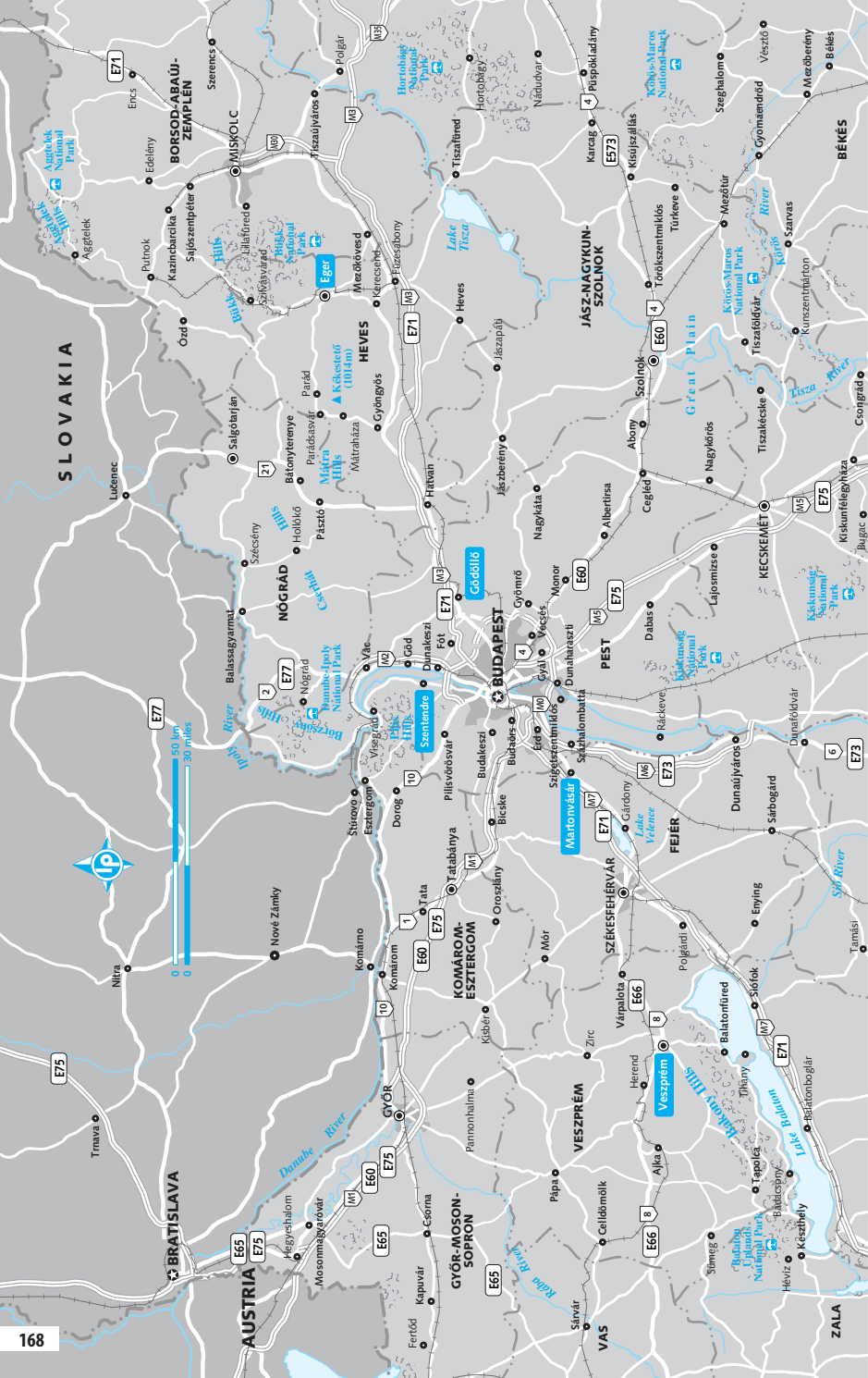


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Excursions ■



Excursions

A lot in Hungary is within easy striking distance of Budapest, and many of the towns and cities in the Danube Bend (to the north of Budapest), Transdanubia (west), Northern Uplands (north and northeast) and even the Great Plain (east and southeast) could be visited on a day trip from the capital. You can get to Szentendre to the north in less than an hour by the HÉV commuter train, for example, and Eger, a lovely Mediterranean-like town lying between the Bükk and Mátra Hills to the northeast, is just two hours away by InterCity train.

This chapter assumes you'll be returning to Budapest after a day of sightseeing, though we've included a few accommodation options in each section in case you miss your train or bus, or simply decide you like the place so much you want to stay a night or two. For fuller treatment of these and other destinations, see Lonely Planet's *Hungary*.

CASTLES & MANOR HOUSES

Some of Hungary's most dramatic castles and opulent manor houses are near to Budapest. First and foremost, is the hilltop fortress at **Eger** (p175), a castle and a half if there ever was one and the stuff of legend (see the boxed text, p177). The **Royal Mansion** (p171) at Gödöllő is Hungary's largest baroque – and now best preserved – manor house. The **Brunswick Mansion** (p173) at Martonvásár may not be able to compete in size or opulence, but it will give any place a run for its money in terms of the company it has kept.

