

# History

## EARLY INHABITANTS

The Carpathian Basin, in which Hungary lies, has been populated for hundreds of thousands of years. Bone fragments found at Vértesszőlös, about 5km southeast of Tata (p151), in the 1960s are believed to be half a million years old. These findings suggest that Palaeolithic and later Neanderthal humans were attracted to the area by the hot springs and the abundance of reindeer, bears and mammoths.

During the Neolithic period (3500–2500 BC), climatic changes forced much of the indigenous wildlife to migrate northward. As a result the domestication of animals and the first forms of agriculture appeared, simultaneously with the rest of Europe. Remnants of the Körös culture in the Szeged area of the southeast (p261) suggest that these goddess-worshipping people herded sheep, fished and hunted.

Indo-European tribes from the Balkans stormed the Carpathian Basin in horse-drawn carts in about 2000 BC, bringing with them copper tools and weapons. After the introduction of the more durable metal bronze, forts were built and a military elite began to develop.

Over the next millennium, invaders from the west (Illyrians, Thracians) and east (Scythians) brought iron, but it was not in common use until the Celts arrived at the start of the 4th century BC. They introduced glass and crafted some of the fine gold jewellery that can still be seen in museums throughout Hungary.

Some three decades before the start of the Christian era the Romans conquered the area west and south of the Danube River and established the province of Pannonia – later divided into Upper (Superior) and Lower (Inferior) Pannonia. Subsequent victories over the Celts extended Roman domination across the Tisza River as far as Dacia (today's Romania). The Romans brought writing, viticulture and stone architecture, and established garrison towns and other settlements, the remains of which can still be seen in Óbuda (Aquincum in Roman times; p74), Szombathely (Savaria; p174), Pécs (Sophranae; p297) and Sopron (Scarabantia; p165). They also built baths near the region's thermal waters and their soldiers introduced the new religion of Christianity.

## THE GREAT MIGRATIONS

The first of the so-called Great Migrations of nomadic peoples from Asia reached the eastern outposts of the Roman Empire late in the 2nd century AD, and in 270 the Romans abandoned Dacia altogether. Within less than two centuries they were also forced to flee Pannonia by the Huns, whose short-lived empire was established by Attila; he had previously conquered the Magyars near the lower Volga River and for centuries these two groups were thought – erroneously – to share a common ancestry. Attila remains a very common given name for males in Hungary, however.

Germanic tribes such as the Goths, Gepids and Longobards occupied the region for the next century and a half until the Avars, a powerful Turkic people, gained control of the Carpathian Basin in the late 6th

*Millennium in Central Europe: A History of Hungary* by László Kontler is recent, definitive and dry. Nonhistorians should turn to Paul Lendvai's more lively *The Hungarians: A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat*.

## TIMELINE

**AD 895–96**

Nomadic Magyar tribes enter and settle in the Carpathian Basin

**1000**

Stephen (István) is crowned 'Christian King' of Hungary at Esztergom on Christmas Day

century. They in turn were subdued by Charlemagne in 796 and converted to Christianity. By that time, the Carpathian Basin was virtually unpopulated except for groups of Turkic and Germanic tribes on the plains and Slavs in the northern hills.

### THE MAGYARS & THE CONQUEST OF THE CARPATHIAN BASIN

The origin of the Magyars is a complex issue, not in the least helped by the similarity in English of the words ‘Hun’ and ‘Hungary’, which are *not* related. One thing is certain: Magyars are part of the Finno-Ugric group of peoples who inhabited the forests somewhere between the middle Volga River and the Ural Mountains in western Siberia as early as 4000 BC.

By about 2000 BC population growth had forced the Finnish-Estonian branch of the group to move westward, ultimately reaching the Baltic Sea. The Ugrians migrated from the southeastern slopes of the Urals into the valleys, and switched from hunting and fishing to primitive farming and raising livestock, especially horses. The Magyars’ equestrian skills proved useful half a millennium later when climatic changes brought drought, forcing them to move north to the steppes.

On the plains, the Ugrians turned to nomadic herding. After 500 BC, by which time the use of iron had become commonplace, some of the tribes moved westward to the area of Bashkiria in central Asia. Here they lived among Persians and Bulgars and began referring to themselves as Magyars (from the Finno-Ugric words *mon*, ‘to speak’, and *e*, ‘man’).

Several centuries later another group split away and moved south to the Don River under the control of the Khazars, a Turkic people. Here they lived among various groups under a tribal alliance called *onogur*, or ‘10 peoples’. This is the derivation of the word ‘Hungary’ in English and ‘Ungarn’ in German. Their penultimate migration brought them to what modern Hungarians call the Etelköz, the region between the Dnieper and lower Danube Rivers just north of the Black Sea.

Small nomadic groups of Magyars probably reached the Carpathian Basin as early as the mid-9th century AD, acting as mercenaries for various armies. It is believed that while the men were away on a campaign in about 889, the Pechenegs, a fierce people from the Asiatic steppe, allied themselves with the Bulgars and attacked the Etelköz settlements. When they were attacked again in about 895, seven tribes under the leadership of Árpád – the *gyula* (chief military commander) – upped stakes. They crossed the Verecke Pass (in today’s Ukraine) into the Carpathian Basin.

The Magyars met almost no resistance and the tribes dispersed in three directions: the Bulgars were quickly dispatched eastward; the Germans had already taken care of the Slavs in the west; and Transylvania was wide open. Known for their ability to ride and shoot, and no longer content with being hired guns, the Magyars began plundering and pillaging. Their raids took them as far as Spain, northern Germany and southern Italy, but in the early 10th century they began to suffer a string of defeats. In 955 they were stopped in their tracks for good by the German king Otto I at the Battle of Augsburg.

This and subsequent defeats – the Magyars’ raids on Byzantium ended in 970 – left the tribes in disarray, and they had to choose between their more powerful neighbours – Byzantium to the south and east or the Holy

Roman Empire to the west – to form an alliance. In 973 Prince Géza, the great-grandson of Árpád, asked the Holy Roman emperor Otto II to send Catholic missionaries to Hungary. Géza was baptised along with his son Vajk, who took the Christian name Stephen (István), after the first martyr. When Géza died, Stephen ruled as prince. Three years later, he was crowned ‘Christian King’ Stephen I, with a crown sent from Rome by Otto’s erstwhile tutor, Pope Sylvester II. Hungary the kingdom – and the nation – was born.

### KING STEPHEN I & THE ÁRPÁD DYNASTY

Stephen set about consolidating royal authority by siezing the land of the independent-minded clan chieftains and establishing a system of *megye* (counties) protected by fortified *vár* (castles). The crown began minting coins and, shrewdly, Stephen transferred much land to his most loyal (mostly Germanic) knights. The king sought the support of the church throughout and, to hasten the conversion of the population, ordered that one in every 10 villages build a church. He also established 10 episcopates, two of which – Kalocsa and Esztergom – were made archbishoprics. Monasteries were set up around the country and staffed by foreign – notably Irish – scholars. By the time Stephen died in 1038 – he was canonised less than half a century after his death – Hungary was a nascent Christian nation, increasingly westward-looking and multiethnic.

Despite this apparent consolidation, the next two and a half centuries until 1301 – the reign of the House of Árpád – would test the kingdom to its limit. The period was marked by continuous struggles between rival pretenders to the throne, weakening the young nation’s defences against its more powerful neighbours. There was a brief hiatus under King Ladislas I (László; r 1077–95), who ruled with an iron fist and fended off attacks from Byzantium; and also under his successor Koloman the Booklover (Könyves Kálmán; r 1095–1116), who encouraged literature, art and the writing of chronicles until his death in 1116.

Tensions flared again when the Byzantine emperor made a grab for Hungary’s provinces in Dalmatia and Croatia, which it had acquired by

#### BLAME IT ON THE BIRD

The ancient Magyars were strong believers in magic and celestial intervention, and the *táltos* (shaman) enjoyed an elevated position in society. Certain animals – for example, bears, stags and wolves – were totemic and it was taboo to mention them directly by name. Thus the wolf was ‘the long-tailed one’ and the stag the ‘large-antlered one’. In other cases the original Magyar word for an animal deemed sacred was replaced with a foreign loan word: *medve* for ‘bear’ comes from the Slavic *medved*.

No other ancient totemic animal is better known to modern Hungarians than the *turul*, a hawk-like bird that supposedly impregnated Emese, the grandmother of Árpád. The legend can be viewed in many ways: as an attempt to foster a sense of common origin and group identity in the ethnically heterogeneous population of the time; as an effort to bestow a sacred origin on the House of Árpád and its rule; or just as a good story.

In the recent past, the fearsome-looking *turul* has been used as a symbol by the far right – much to the distress of average Hungarians, who simply look upon it as their heraldic ‘eagle’ or ‘lion’.

If you’d like to learn more about the nomadic Magyars, their civilisation and art, go to <http://studentorgs.utexas.edu/husa/origins/magyarhist/magyar.art.html>.

The early Magyars were such fierce fighters that a common Christian prayer during the Dark Ages was: ‘Save us, O Lord, from the arrows of the Hungarians.’

#### 1222

King Andrew II signs the Golden Bull, according the nobility more rights and powers

#### 1241–42

The Mongols sweep across Hungary, reducing the population by up to one-half

#### 1458–90

Medieval Hungary enjoys a golden age under the enlightened reign of King Matthias Corvinus

#### 1514

A peasant uprising is crushed, with 70,000 people – including leader György Dózsa – killed

the early 12th century. Béla III (r 1172–96) successfully resisted the invasion and had a permanent residence built at Esztergom (p146), which was then the alternative royal seat to Székesfehérvár. Béla's son, Andrew II (András; r 1205–35), however, weakened the crown when, to help fund his crusades, he gave in to local barons' demands for more land. This led to the Golden Bull, a kind of Magna Carta signed at Székesfehérvár in 1222, which limited some of the king's powers in favour of the nobility.

When Béla IV (r 1235–70) tried to regain the estates, the barons were able to oppose him on equal terms. Fearing Mongol expansion and realising he could not count on the support of his subjects, Béla looked to the west and brought in German and Slovak settlers. He also gave asylum to Turkic Cuman (Kun) tribes displaced by the Mongols in the east. In 1241 the Mongols arrived in Hungary and swept through the country, burning it virtually to the ground and killing an estimated one-third to one-half of its two million people.

To rebuild the country as quickly as possible Béla, known as the 'second founding father', again encouraged immigration, inviting Germans to settle in Transdanubia, Saxons in Transylvania and Cumans on the Great Plain. He also built a string of defensive hilltop castles, including the ones at Buda (p69) and Visegrád (p142). But in a bid to appease the lesser nobility, he handed them large tracts of land. This strengthened their position and demands for more independence even further; by the time of Béla's death in 1270, anarchy had descended upon Hungary. The rule of his reprobate son and heir Ladislas the Cuman (so-called because his mother was a Cuman princess) was equally unsettled. The Árpád line died out in 1301 with the death of Andrew III, who left no heir.

## MEDIEVAL HUNGARY

The struggle for the Hungarian throne following the death of Andrew III involved several European dynasties, but it was Charles Robert (Károly Róbert) of the French House of Anjou who, with the pope's blessing, finally won out in 1308 and ruled for the next three and a half decades. Charles Robert was an able administrator who managed to break the power of the provincial barons (though much of the land remained in private hands), sought diplomatic links with his neighbours and introduced a stable gold currency called the florin (or forint). In 1335 Charles Robert met the Polish and Bohemian kings at the new royal palace in Visegrád to discuss territorial disputes and to forge an alliance that would smash Vienna's control of trade.

Under Charles Robert's son, Louis I the Great (Nagy Lajos; r 1342–82), Hungary returned to a policy of conquest. A brilliant military strategist, Louis acquired territory in the Balkans as far as Dalmatia and Romania and as far north as Poland. He was crowned king of Poland in 1370, but his successes were short-lived; the menace of the Ottoman Turks had begun.

As Louis had no sons, one of his daughters, Mary (r 1382–87), succeeded him. This was deemed unacceptable by the barons, who rose up against the 'petticoat throne'. Within a short time Mary's husband, Sigismund (Zsigmond; r 1387–1437) of Luxembourg, was crowned king. Sigismund's 50-year reign brought peace at home, and there was a great flowering of Gothic art and architecture in Hungary (p40). But while he

managed to procure the coveted crown of Bohemia and was made Holy Roman emperor in 1433, he was unable to stop the Ottoman onslaught and was defeated by the Turks at Nicopolis (now Bulgaria) in 1396.

There was an alliance between Poland and Hungary in 1440 that gave Poland the Hungarian crown. When Vladislav I (Úlászló) of the Polish Jagiellon dynasty was killed fighting the Turks at Varna in 1444, János Hunyadi was declared regent. A Transylvanian general born of a Wallachian (Romanian) father, János Hunyadi began his career at the court of Sigismund. His 1456 decisive victory over the Turks at Belgrade (Hungarian: Nándorfehérvár) checked the Ottoman advance into Hungary for 70 years and assured the coronation of his son Matthias (Mátyás), the greatest ruler of medieval Hungary.

Wisely, Matthias (r 1458–90), nicknamed Corvinus (the Raven) from his coat of arms, maintained a mercenary force of 8000 to 10,000 men by taxing the nobility, and this 'Black Army' conquered Moravia, Bohemia and even parts of lower Austria. Not only did Matthias Corvinus make Hungary one of central Europe's leading powers, but under his rule the nation enjoyed its first golden age. His second wife, the Neapolitan princess Beatrice, brought artisans from Italy who completely rebuilt and extended the Gothic palace at Visegrád (p142); the beauty and sheer size of the Renaissance residence was beyond compare in the Europe of the time.

But while Matthias, a fair and just king, busied himself with centralising power for the crown, he ignored the growing Turkish threat. His successor Vladislav II (Úlászló; r 1490–1516) was unable to maintain even royal authority, as the members of the diet (assembly), which met to approve royal decrees, squandered royal funds and expropriated land. In May 1514, what had begun as a crusade organised by the power-hungry archbishop of Esztergom, Tamás Bakócz, turned into a peasant uprising against landlords under the leadership of one György Dózsa.

The revolt was brutally repressed by noble leader John Szapolyai (Zápolyai János). Some 70,000 peasants were tortured and executed; Dózsa himself was fried alive on a red-hot iron throne. The retrograde Tripartitum Law that followed the crackdown codified the rights and privileges of the barons and nobles, and reduced the peasants to perpetual serfdom. By the time Louis II (Lajos) took the throne in 1516 at the tender age of nine, he couldn't count on either side.

## THE BATTLE OF MOHÁCS & TURKISH OCCUPATION

The defeat of Louis' ragtag army by the Ottoman Turks at Mohács (p286) in 1526 is a watershed in Hungarian history. On the battlefield near this small town in Southern Transdanubia a relatively prosperous and independent medieval Hungary died, sending the nation into a tailspin of partition, foreign domination and despair that would be felt for centuries afterward.

It would be unfair to lay all the blame on the weak and indecisive teenage King Louis or on his commander-in-chief, Pál Tomori, the archbishop of Kalocsa. Bickering among the nobility and the brutal response to the peasant uprising a dozen years before had severely diminished Hungary's military might, and there was virtually nothing left in the royal coffers. By 1526 the Ottoman sultan Suleiman the Magnificent occupied

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1526

Hungary is defeated at the Battle of Mohács; the Turkish occupation lasting more than a century and a half begins

1541

Buda falls to the Ottomans; Hungary is partitioned and shared between the Turks, the Habsburgs and the Transylvanian princes

1699

Peace signed with the Turks at Karlowitz (now in Serbia)

1703–11

Ferenc Rákóczi II fights and loses a war of independence against the Habsburgs

much of the Balkans, including Belgrade, and was poised to march on Buda and then Vienna with a force of 100,000 men.

Unable – or, more likely, unwilling – to wait for reinforcements from Transylvania under the command of his rival John Szapolyai, Louis rushed south with a motley army of 26,000 men to battle the Turks and was soundly thrashed in less than two hours. Along with bishops, nobles and an estimated 20,000 soldiers, the king was killed – crushed by his horse while trying to retreat across a stream. John Szapolyai, who had sat out the battle in Tokaj, was crowned king six weeks later. Despite grovelling before the Turks, Szapolyai was never able to exploit the power he had sought so single-mindedly. In many ways greed, self-interest and ambition had led Hungary to defeat itself.

After Buda Castle fell to the Turks in 1541, Hungary was torn into three parts. The central section, including Buda, went to the Turks, while parts of Transdanubia and what is now Slovakia were governed by the Austrian House of Habsburg and assisted by the Hungarian nobility based at Bratislava. The principality of Transylvania, east of the Tisza River, prospered as a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire, initially under Szapolyai's son John Sigismund (Zsigmond János; r 1559–71). Though heroic resistance continued against the Turks throughout Hungary, most notably at Kőszeg (see boxed text, p181) in 1532, Eger (see boxed text, p330) 20 years later and Szigetvár (see boxed text, p307) in 1566, this division would remain in place for more than a century and a half.

