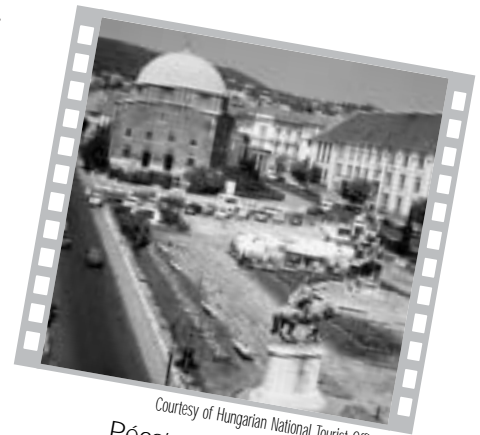
Major Attractions

Pécs

Mysterious Roman burial vaults, Turkish mosques, a slender minaret, fine Zsolnay ceramics, grandiose Csontváry paintings, and decorative Vasarely patterns can all be found in this 2,000-year-old city. Lying at the southern foot of the Mecsek hills, the almond trees blossoming in spring, its restaurants and cafes reflect the Mediterranean climate and atmosphere. The road leading to the summit of the hills is bordered by the steep streets and interesting houses of old Pécs, Tettye.

Roman-era Pécs, “Sopiana,” was a significant center for early Christianity. Excavations have uncovered remarkable finds of international value dating back to the 5th century. The Basilica is one of the most valuable medieval structures in Hungary. Pécs has the most significant surviving Turkish buildings from the 150-year Ottoman domination. This includes the Pasha Gazi Kassim mosque, which is a present-day Catholic church; and the Mosque of Pasha Yakovali Hassan, a virtually intact Muslim architectural delight that functions as a museum today.

The Lyceum Church and former Pauline Monastery is one of the most significant Baroque monuments in the city. The Csontváry Museum holds many works by Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka (1853-1919), a unique Hungarian painter who combined Romanticism, Symbolism, and Expressionism. The Amerigo Tot Museum holds the entire life-work of this world-famous Hungarian sculptor (1909-1984) in one of the oldest houses in the city. The Zsolnay Ceramics Exhibition tells the history and also displays the finest pieces of world-famous Zsolnay porcelain. Finally, the Vasarely Museum shows works by the world-famous pioneer of op-art and abstract geometry, Victor Vasarely (1908-1997), who was born here.



Courtesy of Hungarian National Tourist Office
Pécs' main square

Lake Balaton Region

Central Europe's largest lake, the "Hungarian Sea," is one of the country's most precious natural resources and most visited resort area. It lies in the center of Transdanubia and has opalescent, yellow-green, silky-smooth waters. The water temperatures in summer are warm making it popular for swimming and sailing. This is also a wine-growing region, and there are many spas.

Major Attractions

Hévíz

The world's second-largest warm-water lake, at 49,000 square meters, is renowned for the curative effects of its mud, used at the spa since 1795. Located six kilometers from the northern shore of Lake Balaton, it is covered with water lilies.

Keszthely

The largest and oldest settlement in Lake Balaton was an important trading center in Roman times. The Festetics Mansion, the third largest in the country, is a 101-room Baroque palace. Its owner, György Festetics, was founder of Europe's first agricultural school, the Georgikon, part of which still exists as a museum. The Helikon Library contains 8,000 rare books. Chamber concerts are held in the mirrored gala hall of the Festetics Mansion.

Lake Balaton Wine Region

The following are three well-known areas: Balatonfüred-Csopak Wine Region on the northern shore of Lake Balaton contains red soil, which has been ideal since the Roman Age for producing fragrant, full-bodied white wines. The Balaton-Mellék Wine Region by the gentle southern slopes of volcanic hills produces fiery white wines with acidity and a fruity flavor. The South Balaton Wine Region produces white and red wines of diverse characteristics.

Tihany

Recognizable from a distance because of its twin-towered church, this peninsula of volcanic origin jutting out into the lake has been inhabited for nearly 1,000 years. It is covered with a variety of rare flora and fauna including tens of thousands of birds. From the Benedictine Abbey founded in 1055, only the crypt—one of Hungary's most precious architectural treasures in which the tomb of King Andrew I lies—has survived. This is the only district in the north Balaton Lake area that produces red wines. There is a Pottery Museum in the old Village;

an open-air Ethnographical Museum preserves the 18th-century houses of the former fishing village.