CATHEDRALS

If you haven't had your fill of grand churches in Budapest, travel the extra distance north to Szentendre, whose **Belgrade Cathedral** (p170) is the seat of the Serbian Orthodox primate in Hungary and contains an important collection of church plate and liturgical objects. Windy Veszprém, set high up on a plateau, has so many fine churches that the locals exclaim, 'Either the wind is blowing or the bells are ringing in Veszprém'. But first and foremost is the **Cathedral of St Michael** (p174) with an important Gothic crypt. The cathedral, is on the site of the first bishop's palace, and parts of it date from the beginning of the 11th century. The enormous **neoclassical cathedral** (p176) at Eger, however, is the most important architecturally and, despite its size and scale, is surprisingly light and airy inside.

WINE

Eger, the birthplace of the famed **Bikavér** (Bull's Blood wine; see p177), is inextricably linked with wine, and one of the best places in Hungary to sample the fruit of the vine is at the nearby **Valley of the Beautiful Women** (p176). If you're driving towards Eger from Budapest, you might consider leaving Rte 3 at Gyöngyös and following the

ORGANISED TOURS

If you're pressed for time or too lazy to do it yourself, a number of travel agencies (p195) and tour operators (p52) organise excursions to destinations outside Budapest. By way of example, a 4½-hour tour by boat and bus to Szentendre or to Gödöllő just by bus with Cityrama costs 11,000Ft (children under 12 free or half price), while an 8½-hour tour of the Danube Bend by coach and boat with stops at Visegrád and Esztergom costs 14,000Ft. Cityrama also offers day trips to Lake Balaton (Balatonfüred and Tihany) and Herend (16,000Ft, nine to 10 hours) as well as to Lajosmizse on the Southern Great Plain (18,000Ft, eight hours). Hungary Program Centrum operates similar tours at almost the same prices, as well as an eight-hour trip to Bugac in Kiskunság National Park (19,000Ft) and a nine-hour tour of the Eger wine region (22,000Ft). Vista has a six-day tour of the country including accommodation and half-board that takes in parts of the Northern Uplands, Great Plain, Southern Transdanubia and Lake Balaton region for €599/499 per person single/double (sharing).

circuitous Rte 24 through the **Mátra Hills** to Parádsasvár and then cutting eastward onto Eger. The region's whites – Rieslings, Leányka and Hárslevelű – are all worth trying. And from Veszprém the **Badacsony region** along the northwestern shore of Lake Balaton, famed for its crisp white Olaszrizling and unique Kéknyelű (Blue Stalk), is within easy driving distance.

SZENTENDRE

Szentendre (St Andrew; population 22,700) is the gateway to the Danube Bend, the S-shaped curve in Hungary's mightiest river that begins just below Esztergom and twists for 20km before reaching the capital. As an art colony turned lucrative tourist centre, Szentendre strikes many as a little too 'cutesy', and the town can be crowded and relatively expensive. Still, it's an easy destination from Budapest, and the many art museums, galleries and Serbian Orthodox churches make the trip well worthwhile. Just try to avoid it on summer weekends.

Right in the centre of **Fő tér**, the colourful heart of Szentendre surrounded by 18th- and 19th-century burghers' houses, stands the **Plague Cross** (Pestis-kereszt), an iron cross decorated with icons on a marble base, erected in 1763 as an ex-votive. Across the square to the northeast is the Serbian Orthodox **Blagoveštenska Church**, built in 1754. The church, with fine baroque and rococo elements, hardly looks 'eastern' from the outside (it was designed by András Mayerhoffer), but once you step inside, the ornate iconostasis and elaborate 18th-century furnishings give it away.

If you descend **Görög utca** and turn south (right) onto Vastagh György utca, you'll reach the entrance to the **Margit Kovács Ceramic Collection**, Szentendre's biggest draw and one of the few museums here open all year. Kovács (1902–77) was a ceramicist who combined Hungarian folk, religious and modern themes to create elongated, Gothic-like figures. Some of her works are overly sentimental, but many are very powerful, especially the later ones in which she became obsessed with mortality.

Castle Hill (Vár-domb), which can be reached via Váralja lépcső, the narrow set of steps between Fő tér 8 and 9, was the site of a fortress in the Middle Ages, but all that's left of it is the **Parish Church of St John**, from where you can enjoy views of the town. The red spire of **Belgrade Cathedral**, seat of the Serbian Orthodox bishop in Hungary and built in 1764, rises from within a walled courtyard to the north. One of the church outbuildings contains the

TRANSPORT

Distance from Budapest 19km

Direction North

Travel time 40 minutes by HÉV suburban train

Boat From May to August, one daily Mahart ferry plies the Danube to/from Vigadó tér (Map p224) in Pest and Batthyány tér (Map p220) in Buda, departing at 9am and arriving at Szentendre at 10.40am (one way/return 990/1485Ft). The return boat leaves at 5.45pm. The service dwindles to weekends only in April, late September and October. From June to mid-September two extra boats depart from Budapest at 10.30am and 2pm bound for Szentendre, returning at 12.20pm and 5pm (one way 1400Ft); in the last half of May and September only the 10.30am and 5pm services run.