The Turkish occupation was marked by constant fighting among the three divisions; Catholic 'Royal Hungary' was pitted against both the Turks and the Protestant Transylvanian princes. Gábor Bethlen, who ruled Transylvania from 1613 to 1629, tried to end the warfare by conquering 'Royal Hungary' with a mercenary army of Heyduck peasants and some Turkish assistance in 1620. But both the Habsburgs and the Hungarians themselves viewed the 'infidel' Ottomans as the greatest threat to Europe since the Mongols and blocked the advance.

As Ottoman power began to wane in the 17th century, Hungarian resistance to the Habsburgs, who had used 'Royal Hungary' as a buffer zone between Vienna and the Turks, increased. A plot inspired by the palatine Ferenc Wesselényi was foiled in 1670 and a revolt (1682) by Imre Thököly and his army of *kuruc* (anti-Habsburg mercenaries) was quelled. But with the help of the Polish army, Austrian and Hungarian forces liberated Buda from the Turks in 1686. An imperial army under Eugene of Savoy wiped out the last Turkish army in Hungary at the Battle of Zenta (now Senta in Serbia) 11 years later. Peace was signed with the Turks at Karlowitz (now in Serbia) in 1699.

## HABSBURG RULE

The expulsion of the Turks did not result in a free and independent Hungary, and the policies of the Habsburgs' Counter-Reformation and heavy taxation further alienated the nobility. In 1703 the Transylvanian prince Ferenc Rákóczi II assembled an army of *kuruc* forces against the Austrians at Tiszahát in northeastern Hungary. The war dragged on for eight years and in 1706 the rebels 'dethroned' the Habsburgs as the rulers of Hungary. Superior imperial forces and lack of funds, however, forced

the *kuruc* to negotiate a separate peace with Vienna behind Rákóczi's back. The 1703–11 war of independence had failed, but Rákóczi was the first leader to unite Hungarians against the Habsburgs.

The armistice may have brought the fighting to an end, but Hungary was now little more than a province of the Habsburg Empire. Five years after Maria Theresa ascended the throne in 1740, the Hungarian nobility pledged their 'lives and blood' to her at the diet in Bratislava in exchange for tax exemptions on their land. Thus began the period of 'enlightened absolutism' that would continue under the rule of Maria Theresa's son Joseph II (r 1780–90).

Under both Maria Theresa and Joseph, Hungary took great steps forward economically and culturally. Depopulated areas in the east and south were settled by Romanians and Serbs, while German Swabians were sent to Transdanubia. Joseph's attempts to modernise society by dissolving the all-powerful (and corrupt) religious orders, abolishing serfdom and replacing 'neutral' Latin with German as the official language of state administration were opposed by the Hungarian nobility, and he rescinded most (but not all) of these orders on his deathbed.

Dissenting voices could still be heard and the ideals of the French Revolution of 1789 began to take root in certain intellectual circles in Hungary. In 1795 Ignác Martonovics, a former Franciscan priest, and six other prerepublican Jacobites were beheaded at Vérmező (Blood Meadow) in Buda for plotting against the crown.

Liberalism and social reform found their greatest supporters among certain members of the aristocracy, however. Count György Festetics (1755–1819), for example, founded Europe's first agricultural college at Keszthely. Count István Széchenyi (1791–1860), a true Renaissance man and called 'the greatest Hungarian' by his contemporaries (see boxed text, p171), advocated the abolition of serfdom and returned much of his own land to the peasantry.

The proponents of gradual reform were quickly superseded by a more radical faction who demanded more immediate action. The group included Miklós Wesselényi, Ferenc Deák and Ferenc Kölcsey, but the predominant figure was Lajos Kossuth (1802–94). It was this dynamic lawyer and journalist who would lead Hungary to its greatest-ever confrontation with the Habsburgs.

## THE 1848–49 WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Early in the 19th century the Habsburg Empire began to weaken as Hungarian nationalism increased. Suspicious of Napoleon's motives and policies, the Hungarians ignored French appeals to revolt against Vienna and certain reforms were introduced: the replacement of Latin, the official language of administration, with Magyar; a law allowing serfs alternative means of discharging their feudal obligations of service; and increased Hungarian representation in the Council of State.

The reforms carried out were too limited and far too late, however, and the Diet became more defiant in its dealings with the crown. At the same time, the wave of revolution sweeping Europe spurred on the more radical faction. In 1848 the liberal Count Lajos Batthyány was made prime minister of the new Hungarian ministry, which counted

Do you have Habsburg blood – from either the Austrian or the Hungarian branch – flowing through your veins? Find out by logging on to <http://worldroots.com/brigitte/royal/royal10.htm>.

Habsburg emperor Joseph was called the 'hatted king' because he was never actually crowned in Hungary.

### 1848–49

War of Independence; Lajos Batthyány and 13 of his generals are executed for their role

### 1867

Act of Compromise creates the Dual Monarchy; Austria (the empire) and Hungary (the kingdom)

### 1918

Austria-Hungary loses WWI in November and the political system collapses; Hungary declares itself a republic

### 1919

Béla Kun's Republic of Councils, the world's second communist government after the Soviet Union, lasts for five months

'After Buda Castle fell to the Turks in 1541, Hungary was torn into three parts'



Deák, Kossuth and Széchenyi among its members. The Habsburgs also reluctantly agreed to abolish serfdom and proclaim equality under the law. But on 15 March a group calling itself the Youth of March, led by the poet Sándor Petőfi, took to the streets to press for even more radical reforms and revolution. Habsburg patience was wearing thin.

In September 1848 the Habsburg forces, under the governor of Croatia, Josip Jelačić, launched an attack on Hungary, and Batthyány's government was dissolved. The Hungarians hastily formed a national defence commission and moved the government seat to Debrecen, where Kossuth was elected governor-president. In April 1849 the parliament declared Hungary's full independence and the Habsburgs were 'dethroned' for the second time.

The new Habsburg emperor, Franz Joseph (r 1848–1916), was not at all like his feeble-minded predecessor Ferdinand V (r 1835–48). He quickly took action, seeking the assistance of Russian tsar Nicholas I, who obliged with 200,000 troops. Support for the revolution was waning rapidly, particularly in areas of mixed population where the Magyars were seen as oppressors. Weak and vastly outnumbered, the rebel troops were defeated by August 1849.

A series of brutal reprisals ensued. In October Batthyány and 13 of his generals – the so-called 'Martyrs of Arad' – were executed, and Kossuth went into exile in Turkey. (Petőfi died in battle in July of that year.) Habsburg troops then went around the country systematically blowing up castles and fortifications lest they be used by resurgent rebels.

### THE DUAL MONARCHY

Hungary was again merged into the Habsburg Empire as a conquered province and 'neoabsolutism' was the order of the day. Passive local resistance and disastrous military defeats for the Habsburgs in 1859 and 1865, however, pushed Franz Joseph to the negotiating table with liberal Hungarians under Deák's leadership.

The result was the Act of Compromise of 1867 (German: Ausgleich), which created the Dual Monarchy of Austria (the empire) and Hungary (the kingdom) – a federated state with two parliaments and two capitals: Vienna and Pest (Budapest when Buda, Pest and Óbuda were merged in 1873). Only defence, foreign relations and customs were shared. Hungary was even allowed to raise a small army.

This 'Age of Dualism' would continue until 1918 and would spark an economic, cultural and intellectual rebirth in Hungary. Agriculture developed, factories were established, and the composers Franz Liszt and Ferenc Erkel wrote beautiful music. The middle class, dominated by Germans and Jews in Pest, burgeoned and the capital entered into a frenzy of building. Much of what you see in Budapest today – from the grand boulevards with their Eclectic-style apartment blocks to the Parliament building and Matthias Church in the Castle district – was built at this time. The apex of this golden age was the six-month exhibition in 1896 celebrating the millennium of the Magyar conquest of the Carpathian Basin, *honfoglalás*.

But all was not well in the kingdom. The city-based working class had almost no rights and the situation in the countryside remained as dire as

it had been in the Middle Ages. Minorities under Hungarian control – Czechs, Slovaks, Croats and Romanians – were under increased pressure to 'Magyarise', and many viewed their new rulers as oppressors. Increasingly they worked to dismember the empire.

### WWI, THE REPUBLIC OF COUNCILS & TRIANON

On 28 July 1914, a month to the day after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Habsburg throne, by a Bosnian Serb in Sarajevo, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia and entered WWI allied with the German Empire. The result was disastrous, with widespread destruction and hundreds of thousands killed on the Russian and Italian fronts. At the armistice in 1918 the fate of the Dual Monarchy – and Hungary as a multinational kingdom – was sealed.

A republic under the leadership of Count Mihály Károlyi was declared five days after the armistice was signed, but the fledgling republic would not last long. Destitution, the occupation of Hungary by the Allies and the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia had radicalised much of the working class in Budapest. In March 1919 a group of Hungarian communists under a former Transylvanian journalist called Béla Kun seized power. The so-called *Tanácsköztársaság*, or Republic of Councils, set out to nationalise industry and private property and build a fairer society, but mass opposition to the regime led to a brutal reign of 'red terror'. Kun and his comrades, including Minister of Culture Béla Lugosi of *Dracula* fame, were overthrown in just five months by Romanian troops, who occupied the capital.

In June 1920 the Allies drew up a postwar settlement under the Treaty of Trianon that enlarged some countries, truncated others and created several new 'successor states'. As one of the defeated nations with large numbers of minorities demanding independence within its borders, Hungary stood to lose more than most – and it did. The nation was

Miklós Jancsó's film *Csend és Kidáltás* (Silence and Cry; 1967) is a political thriller about a 'red' who takes refuge among politically dubious peasants after the overthrow of Béla Kun's Republic of Councils in 1919.

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1920

Treaty of Trianon carves up much of central Europe, reducing historical Hungary by almost two-thirds

1941

Hungary joins the Axis led by Germany and Italy against the Allies in WWII

1944

Germany invades and occupies Hungary; most Hungarian Jews are deported to Nazi concentration camps

1945

Budapest is liberated by the Soviet army in April, a month before full victory in Europe

reduced to about 40% of its historical size and, while it was now largely a homogeneous nation-state, for millions of ethnic Hungarians in Romania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, the tables had turned: they were now in the minority.

'Trianon' became the singularly most hated word in Hungary, and the *diktátum* is still reviled today as if it were imposed on the nation just yesterday. Many of the problems it created remained for decades and it has coloured Hungary's relations with its neighbours for more than 40 years.

## THE HORTHY YEARS & WWII

In March 1920, in Hungary's first-ever election by secret ballot, parliament chose a kingdom as the form of state and – lacking a king – elected as its regent Admiral Miklós Horthy, who would remain in the position until the latter days of WWII. Horthy embarked on a 'white terror' – every bit as fierce as the red one of Béla Kun – that attacked communists and Jews for their roles in supporting the Republic of Councils. As the regime was consolidated it showed itself to be extremely rightist and conservative. Though the country had the remnants of a parliamentary system, Horthy was all-powerful and very few reforms were enacted. On the contrary, the lot of the working class and the peasantry worsened.

One thing on which everyone agreed was that the return of the 'lost' territories was essential for Hungary's development and '*Nem, Nem, Soha!*' (No, No, Never!) became the rallying cry. Early on Prime Minister István Bethlen was able to secure the return of Pécs, illegally occupied by Yugoslavia, and the citizens of Sopron voted in a plebiscite to return to Hungary from Austria, but that was not enough. Hungary obviously could not count on France, Britain and the USA to help recoup its land; instead, it sought help from the fascist governments of Germany and Italy.

Hungary's move to the right intensified throughout the 1930s, though it remained silent when WWII broke out in September 1939. Horthy hoped an alliance would not actually mean having to enter the war, but after recovering northern Transylvania and part of Croatia with Germany's help, he was forced to join the German and Italian-led Axis in June 1941. The war was as disastrous for Hungary as WWI had been, and hundreds of thousands of Hungarian troops died while retreating from Stalingrad, where they'd been used as cannon fodder. Realising too late that his country was on the losing side again, Horthy began negotiating a separate peace with the Allies.

When Germany caught wind of this in March 1944 it sent in its army, which occupied all of Hungary. Under pressure, Horthy installed Ferenc Szálasi, the deranged leader of the pro-Nazi Arrow Cross Party, as prime minister in October before being deported to Germany. (Horthy would later find exile in Portugal, where he died in 1957. Despite some public outcry, his body was taken to Hungary in September 1993 and buried in the family plot at Kenderes, east of Szolnok.)

The Arrow Cross Party moved quickly to quash any opposition, and thousands of liberal politicians and labour leaders were arrested. At the same time, its puppet government introduced anti-Jewish legislation similar to that in Germany and Jews, relatively safe under Horthy, were

rounded up into ghettos by Hungarian Nazis. In May 1944, less than a year before the war ended, some 430,000 Jewish men, women and children were deported to Auschwitz and other labour camps in just over eight weeks, where they starved to death, succumbed to disease or were brutally murdered by the German fascists and their henchmen.

Hungary now became an international battleground for the first time since the Turkish occupation, and bombs began falling on Budapest. The resistance movement drew support from many sides, including the communists. Fierce fighting continued in the countryside, especially near Debrecen and Székesfehérvár, but by Christmas 1944 the Soviet army had encircled Budapest. When the Germans and Hungarian Nazis rejected a settlement, the siege of the capital began. By the time the German war machine had surrendered in April 1945, many of Budapest's homes, historic buildings and churches had been destroyed.

## THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY

When free parliamentary elections were held in November 1945, the Independent Smallholders' Party (FKgP) received 57% (245 seats) of the vote. In response, Soviet political officers, backed by the occupying Soviet army, forced three other parties – the Communists, Social Democrats and National Peasants – into a coalition. Limited democracy prevailed, and land-reform laws, sponsored by the communist Minister of Agriculture Imre Nagy, were enacted, doing away with the prewar feudal structure.

Within a couple of years, the Communists were ready to take complete control. After a rigged election (1947) held under a complicated new electoral law, they declared their candidate, Mátyás Rákosi, victorious. The following year the Social Democrats merged with the communists to form the Hungarian Workers' Party.

Rákosi, a big fan of Stalin, began a process of nationalisation and unfeasibly rapid industrialisation at the expense of agriculture. Peasants were forced into collective farms and all produce had to be delivered to state warehouses. A network of spies and informers exposed 'class enemies' (such as Cardinal József Mindszenty; see boxed text, p147) to the secret police called the ÁVO (ÁVH after 1949). The accused were then jailed for spying, sent into internal exile or condemned to labour camps, like the notorious one at Recsk in the Mátra Hills (p327).

Bitter feuding within the party began, and purges and Stalinist show trials became the norm. László Rajk, the communist minister of the interior (which also controlled the secret police), was arrested and later executed for 'Titoism'; his successor János Kádár was tortured and jailed. In August 1949, the nation was proclaimed the 'People's Republic of Hungary'.

After the death of Stalin in March 1953 and Krushchev's denunciation of him three years later, Rákosi's tenure was up and the terror began to abate. Under pressure from within the party, Rákosi's successor Ernő Gerő rehabilitated Rajk posthumously and readmitted Nagy, who had been expelled from the party a year earlier for suggesting reforms. But Gerő was ultimately as much a hardliner as Rákosi and, by October 1956 during Rajk's reburial, whisperings for a genuine reform of the system – 'socialism with a human face' – could already be heard.

A perplexed US president Franklin D Roosevelt once asked: 'Hungary is a kingdom without a king, run by a regent who's an admiral without a navy?'

*The Siege of Budapest: 100 Days in World War II* by Krisztián Ungváry examines the battle to overrun a major European capital often forgotten in favour of Warsaw or Berlin.

1949

Communists are in complete control; Hungary is declared the 'People's Republic of Hungary'

1956

Hungary is in revolution in October; János Kádár is installed as leader

1958

Imre Nagy and others are executed by the communist regime for their role in the Uprising

1962

Amnesty is extended to those involved in the 1956 Uprising by the communist government

## THE 1956 UPRISING

The nation's greatest tragedy – an event that rocked communism, pitted Hungarian against Hungarian and shook the world – began on 23 October, when some 50,000 university students assembled at Bem tér in Buda shouting anti-Soviet slogans and demanding that Nagy be named prime minister. That night a crowd pulled down the colossal statue of Stalin near Heroes' Square, and shots were fired by ÁVH agents on another group gathering outside the headquarters of Hungarian Radio in Pest. Overnight, Hungary was in revolution.