Northeastern Hungary

Hungary's highest mountain range cuts diagonally through the north of the country from the Danube to the Tisza. The 700- to 900-meter ranges of the Cserhátt, Mátra, Bükk, and Zemplén mountains hide unique natural and cultural-historical treasures. Folk art is similarly unique to this region, such as Palóc embroideries and Matyó folk costumes. An abundance of castles, historical towns, medicinal spas, and quiet resorts awaits visitors who can depart on discovery tours, botanical and geological walks, bird and animal watching, hunting and fishing, on horseback, on foot, or by train.

Major Attractions

Aggtelek

The Baradla Cave, Europe's largest stalactite cave, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Scientists believe that it is one of the earth's most magnificent natural phenomenon. The Hungary section stretches 17 kilometers with underground streams, caverns, and huge stalactites—a mysterious fairy-tale world indeed. The Cave Museum displays archeological finds as well as the rich and rare flora and fauna of this 20,000-hectare karst, which has been a biosphere since 1979.

Eger

This is one of the most attractive Baroque cities with winding streets, narrow lanes, and many historic buildings. Széchenyi Street, the town's pedestrian street, is lined with terraced cafes and confectioneries. A one-thousand-year-old Episcopal seat, today it is an archepiscopal center. István Dobó, the castellan, gave the town the title "patriotic town" for its month-long resistance in 1552 against Turkish forces that outnumbered his small army 20 times. Eger is also a town of students, medicinal baths, and fine red and white wines one can taste in century-old cellars.

The Basilica, the second-largest church in Hungary, was built in Neoclassical style in only five years starting in 1831. It contains the largest organ in the country. The Archepiscopal Palace has been the residence of the bishops of Eger for 250 years. The late-Baroque Lyceum was built at the end of the 18th century as a university and has one of the country's most beautiful libraries. It has decorative carvings, lovely ceiling frescoes, 130,000 volumes, old codices, and the only letter of Mozart in Hungary. The medieval Eger Castle comprises ruins of the 13th-century cathedral with underground chambers, the 15th-century Gothic Episcopal palace, and the István Dobó Castle Museum.



One of the most famous historic buildings is a slender Turkish minaret that is Europe's most northerly structure dating from the Turkish period. The Turkish baths are a fascinating memory of a bathing culture created under Ottoman rule (1596–1686).

Eger red wines such as “Bull’s Blood” (a masculine, deep ruby-colored, fiery red produced from several varieties of red grapes) have won Hungary international acclaim due to their attractive color and pleasant tannic acid content. During several years of aging in large wooden casks in wine cellars with an excellent micro-climate, these wines become delightfully tangy, velvety, full-bodied, and rich in aroma.

Holloko

This is the world's first village to be listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This small village nestled among the Cserhát Mountains has preserved its medieval form. The village center consists of 65 buildings of this living museum and the remarkable white-walled church. Palóc people dressed in old, original costumes still live there and demonstrate the old crafts of wood-carving, pearl-threading, and weaving.

Tokaj

This center of the Tokaj-Hegyalja historical wine region produces the world-famous Tokaj Aszú called “the king of wines, the wine of kings.” This region boasts an immense widespread system of cellars ideal for the storage and maturation of wine in bottles or casks. The cellar walls are covered with a thick black coat of fungus, that “noble rot” that enters into mystical interaction with the wines. That is the secret of these renowned wines. It was even used as a medicine in the Middle Ages.

Hungarian Great Plain

The sand-hills of Bugac in the middle of the Great Plain stretching from the Danube to the eastern border of the country together with the alkaline soils of Hortobágy to the northeast make up the flat region of the incomparable “Hungarian Puszta.” Typical farm life in Bugac has survived, as have the ancient domesticated animals on the Hortobágy, and bird species that are unique to this region of Europe. Various breeds of their intelligent and skillful sheep dogs are much sought after even abroad.

During horse shows the tourist has the opportunity to learn about the traditions of the earlier pastoral way of life, animal husbandry in the Great Plain, and fine Hungarian cuisine. The vast thermal water resources under the soil not only produce good wine but also

feed into medicinal baths. A unique natural phenomenon is the rarely seen mirage, when an inverted image of small villages is seen floating in the haze.