Bus Buses from Pest's Árpád hid station (Map pp226–7), which is on the M3 metro line, run to Szentendre at least once an hour throughout the day (241Ft, 30 minutes).

Car Rte 11 from Buda

HÉV Trains depart from Batthyány tér (Map p224) in Buda (160Ft, 40 minutes) every 10 to 20 minutes throughout the day. Remember that a yellow city bus/metro ticket is good only as far as the Békásmegyér stop on the way; you'll have to pay extra to get to Szentendre. Also, many HÉV trains run only as far as Békásmegyér, where you must cross the platform to board the train for Szentendre. The last train leaves Szentendre for Budapest at 11.10pm.

Serbian Ecclesiastical Art Collection, a treasure-trove of icons, vestments and other sacred objects in precious metals.

The **Hungarian Open-Air Ethnographical Museum**, 3km northwest of the centre and accessible by bus from bay 7 at the station, is Hungary's most ambitious open-air museum. While plans ultimately call for some 300 farmhouses, churches, bell towers, mills and so on to be set up in 10 regional units, so far only five have been built.

Information

Tourinform (☎ 26-317 965; szentendre@tourinform.hu; Dumtsa Jenő utca 22; ☎ 9.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri year-round, plus 10am–2pm Sat & Sun mid-Mar–Oct)

Sights

Belgrade Cathedral (Belgrád Székesegyház; Alkotmány utca; adult/child incl art collection 300/150Ft; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun Mar–Oct, 10am–4pm Fri–Sun Jan & Feb)

Blagoveštenska Church (☎ 26-310 554; admission 200Ft; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun)

Hungarian Open-Air Ethnographical Museum (Magyar Szabadtéri Néprajzi Múzeum; ☎ 26-502 500; Sztaravodai út 1; admission free Tue & Wed, adult/child Thu & Fri 600/400Ft, Sat & Sun 800/400Ft; ☎ 9am–5pm Tue–Sun Apr–Oct)

Margit Kovács Ceramic Collection (Kovács Margit Kerámiagyűjtemény; ☎ 26-310 224; Vastagh György utca 1; adult/child 600/300Ft; ☎ 9am–5pm Mar, 10am–6pm Apr–Oct)

Parish Church of St John (Szent János Plébániatemplom; Templom tér; ☎ 10am–4pm Tue–Sun Apr–Oct)

Serbian Ecclesiastical Art Collection (Szerb Egyházművészeti Gyűjtemény; ☎ 26-312 399; Pátriárka utca 5; adult/child 400/200Ft; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun Mar–Oct, 10am–4pm Fri–Sun Jan & Feb)

GÖDÖLLŐ

Easily accessible on the HÉV suburban train, Gödöllő (population 32,400), which is roughly pronounced 'good-duh-ler', is an easy day trip from Budapest. The main attraction here is the **Royal Mansion** completed in the 1760s, which is Hungary's largest baroque manor house. But the town of Gödöllő itself, full of lovely baroque buildings and monuments and home to the seminal Gödöllő Artists' Colony (1901–20), is worth the trip.

The **Royal Mansion**, sometimes called the Grassalkovich Mansion after its commissioner, Count Antal Grassalkovich (1694–1771), confidante of Empress Maria Theresa, was designed by András Mayerhoffer in 1741. After the formation of the Dual Monarchy in 1867, the mansion (or palace) was enlarged as a summer retreat for Emperor Franz Joseph and soon became the favoured residence of his consort, the much beloved Habsburg empress and Hungarian queen, Elizabeth (1837–98), affectionately known as Sissi. Between the two world wars, the regent, Admiral Miklós Horthy, also used it as a summer residence, but after the communists came to power, part of the mansion was used as Soviet barracks, then subsequently as an old people's home and temporary housing. The rest was left to decay.

Eating

Aranyársákny (Golden Dragon; ☎ 26-301 479; Alkotmány 1/a; mains from 2000Ft; ☎ noon–10pm) This place may sound Chinese but it serves superb Hungarian and Austrian dishes at above-average prices.

Palapa (☎ 26-302 418; Batthyány utca 4; mains 1000–1500Ft; ☎ 5pm–midnight Mon–Fri, noon–midnight Sat & Sun) The food at this colourful Mexican restaurant makes it the perfect place for a change from heavy Hungarian fare.

Promenade (☎ 26-312 626; Futó utca 4; mains 1500–2500Ft; ☎ noon–midnight) Vaulted ceilings, white-washed walls and a wonderful terrace overlooking the Danube are all highlights here, one of Szentendre's best restaurants serving Hungarian and international dishes.