The next day Nagy, the reform-minded minister of agriculture, formed a government while János Kádár was named president of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Workers' Party. At first it appeared that Nagy might be successful in transforming Hungary into a neutral, multiparty state. On 28 October the government offered amnesty to all those involved in the violence and promised to abolish the ÁVH. On 31 October hundreds of political prisoners were released and widespread reprisals began against ÁVH agents. The next day Nagy announced that Hungary would leave the Warsaw Pact and proclaimed its neutrality.

At this, Soviet tanks and troops crossed into Hungary and within 72 hours began attacking Budapest and other centres. Kádár, who had slipped away from Budapest to join the Russian invaders, was installed as leader.

Fierce street fighting continued for several days – encouraged by Radio Free Europe broadcasts and disingenuous promises of support from the West, which was embroiled in the Suez Canal crisis at the time. When the fighting was over, 25,000 people were dead. Then the reprisals – the worst in Hungarian history and lasting several years – began. About 20,000 people were arrested and 2000 – including Nagy and his associates – were executed. Another 250,000 refugees fled to Austria.

## HUNGARY UNDER KÁDÁR

After the revolt, the ruling party was reorganised as the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, and Kádár, now both party president and premier, launched a programme to liberalise the social and economic structure, basing his reforms on compromise. (His most quoted line was: 'Whoever is not against us is with us' – a reversal of the Stalinist adage: 'Those not with us are against us'.) In 1968, he and the economist Rezső Nyers unveiled the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) to introduce elements of a market to the planned economy. But even this proved too daring for many party conservatives. Nyers was ousted and the NEM was all but abandoned.

Kádár managed to survive that power struggle and went on to introduce greater consumerism and market socialism. By the mid-1970s Hungary was light years ahead of any other Soviet bloc country in its standard of living, freedom of movement and opportunities to criticise the government. People may have had to wait seven years for a Lada car or 12 years for a telephone, but most Hungarians could at least enjoy access to a second house in the countryside through work or other affiliation and a decent standard of living. The 'Hungarian model' attracted much Western attention – and investment.

But things began to sour in the 1980s. The Kádár system of 'goulash socialism', which seemed so 'timeless and everlasting' (as one Hungarian writer put it) was incapable of dealing with such 'unsocialist' problems as unemployment, soaring inflation and the largest per-capita foreign debt in Eastern Europe. Kádár and the 'old guard' refused to hear talk about party reforms. In June 1987 Károly Grósz took over as premier and less than a year later Kádár was booted out of the party and forced to retire.

## RENEWAL & CHANGE

A group of reformers – among them Nyers, Imre Pozsgay, Miklós Németh and Gyula Horn – took charge. Party conservatives at first put a lid on real change by demanding a retreat from political liberalisation in exchange for their support of the new regime's economic policies. But the tide had already turned.

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1988 new political parties were formed and old ones revived. In January 1989 Pozsgay, seeing the handwriting on the wall as Mikhail Gorbachev launched his reforms in the Soviet Union, announced that the events of 1956 had been a 'popular insurrection' and not the 'counter-revolution' that the regime had always called it. Four months later some 250,000 people attended the reburial of Imre Nagy and other victims of 1956 in Budapest.

In July 1989, again at Pozsgay's instigation, Hungary began to demolish the electrified wire fence separating it from Austria. The move released a wave of East Germans holidaying in Hungary into the West and the opening attracted thousands more. The collapse of the communist regimes around the region had become unstoppable.

## THE REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY AGAIN

At their party congress in February 1989 the Communists had agreed to give up their monopoly on power, paving the way for free elections in March or April 1990. On 23 October 1989, the 33rd anniversary of the 1956 Uprising, the nation once again became the Republic of Hungary. The party's name was changed from the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party to the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP).

The MSZP's new programme advocated social democracy and a free-market economy, but this was not enough to shake off the stigma of its four decades of autocratic rule. The 1990 vote was won by the centrist Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), which advocated a gradual transition to capitalism. The social-democratic Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), which had called for much faster change, came second and the Socialists trailed far behind. As Gorbachev looked on, Hungary changed political systems with scarcely a murmur and the last Soviet troops left Hungarian soil in June 1991.

In coalition with two smaller parties – the Independent Smallholders and the Christian Democrats (KDNP) – the MDF provided Hungary with sound government during its painful transition to a full market economy. Those years saw Hungary's northern (Czechoslovakia) and southern (Yugoslavia) neighbours split along ethnic lines. Prime Minister József Antall did little to improve Hungary's relations with Slovakia, Romania or Yugoslavia by claiming to be the 'emotional and spiritual'

**'In February 1989 the Communists had agreed to give up their monopoly on power'**

The website of the Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution ([www.rev.hu](http://www.rev.hu)) will walk you through the build-up, outbreak and aftermath of Hungary's greatest modern tragedy.

1988

János Kádár is forced to retire in May after more than three decades in power

1989

The electrified fence separating Hungary and Austria is removed in July; the Republic of Hungary is declared in October

1990

The centrist MDF wins the first free elections in 43 years in April; Árpád Göncz is elected the first president in August

1991

The last Soviet troops leave Hungarian soil in June

prime minister of the large Magyar minorities in those countries. Antall died in December 1993 after a long fight with cancer and was replaced by interior minister Péter Boross.

Despite initial successes in curbing inflation and lowering interest rates, a host of economic problems slowed the pace of development, and the government's laissez-faire policies did not help. Like most people in the region, Hungarians had unrealistically expected a much faster improvement in their living standards. Most of them – 76% according to a poll in mid-1993 – were 'very disappointed'.

In the May 1994 elections the Socialist Party, led by Gyula Horn, won an absolute majority in parliament. This in no way implied a return to the past, and Horn was quick to point out that it was in fact his party that had initiated the whole reform process in the first place. Árpád Göncz of the SZDSZ was elected for a second five-year term as president in 1995.

### THE ROAD TO EUROPE

After its dire showing in the 1994 elections, the Federation of Young Democrats (Fidesz) – which until 1993 limited membership to those aged under 35 in order to emphasise a past untainted by communism, privilege and corruption – moved to the right and added 'MPP' (Hungarian Civic Party) to its name to attract the support of the burgeoning middle class. In the elections of 1998, during which it campaigned for closer integration with Europe, Fidesz-MPP won by forming a coalition with the MDF and the agrarian conservative Independent Smallholders' Party. The party's youthful leader, Viktor Orbán, was named prime minister.

Despite the astonishing economic growth and other gains made by the coalition government, the electorate grew increasingly hostile to Fidesz-MPP's – and Orbán's – strongly nationalistic rhetoric and perceived arrogance. In April 2002 the largest turnout of voters in Hungarian history unseated the government in the country's most closely fought election ever and returned the MSZP, allied with the SZDSZ, to power under Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy, a free-market advocate who had served as finance minister in the Horn government. In August 2004, amid revelations that he had served as a counterintelligence officer in the late 1970s and early 1980s while working in the finance ministry and with the government's popularity at a three-year low, Medgyessy tendered his resignation – the first collapse of a government in Hungary's postcommunist history. Sports Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány of the MSZP was named in his place.

Hungary became a fully fledged member of NATO in 1999 and, with nine so-called accession countries, was admitted into the EU in May 2004. In June 2005 parliament elected László Sólyom, a law professor and founding member of the MDF, as the third president of the republic to succeed the outgoing Ferenc Mádl.

**'In April 2002 the largest turnout of voters in Hungarian history unseated the government in the country's most closely fought election ever'**

1999

Hungary joins NATO

2004

Hungary is admitted to the EU along with nine other new member-nations



# The Culture

## THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

When the Italian-American Nobel Prize-winning physicist Enrico Fermi (1901–54), was asked whether he believed extraterrestrials actually existed, he replied: ‘They are among us, but they call themselves Hungarians.’ Dr Fermi was, of course, referring to the Magyars, an Asiatic people of obscure origins who do not speak an Indo-European language and make up the vast majority of Hungary’s population.

On the whole, Hungarians are not uninhibited souls like the extroverted Romanians or the sentimental Slavs, who will laugh or cry at the drop of a hat (or drink). Forget about the impassioned, devil-may-care Gypsy-fiddling stereotype – it doesn’t exist. Hungarians are a reserved and somewhat formal people. They are almost always extremely polite in social interaction and the language can be very courtly – even when doing business with the butcher or having a haircut. The standard greeting for a man to a woman (or youngsters to their elders, regardless of sex) is *Csókolom* (‘I kiss it’ – ‘it’ being the hand). People of all ages – even close friends – shake hands with gusto when meeting.

The national anthem calls Hungarians ‘a people torn by fate’ and the overall mood is one of *honfíbu*, literally ‘patriotic sorrow’ but really a penchant for the blues with a sufficient amount of hope to keep most people going. This mood certainly predates what Hungarians call ‘*az átkos 40 év*’ (the accursed 40 years) of communism. To illustrate what she saw as the ‘dark streak in the Hungarian temperament’, the late US foreign correspondent Flora Lewis recounted a story in *Europe: A Tapestry of Nations* that was the talk of Europe in the early 1930s. ‘It was said’, she wrote, ‘that a song called *Gloomy Sunday* so deeply moved otherwise normal people (in Budapest) that whenever it was played, they would rush to commit suicide by jumping off a Danube bridge.’ The song has been covered in English by many artists, including Billie Holiday, Sinéad O’Connor and Björk, and is the subject of German director Rolf Schübel’s eponymous romantic drama.

Hungary is a highly cultured and educated society, with a literacy rate of over 99% among those 15 years and over. School is compulsory until the age of 16. About 65% of the population have completed secondary-school and 10% are university graduates. There are currently 19 universities.

## WHERE THE FIRST COME LAST

Following a practice unknown outside Asia, Hungarians reverse their names in all uses, and their ‘last’ name (or surname) always comes first. For example, John Smith is never János Kovács but Kovács János, while Elizabeth Taylor is Szabó Erzsébet and Francis Flour is Liszt Ferenc.

Most titles also follow the structure: Mr John Smith is Kovács János úr. Many women follow the practice of taking their husband’s full name. If Elizabeth were married to John, she might be Kovács Jánosné (Mrs John Smith) or, increasingly popular among professional women, Kovácsné Szabó Erzsébet.

To avoid confusion, all Hungarian names in this guide are written in the usual Western manner – Christian name first – including the names of museums, theatres etc if they are translated into English: Budapest’s Arany János színház is the János Arany Theatre in English. Addresses are always written in Hungarian as they appear on street signs: Kossuth Lajos utca, Dísz tér etc.

Hungary's contributions to specialised education and the sciences have been far greater than its present size and population would suggest. A unique method of music education devised by the composer Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967) is widespread, and the Pető Institute in Budapest has a very high success rate in teaching children with cerebral palsy to walk. Albert Szent-Györgyi (1893–1986) won the Nobel Prize for Medicine or Physiology in 1937 for his discovery of vitamin C; Georg von Békésy (1899–1972) won the same prize in 1961 for his research on the inner ear; and Eugene Paul Wigner (1902–95) received a Nobel Prize in 1963 for his research in nuclear physics.

## LIFESTYLE

About two-thirds of all Hungarians now live in towns (opposite) though many retain some connection with the countryside – be it a *nyaralóház* (summer cottage) in the hills or by the lake, or a hut in one of the wine-growing regions.

That's not to say traditional culture is exactly thriving in Hungary. Apart from the Busójárás festival in Mohács (p371), Farsang and other pre-Lenten carnivals are now celebrated at balls and private parties, and only some people go in costume. The sprinkling of water or perfume on young girls on Easter Monday is now rare except in the village of Hollókő (p317) in the Northern Uplands, though the Christmas tradition of Betlehmezés, where young men and boys carry model churches containing a manger from door to door, can still be seen in some parts of the countryside. A popular event for city folk, with tenuous ties to the countryside, is the *disznótör*, which involves the slaughtering of a pig followed by an orgy of feasting and drinking. (The butchering, thankfully, is done somewhere out the back by an able-bodied *paraszt* or peasant.)

Like Spaniards, Poles and many others with a Catholic background, Hungarians celebrate *névnap* (name days) rather than (or as well as) birthdays. Name days are usually the Catholic feast day of their patron saint, but less holy names have a date, too. Most calendars in Hungary list them and it's traditional for men to give women – colleagues, classmates and neighbours as well as spouses and family members – at least a single blossom.

By and large Hungarians tend to meet their friends and entertain outside the home at cafés and restaurants. If you are invited to a Hungarian home, bring a bunch of flowers (available in profusion all year and very inexpensive) or a bottle of good local wine (p55).

You can talk about anything under the sun – from religion and politics to whether the Hungarian language really is more difficult than Japanese and Arabic – but money is a touchy subject. Traditionally, the discussion of wealth – or even wearing flashy jewellery and clothing – was considered gauche in Hungary. Though it's almost impossible to calculate (the 'black economy' being so widespread and important), the average monthly salary in Hungary at the time of writing was 146,000/94,000Ft gross/net (or €599/386). The minimum wage was 57,000Ft (€235) a month.

Drinking is an important part of social life in a country that has produced wine and fruit brandies for thousands of years. Consumption is high; only Luxembourg and Ireland drink more alcohol per capita in Europe. Alcoholism in Hungary is not as visible to the outsider as it is in, say, Poland or Russia, but it's there nonetheless; official figures suggest that as much as 9% of the population are fully fledged alcoholics.

For lots more names that you may or may not have known were Magyar, get hold of *Eminent Hungarians* by Ray Keenoy, a 'light-hearted look' at the subject, or check out [www.webenetics.com/hungary/famous.htm](http://www.webenetics.com/hungary/famous.htm).

Hungarian men can be sexist in their thinking, but women do not suffer any particular form of harassment (though domestic violence and rape get little media coverage here). Most men – even drunks – are effusively polite to women. Women may not be made to feel especially welcome when eating or drinking alone, but it's really no different from most other countries in Europe.

Life expectancy in Hungary is very low by European standards: just over 68 years for men and almost 77 for women. The nation also has one of Europe's lowest birth rates – 9.76 per 1000 population, with a population growth of -0.26% – and, sadly, one of the highest rates of suicide (see boxed text, below). Currently 57% of all Hungarian marriages end in divorce.

The lesbian and gay communities keep a low profile outside Budapest. Both groups can enter into domestic partnerships, but such arrangements carry very few legal rights. At the time of writing, the government was considering introducing partnership legislation similar to that of the UK by perhaps as early as 2007.

## POPULATION

According to the 2001 census just over 92% of the population is ethnically Magyar. Non-Magyar minorities who make their home here include Germans (2.6%), Serbs and other South Slavs (2%), Slovaks (0.8%), Romanians (0.7%) and others. The number of Roma is officially put at 1.9% of the population (or 193,800 people), though in some sources the figure is twice as high.

The population density is about 109 people per sq km and just under 65% of the total live in towns or cities. Almost a quarter of the population live in one of the nation's six largest cities: Budapest (1.75 million), Debrecen (205,000), Miskolc (178,000), Szeged (161,000), Pécs (157,000) and Győr (129,000). More than half – 54% in fact – of the total 3150 communities in Hungary are in Transdanubia.

For the most part, ethnic minorities in Hungary aren't discriminated against and their rights are inscribed in the constitution. Yet this has not stopped the occasional attack on non-white foreigners, a rise in anti-Semitism and the widespread hatred of and discrimination against Roma.

Significantly almost half as many Magyars (or descendants of ethnic Hungarians) – about five million people – live outside the country's national borders as within them, mostly as a result of the Trianon Treaty (1920), WWII and the 1956 Uprising. The estimated 1.45 million Hungarians in Transylvania (now Romania) constitute the largest ethnic minority in Europe, and there are another 580,000 Magyars

Cleveland, Ohio, was once the largest 'Hungarian' city outside Hungary and more than 200,000 ethnic Hungarians live in Ohio ([www.clevelandmemory.org/hungarian/](http://www.clevelandmemory.org/hungarian/)).

### A DUBIOUS DISTINCTION

Hungary has one of the world's highest suicide rates – 60.1 per 100,000 people, surpassed only by Russia and several other former Soviet republics. Psychologists still differ as to why. Some say that Hungarians' inclination to gloom leads to an ultimate act of despair. Others link it to a phenomenon not uncommon here in the late 19th century. As the Hungarian aristocracy withered away, the *kisnemesség* (minor nobility), some of whom were no better off than the local peasants, would do themselves in to 'save their name and honour'. As a result, suicide was – and is – not looked upon dishonourably as such. Victims may be buried in hallowed ground and the euphemistic sentence used in newspaper obituaries is: 'János Kádár/Erzsébet Szabó died suddenly and tragically.' About 60% of suicides are by hanging.

in Slovakia, 295,000 in Serbia, 170,000 in Ukraine, 70,000 in Austria, 16,500 in Croatia, 14,500 in the Czech Republic and 10,000 in Slovenia. Hungarian immigrants to the USA, Canada, Australia and Israel total more than one million.