Major Attractions

Debrecen

The country's second-largest city was called "Calvinist Rome" in the 16th century because of its pivotal role in the Reformation. This center of learning during the Middle Ages became known as the "capital" of the War of Independence in 1848-49. The city hosts a colorful Flower Carnival in August, Jazz Days, and Summer University (for those who wish to learn Hungarian). The Calvinist Great Church, the country's largest, has become the symbol of the city. The Calvinist College is known as "the school of the country" and contains a Museum and a Library. The Aranybika (Golden Bull) Hotel is the country's oldest still-operating hotel. The Neoclassical City Hall is considered one of the most beautiful of its kind. The Mill is Central Europe's largest windmill, an industrial historical monument. The local medicinal baths are called Nagyerdei. In the city's most famous Déri Museum one can view the huge, dramatic trilogy painted by the internationally known Hungarian artist Mihály Munkácsy (1844-1900): *Pilate before Christ*, *Ecce homo*, and *Golgotha*.

Hortobágy

This is one of Europe's largest protected grasslands where the Hungarian grey cattle, stud, flocks of twisted-horn Racka sheep, and buffalo herds graze. The Hortobágy National Park represents 70,000 hectares set aside in 1973. There is a Pastoral Museum displaying aspects of the shepherd's life. The Circled Barn exhibits the unique flora and fauna of the grassland along with folk arts and crafts. The Gallery contains Hungarian paintings of the Puszta. International Equestrian days are held every July.

Kalocsa

Tasty and sometimes fiery red peppers for paprika drying in strings off the houses, the flower-ornamented wall paintings of verandahs, and the beautiful embroidery and folk costumes that combine fine laces with colorful flower motifs have spread the fame of this area into distant lands. The 200-year-old Regional House of Folk contains the most attractive embroideries, folk costumes, and room and kitchen furnishings. This town even has a Museum dedicated solely to the Hungarian spice paprika. In September it hosts the annual Paprika Festival as well.



Courtesy of Hungarian National Tourist Office
Native costume in Kalocsa

Kecskemét

The seat of the Bács-Kiskun is also known as the “Famous Town.” Its *pálinka* (apricot brandy), Art Nouveau buildings decorated with colorful ceramics, and the Kodály method of teaching music have spread its fame far and wide. The Kodály Institute named after locally born composer Zoltan Kodály (1882-1967) attracts people from all over the world. Many famous buildings are on the spacious Kossuth Square.

The Town Hall, the country’s most beautiful, is a masterpiece of Hungarian Art Nouveau, with its glazed tile roof, colorful floral decorations, and lovely frescoes in the magnificent Gala Hall. Chimes play melodies composed by Kodály every hour. The Cifrapalota (Ornamental Palace), decorated with colorful floral-patterned ceramics, is a turn-of-the-century Hungarian Art Nouveau masterpiece. The Museum of Naïve Art (known as the “Stork House”), dating back two centuries, houses Hungary’s largest collection of its type.

Szeged

This town, situated at the confluence of the Tisza and Maros Rivers, is known as the “Sunshine Town” due to its annual 2,100 hours of sunshine. In 1879 the River Tisza burst its banks and in one single night almost swept away the entire town, but a planned new town was built with eclectic Art Nouveau buildings thanks to international aid. The traditional intellectual atmosphere and the famed schools of the town have given and continue to contribute great writers, poets, and scientists to the country.

Several of the town’s most well-known buildings are located on Dóm Square (the size of St. Mark’s Square in Venice, Italy), one of the finest squares in the country. In summer there is an Open-Air Festival there. The New Synagogue, one of the most beautiful in Europe, is a monumental Moorish Art Nouveau building. The largest church built in the Great Plain in the Middle Ages was the 15th-century late Gothic Church of the Virgin Mary. Most of the Castle was demolished in 1882; however, there is a local history exhibition in the remaining part. Finally, there is the Salami Factory showing visitors the manufacturing process. World-famous products originating from here include the inimitable Pick salami and the Szeged red paprika, which provides a fine taste to Hungarian dishes such as Szeged fish soup.