Sleeping

Bükkös (☎ 26-312 021; Bükkös part 16; s/d 8500/11,000Ft) This small hotel has a touch of style about it and its 16 rooms are cosy and warm; ask for one overlooking Bükkös Stream.

Centrum (☎ 26-302 500; www.hotelcentrum.hu; Bogdányi utca 15; s/d 9000/10,000Ft) A stone's throw from the Danube, this quaint *pension* occupies a well-renovated house. Its half-dozen rooms are large and bright and filled with antique furniture.

Ilona (☎ 26-313 599; Rákóczi Ferenc utca 11; s/d 5000/6600Ft) Ilona is a perfect little *pension* with plenty going for it – superb central location, locked parking, inner courtyard for breakfast and six small but tidy rooms.

Partial renovation of the mansion began in 1994, and today there are some 26 rooms that open for public inspection as the Palace Museum on the ground and 1st floors. They have been restored (some would say too heavily) to the period when the imperial couple were in residence, and Franz Joseph's suites (done up in manly greys and golds) and Sissi's lavender-coloured private apartments are impressive. Check out the **Decorative Hall**, all gold tracery and chandeliers, where chamber-music concerts are held year-round but especially in late June and early July during the Palace Concerts Chamber Music Festival; the **Queen's Salon**, with a Romantic-style oil painting of Sissi patriotically repairing the coronation robe of King Stephen with needle and thread; and the **Study Annexe**, with a restored ceiling painting and an 18th-century tapestry of the huntress Diana.

Several other recently opened rooms and buildings can be visited on a guided tour only at extra cost, including the baroque **Palace Theatre** in the southern wing; the **Royal Hill Pavilion** in the park, built in the 1760s; and the **Royal Baths**.

Information

Tourinform (☎ 28-415 402; godollo@tourinform.hu; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar) Just inside the entrance to the Royal Mansion. Has sample menus from restaurants around town.

www.godollotourinform.hu Town website in English.

TRANSPORT

Distance from Budapest 27km

Direction Northeast

Travel time 40 minutes by HÉV suburban train

Bus Buses from Stadionok bus station (Map pp218-19) in Pest serve Gödöllő (302Ft, 40 minutes) about every half-hour throughout the day. The last bus back is just after 7.15pm weekdays (shortly after 8pm on Saturday and Sunday).

Car Rte 3 from central Pest

HÉV Trains from Örs vezér tere at the terminus of the M2 metro link Budapest with Gödöllő (326Ft, 40 minutes, half-hourly) throughout the day. Make sure you get off at the Szabadság tér stop, which is the third to last. The last train leaves for Budapest from this stop just before 10.45pm.

Sights

Royal Mansion (Királyi Kastély; ☎ 28-410 124; www.kiralyikastely.hu; Szabadság tér 1; adult/child/family 1400/700/2800Ft; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar) Cultural programmes take place here throughout the year.

Eating

Kastélykert (☎ 28-527 020; Szabadság tér 4; starters 480-1990Ft, mains 1000-1840Ft; 🕒 noon-11pm) Situated in a lovely old baroque house opposite the mansion, the 'Castle Garden' is an upmarket choice for an evening meal.

Mei Shi Lin (☎ 28-412 658; Kossuth Lajos utca 33; rice & noodle dishes 450-1680Ft, mains 950-2150Ft; 🕒 11am-10pm Sun-Thu, 11am-11pm Fri & Sat) This pleasant eatery serves surprisingly good Chinese food.

Pizza Palazzo (☎ 28-420 688; Szabadság tér 2; pizza & pasta 750-1250Ft, mains 950-1590Ft; 🕒 11am-11pm) A popular pizzeria with some more-substantial main courses, conveniently attached to the Szabadság tér HÉV station.

MARTONVÁSÁR

Lying almost exactly halfway between Budapest and the Central Transdanubian city of Székesfehérvár and easily accessible by train, Martonvásár (population 5200) is the site of the former **Brunswick Mansion**, one of the loveliest summertime concert venues in Hungary. The mansion was built in 1775 for Count Antal Brunswick (Magyarised as Brunszvik), the patriarch of a family of liberal reformers and patrons of the arts; his daughter, Teréz, established Hungary's first nursery school in Pest in 1828.

Beethoven was a frequent visitor to the manse, and it is believed that Jozefin, Teréz's sister, was the inspiration for his *Appassionata* and *Moonlight* sonatas, which the great Ludwig composed here.

Brunswick Mansion was rebuilt in neo-Gothic style in 1875 and restored to its ivory and sky-blue glory a century later. It now houses the Agricultural Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, but you can see at least part of the mansion by visiting the small **Beethoven Memorial Museum** to the left of the main entrance.

A walk around the **park grounds** – one of Hungary's first 'English parks' to be laid out when these were all the rage in central Europe in the early 19th century – is a pleasant way to spend a warm summer afternoon. The highlight of the so-called **Martonvásár Days** (Martonvásár Napok) festival in July are the Beethoven Evenings (Beethoven-estjei) on Saturday at 7pm, when concerts are held on the small island in the middle of the lake (reached by a wooden footbridge).