## SPORT

Hungarians enjoy attending sporting matches and watching them on TV as much as they do participating. The most popular spectator sports are football and water polo, though auto and horse racing and even chess have their fans.

Football is far and away the nation's favourite sport, and people still talk about the 'match of the century' at Wembley in 1953 when the Magic Magyars beat England 6-3 – the first time England lost a home match. There are a dozen premier league football teams in Hungary, with four of them based in the capital (p120).

In water polo, Hungary has dominated the European Championships (12 times) and the Olympic Games (eight times) for decades, so it's worthwhile catching a professional or amateur game of this exciting seven-a-side sport. For details, see p120.

The Formula One Hungarian Grand Prix (p371), the sporting event of the year, takes place near Budapest in August.

## MEDIA

As in most European countries, printed news has strong political affiliations in Hungary. Almost all the major broadsheets have left or centre-left leanings, with the exception of the conservative *Magyar Nemzet* (Hungarian Nation).

The most respected publications are the weekly news magazine *Heti Világgazdaság* (World Economy Weekly), known as HVG, and the former Communist Party mouthpiece *Népszabadság* (People's Freedom). This daily broadsheet is now completely independent and has the highest paid circulation (198,000) of any Hungarian newspaper. Hard on its heels is the Swiss-owned *Blikk*, a brash tabloid that focuses on sport, stars and sex – not necessarily in that order. Specialist publications include the weekly intellectual *Élet és Irodalom* (Life and Literature), the satirical biweekly *Hócipő* (Snowshoe) and the mass-circulation *Nemzeti Sport* (National Sport).

With the sale of the state-owned TV2, Magyar Televízió (MTV) controls only one channel (MTV-1) though there is a public terrestrial channel (M2) and a public satellite one (Duna TV). A second private terrestrial channel (RTL Klub) and some 20 private cable and satellite channels nationwide broadcast everything from game and talk shows to classic Hungarian films. Most midrange and top-end hotels and *pensions* have satellite TV, mainly in German.

The public Magyar Rádió (MR; Hungarian Radio) has three stations, and they are named after famous Hungarians: Lajos Kossuth (jazz and news; 98.6AM), the most popular station in the country; Sándor Petőfi (1960s to 1980s music, news and sport; 94.8FM); and Béla Bartók (classical music and news; 105.3FM). Budapest Rádió, the external arm of Hungarian Radio, broadcasts on 88.1FM and 91.9FM.

Juventus (89.5FM), a music station popular with youngsters, claims the second-highest audience in Hungary. Szeged-based Rádió 88 (95.4FM) plays the greatest hits from the 1980s and 90s – just what students want. Danubius Rádió (98.3FM and 103.3FM) is a mixture of popular music and news.

Hungary finished 13th overall at both the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens and the games at Sydney in 2000, with exactly the same number of medals: 17 (eight gold, six silver and three bronze).

## MADONNA, THE MIGHTY TEST MOUSE

When director Alan Parker was scouting around for locations for his film *Evita* in the mid-1990s, he chose that European destination so well known for its swarthy citizens and Latino temperament – Budapest – and lead actress Madonna started packing her Louis Vuittons. While in the Hungarian capital, *az anyagias lány* (the Materialistic Girl) agreed to be interviewed by *Blikk* and the script has since become a cult favourite. *Blikk* asked the questions in Hungarian, which were translated into English for Madonna, then back into Hungarian and published. At the request of *USA Today* – bless 'em – the interview was translated back into English for publication in the USA. The result was, well, a *kuplerdj*, literally a 'whorehouse' – slang in Hungarian for one mighty mess. Herewith some snippets:

*Blikk*: 'Madonna, Budapest says hello with arms that are spread-eagled. Are you in good odour? You are the biggest fan of our young people who hear your musical productions and like to move their bodies in response.'

Madonna: 'Thank you for saying these compliments.' (She holds up her hands.) 'Please stop with taking sensationalist photographs until I have removed my garments for all to see.' (She laughs.) 'This is a joke I have made.'

*Blikk*: 'Madonna, let's cut toward the hunt. Are you a bold hussy-woman that feasts on men who are tops?'

Madonna: 'Yes, this is certainly something that brings to the surface my longings. In America it is not considered to be mentally ill when a woman advances on her prey in a discotheque setting with hardy cocktails present. And there is a more normal attitude toward leather play-toys.'

*Blikk*: 'Tell us how you met Carlos, your love servant who is reputed? Did you know he was heaven-sent right off the stick? Or were you dating many other people in your bed at the same time?'

Madonna: 'No, he was the only one I was dating in my bed then, so it is a scientific fact that the baby was made in my womb using him. But as regards those questions, enough! I am a woman and not a test mouse!'

*Blikk*: 'May we talk about your other "baby", your movie, then? Please do not be denying that the similarities between you and the real *Evita* are grounded in basis. Power, money, tasty food, Grammys – all these elements are afoot.'

Madonna: 'What is up in the air with you? *Evita* never was winning a Grammy!'

*Blikk*: 'OK, here's a question from left space. What was your book *Slut* about?'

Madonna: 'It was called *Sex*, my book.'

*Blikk*: 'Not in Hungary. Here it was called *Slut*... There is much interest in you from this geographical region, so I must ask this final question. How many Hungarian men have you dated in bed? Are they No 1? How are they comparing to Argentine men, who are famous for being tip-top as well?'

Madonna: 'Well, to avoid aggravating global tension, I won't say. It's a tie.' (She laughs.) 'No, no, I am serious now. See here I am working like a canine all the way around the clock! I am too busy even to try the goulash that makes your country for the record books.'

*Blikk*: 'Thank you for your candid chitchat.'

Madonna: 'No problem, friend who is a girl.'

*Blikk* is available at quality newsstands nationwide.

## RELIGION

Hungarians tend to have a more pragmatic approach to religion than most of their neighbours, and almost none of the bigotry. It has even been suggested that this generally sceptical view of matters of faith has led to Hungarians' high rate of success in science and mathematics. Except in villages and on the most important holy days (Easter, the Assumption of Mary, and Christmas), churches are never full. The Jewish community in Budapest, on the other hand, has seen a great revitalisation in recent years – mostly due to an influx of Orthodox Jews from the USA and Israel.

Of those Hungarians declaring religious affiliation in the 2001 census, about 52% said they were Roman Catholic, 16% Reformed (Calvinist) Protestant and nearly 3% Evangelical (Lutheran) Protestant. There are also small Greek Catholic (2.5%), and Orthodox and other Christian (1%) congregations. Hungary's Jews (though not always practicing) number about 80,000, down from a prewar population of nearly 10 times that amount, with almost 90% living in Budapest.

## ARTS

The arts in Hungary have been both starved and nourished by the pivotal events in the nation's history. King Stephen's conversion to Catholicism brought Romanesque and Gothic art and architecture to Hungary, while the Turkish occupation nipped most of Hungary's Renaissance in the bud. The Habsburgs opened the doors to baroque influences. The arts thrived under the Dual Monarchy (Austro-Hungarian Empire), through truncation and even under fascism. The early days of communism brought socialist-realist art celebrating wheat sheaves and muscle-bound steelworkers to a less-than-impressed populace, but much money was spent on music and 'correct art' such as classical theatre.

### Painting & Architecture

The abbey church at Ják (p177) is a fine example of Romanesque architecture, and there are important Gothic churches in Nyírbátor (p360) and Sopron (p165). For Gothic art, have a look at the 15th-century altarpieces done by various masters at the Christian Museum in Esztergom (p147). The Corpus Christi Chapel in the basilica at Pécs (p297), the Bakócz Chapel in Esztergom Basilica (p145) and the Royal Palace at Visegrád (p142) contain exceptional examples of Renaissance masonry.

Baroque abounds in Hungary; you can see architectural examples in virtually country town. For something on a grand scale, visit the Esterházy Palace at Fertőd (p169) or the Minorite church in Eger (p330). The ornately carved altars in the Minorite church at Nyírbátor (p360) and the Abbey Church in Tihany (p208) are baroque masterpieces. The greatest painters of this period were the 18th-century artists Anton Maulbertsch (frescoes in the Ascension Church at Sümeg; p204) and István Dorffmeister (frescoes in the Bishop's Palace in Szombathely; p174).

Distinctly Hungarian art and architecture didn't come into its own until the mid-19th century when Mihály Pollack, József Hild and Miklós Ybl were changing the face of Budapest, or racing around the country building mansions and cathedrals. The Romantic Nationalist school of heroic paintings, best exemplified by Bertalan Székely (1835–1910) and Gyula Benczúr (1844–1920), fortunately gave way to the realism of Mihály Munkácsy (1844–1900), the 'painter of the *puszta*'. The greatest painters from this period were Tivadar Koszka Csontváry (1853–1919), who has been compared with Van Gogh, and József Rippl-Rónai (1861–1927), the key exponent of Secessionist art in Hungary. There are museums dedicated to their work in Pécs (p297) and Kaposvár (p303), respectively. Favourite artists of the 20th century include Victor Vasarely (1908–97), the so-called father of Op Art who began life as Győző Vásárhelyi but changed his name when he emigrated to Paris in 1930, and the sculptor Amerigo Tot (1909–84). There are museums dedicated to Victor Vasarely in Pécs (p298) and Budapest (p74), and one with Amerigo Tot's work in Pécs (p298).

The Romantic Eclectic style of Ödön Lechner (Budapest Museum of Applied Arts; p94) and Hungarian Secessionist or Art Nouveau (Reök Palace in Szeged; p261) brought unique architecture to Hungary at the

## HUNGARIAN FOLK ART

Hungary has one of the richest folk traditions in Europe and this is where the country often has come to the fore in art. Many urban Hungarians probably wouldn't want to hear that, considering folk art a bit *déclassé* and its elevation to the work of the communist regime, but it's true.

As segments of the Hungarian peasantry became more prosperous in the early 18th century, they tried to make their world more attractive by painting and decorating objects and clothing. It's important to remember two things when looking at folk art. First, with very few exceptions (such as the 'primitive' paintings in Kecskemét's Hungarian Museum of Naive Artists; p244), only practical objects were decorated. Second, this was not 'court art' or the work of artisans making Chinese brocade or Fabergé eggs. It was the work of ordinary people trying to express the simple world around them in a new and different way.

The main centre of cottage weaving has always been the Sárköz region (p284), near Szekszárd in Southern Transdanubia – its distinctive black and red fabric is copied everywhere. Simpler homespun material can be found in the Northeast, especially around the Tiszahát. Because of the abundance of reeds in these once marshy areas, the people here became skilled at cane weaving as well.

Three groups of people stand out for their embroidery, the acme of Hungarian folk art: the Palóc of the Northern Uplands, especially around the village of Hollókő (p317); the Matyó from Mezőkövesd (p334); and the women of Kalocsa (p248). The various differences and distinctions are discussed in the appropriate chapters, but to our minds no-one works a needle like a Matyó seamstress. Also impressive are the woollen waterproof coats called *szűr*, once worn by herders on the Great Plain, which were masterfully embroidered by men using thick, 'furry' yarn.

Folk pottery is world-class here and no Hungarian kitchen is complete without a couple of pairs of matched plates or shallow bowls hanging on the walls. The centre of this industry is the Great Plain – Hódmezővásárhely, Karcag and Tiszafüred, in particular – though fine examples also come from Transdanubia, especially from the Órség region. There are jugs, pitchers, plates, bowls and cups, but the rarest and most attractive are the *írókázás fazékok* (inscribed pots), usually celebrating a wedding day, or in the form of animals, or people such as the *Miskai kancsó* (Miska jugs), not unlike English Toby jugs, from the Tisza River region. Nádudvar near Hajdúszoboszló on the Great Plain specialises in black pottery – striking items and far superior to the greyish stuff produced in Mohács in Southern Transdanubia.

Objects carved from wood or bone – mangling boards, honey-cake moulds, mirror cases, tobacco holders, saltcellars – were usually the work of herders or farmers idle in winter. The shepherds and swineherds of Somogy County south of Lake Balaton and the cowherds of the Hortobágy excelled at this work, and their illustrations of celebrations and local 'Robin Hood' outlaws like Horseshoe Steve are always fun to look at.

Most people made and decorated their own furniture in the old days, especially cupboards for the *tiszta szoba* (parlour) and *tulipán ládák* (trousseau chests with tulips painted on them). Among the finest traditional furniture in Hungary are the tables and chairs made of golden spotted poplar from the Gemenc Forest near Szekszárd. The oaken chests decorated with geometrical shapes from the Ormánság region of Southern Transdanubia are superior to the run-of-the-mill tulip chests.

end of the 19th century and the start of the 20th. Art Nouveau fans will find in cities such as Budapest, Szeged and Kecskemét some of the best examples of the style outside Brussels, Nancy and Vienna.

Postwar architecture in Hungary is almost completely forgettable. One exception is the work of Imre Makovecz, who has developed his own 'organic' style (not always popular locally) using unusual materials like tree trunks and turf. His work is everywhere, but among the best (or strangest) examples are the cultural centres at Sárospatak (p350) and Szigetvár (p306), and the Evangelist church in Siófok (p190).

A turning point for modern art in Hungary came in 2005 when the Ludwig Museum (p94) moved from Castle Hill to its new purpose-built premises in the Palace of Arts, opposite the National Theatre.

The dynamic Association of Young Artists (www.c3.hu/fkse), a branch of the Hungarian Artists' National Association that only allows those under 35 to join it, is a showcase for contemporary Hungarian art.



## Music & Dance

Hungary has produced many leading musicians in the world of classical music, but one person stands head and shoulders above the rest: Franz (or, in Hungarian, Ferenc) Liszt (1811–86). Liszt established the Academy of Music in Budapest and liked to describe himself as ‘part Gypsy’. Some of his works, notably the 20 *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, do in fact echo the traditional music of the Roma.

Ferenc Erkel (1810–93) is the father of Hungarian opera, and two of his works – the nationalistic *Bánk Bán*, based on József Katona’s play of that name, and *László Hunyadi* – are standards at the Hungarian State Opera House. Erkel also composed the music for the national anthem, *Himnusz*.

Imre Kálmán (1882–1953) was Hungary’s most celebrated composer of operettas. The *Queen of the Csárdás* and *Countess Marica* are two of his popular works.

Béla Bartók (1881–1945) and Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967) made the first systematic study of Hungarian folk music, travelling together and recording throughout the Magyar linguistic region in 1906. Both used their findings in some of their compositions – Bartók in *Bluebeard’s Castle*, for example, and Kodály in the *Peacock Variations*.

There are many symphony orchestras both in the capital and provincial cities. Among the finest are the Budapest Festival Orchestra and the Hungarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, which uses the name Budapest Symphony Orchestra on certain domestic and on all of its foreign recordings.

Pop music is as popular here as anywhere – indeed, Hungary has one of Europe’s biggest pop spectacles, the annual Sziget Music Festival (p371). It attracts more than 200 bands and an audience of almost 370,000 people.

It is important to distinguish between ‘Gypsy’ music and Hungarian folk music. Gypsy music as it is known and heard in Hungarian restaurants from Budapest to Boston is urban schmaltz and based on tunes called *verbunkos* played during the Rákóczi independence wars. At least two fiddles, a bass and a cymbalom (a curious stringed instrument played with sticks) are *de rigueur*. You can hear this saccharine *csárdás* (Hungarian-style restaurant/inn) music at almost any fancy hotel restaurant in the provinces or get hold of a recording by Sándor Déki Lakatos and his band.

Hungarian folk musicians play violins, zithers, hurdy-gurdies, bagpipes and lutes on a five-tone diatonic scale. Watch out for Muzsikás (with the inimitable Marta Sebestyén or on her own); Ghymes, a Hungarian folk band from Slovakia; and the Hungarian group Vujicsics that mixes elements of South Slav music. The music of the Csángó people, an ethnic group of Hungarians living in eastern Transylvania and Moldavia, is particularly haunting and is performed during the 10-day Jászberény Summer (p371), which attracts folk aficionados from all over. For something more contemporary – Western beats with East European tonal flavours – listen to Anima Sound System, in particular their *Hungarian Astronaut* CD.

To confuse matters, Roma – as opposed to Gypsy – music traditionally sung a cappella (though sometimes it is backed with percussion and even guitar). Two of the best-known modern Roma groups are Kalyi Jag (Black Fire), from northeastern Hungary and led by Gusztav Varga, and Romano Drom. Check out the latter’s *Romano Trip: Gypsy Grooves from Eastern Europe*, where Roma folk meets world music, with an electronic twist.

Attending a *táncház* (dance house; p118) is an excellent way to hear Hungarian folk music and even to learn to dance. It’s all good fun and they’re relatively easy to find, especially in Budapest where the dance house revival began. Hungary also has ballet companies based in Budapest, Pécs and Szeged, but the best by far is the Győr Ballet (p159).

When Almásy (Ralph Fiennes) plays a Hungarian folk song on the phonograph for Katharine (Kristin Scott Thomas) in Anthony Minghella’s film *The English Patient* (1996) it is Marta Sebestyén singing *Szezelem*, *Szezelem* (Love, Love).

For times, dates and places of *táncház* meetings and performances in Budapest and around the rest of the country, check out the website [www.tanchaz.hu/](http://www.tanchaz.hu/).

## Literature

No-one could have put it better than the poet Gyula Illyés (1902–83), who wrote: ‘The Hungarian language is at one and the same time our softest cradle and our most solid coffin.’ The difficulty and subtlety of the Magyar tongue has excluded most outsiders from Hungarian literature for centuries and, though it would be wonderful to be able to read the swashbuckling odes and love poems of Bálint Balassi (1554–94) or Miklós Zrínyi’s *Peril of Sziget* (1651) in the original, most people will have to make do with their works in translation (see boxed text, p44).

Sándor Petőfi (1823–49) is Hungary’s most celebrated and accessible poet and a line from his work *National Song* became the rallying cry for the 1848–49 War of Independence, in which Petőfi fought and died. A deeply philosophical play called *The Tragedy of Man* by Imre Madách (1823–64), published a decade after Hungary’s defeat in the War of Independence, is still considered to be the country’s greatest classical drama.

Hungary’s defeat in 1849 led many writers to look to Romanticism for inspiration and solace: winners, heroes and knights in shining armour became popular subjects. Petőfi’s comrade-in-arms, János Arany (1817–82), whose name is synonymous with impeccable Hungarian, wrote epic poetry (including the *Toldi Trilogy*) and ballads.

Another friend of Petőfi, the prolific novelist and playwright Mór Jókai (1825–1904), gave expression to heroism and honesty in such wonderful works as *The Man with the Golden Touch* and *Black Diamonds*. This ‘Hungarian Dickens’ still enjoys widespread popularity. Another perennial favourite, Kálmán Mikszáth (1847–1910), wrote satirical tales such as *The Good Palóc People* and *St Peter’s Umbrella*, in which he poked fun at the gentry in decline. Apparently the former US president Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919) enjoyed the latter so much that he insisted on visiting the ageing novelist during a European tour in 1910.

Zsigmond Móricz (1879–1942) was a very different type of writer. His works, in the tradition of Émile Zola, examined the harsh reality of peasant life in Hungary in the late 19th century. His contemporary Mihály Babits (1883–1941), poet and editor of the influential literary magazine *Nyugat* (West), made the rejuvenation of Hungarian literature his lifelong work.

Two 20th-century poets are unsurpassed in Hungarian letters: Endre Ady (1877–1919), sometimes described as a successor to Petőfi, was a reformer who ruthlessly attacked Hungarians’ growing complacency and materialism, provoking a storm of protest from right-wing nationalists. The work of socialist poet Attila József (1905–37) expressed the alienation felt by individuals in the modern age; *By the Danube* is brilliant even in English. József ran afoul of both the underground communist movement and the Horthy regime. Tragically, he threw himself under a train near Lake Balaton at the age of 32. A recent ‘discovery’ is the late Sándor Márai (1900–89), whose crisp style has encouraged worldwide interest in Hungarian literature.

Among Hungary’s most important contemporary writers are Imre Kertész (1929–), György Konrád (1933–), Péter Nádas (1942–) and Péter Esterházy (1950–). Konrád’s *A Feast in the Garden* (1985) is an almost autobiographical account of a Jewish community in a small eastern Hungarian town. *A Book of Memoirs* by Nádas traces the decline of communism written in the style of Thomas Mann and has been made into a film. In *The End of a Family Story*, Nádas uses a child narrator as a filter for the adult experience of 1950s communist Hungary. Esterházy’s partly autobiographical *Celestial Harmonies* (2000) paints a favourable portrait of the protagonist’s father. His later *Revised Edition* (2002) is based on documents revealing his father to have been a government informer during the communist regime.

*Culture Shock! Hungary: A Guide to Customs & Etiquette* by Zsuzsanna Ardo goes beyond the usual anecdotal information and observations offered in this series and is virtually an anthropological and sociological study of the Magyar race.

Hungarian Literature Online ([www.hlo.hu](http://www.hlo.hu)) leaves no page unturned in the world of Hungarian books, addressing everyone from writers and editors to translators and publishers.



### HUNGARIAN WRITERS IN ENGLISH

The following is a small selection of key Hungarian literary works available in English at Bestsellers or the Writers' Bookshop in Budapest (p65).

- *The Tragedy of Man* (Imre Madách, 1859–60) This lyrical drama, inspired by Milton and Goethe, puts a different spin on human history and examines the limitations of science and technology in dealing with moral issues.
- *The Man with the Golden Touch* (Mór Jókai, 1872) Jókai's best work is a realistic portrait of the cruel world of finance, which is conquered by a hero with the 'Midas touch', and an attack on the commercialism of modern civilisation.
- *St Peter's Umbrella* (Kálmán Mikszáth, 1895) This delightful novel is a mixture of legend, fairy tale and social satire woven into the upbeat tale of a successful search for happiness.
- *Eclipse of the Crescent Moon* (Géza Gárdonyi, 1901) This *Boys Own*-style page-turner tells the story of the siege of Eger by the Turks in 1552 and an orphaned peasant boy who grows up to become one of the greatest (fictional) heroes in Hungarian history.
- *Be Faithful unto Death* (Zsigmond Móricz, 1921) This moving story of a bright and sensitive schoolboy being educated at an old, very established boarding school in Debrecen is a microcosm of Hungary truncated after the treaty of Trianon.
- *Skylark* (Dezső Kosztolányi, 1924) The story of a spinster living in the back of beyond of provincial Hungary conceals tensions and the purposeless of life.
- *The Story of My Wife* (Milan Füst, 1942) This complex tale of obsession concerns a Dutch captain's attempts to learn the truth about his coquettish French wife.
- *Embers* (Sándor Márai, 1942) The story of a lifelong grievance that consumed the lives and friendship of two men for more than four decades.

Novelist and Auschwitz survivor Kertész won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2002, the first time a Hungarian has gained this distinction. Of his eight novels, only three – *Fateless* (1975), *Kaddish for a Child Not Born* (1990) and *Liquidation* (2003) – have been translated into English.

### Cinema

Scarce government grants has limited the production of recent Hungarian films to under 20, but there are a handful of good (and even great) ones. For classics, look out for films by Oscar-winning István Szabó (*Sweet Emma*, *Dear Böbe*, *The Taste of Sunshine*), Miklós Jancsó (*Outlaws*) and Péter Bacsó (*The Witness*, *Live Show*). Other favourites are *Simon Mágus*, the surrealist tale of two magicians and a young woman in Paris from Ildikó Enyedi, and her *Tender Interface* about the brain-drain from Hungary after WWII.

Péter Timár's *Csinibaba* is a satirical look at life – and film production quality – during communism. *Zimmer Feri*, set on Lake Balaton, pits a young practical joker against a bunch of loud German tourists; the typo in the title is deliberate. Timár's *6:3* takes viewers back to that glorious moment when Hungary defeated England in football (p38). Gábor Herendi's *Something America* is the comic tale of a filmmaking team trying to profit from an expatriate Hungarian who pretends to be a rich producer.

Of more recent vintage is Hungarian-American director Nimród Antal's *Kontroll*, a high-speed romantic thriller set almost entirely in the Budapest metro in which assorted outcasts, lovers and dreamers interact. And if it's unusual you want, try *Hukkle* by György Pálfi, a curious film where a bizarre cacophony of hiccups, belches, buzzing and grunting replaces dialogue. A sinister David Lynch-like classic or lad's movie? You decide.

# Environment

## THE LAND

Hungary occupies the Carpathian Basin in the very centre of Eastern Europe. It covers 93,030 sq km – about the same size as Portugal or the US state of Indiana – and shares 2171km of border with seven countries: Austria, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia.

The country has three basic topographies: the low-lying regions of the Great Plain (Nagyalföld) in the east, centre and southeast, and of the Little Plain (Kisalföld) in the northwest, which together account for two-thirds of Hungary's territory; the mountain ranges in the north; and the hilly regions of Transdanubia in the west and southwest. The longest rivers are the Tisza (596km in Hungary) and the Danube (417km), which divide the country into three parts. The country has well over 1000 lakes, of which the largest by far is Lake Balaton (596 sq km) followed by Lake Tisza (127 sq km).

## Regions

Hungary's topographical divisions do not accurately reflect the country's cultural and subtler geographical differences, nor do the 19 administrative *megye* (counties) help travellers much. Instead, Hungary can be divided into eight main regions: Budapest and environs, the Danube Bend, Western Transdanubia, the Lake Balaton region, Southern Transdanubia, the Great Plain, the Northern Uplands and the Northeast (see map, p10).

Greater Budapest, by far Hungary's largest city with about 1.75 million people and the most exciting spot in Hungary for travellers, has for its borders Csepel Island in the Danube River to the south, the start of the Great Plain to the east, the Buda Hills to the west and the Danube Bend to the north. The Danube splits the city in two, with flat Pest on the east side and hilly Buda on the west.

The Danube Bend, an area of great beauty and historical significance, is the point at which the river, flowing eastward across Europe, is forced southward by two small ranges of hills. Its main city is Esztergom.

Transdanubia – the area 'across the Danube' to the west – is a region of striking contrasts. Western Transdanubia is both hilly and flat – the Little Plain is to the north – and its chief centres are the historical cities of Győr, Sopron and Szombathely, all rich in art and architecture. Central Transdanubia is dominated by Lake Balaton, the nation's watery playground. Székesfehérvár is the largest city here. Southern Transdanubia, with almost Mediterranean-like Pécs as its 'capital', is less hilly and a treasure-trove of traditional architecture and culture. Wine is produced throughout Transdanubia but the reds of the south are the best.

The Great Plain, often called the *puszta*, is a prairie scarcely 200m above sea level that stretches for hundreds of kilometres east of the Danube River. The central part, the most industrialised area of the plain, has Szolnok as its major town. The Eastern Plain is largely saline grassland and given over to the breeding of livestock, though some of the land is national parkland and ideal for bird-watching. Debrecen is the principal city. The Southern Plain is agriculturally rich, with cereal crops and fruit in abundance, and the occasional farmstead breaking the scenic monotony. Kecskemét and Szeged, both with more than their share of things to see and do, are market towns that have grown into cities on the plain. Horse riding is a major pastime here.

If you want to learn more about what the Hungarians called the *szőke* (blond) Danube, check out Claudio Magris' *The Danube*. Part history, part philosophy and part travelogue, it's an overall excellent read.

Budapest is the sixth-largest city in the EU, after London, Berlin, Madrid, Rome and Paris.

The mean depth of Balaton, the largest lake in Europe outside Scandinavia, is only 3m, though the lake floor drops to 12m in the Tihany Strait.

There are three distinct Magyar dog breeds: the giant white komondor, a sheepdog with a corded coat; the short-haired vizsla pointing dog; and the unforgettable mop-like puli herding dog.

The Northern Uplands is Hungary's 'mountainous' region and has a number of peaks averaging between 400m and 800m, the highest of which is Kékes (1014m) in the Mátra Hills. Abutting the forested hills and valleys of the Northern Uplands are lush vineyards and sprawling factories, many now in decline. Industrial Miskolc and lovely Eger are the region's main cities.

Northeast Hungary is much lower than the Northern Uplands but not quite as flat as the Great Plain. It is a fruit-growing region and ethnically quite heterogeneous, with the bulk of the nation's Roma population living here. This is the place to come if you are interested in indigenous folk culture and architecture, especially wooden churches. Nyíregyháza is the main centre.

## WILDLIFE

### Animals

While there are a lot of common European animals in Hungary (deer, hare, wild boar, foxes, and wolves) as well as some rare species (wild cat, lake bat, and Pannonian lizard), wildlife is not a major attraction unless you count our fine-feathered friends. Well over half of the country's 450 known vertebrates are birds, for the most part waterfowl attracted by the rivers, lakes and wetlands. For details on the best places to watch birds in Hungary, see boxed text, p51.

### Plants

Just over 50% of Hungary is under cultivation of some form or another; 19% of it is forested but only 10% is natural forest. It is home to some 2200 flowering plant species and, because of its topography and transitional climate, many of them are not normally found at this latitude. Much of the flora in the Villány and Mecsek Hills of Southern Transdanubia, for example, is usually seen only around the Mediterranean. The salty Hortobágy region on the Eastern Plain has many plants normally found by the seashore, and the Nyírség area is famous for meadow flowers. The Gemenc Forest on the Danube near Szekszárd, the Little Balaton in the centre of Transdanubia and the Tisza River backwater east of Kecskemét are all important wetlands. Most of the trees in the nation's forested areas are deciduous (beech, oak and birch); only a small percentage are fir.

## NATIONAL PARKS

Hungary now has 11 national parks, up from just five a decade ago. The three on the Great Plain – Hortobágy National Park (also a Unesco World Heritage site; p238), Kiskunság National Park (p246) and Körös-Maros National Park (p273) – protect the wildlife, fragile wetlands and marsh and saline grasslands of the *puszta*. In Western Transdanubia there are three largely forested parks: Őrség National Park in the Őrség region (p185), the Írott-kő Forest near Kőszeg (p183), which calls itself a 'nature park', and Fertő-Hanság National Park at Lake Fertő (p162), which Hungarians share with Austrians (who call it Neusiedlersee). The Northern Uplands counts two national parks: one in the almost completely wooded Bükk Hills (p327) and the other in the Aggtelek karst region (Aggtelek National Park; p342), with its extensive system of caves and streams hewn into the limestone that spills into Slovakia.

Hungary's other national parks are Danube-Dráva National Park, which incorporates the Gemenc Forest (p283) in Southern Transdanubia; Balaton Uplands National Park (p195), within the hilly areas north of Lake Balaton; and Danube-Ipoly National Park (p141), on the Danube Bend.

In addition to national parks, Hungary maintains 1300 'landscape protection' and 'nature conservation' areas that range from such places as the Tihany peninsula on Lake Balaton to a clump of ancient oak trees in Hajdúböszörmény.

Hungary currently counts nine Unesco World Heritage sites, of which two (the caves of the Aggtelek and Slovak Karst and Lake Fertő) are shared with neighbouring Slovakia and Austria, respectively.

## RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

The rules and regulations in most national parks and nature reserves are fairly obvious: no littering, no picking flowers, no collecting insects (eg butterflies), no open fires except in designated areas, no loud noises or music and so on. Bear in mind that the flora and fauna of certain ecosystems – Hortobágy National Park, for example – are very fragile, and you should never stray from marked hiking trails and paths.

Minimise the waste you carry out of protected areas by removing packaging and taking no more food than you need. Don't use detergents or toothpaste in or near watercourses, even if they are biodegradable.

Traffic congestion on Hungary's roads is a problem in peak season, and visitors will do themselves and residents a favour if they forgo driving and use public transport, especially in the cities. Also remember to use the recycling banks on the streets of larger towns and the litter bins.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Pollution is a large and costly problem, particularly because Hungary has had to hasten the pace of cleaning up its act before joining the EU. Low-grade coal that fuels some power plants and industries creates sulphur dioxide and acid rain. Nitrogen oxide emitted by cars on highways and in city centres causes severe air pollution. Over-use of nitrate fertilisers in agriculture has caused groundwater to become contaminated with phosphates.

There has been a marked improvement since the creation of the Ministry of the Environment in the 1990s. Between 1990 and 1997, for example, sulphur dioxide emissions fell by one-third and are expected to decrease further following the closure or conversion to gas turbines of all but one or possibly two – in Oroszlány south of Tata and the Mátra Hills in the Northern Uplands – of the nation's coal-fired power stations. At the same time nitrogen oxide levels dropped by only one-fifth. Vehicles are burning cleaner fuel but there are a lot more of them on the roads. The Soviet-designed nuclear power generator at Paks in Southern Transdanubia produces about one-third of the nation's electricity. And the total amount of annual waste produced has dropped from 106 million tonnes to between 75 and 80 million tonnes, which corresponds to the EU average.

Log on to [www.rec.org](http://www.rec.org) to learn about the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, a Szentendre-based body developing a common ecosystem strategy and solving environmental problems in the region.