The baroque **Catholic church** (1775), attached to the mansion but accessible from outside the grounds, has frescoes by Johannes Cymbal. There's also delightful the **Nursery Museum** in the park, crammed with school-related materials as well as dolls and other toys.

Information

Agricultural Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (www.mgki.hu) Includes some information about the mansion and museums.

Martonvásár Days (www.filharmonikusok.hu)

Sights

Beethoven Memorial Museum (Beethoven Emlékmúzeum; ☎ 22-569 500; adult/child/family 200/100/400Ft; 🕒 10am-noon & 2-4pm Tue-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-noon & 2-4pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar)

Brunswick Mansion (Brunszvik-kastély; Brunszvik út 2)

Sleeping

Galéria (☎ /fax 28-418 691; Szabadság tér 8; s/d with shared bathroom 6500/8700Ft, with shower 8500/10,900Ft, with shower & toilet 9800/12,500Ft) This five-room *penthouse*, which is 300m northeast of the mansion, is in as central a position as you'll find if you are planning to spend the night in Gödöllő. There's a range of options to choose from.

GATE College (☎ 28-410-200; gatekollegium@free.mail.hu; Péter Károly utca 1; dm about 2000Ft) A short distance east of the HÉV terminus, this college at St Stephen University has dormitory accommodation from June to August.

TRANSPORT

Distance from Budapest 33km

Direction Southwest

Travel time 40 minutes by train

Car Rte 7 from southern Buda

Train Dozens of trains between Déli train station (Map p220) and Kelenföld train station (Map pp228-9) in Buda and Székesfehérvár stop at Martonvásár (326Ft, 40 minutes, every 20 minutes) every day. If you attend a concert in summer, you can easily make your way back to Budapest on the last train, which departs just before 11.30pm.

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Nursery Museum (Óvodamúzeum; ☎ 22-569 518; adult/child 250/120Ft; ☹ 10am-2pm Tue-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat & Sun mid-Mar–mid-Oct, 10am-2pm Tue & Fri, 11am-3pm Sun mid-Oct–mid-Mar)

Park (adult/child/family 200/100/400Ft; ☹ 8am-6pm May-Oct, 8am-4pm Nov-Apr)

Eating & Sleeping

Macska (☎ 22-460 127; Budai út 21; r per person 3200Ft) A *pension* with six rooms whose name means

actually 'Cat' is crawling with felines and is definitely not the place for hyperallergenic travellers. Its on-site **restaurant** (soups 350-580Ft, mains 850-2050Ft; ☹ noon-10pm Sun & Mon, noon-11pm Tue-Thu, noon-midnight Fri & Sat) serves the standard Hungarian *csárda* (inn) dishes.

Postakocsi (☎ 22-460 013; Fehérvári utca 1; soups & starters 280-880Ft, mains 930-2200Ft; ☹ 10am-10pm) In the centre of town, this is a convenient place for lunch and has courtyard seating. Expect basic Hungarian fodder.

VESZPRÉM

Spreading over five hills between the northern and southern ranges of the Bakony Hills, Veszprém (population 62,900) has one of the most dramatic locations in Central Transdanubia. The walled castle district atop a plateau, once the favourite residence of Hungary's queens, is now a living museum of baroque art and architecture, and it's a delight to stroll through the Castle Hill district's single street, admiring the embarrassment of fine churches and civic buildings. What's more, Lake Balaton, the nation's playground, is only 13km to the south and Herend, home of Hungary's finest porcelain (p178) is the same distance to the northwest.

As you ascend Castle Hill (Vár-hegy) and its sole street, Vár utca, you'll pass under **Heroes' Gate** (Hősök-kapuja), an entrance built in 1936 from the stones of a 15th-century castle gate. On the left is the **Firewatch Tower**, an architectural hybrid of Gothic, baroque and neoclassical styles, which can be climbed.

The U-shaped **Bishop's Palace**, designed by Jakob Fellner of Tata in the mid-18th century, is where the queens' residence stood in the Middle Ages. It faces Szentháromság tér, named for the **Trinity Column** (1751) in the centre.

Next to the Bishop's Palace is the early Gothic **Gizella Chapel**, named after the wife of King Stephen, who was crowned near here early in the 11th century. Inside the chapel are some Byzantine-influenced 13th-century frescoes of the Apostles. The **Queen Gizella Museum** of religious art is opposite.

The **cathedral**, dedicated to St Michael, is on the site of the first bishop's palace. Parts of it date from the beginning of the 11th century, but the cathedral has been rebuilt many times since then. The early Gothic crypt is original, though. Beside the cathedral, the octagonal foundation of the 13th-century **Chapel of St George** sits under a glass dome.

From the rampart known as **World's End** at the end of Vár utca, you can gaze north to craggy Benedict Hill (Benedek-hegy) and the Séd Stream and west to the concrete viaduct (now St Stephen's Valley Bridge) over the Betekints Valley. Below you to the north, in Margit tér, are the ruins of the medieval **Dominican Convent of St Catherine** and to the west what little remains of the 11th-century **Veszprém Valley Convent**, whose erstwhile cloistered residents are said to have stitched Stephen's crimson silk coronation robe early in the 11th century. The **statues of King Stephen and Queen Gizella** at World's End were erected in 1938 to mark the 900th anniversary of Stephen's death.