# Activities

A visit to Hungary is not just an educational or cultural experience – there are plenty of outstanding outdoor activities on offer, too. Indeed, you could forsake many of the country's sights and spend your entire time boating, cycling, bird-watching or taking the waters.

Urbanites love a day out in the country to escape their relatively cramped living quarters and the pollution of the towns and cities, and nothing is more sacred than the *kirándulás* (outing), which can be a day of hiking, swimming, horse riding or just a picnic of *gulyás* (beef goulash soup) cooked in a *bogrács*, a kettle suspended over a fire with a tripod, in the open air by a river or lake.

## THERMAL BATHS

Since the Romans settlers have enjoyed Hungary's thermal waters; some 1300 springs are registered and 300 used for bathing purposes. Many of the 150 or so spas open to the public, such as those at Balatonfüred (p211), Hajdúszoboszló (p241), Hévíz (p197) and Gyula (p277), are very serious affairs indeed, with people coming to 'take the waters' for specific maladies: respiratory, muscular, cardiac or gynaecological. Most hotels at these spas offer cure packages (including accommodation, use of the spa and other facilities, medical examination, treatments etc) that last a week or longer. **Danubius Travels** (☎ 1-888 8200; www.danubiusgroup.com; V Szervita tér 8) in Budapest is the expert in the field and books packages. **Tourinform** (☎ 1 438 8080, 24hr information hotline 06 80 630 800; www.tourinform.hu), with offices nationwide, distributes the useful *Health and Wellness* brochure listing spa centres across Hungary.

One of the biggest growth industries in Hungarian tourism is the emergence (or rather conversions from old outdated spas) of huge wellness centres such as the new modern complex at Sárvár (p180) and the Raba Quelle at Győr (p158). They remain serious centres for those seeking a cure, of course, but they also offer holistic and beauty treatments.

## HORSE RIDING

There's a Hungarian saying that the Magyars were 'created by God to sit on horseback'. Judging from the number of stables, riding schools and trails around the country, that is still true today.

A lot of riding in Hungary is the follow-the-leader variety up to a castle, through open fields, or in horse-drawn coaches. Larger schools, however, have horses that can be taken into the hills or across the *Puszta* (Great Plain) by more experienced riders. These schools also offer lessons. Not surprisingly, the best centres are on the Great Plain – at Mátá (p239) near Hortobágy and Bugac (p246) near Kecskemét and Solt (p257), north of Kalocsa. In Transdanubia you'll find good a school in Orfű (p302) while around Lake Balaton they're at Sümeg (p205) and Keszthely (p195). However, nothing compares with mounting a Lipizzaner at the stud farm at Szilvásvár (p336) in the Northern Uplands.

The nonprofit **Hungarian Equestrian Tourism Association** (MTSZ; ☎ 1-456 0444; www.equih.hu; IX Ráday utca 8) in Budapest can provide you with a list of recommended riding schools nationwide. Also in the capital, **Pegazus Tours** (☎ 1-317 1644; www.pegazus.hu; V Ferenciek tere 5) organises riding tours of between three and five days (€300 to €350) and one week to nine days (€750 to €850) in Transdanubia, the Great Plain and around Lake Balaton.

The word 'coach' comes from Kocs, a small village southwest of Tata in Western Transdanubia where light horse-drawn vehicles were first used in place of more cumbersome wagons for journeys between Budapest and Vienna.

For more information about the distinctive Hungarian breed of horse called the Nonius, see [http://horsecare.stablemade.com/\\_articles/nonius.htm](http://horsecare.stablemade.com/_articles/nonius.htm). For the Lipizzaner, go to [www.imh.org/imh/bw/lip.html](http://www.imh.org/imh/bw/lip.html).

## CANOEING & KAYAKING

As Hungary is in a basin, it has many rivers of varying sizes; there are some 4000km of passable waterways, most of which are navigable by canoe or kayak at some point during the year, though April to September is probably the best time. Boat rental, food and camping along the rivers and lakes are cheap; in fact an *evezőstúra* (rowing excursion) is considered the 'poor man's holiday' in Hungary and is popular with students.

There are many canoe and kayak trips available. Following the Danube from Rajka to Mohács (386km) or the Tisza River from Tisza becs to Szeged (570km) are popular runs, but there are less congested waterways and shorter trips such as the 210km stretch of the Körös and Tisza Rivers from Békés to Szeged or the Rába River from Szentgotthárd to Győr (205km).

**Cartographia** (www.cartographia.hu) has several water-sports maps (*víz-útirázók térképei*; 800Ft to 1100Ft) to the rivers and lakes of Hungary (eg the 1:50,000 *Rába*, the 1:40,000 *Tisza-tó* etc).

You can find all the kayak and canoe clubs in Hungary listed on the website of the **Hungarian Kayak-Canoe Association** (MKKSZ; www.mkksz.hu), and many of them can provide information or help you with the routing in their area. The water tours section of the **Hungarian Friends of Nature Federation** (MTSZ; ☎ 1-332 7177, 331-2467; www.fsz.bme.hu/mtsz; VI Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út 31) in Budapest can also be of assistance.

**Vizitúra** (☎ 1-280 8182; info@vizitura.hu; IX Hurok utca 1), based in Budapest, organises tours on most of Hungary's rivers. A four-seat canoe rents for 1400Ft to 2000Ft a day, and a guide is 15,000Ft (Hungarian-speaking) or 30,000Ft (English-speaking) per day.

## SWIMMING

Swimming is extremely popular in Hungary, and most towns have both a covered and outdoor pool, allowing enthusiasts to get into the water year-round. The entry fee is generally low (from 550Ft), and you can often rent swimming costumes and bathing caps (the latter are mandatory in most indoor pools) for roughly the same price. All pools have a locker system. Find one, get changed in it (or beside it) and call over the attendant. He or she will lock the door with your clothes inside and hand you a numbered tag to tie on your costume. Note: in order to prevent theft lest you lose or misplace the tag, the number is not the same as the one on the locker, so commit the *locker* number to memory.

Lakes and rivers of any size have a grassy *strand* (beach), often with showers and changing facilities.

## HIKING

There is good hiking in the forests around Visegrád (p144), Esztergom (p148), Badacsony (p200), Kőszeg (p183) and Budapest (p74). North of Eger are the Bükk Hills (p327) and, south of Kecskemét, the Bugac (p246), both national parks with marked hiking trails. The best time to go hiking is in spring and autumn.

Cartographia publishes 30 hiking maps (average scales 1:40,000 and 1:60,000; 900/2350Ft folded/spiral-bound) to the hills, plains and forests of Hungary. Most are available from its outlet in Budapest (p65). On all hiking maps, paths appear as a red line and with a letter, or an abbreviation in Hungarian, indicating the colour-coding of the trail. Colours are painted on trees or the letter of the colour in Hungarian appears on markers: 'K' for *kék* (blue), 'P' for *piros* (red), 'S' for *sárga* (yellow) and 'Z' for *zöld* (green).

Contact the nonprofit Hungarian Friends of Nature Federation (see above) in Budapest for information and advice.

The first Hungarian Olympic medallist was swimmer Alfréd Hajós, who took two golds at the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896.

*Walking in Hungary: 32 Routes through Upland Areas* by Tom Chrystal and Beata Dosa leads hikers through the hills of northern Hungary and Transdanubia.

## CYCLING

Hungary's flat terrain makes it ideal for cycling, and cycle lanes in towns and regions (Budapest, Szeged, along the Danube and Tisza Rivers, around Lake Balaton) now total upward of 2000km, with more on the way. In addition, there are thousands of kilometres of roads with light traffic and dikes suitable for cycling. Among the choicest areas to explore on two wheels are the Danube Bend (p136), the Kál Basin southeast of Tapolca (p201), the Hortobágy National Park (p238), the Őrség region (p185) the Sopron region (p169) and the Zemplén Hills (p344).

**Frigoria** ([www.frigoriakiado.hu](http://www.frigoriakiado.hu)) publishes the very useful 1:250,000-scale *Cycling around Hungary (Kerékpártúrák Magyarországon; 2950Ft)*, with 100 tours outlined and places of interest and service centres listed in several languages, including English. It also produces similar map guides (average price 1800Ft) to a dozen different regions, including Lake Balaton, Southern Transdanubia and the Danube Bend.

For information and advice on cycling, contact the very helpful **Hungarian Cyclists' Club** (MK; ☎ 1-206 6223, 06 30 922 9052; [www.kerosz.hu](http://www.kerosz.hu)) or the **Hungarian Bicycle Touring Association** (MKT SZ; ☎ 1-311 2467; [mkt sz@dpg.hu](mailto:mkt sz@dpg.hu); VI Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út 31, 2/F), which are in Budapest. Mountain bikers should get in touch with the **Hungarian Mountain Bike Association** (MMBSZ SZ; ☎ 1-278 0946; [mkt sz@dpg.hu](mailto:mkt sz@dpg.hu)), also based in the capital.

Remember when planning your itinerary that bicycles are banned from motorways as well as national highways Nos 0 to 9, and they must be fitted with lights and reflectors. On certain train lines, bicycles can be transported in special carriages holding up to 58 bikes.

**Balázs and Friends Cyclists' Sport Association** (BBBSE; ☎ 1-227 6236, 06 30 991 6327; [info@bbbse.hu](mailto:info@bbbse.hu); XXII Háros utca 47-49) in Budapest has cycling trips of one to three days (2000Ft to 15,000Ft, including transport and accommodation) throughout the year.

**Happy Bike** (☎ 06 20 556 8686; [www.happybike.hu](http://www.happybike.hu)), in association with the Hungarian Cyclists' Club, has five more ambitious week-long trips in Transdanubia, including Lake Balaton, the Danube Bend and the Őrség region for €397 to €467, including bicycle rental, accommodation, three meals a day and luggage transport.

Also in the capital, **Velo-Touring** (☎ 1-319 0571; [www.velo-touring.hu](http://www.velo-touring.hu); XI Előpatak utca 1; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) is a large cycling travel agency that has an eight-day spa tour from Hajdúszoboszló on the Great Plain to various spa towns (€655), a 10-day Lake Balaton-Vienna circuit (€729) and a 10-day tour of the Danube Bend and beyond (€736). Prices include a bike, accommodation and two meals a day; groups can range from eight to 20 cyclists.

## BIRD-WATCHING

Hungary, the ornithological crossroads of Europe, has some of the best bird-watching sites in Europe. Indeed, some 380 of the continent's 400-odd species have been sighted here, and a full 250 are resident or regular visitors. The country's indigenous populations of great white egrets (over 2000 pairs), spoonbills (several hundred pairs) and red-footed falcons (800 pairs), as well as white-tailed eagles (70 pairs), aquatic warblers (600 singing males), saker falcons (150 pairs) and great bustards (1200 birds) are among the most important in Europe, and more eastern imperial eagles (80 pairs) nest here than anywhere else in Europe. The arrival of the storks to the Great Plain, the Northern Uplands and the Northeast in April and May is a wonderful sight to behold.

If you prefer a guided rather than a DIY outing, look no further than **Birding Hungary** (☎ 06 70 214 0261; [www.birdinghungary.com](http://www.birdinghungary.com)), owned and operated

## THE BIRDS OF HUNGARY

There are dozens of excellent sites for bird-watching in Hungary, but the best ones are the Hortobágy region, the Kiskunság, Lake Fertő, Aggtelek, the Little Balaton (Kis-Balaton) and Tisza Lake. The Pilis, Bükk and Buda Hills and even small lakes like the ones at Tata and Fehér, north of Szeged, attract a wide variety of bird life. Spring and autumn are always good seasons for sightings, but the best month is May, when breeding is in full swing.

### Hortobágy (p238)

This region of grassy, saline steppe, large fish ponds and marshes on the Great Plain is one of the best bird areas of Europe, with more than 300 species sighted, including great bustards, red-footed falcons and aquatic warblers. Almost any time of year is good for saker falcons, long-legged buzzards and white-tailed eagles; September/October is when geese and up to 70,000 cranes pass through. The Hortobágy fishponds are home to four species of grebe and eight species of heron, as well as several varieties of tern. In winter they host white-tailed eagles.

### Lake Fertő (p162)

Some 210 nesting and migrant species have been registered at Fertő-Hanság National Park, which includes the southern end of shallow, saline Lake Fertő, near the Austrian border in Western Transdanubia. April to June sees the most activity in the lake's reedbeds, August sees the arrival of white storks, and autumn is the best time to sight white-fronted and bean geese.

### Aggtelek (p342)

The hilly karst region of Aggtelek is a breeding ground for black storks, corncrakes, Ural owls, rock buntings, honey buzzards and various types of woodpecker. The best time to visit is April to September.

### Little Balaton (p195)

This vast wetland, which is composed of impenetrable reed-choked ponds and a reservoir created in 1984, is home to about 100 breeding species. The best place to view little egrets, spoonbills, terns and warblers is from Kányavári Island (Kányavári-sziget), a tiny island with two observation towers. The optimum season is April to August. In autumn tens of thousands of birds stop here on passage.

### Lake Tisza (p230)

The northern third of this vast artificial lake, the area just east of Poroszló, is a bird reserve under the jurisdiction of Hortobágy National Park. The reedbeds and forests along the Tisza River attract large numbers of purple herons, little bitterns, great white egrets, cormorants and black kites. Any time of year is good for birding at Lake Tisza, but May and June are best for breeding birds and August and September for storks and raptors on passage.

### Bükk Hills (p327)

This range of wooded hills east of Budapest, which forms Bükk National Park, supports a good variety of woodpeckers and flycatchers from May to July, as well as imperial eagles and woodland birds.

### Tata (p153)

Old Lake (Öreg-tó), a nature conservation area at this Western Transdanubia city, attracts a considerable number and variety of waterfowl from October to February; between 20,000 and 40,000 white-fronted and bean geese can pass through in February alone. The best viewing spot is the southern end of the lake, where a thermal spring prevents that part of the lake from freezing over. The adjoining park and woodland attracts waxwings, hawfinches, bramblings and various woodpeckers in winter.

Gerard Gorman's *The Birds of Hungary* is the birder's Bible for assistance in spotting the best of Hungary's feathered friends. His *Where to Watch Birds in Eastern Europe* will set your sights further afield but is difficult to find.



by Gerard Gorman, Hungary's most experienced bird guide. He runs between one and four organised birding tours a month from spring to late autumn that usually take in parts of the Northern Uplands and the Hortobágy, and last between four and eight days. Tailor-made tours and daily guiding are also available for around €100 a day.

Another experienced company with a solid reputation is Debrecen-based **Aquila Nature Tours** (☎ 52-456 744; aquila@hu.inter.net), which offers bird-watching tours in the Hortobágy and Zemplén Hills for about €65 a day.

The **Hungarian Ornithological & Nature Conservation Society** (MME; ☎ 1-275 6247; mme@mme.hu; XII Költő utca 21) in Budapest can help with general information, too. They also have a **birder shop** (☎ 1-270 2920; XIII Katona József utca 35; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) in the capital, which stocks books and guides, binoculars, clothing and bird-watching accessories.

## SAILING & WINDSURFING

For sailing, you might try Lake Velence or Lake Tisza, but the real centre is Lake Balaton. Qualified sailors can rent boats at locations around Lake Balaton (p186), including Balatonfüred, Siófok, Balatonaliga, Balatonalmádi, Balatonkenese and Tihany. You'll find **Sail & Surf** (☎ 0630 227 8927; www.wind99.com), a sailing and windsurfing centre at **Club Tihany** (p209), with rental and both group and private lessons available. They also charter yachts. Expect to pay from €270 to €300 per weekend and €590 to €690 per week for a yacht sleeping four to six people.

Wherever there's water, a bit of wind and a camp site, you'll find sailboards for rent – on Lake Tisza at Abádszalók (p231), Lake Velence (p222) at Gárdony and Velence town, and Lake Fertő (p162) near Fertőrákos. The main place for windsurfing, however, is Lake Balaton (p188), especially at Kesthely, Balatonszabadi, Balatonvilágos and Balatonaliga. The best time for it is early and late summer, as the wind tends to die down in July and August.

The **Hungarian Windsurfing Association** (MSZSZ; ☎ 1-488 0312; husurf@windsurfing.hu; XII Krisztina körút 3) in Budapest can answer any questions you may have.

## FISHING

Hungary's lakes and sluggish rivers are home to pike, perch, carp and other coarse fish. You'll see people fishing in waterways everywhere, but Lake Balaton and the Tisza River – especially at the Kisköre Reservoir southwest of Tiszafüred – are particularly popular venues. The water surface area of Hungary measures 130,000 sq km, and anglers make use of more than half of it.

In order to fish, you need a state fishing license valid for a year as well as a local one issued by the day, week or year for the area that interests you. You can usually buy them at the same place – anglers' clubs and associations, tackle shops, or even ticket booths by the water at more popular venues. The best source of information is the **National Federation of Hungarian Anglers** (MOHOSZ; ☎ 1-248 2590; www.mohosz.hu; XII Korompai utca 17) in Budapest.