Information

Tourinform (☎ 88-404 548; veszprem@tourinform.hu; Vár utca 4; ☹ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Jun-Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-May)

www.veszprem.net Useful town website partly in English.

Sights

Bishop's Palace (Püspöki Palota; ☎ 88-426 088; Vár utca 16; adult/child 500/250Ft; ☹ 10am-6pm May-Aug, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Sep–mid-Oct)

Cathedral (Székesegyház; ☎ 88-328 038; Vár utca 18-20; ☹ 10am-6pm May-Aug, 10am-5pm Sep–mid-Oct)

Chapel of St George (Szent György Kápolna; ☎ 88-426 088; adult/child 100/70Ft; ☹ 10am-6pm May-Aug, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Sep–mid-Oct)

Firewatch Tower (tűztorony; ☎ 88-425 204; Vár utca 9; adult/child 300/200Ft; ☹ 10am-6pm May-Oct, 10am-5pm mid-Mar–Apr)

Gizella Chapel (Gizella kápolna; ☎ 88-426 088; Vár utca 18; adult/child 100/70Ft; ☹ 10am-6pm May-Aug, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Sep–mid-Oct)

Queen Gizella Museum (Gizella Királyné Múzeum; ☎ 88-426 088; Vár utca 35; adult/child 300/150Ft; ☹ 10am-6pm May-Aug, 10am-5pm Sep–mid-Oct)

Eating

Café Piazza (☎ 88-444 445; Óváros tér 4; pizzas 800Ft; ☹ 8.30am-10pm) A simple Veszprém pizzeria with big

EGER

Everyone loves Eger (population 58,300), and it's immediately apparent why: the beautifully preserved baroque architecture gives the town a relaxed, almost Mediterranean, feel; it is the home of the celebrated Egri Bikavér (Eger Bull's Blood) wine, known the world over; and it is flanked by two of the Northern Uplands' most beautiful ranges of hills. Hungarians visit Eger for those reasons and more, for it was here that István Dobó and his troops fended off the Turks for the first time during the 170 years of occupation in 1552 (p177).

The best overview of the city can be had by climbing up the cobblestone lane from Dózsa György tér to **Eger Castle**, which was erected in the 13th century after the Mongol invasion. Much of the castle is of modern construction, but you can still see the foundations of 12th-century **St John's Cathedral**. Models and drawings in the **István Dobó Museum**, housed in the former Bishop's Palace (1470) in the castle grounds, show how it once looked. On the ground floor, a statue of Dobó takes pride of place in **Heroes' Hall**. The 19th-century building on the northwestern side of the courtyard houses the **Eger Art Gallery**, with several works by Mihály Munkácsy.

Beneath the castle are **casemates** hewn from solid rock, which you are able to tour with a Hungarian-speaking guide included in the admission fee (English-language guide 600Ft extra). Other exhibits, including the **Waxworks** and **Minting Exhibit** cost extra. You can still tour the castle grounds on Monday, when all the other exhibits are closed.

pies as well as seating on the square to enjoy the summer weather.

Elefánt Bisztró (☎ 88-329 695; Óváros tér 6; mains from 1000Ft) From steaks to salads, Elefánt has a go at most Hungarian dishes and has outdoor seating.

Óváros (☎ 88-326 790; Szabadság tér 14; mains from 6500Ft; 8am-midnight Jun-Aug, 10am-10pm Sep-May) This restaurant attracts diners throughout the day with its baroque setting, an extensive menu including fish dishes, and reliable cuisine.

Sleeping

Oliva (☎ 88-403 875; www.oliva.hu; Buhim utca 14-16; s/d 13,800/15,400Ft) This exquisite 11-room *pension* has stylish and modern rooms with enough space to be comfortable and is only a short stroll to the Castle Hill district.

Péter Pál (☎ 88-567 790; info@peterpal.hu; Dózsa György utca 3; s/d 6600/8900Ft) Only a short walk to the centre of town, Péter Pál is another fine choice with 14 simple yet stylish rooms, a pleasant garden, above an average restaurant. The staff are very friendly and helpful to guests.

TRANSPORT

Distance from Budapest 128km

Direction Northeast

Travel time Two hours by direct train

Bus Buses link Eger with Budapest (1570Ft, 2¼ hours) hourly via the high-speed M3.

Car Rte 3 from central Pest to Kerecsend and then Rte 25 to Eger

Train Eger is on a minor line linking Putnok and Füzesabony; you usually have to change at the latter for Budapest (1624Ft). There are up to seven direct trains a day to and from Budapest's Keleti train station (Map pp218–19) that do not require a change (two hours).