Only sailing and rowing boats and craft with electric motors are allowed on Lake Balaton.

# Food & Drink

Much has been written about Hungarian food – some of it silly, a lot of it downright false. It's true that Hungarian cuisine has had many outside influences and that it makes great use of paprika. But even that spice's hottest variety (called *csípős*) is pretty mild; a taco with salsa or a chicken vindaloo tastes a lot more 'fiery'.

Although still relatively inexpensive by Western standards and served in huge portions, Hungarian food is heavy and can be unhealthy. Meat, sour cream and fat abound and, except in season, *saláta* (salad) means a plate of pickled vegetables. Things are changing, however, at least in Budapest. A number of vegetarian (or partially vegetarian) restaurants have opened, more places now offer a wider selection of 'real' vegetarian dishes and ethnic food is very popular. And even Hungarian food itself is undergoing a long-awaited transformation. *Kortárs magyar konyha* (modern Hungarian cuisine) is being touted at more and more restaurants and, judging from the bookings at the establishments serving it, it's here to stay.

## STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Hungarians are for the most part not big eaters of *reggeli* (breakfast), preferring a cup of tea or coffee with a plain bread roll at the kitchen table or on the way to work. *Ebéd* (lunch), eaten at 1pm, is traditionally the main meal in the countryside. *Vacsora* (dinner) – supper, really – is less substantial when eaten at home, often just sliced meats, cheese and some pickled vegetables.

## Bread & Pasta

It is said that Hungarians will eat 'bread with bread' and *kenyér* (leftover bread) has been used to thicken soups and stews since at least the reign of King Matthias; *kifli* (crescent-shaped rolls) have been popular since the Turkish occupation. But, frankly, bread in Hungary is not as memorable as the flour-based *galuska* (dumplings) and *tarhonya* (egg barley pasta) served with dishes such as *pörkölt* (stew), *paprikás* and *tokány* (p54).

## Soup

Most Hungarian meals start with *leves* (soup). This is usually something like *gombaleves* (mushroom soup) or *gombóclevés* (meat-filled dumplings in consommé). More substantial fare is beef *gulyásleves* (p54) and *bableves*, a thick bean soup, which are sometimes eaten as a main course. Another favourite is *halászlé* (fisherman's soup), a rich soup of poached carp, fish stock, tomatoes, green peppers and paprika.

## Meat & Fish

Hungarians eat an astonishing amount of meat, and 'meat-stuffed meat' is a dish often on menus here. Pork, beef, veal and poultry are the meats most commonly used. They can be breaded and fried, baked, turned into some paprika-flavoured concoction or simmered in *lecsó*, a tasty mix of peppers, tomatoes and onions (and one of the few Hungarian sauces that does not include paprika). Lamb and mutton are rarely eaten in Hungary.

A typical menu will have up to 10 pork and beef dishes, a couple of fish ones and usually only one poultry dish. Goose livers and legs and turkey breasts – though not much else of the birds – make it onto most menus.

*Culinaria Hungary* by Aniko Gergely et al is a beautifully illustrated, 320-page tome on all things involving Hungarian food, from soup to nuts and more. It is as prized for its recipes as the history and traditions it contains.

For a good selection of Hungarian recipes online, go to <http://lingua.arts.klte.hu/hungary/konyha.htm>.

The early Magyars were so successful in battle because, unlike other armies, which fed from an accompanying (and very slow) herd of cattle, the Hungarian horsemen carried dried meat and pasta and turned it into nourishing *gulyás* when they reached a water source.

Freshwater fish, such as the indigenous *fogas* (great pike-perch) and the smaller *süllő* from Lake Balaton, and *ponty* (carp) from the nation's rivers and streams, is plentiful but can be expensive and often overcooked.

## Paprika

Many dishes are seasoned with paprika, a spice as Magyar as King Stephen; indeed, not only is it used in cooking but it also appears on restaurant tables as a condiment beside the salt and pepper shakers. It's generally quite a mild spice and is used predominantly with sour cream or in *rántás*, a heavy roux of pork lard and flour added to cooked vegetables. *Töltött*, things stuffed with meat and/or rice, such as cabbage or peppers, are cooked in *rántás* as well as in tomato sauce or sour cream.

There are four major types of meat dish that use paprika. The most famous is *gulyás* or *gulyásleves*, a thick beef soup cooked with onions, cubed potatoes and paprika, and usually eaten as a main course. *Pörkölt*, or 'stew', is closer to what foreigners call 'goulash'; the addition of sour cream, less paprika and white meat, such as chicken, makes the dish *paprikás*. *Tokány* is similar to *pörkölt* and *paprikás* except that the meat is not cubed but cut into strips, black pepper is on equal footing with the paprika, and bacon, sausage or mushroom are added as flavouring.

## Vegetables

Fresh salad as it's usually known around the world is called *vitamin saláta* here and is usually available when lettuce is in season; almost everything else is *savanyúság* (literally 'sourness'), which can be anything from mildly sour-sweet cucumbers and pickled peppers to almost acid sauerkraut.

*Zöldség* (boiled vegetables), when available, are 'English-style' or *angolos zöldség*. The traditional way of preparing vegetables – real Hungarian 'comfort food' – is in *főzelék*, where peas, green beans, lentils or marrow are fried or boiled and then mixed into a roux with milk.

## Desserts

Hungarians love sweets and eat them with great gusto. Intricate pastries such as *Dobos torta*, a layered chocolate and cream cake with a caramelised brown sugar top, and *rétes* (strudel) filled with poppy seeds or cherry preserves are usually consumed mid-afternoon in one of Hungary's ubiquitous *cukrászda* (cake shop or patisserie). Desserts more commonly found on restaurant menus include *somlói galuska*, a sponge cake with chocolate and whipped cream, and *Gundel palacsinta*, flambéed pancake with chocolate and nuts.

## DRINKS

A *kávéház*, literally a 'coffee house' or 'café', is the best place to get something hot or nonalcoholic and cold. An *eszpresszó*, along with being a type of coffee, is essentially a coffee house too, but it usually also sells alcoholic drinks and light snacks.

To sample the local brew or vintage try visiting: a *söröző*, a pub with draught beer (*csapolt sör*) on tap; a *borozó*, an establishment (usually a dive) serving wine; and a *pince*, which can be a beer or wine cellar but is usually the latter and also called *bor pince*.

## Nonalcoholic Drinks

Hungarians drink a tremendous amount of *kávé* (coffee) – as a *fekete* (single black), a *dupla* (double) or with milk, *tejes kávé*. Decaffeinated coffee is *koffeinmentes kávé*.

Hungary produces about 10,000 tonnes of paprika a year and exports 55% of it while each Hungarian consumes an average of 500g of the spice annually.

The 1971 film *Szindbád* (Sinbad), based on the eponymous novel by Gyula Krúdy (1878–1933) and directed by Zoltán Huszárík, featured a scene of a diner eating bone marrow on toast, which had the audience spellbound and salivating at a time when such luxuries were at a premium in socialist Hungary.

Black tea (*tea*; *tay-ah*) is not as popular as coffee in Hungary, though *teaház* (teahouses) serving every imaginable type of tea and tisane have become very trendy in recent years.

## Alcoholic Drinks

Hungarians are big drinkers and enjoy a tipples at the drop of a hat (or a forint or a glass).

### BEER

Hungary produces a number of its own beers for national distribution, and the most common three are Dreher, Kőbányai and Arany Ászok. Some, however, are found only in the vicinity of where they are brewed, such as Borsodi near Miskolc, Kanizsai in Nagykanizsa and Szalon in Pécs. Bottled Austrian, German and Czech beers are readily available. Locally brewed and imported beer in Hungary is almost always *világos sör* (lager), though occasionally you'll come across Dreher Barna (Dreher Brown), which is stout. At a pub, beer is served in a *pohár* (0.3L) or a *korsó* (0.4L or 0.5L).

### BRANDY & LIQUEUR

*Pálinka* is a strong (about 40%), uniquely Hungarian, brandy or *eau de vie* distilled from a variety of fruits but most commonly from apricots or plums. There are many different types and qualities, but among our favourites are *Óbarack*, the double-distilled 'Old Apricot', the kind made with *málna* (raspberry) and anything with *kóser* (kosher) on the label.

Hungarian liqueurs are usually unbearably sweet and artificial tasting, though the Zwack brand is good. Zwack also produces Unicum, a bitter aperitif that has been around since 1790.

### WINE

Wine has been made in Hungary for thousands of years and is sold by the glass or bottle everywhere – at very basic wine bars, food stalls, restaurants, supermarkets and 24-hour grocery stores – and usually at reasonable prices. Old-fashioned wine bars ladle it out by the *deci* (decilitre, 0.1L), but in more modern places it comes by the undefined *pohár* (glass). If you're seriously into wine, you should visit Budapest's speciality wine shops (p121).

When choosing a Hungarian wine, look for the words *minőségi bor* (quality wine) or *különleges minőségű bor* (premium quality wine), Hungary's version of the French quality regulation *appellation contrôlée*. Generally speaking, the vintage or *évjárat* has become important only recently; see boxed text, p57. On a wine label the first word indicates the region, the second the grape variety (eg Villányi Kékfrankos) or the type or brand of wine (eg Tokaji Aszú, Szekszárdi Bikavér). Other important words that you'll see include: *édes* (sweet), *fehér* (white), *félédes* (semisweet), *félszáraz* (semidry or medium), *pezsgő* (sparkling), *száraz* (dry) and *vörös* (red).

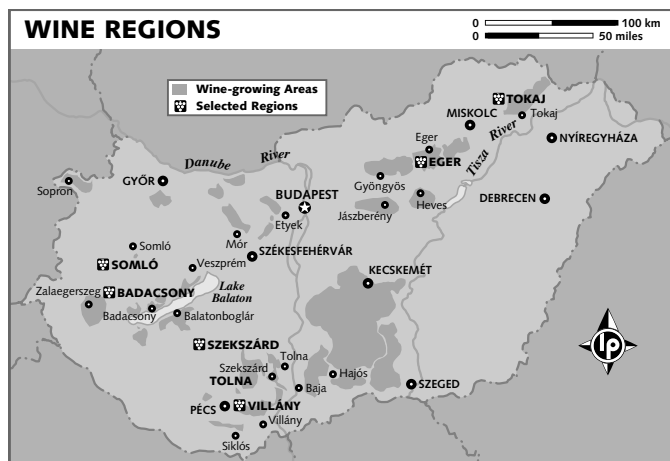
One very surprising development since Hungary joined the EU in 2004 is that locals are still overwhelmingly buying their own wine despite the great increase in prices (at least in top-shelf wines) and the steady stream of cheaper wines from other parts of the union. Are they being loyal to the local product or just too familiar with the Magyar varieties to switch? As they say in the trade, only time will tell.

### Tokaj

The volcanic soil, sunny climate and protective mountain barrier of the Tokaj-Hegyalja region in the Northern Uplands make it ideal for growing grapes and making wine.

Habsburg Emperor Joseph II supposedly gave Hungary's most famous liqueur its name when he first tasted it, exclaiming: 'Das ist ein Unikum!' (This is a unique drink!).

The single best website for Hungarian wines is [www.bortarasag.hu/en/](http://www.bortarasag.hu/en/). It also lists prices from the Bortársaság (Wine Society), Hungary's foremost wine club.



Hungary now counts 22 distinct wine-growing areas in Transdanubia, the Balaton region, the Northern Uplands and the Great Plain.

Tokaj dessert wines are rated according to the number – from three to six – of *puttony* (butts, or baskets for picking) of sweet Aszú grapes added to the base wines. These are grapes infected with ‘noble rot’, a mould called *Botrytis cinera* that almost turns them into raisins on the vine. Aszú Eszencia, an essence even sweeter than six-*puttony* wine, is added – very judiciously – to improve the wine. Some six-*puttony* Aszú sells for as little as 6000Ft.

Tokaj also produces less-sweet wines, including dry Szamorodni (an excellent aperitif) and sweet Szamorodni, which is not unlike an Italian *vin santo*. Of the four grape varieties grown here Furmint and Hárslevelű (Linden Leaf) are the driest. Some Hungarian wine connoisseurs believe dry Furmint, with a flavour recalling apples, has the potential to become the best white wine in the country.

For Tokaji Aszú the name to look out for is István Szepsy, who concentrates on the upscale six-*puttony* variety as well as the Aszú Eszencia itself. His 2000 six-*puttony* Aszú currently retails for a cool 19,950Ft a bottle and his 1999 Eszencia is 45,000Ft for a mere 37.5cL. Szepsy Cuvée, aged in stainless steel barrels for a year or two (against the usual five for Tokaji Aszú) was first bottled in 1999 and is a complex, elegant blend comparable to Sauternes. A bottle of his excellent 2002 vintage is around 10,900Ft. Disznókó produces a six-*puttony* Aszú (about 9000Ft) reminiscent of apricots, and a fine, sweet Szamorodni (3010Ft). Other names to watch out for in quality Tokaj wines are Hétszőlő, Degenfeld and, for Furmint, Oremus and Bérés. Oremus’ Mandolás Furmint 2003 (2050Ft) and Bérés’ single Furmint 2003 (2850Ft) are both excellent value for money.

Vintage has always played a more important role in Tokaj than elsewhere in Hungary, and it is said that there is only one truly excellent year each decade. The wines produced in 1972, 1988, 1999, 2000 and 2003 were all superb, though 1993 was almost as good.

### Eger

Flanked by two of the Northern Uplands’ most beautiful ranges of hills and on the same latitude as Burgundy, Eger is the home of the celebrated Egri Bikavér (Eger Bull’s Blood). By law, Hungarian vintners must spell out the blend of wine on their label; the sole exception is Bikavér, though

it’s usually Kékfrankos (Blaufränkisch) mixed with other reds, sometimes including Kadarka. One of the few wineries whose blend of Bikavér is known for sure is Tibor Gál’s. Its blend is 50% Kékfrankos and 50% Cabernet and it is excellent (2150Ft). Another producer of Bikavér to watch out for is István Toth. His 1999 Bikavér (3150Ft) can easily compare with any of the ‘big’ reds from Villány.

Eger produces Pinot Noir and some experts think Vilmos Thummerer’s 1999 vintage (3500Ft) is on par with the *premiers crus* from Burgundy. His Vili Papa Cuvée, a blend of Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, is a monumental wine aged in new wood, with fleshy fruit flavours. It’s priced from 9900Ft for the 1999 vintage. You’ll also find several decent whites in Eger, including Leányka (Little Girl), Olaszrizling (Italian Riesling) and Hárslevelű from Debrő. Something new is Tibor Gál’s Viognier 2003 (4350Ft; a delicate floral white), a variety once limited to 2 hectares and now planted on 10.

### Villány

Villány-Siklós, in Hungary’s southernmost and warmest region – it is on the same latitude as Bordeaux – is one of Hungary’s principal producers of wine, noted especially for its red Kékoportó (Blauer Portugieser), Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot wines. They are almost always big-bodied Bordeaux-style wines and are high in tannin. The region is also now experimenting in Pinot Noir.

Among the best vintners in Villány is József Bock, whose Cuvée Barrique (6980Ft) is a smoky, earthy special blend of Kékfrankos (Blaufränkisch), Cabernet Franc and Merlot. Other vintners to watch out for are Márton Mayer and Alajos Wunderlich, especially the latter’s Cabernet Sauvignon (3150Ft). Wines to try from this region include Attila Gere’s elegant and complex Cabernet Sauvignon (2950Ft) and his Kopár (9500Ft), a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot, as well as Ede Tiffán’s austere, tannic Kékoportó and Cabernet Franc.

### Szekszárd

Mild winters and warm, dry summers combined with favourable loess soil help Szekszárd in Southern Transdanubia to produce some of the best affordable red wines in Hungary. They are not like the big-bodied reds of Villány, but softer and less complex, with a distinctive paprika flavour, and are easy to drink. In general they are much better value. An excellent, premium-quality Szekszárd retails for 2000Ft to 3000Ft.

### THE BEST YEARS OF THEIR LIVES

**1997** Excellent year for reds across the board, but especially in Eger and Szekszárd.

**1998** Very mediocre year, except for producers of the very best reds (eg those in Villány).

**1999** Superb year; biggest vintage for both whites and reds ever.

**2000** Very hot summer raises alcohol levels in whites, impairing acids and lowering quality; excellent year for reds in Eger, Sopron, Szekszárd and Villány.