TRANSPORT

Distance from Budapest 112km

Direction Southwest

Travel time Two hours by train

Bus Connections with Budapest (1450Ft, 2¼ hours) are excellent, with between half-hourly and hourly departures.

Car Rte M7 to Székesfehérvár and Rte 8 to Veszprém

Train Three lines meet at Veszprém. Some seven trains a day link Budapest with Veszprém (1212Ft, two hours) via Székesfehérvár.

Back in town, you can begin a walking tour of the city at **Eger Cathedral**, a neoclassical monolith designed in 1836 by József Hild. Despite the cathedral's size and ornate altars, the interior is surprisingly light and airy.

Directly opposite the cathedral is the sprawling Zopf-style **Lyceum** dating from 1765. The 20,000-volume **library** on the 1st floor of the south wing contains hundreds of priceless manuscripts and codices. The **ceiling fresco** (1778) here is a *trompe l'œil* masterpiece depicting the Counter-Reformation's Council of Trent (1545–63) and a lightning bolt setting heretical manuscripts ablaze. The **Astronomy Museum** on the 6th floor of the east wing contains 18th-century astronomical equipment and an **observatory**; climb three more floors up to the observation deck for a great view of the city and to try out the **camera obscura**, the 'eye of Eger', designed in 1776 to spy on the town and to entertain townspeople.

On the southern side of central Dobó István tér stands the **Minorite church**, built in 1771 and one of the most glorious baroque buildings in the world. The altarpiece of the Virgin Mary and St Anthony of Padua was completed by Johann Kracker, the Bohemian painter who also did the fire-and-brimstone ceiling fresco in the Lyceum library. Statues of István Dobó and his comrades-in-arms routing the Turks in 1552 fill the square in front of the church.

To the north of the square is the 40m-high **minaret** topped with a cross. Only non-claustrophobes will want to brave the 97 narrow spiral steps to the top. To the south of Dobó István tér is Kossuth Lajos utca, a tree-lined street with dozens of architectural gems. The former **Orthodox synagogue**, built in 1893, is now a furniture store backing onto a shopping mall. (A **neoclassical synagogue** dating from 1845 and now partly renovated is around the corner at Dr Hibay Károly utca 7.) You'll pass several baroque and Eclectic buildings, including the **county hall**, with a wrought-iron grid above the main door of Faith, Hope and Charity by Henrik Fazola, a Rhinelander who settled in Eger in the mid-18th century. Walk down the passageway, and you'll see more of his magnificent work – two baroque wrought-iron gates. The one on the right shows the seal of Heves County and has a comical figure on its handle. The more graceful gate on the left is decorated with grapes. The wrought-iron balcony and window grilles of the rococo **Provost's Palace** were also done by Fazola.

Don't miss visiting the wine cellars of the evocatively named **Valley of the Beautiful Women** (Szépasszony-völgy), which is southwest of the centre. From the western end of the cath-

edral, walk south along Trinitárius utca to Bartók Béla tér and then west down Király utca to Szépasszony-völgy utca. Veer to the left as you descend the hill, passing the large Talizmán restaurant, and head into the valley, where you'll find dozens of cellars. Alternatively take the **mini train** from Dobó István tér to the valley's entrance in season.

This is the place to sample Bull's Blood – one of very few reds produced in Eger – or any of the whites: Leányka, Olaszrizling and Hárslevelű from nearby Debrő. The choice of wine cellars can be a bit daunting and their characters can change, so walk around and have a look yourself. Nos 16, 17, 29 and 48 are always popular; for schmaltzy Gypsy music, try No 32 or 42. But if you're interested in good wine, visit cellars Nos 5, 18 and 31. Be careful though; those 100mL glasses (50Ft to 80Ft) go down easily. Hours are erratic, but a few cellars are sure to be open till the early evening. The taxi fare back to Eger centre is about 1000Ft.

Information

Tourinform (☎ 36-517 715; eger@tourinform.hu; Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca 9; 🕒 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm Sat mid-Sep–mid-Jun) Ask for the useful *Insight to Eger* magazine available in a number of languages.

Sights

Astronomy Museum (adult/student 500/350Ft)

Casemates (🕒 9am–5pm)

County hall (megyeháza; Kossuth Lajos utca 9)

Eger Castle (Egri Vár; ☎ 36-312 744; www.div.iif.hu; Vár 1; adult/child castle & grounds 1000/500Ft, grounds only 400/200Ft, underground passageways 300Ft; 🕒 8am–8pm Tue–Sun Apr–Aug, 8am–7pm Tue–Sun Sep, 8am–6pm Tue–Sun Oct & Mar, 8am–5pm Tue–Sun Nov–Feb)

Eger Cathedral (Egri Főszékesegyház; Pyrker János tér 1; 🕒 9am–7pm Mon–Sat, 1–5pm Sun)

István Dobó Museum (🕒 9am–5pm Tue–Sun Apr–Oct, 9am–3pm Tue–Sun Nov–Mar)

Lyceum (Líceum; ☎ 36-520 400; Eszterházy tér 1; library adult/student 500/350Ft; 🕒 9.30am–3.30pm Tue–Sun Apr–Sep, 9.30am–1pm Sat & Sun Oct–Mar)