**2001** Decent year for whites in general; very good for some top-end reds (eg from Eger and Villány).

**2002** No great whites, but the reds are firm and cellar well, depending on the grower.

**2003** Very hot year, with a long, very even ripening season. The whites suffer from burned acids and preponderant alcohol; however, the reds are even more promising than in 2000 – full-bodied and big, almost with a California flair.

**2004** Inferior year throughout, with aggressive whites and thin reds.

**2005** Very wet summer is catastrophic for whites, but red-wine growers are hopeful at the time of writing (mid-September).

Two excellent sources on Hungarian wines are the richly illustrated *Terra Benedicta: Tokaj and Beyond* by Gábor Rohály et al and *The Wines of Hungary* by Alex Liddell. These books don’t just look at the wines but the whole winemaking process.

## WINE & FOOD

The pairing of food with wine is as great an obsession in Hungary as it is in, say, France. Everyone agrees that sweets like strudel go very well indeed with a glass of Tokaji Aszú, but what is less appreciated is the wonderful synergy that this wine enjoys with savoury foods like foie gras and cheeses such as Roquefort, Stilton and Gorgonzola. A bone-dry Olaszrizling from Badacsony is a superb accompaniment to any fish dish, but especially the pike-perch indigenous to nearby Lake Balaton. Villány Sauvignon Blanc is excellent with goat's cheese.

It would be a shame to 'waste' a big wine like a Vili Papa Cuvée on traditional but simple Hungarian dishes like *gulyás* or *pörkölt*; save it for a more complex or sophisticated meat dish. Try Kékfrankos or Szekszárd Kadarka with these simpler dishes. Cream-based dishes stand up well to late-harvest Furmint and pork dishes are nice with new Furmint or Kékfrankos. Try Hárslevelű with poultry.

The premier grape here is Kadarka, a late-ripening variety, which is produced in limited quantities. The best Kadarka is made by Ferenc Takler (2590Ft). Kadarka originated in the Balkans (the Bulgarian Gamza grape is a variety of it) and is a traditional ingredient in making Szekszárd Bikavér, a wine usually associated with Eger. In fact, many wine aficionados in Hungary prefer the Szekszárd variety of 'Bull's Blood'; try the Heimann 1999 variety (2750Ft) or his much praised Stílusgyakorlat Cuvée 2003 (3250Ft), which is six parts Merlot and one part Syrah, Hungary's 'newly discovered' variety of grape. The best Merlot (2350Ft) and Kékfrankos from Szekszárd is produced by Ferenc Vesztergombi, who also makes an excellent Bikavér (2970Ft). Tamás Dúzi is acknowledged to be the finest producer of Hungarian rosés; sample his tried and true (and very dry) 1999 Zweigelt.

### Badacsony

The Badacsony region is named after the 400m-high basalt massif that rises like a bread loaf from the Tapolca Basin, along the northwestern shore of Lake Balaton. Wine has been produced here for centuries and the region's Olaszrizling, especially that produced by Huba Szeremley (1850Ft), is among the best dry white wines for everyday drinking available in Hungary. Olaszrizling, a straw-blond Welschriesling high in acid that is related to the famous Rhine vintages in name only and is actually French in origin, is drunk young – in fact, the younger, the better. Szeremley's 2000 late harvest Olaszrizling (6750Ft) is almost as sweet as Tokaj.

The area's volcanic soil gives the unique Kéknyelű (Blue Stalk) wine its distinctive mineral taste; it is a complex tippie wine of very low yield that ages well. Szeremley's Kéknyelű (3300Ft) is the only reliably authentic example. A big name producer of quality white wines (eg Nagyküti Chardonnay 2003; 2550Ft) is Jásdi in the nearby Balaton wine region of Csoopak.

### Somló

The entire region of Somló is a single volcanic dome and the soil (basalt talus and volcanic tuff) helps to produce wine that is mineral-tasting, almost flinty. The region boasts two great and indigenous grape varieties: Hárslevelű and Juhfark (Sheep's Tail); the latter takes its name from the shape of its grape cluster. Firm acids give 'spine' to this wine and it reaches its peak at five years old.

Foremost among the producers of Somlói Hárslevelű and Juhfark is Béla Fekete (3390Ft). Another big name in these parts is Imre Györgyovác, whose Olaszrizling (2490Ft) is a big wine with a taste vaguely reminiscent of burnt almonds. His Hárslevelű (2490Ft) is a brilliant golden wine, with a tart, mineral flavour.

The website [www.wineportal.hu](http://www.wineportal.hu) is excellent for basic and background information on Hungarian wine. It also lists the dates and locations of wine events and blind tastings throughout the country.

## WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

An *étterem* is a restaurant with a large selection, including international dishes. A *vendéglő* or *kisvendéglő* is smaller and is supposed to serve inexpensive regional dishes or 'home cooking', but the name is now 'cute' enough for a lot of large places to use it. An *étkezde* is something like a *vendéglő* but cheaper, smaller and often with counter seating. The overused term *csárda* originally signified a country inn with a rustic atmosphere, Gypsy music and hearty local dishes. Now any place that strings dry paprikas on the wall and a couple of painted plates is one. Most restaurants offer a good-value *menü* (set menu) of two or three courses at lunch.

A *bisztró* is a much cheaper sit-down place that is often *önkiszolgáló* (self-service). A *büfé* is cheaper still with a very limited menu. Here you eat while standing at counters.

Other useful words include *élelmiszer* (grocery store), *csemege* (delicatessen) and *piac* (market).

### Quick Eats

Many *hentesáru bolt* (butchers) have a *büfé* selling boiled or fried *kolbász* (sausage), *wirsl* (frankfurters), *hurka* (blood sausage or liverwurst), roast chicken, bread and pickled vegetables. Point to what you want; the staff will weigh it all and hand you a slip of paper with the price. You usually pay at the *pénztár* (cashier) and hand the stamped receipt back to the staff for your food. Here you pay for everything, including a slice of rye bread and a dollop of mustard for your *kolbász*.

Food stalls, known as a *Laci konyha* (Larry's kitchen) or *pecsenyesütő* (roast oven), sell the same sorts of things, as well as fish when located beside lakes or rivers. One of the more popular snacks is *lángos*, deep-fried dough with various toppings (usually cheese and sour cream), available at food stalls throughout Hungary.

## VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Such a carnivorous country as Hungary is naturally suspicious of non-meat eaters. 'You don't want meat!?' we overheard a waiter snarl at an optimistic vegetarian, 'Then go to Romania!' Places around the country that serve good vegetarian meals have been listed in the regional chapters. Where there are no vegetarian restaurants, you'll have to make do with what's on the regular menu or shop for ingredients in the markets. The selection of fresh vegetables and fruit is not great in the dead of winter,

### HUNGARY'S TOP FIVE

- Halászcásárda, Szeged (p265) – the place for paprika-infused *szegedi halászlé* (Szeged-style fish soup) by the cauldron
- Kéhli, Budapest (p109) – this ancient eatery's marrow (animal) on toast is celebrated in Hungarian literature
- Kisfaludy House, Badacsony (p201) – the food (especially the fish dishes) is good and the view of Lake Balaton is spectacular
- Jégverem, Sopron (p166) – the charming 'Icehouse Pension' restaurant is known for the quality and quantity (as only Hungarians know how to dish it out) of its food
- Csülök Csárda, Esztergom (p149) – the 'Pork Knuckle Inn' serves the real McCoy and other good home cooking to both visitors and locals



but come spring and a cycle of bounty begins: from strawberries and raspberries and cherries through all the stone fruits to apples and pears and nuts. Large supermarket chains such as Kaiser's and Rothschild usually sell takeaway salads in plastic containers.

In restaurants, vegetarians can usually order *gombafejek rántva* (fried mushroom caps), pasta and noodle dishes with cheese, such as *túrós csusza* and *sztrapacska*, and an infinite variety of *főzelék*.

Other vegetarian dishes include *rántott sajt* (fried cheese), *gombaleves* (mushroom soup), *gyümölcsleves* (fruit soup) and *sajtos kenyér* (sliced bread with soft cheese). *Bableves* (bean soup) usually (but not always) contains meat. *Palacsinta* (pancakes) may be savoury and made with *sajt* (cheese) or *gomba* (mushrooms), or sweet and prepared with *dió* (nuts) or poppy seeds (*mák*).

## EAT YOUR WORDS

For pronunciation guidelines, see p394.

### Useful Phrases

#### I'm hungry/thirsty.

*Éhes/szomjas vagyok.* *ay-hesh/sawm-yosh vo-dyawk*

#### The menu, please.

*Az étlapot, kérem.* *az ayt-lo-pawt kay-rem*

#### Is there an English-language menu?

*Van angol nyelvű étlap?* *von on-gawl nyel-vëw ayt-lop*

#### What would you recommend?

*Mit ajánlana?* *mit o-yaan-lo-no*

#### I'd like a local speciality.

*Valamilyen helyi specialitást szeretnék.* *vo-lo-mi-yen he-yi shpe-tsi-o-li-taasht se-ret-nayk*

#### I'm (a) vegetarian.

*Vegetáriánus vagyok.* *ve-ge-taa-ri-aa-nush vo-dyawk*

#### Do you have vegetarian food?

*Vannak önöknél vegetáriánus ételek?* *von-nok eu-neuk-nayl ve-ge-taa-ri-aa-nush ay-te-lek*

#### I'm allergic to (nuts/peanuts).

*Allergiás vagyok a (diófélékre/mogyoróra).* *al-ler-gi-aash vo-dyawk o (di-äw-fay-layk-re/ maw-dyaw-räw-ro)*

#### Is service included in the bill?

*A kiszolgálás díja benne van a számlában?* *o ki-sawl-gaa-laash dee-ya ben-ne von o saam-laa-bon*

#### I'd like ..., please.

*Legyen szíves, hozzon egy ...* *le-dyen see-vesh hawz-zawn ej ...*

#### Another ... please.

*Még (egy) ... kérek szépen.* *mayg (ej) ... kay-rek say-pen*

#### Please bring the bill.

*Kérem, hozza a számlát.* *kay-rem hawz-zo o saam-laat*

## Menu Decoder

Restaurant menus are often translated into German and English, with mixed degrees of success. The following is a sample menu as it would appear in a 'generic' Hungarian restaurant. It's far from complete but gives a good idea of what to expect.

### ELŐÉTELEK (APPETISERS)

<i>hortobágyi palacsinta</i>	<i>hawr-taw-baa-dyi po-lo-chin-to</i>	meat-filled pancakes with paprika sauce
<i>libamájpástétom</i>	<i>lí-bo-maa-y-paash-tay-tawm</i>	goose-liver pâté
<i>rántott gombafejek</i>	<i>raan-tawtt gom-bo-fe-y-ek</i>	breaded, fried mushroom caps

### LEVESEK (SOUPS)

*csontleves* *chont-le-vesh*  
*jókai bableves* *yäw-kai bob-le-vesh*  
*meggyleves* *mejji-le-vesh*

*tyúkhúsleves* *tyük-hüsh-le-vesh*

consommé  
 bean soup with meat  
 cold sour-cherry soup  
 (in summer)  
 chicken soup with carrot, kohlrabi, parsley and celery roots

### SALÁTÁK (SALADS)

*cékla saláta* *tsay-klo sho-laa-to*  
*ecetes alma paprika* *e-tse-tesh ol-mo pop-ri-ko*  
*paradicsom saláta* *po-ro-di-chawm sho-laa-to*  
*uborka saláta* *u-bawr-ko sho-laa-to*  
*vegyes saláta* *ve-dyesh sho-laa-to*

pickled beetroot salad  
 pickled (apple) peppers  
 tomato salad  
 sliced pickled-cucumber salad  
 mixed salad of pickles

### KÖRETEK (SIDE DISHES)

*rizi-bizi* *ri-zi-bi-zi*  
*sült hasáburger* *shewlt ho-saa-bur-gon'*

rice with peas  
 chips (French fries)

### KÉSZÉTELEK (READY-MADE DISHES)

*csirke paprikás* *chir-ke pap-ri-kaash*  
*(marha)pörkölt* *(mor-ho)-peur-keult*  
*töltött paprika/Káposzta* *teul-teutt pap-ri-ko/kaa-paws-to*

chicken paprika  
 (beef) stew (many types)  
 stuffed peppers/cabbage

### FRISSENSÜLTEK (DISHES MADE TO ORDER)

*borjú bécsiszelet* *bawr-yü bay-chi se-let*  
*brassói aprópecsenye* *bra-shäwy a-präw pe-che-nye*  
 *cigánypecsenye* *tsi gawn-y-pe-che-nye*  
*csülök* *chew-leuk*  
*hagymás rostélyos* *hoj-maash rawsh-tay-yawsh*  
*rántott hátszínselet* *raan-tawtt haat-seen-se-let*  
*rántott pulykamell* *raan-tawtt pu-y-ko-mell*  
*sertésborda* *sher-taysh-bawr-do*  
*sült csirkemomb* *shewlt chir-ke-tsawmb*  
*sült libacomb* *shewlt li-bo-tsawmb*

Wiener schnitzel  
 braised pork Braşov-style  
 roast pork Gypsy-style  
 smoked pork knuckle  
 beef sirloin fried with onions  
 breaded, fried rump steak  
 breaded, fried turkey breast  
 pork chop  
 roast chicken thigh  
 roast goose leg

### ÉDESSÉGEK (DESSERTS)

*Dobostorta* *daw-bawsh-tawr-to*  
  
*Gundel palacsinta* *gun-del po-lo-chin-to*  
  
*rétes* *ray-tesh*  
*somlói galuska* *shawm-läw-i go-lush-ko*

multilayered 'Dobos' chocolate and cream cake with caramelised brown sugar top  
 'Gundel' flambéed pancake with chocolate and nuts  
 strudel  
 Somló-style sponge cake with chocolate and whipped cream

## Food Glossary

### BASICS

*bors* *bawrsh*  
*cukor* *tsu-kawr*  
*cukorral/cukor nélkül* *tsu-kawr-ol/tsu-kawr nayl-kewl*  
*ennivaló* *en-ni-vo-law*  
*étel* *ay-tel*  
*étlap* *ayt-lop*  
*gyümölcs* *dyew-meulch*

pepper  
 sugar  
 with/without sugar  
 food  
 dish  
 menu  
 fruit

*hús*  
jéggel/jég nélkül  
meleg/forró/hideg  
sajt  
só  
tojás  
vaj  
zöldség

**MEAT & FISH**

*borjúhús*  
csirke  
disznóhús  
hal  
hús  
marhahús  
pulyka

**VEGETABLES**

*gomba*  
káposzta  
karfiol  
sárgarépa  
spenót  
zöldbab  
zöldborsó

**FRUIT**

*alma*  
banán  
cseresznye  
(földi)eper  
körte  
meggy  
narancs  
őszibarack  
sárgabarack  
szőlő

**NONALCOHOLIC DRINKS**

*almalé*  
ásvány víz  
gyümölcslé  
narancslé  
üdítőital  
tej  
víz

**BEER & SPIRITS**

*barackpálinka*  
barna sör  
fél barna sör  
korsó sör  
pohár sör  
sör

*hűsh*  
yay-gel/yayg nayl-kewl  
me-leg/fawr-rāv/hi-deg  
sho-y-t  
shāw  
taw-yaash  
vo-y  
zeuld-shayg

*bawr-yü-hűsh*  
chir-ke  
dis-nāv-hűsh  
hol  
hűsh  
mor-ho-hűsh  
pu-y-ko

*gawm-bo*  
kaa-paws-to  
kor-fi-awl  
shaar-go-ray-po  
shpe-nāwt  
zeuld-bob  
zeuld-bawr-shāw

*ol-mo*  
bo-naan  
che-res-nye  
(feul-di)-e-per  
keur-te  
mejj  
no-ronch  
ēū-si-bo-rotsk  
shaar-go-bo-rotsk  
sēū-lēū

*ol-mo-lay*  
aash-vaan'-veez  
dyew-meulch lay  
no-ronch-lay  
ew-dee-tēū-i-tal  
te-y  
veez

bo-rotsk-paa-lin-ko  
bor-no sheur  
fayl bor-no sheur  
kaw-shāw sheur  
paw-haar sheur  
sheur

meat  
with/without ice  
warm/hot/cold  
cheese  
salt  
egg  
butter  
vegetables

veal  
chicken  
pork  
fish  
meat  
beef  
turkey

mushroom  
cabbage  
cauliflower  
carrot  
spinach  
string (green) bean  
pea

apple  
banana  
(sweet) cherry  
strawberry  
pear  
sour (Morello) cherry  
orange  
peach  
apricot  
grape

apple juice  
mineral water  
fruit juice  
orange juice  
soft drink  
milk  
water

apricot brandy  
dark beer/stout  
dark lager  
mug (half litre) of beer  
glass (one-third litre) of beer  
beer

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