Minaret (🕒 36-410 233; Knézich Károly utca; admission 200Ft; 🕒 9am–6pm Apr–Oct)

Mini train (one way 450Ft; 🕒 10am–6pm Apr–Oct)

THE SIEGE OF EGER

The story of the Turkish attempt to take Eger Castle is the stuff of legend. Under the command of István Dobó, a mixed bag of 2000 soldiers held out against more than 100,000 Turks for a month in 1552. As every Hungarian kid in short trousers can tell you, the women of Eger played a crucial role in the battle, pouring boiling oil and pitch on the invaders from the ramparts. A painting by Bertalan Székely called *The Women of Eger* in the castle's art gallery pays tribute to these brave ladies.

Also significant was Eger's wine. If we're to believe the tale, Dobó sustained his soldiers with the ruby-red vintage. When they fought on with increased vigour – and stained beards – rumours began to circulate among the Turks that the defenders were gaining strength by drinking the blood of bulls. Thus was born the name – and brand – Bikavér (Bull's Blood).

Géza Gárdonyi's *Eclipse of the Crescent Moon* (1901), which describes the siege and is required reading for many young Hungarians, can be found in English translation (Corvina) in the bookshops of Budapest.

Minorite church (Minorita templom; ☎ 36-312 744; Dobó István tér 6; 🕒 9am–5pm Tue–Sun)

Minting Exhibit (adult/child 240/120Ft)

Orthodox synagogue (Ortodox zsinagóga; Kossuth Lajos utca 17)

Provost's Palace (Kisrépösti palota; Kossuth Lajos utca 4)

Waxworks (adult/child 350/250Ft)

Eating

Elefanto (☎ 36-411 031; Katona István tér 2; mains 1000–2000Ft; 🕒 noon–midnight) Perched high above the market, this is a great place, with a nonsmoking interior and covered balcony for alfresco dining when the weather's right.

Palatsintavár (☎ 36-413 986; Dobó utca 9; mains around 1200Ft) This restaurant sports a contemporary art theme and a veg-heavy menu. *Palacsinta* (Hungarian-style pancakes) are served with an abundance of fresh vegetables and range in flavour from Asian to Italian and back again.

Szántófer (☎ 36-517 298; Bródy utca 3; mains around 1000Ft; 🕒 8am–10pm) With farming equipment and cooking utensils hanging from its walls and hearty peasant cuisine filling its menu, Szántófer oozes a rural-rustic atmosphere.

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HEREND PORCELAIN

Herend porcelain is among the finest of all goods produced in Hungary and makes a wonderful gift or memento. The stuff also has a long and fascinating pedigree.

A terracotta factory was set up in Herend (population 3330) in 1826 and began producing porcelain 13 years later under Mór Farkasházi Fischer. Initially it specialised in copying and replacing the nobles' broken chinaware settings imported from Asia, and you'll see some pretty kooky 19th-century interpretations of Japanese art and Chinese faces on display at the **Porcelánium** (☎ 523 262; www.porcelanium.com; Kossuth Lajos utca 140; adult/child/family 1500/500/3100Ft; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Apr-Oct daily, 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sat Nov-Mar), a museum that displays the most prized pieces of the rich Herend collection and a mini-factory where you can witness first-hand how ugly clumps of clay become delicate porcelain.

The factory soon began producing its own patterns; many, like the Rothschild bird and petites roses, were inspired by Meissen and Sèvres designs from Germany and France. The popular Victoria pattern of butterflies and wild flowers was designed for Queen Victoria after she admired a display of Herend pieces at the Great Exhibition in London in 1851.

To avoid bankruptcy in the 1870s, the Herend factory began mass production; tastes ran from kitschy pastoral and hunting scenes to the animal figurines with the distinctive scalelike triangle patterns still popular today. In 1993, 75% of the factory was purchased by its 1500 workers and became one of the first companies in Hungary privatised through an employee stock-ownership plan. The state owns the other 25%.

From Veszprém there is a bus to Herend at least every 30 minutes (203Ft, 20 minutes).

Sleeping

Minaret (☎ 36-410 233; Knézhich Károly utca 4; s/d €35/45) In the shadow of the minaret is this family-run hotel, with 42 good-sized rooms, a fine restaurant and a central location.

Romantik (☎ 36-310 456; www.romantikhotel.hu; Csiky Sándor utca 26; s/d 12,000/15,500Ft) This very friendly and homey hotel with a dozen rooms and a pretty back garden

is an easy walk to the centre of town but far enough away to escape any noise in summer.

Senator Ház (☎ 36-320 466; www.senatorhaz.hu; Dobó István tér 11; s/d €52/72) Arguably the finest small hotel in provincial Hungary, 'Senator House' has 11 warm and cosy rooms on the upper two floors of this delightful 18th-century inn on Eger's main square. Its ground floor is shared between a quality restaurant and a reception that could easily moonlight as a history museum.

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