

Northern Uplands



If the Great Plain is the 'Midwest' of Hungary, then the Northern Uplands (Északi Felföld) are the Rockies. But before your imagination runs wild with dreams of soaring, snow-tipped peaks and hiking trails through untamed wilderness, take a deep breath and note that the highest peak here – the Kékes in the Mátra Hills – 'soars' to just over 1000m. But in a country as flat as a tone-deaf soprano, these foothills of the Carpathians stand head and shoulders above most of Hungary in the environmental and recreational stakes.

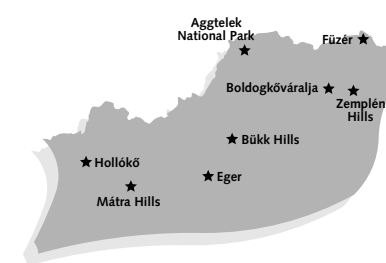
For starters, several hills are heavily forested and have minimal human habitation (although accommodation is readily available), creating hiking opportunities. A large part of the lower slopes are given over to grape growing, and some of Hungary's best wines – particularly in the Tokaj region – are made here. In the northern reaches of the Uplands at Aggtelek are the Baradla-Domica caves, Europe's largest stalactite system with 25km of interlinking caves.

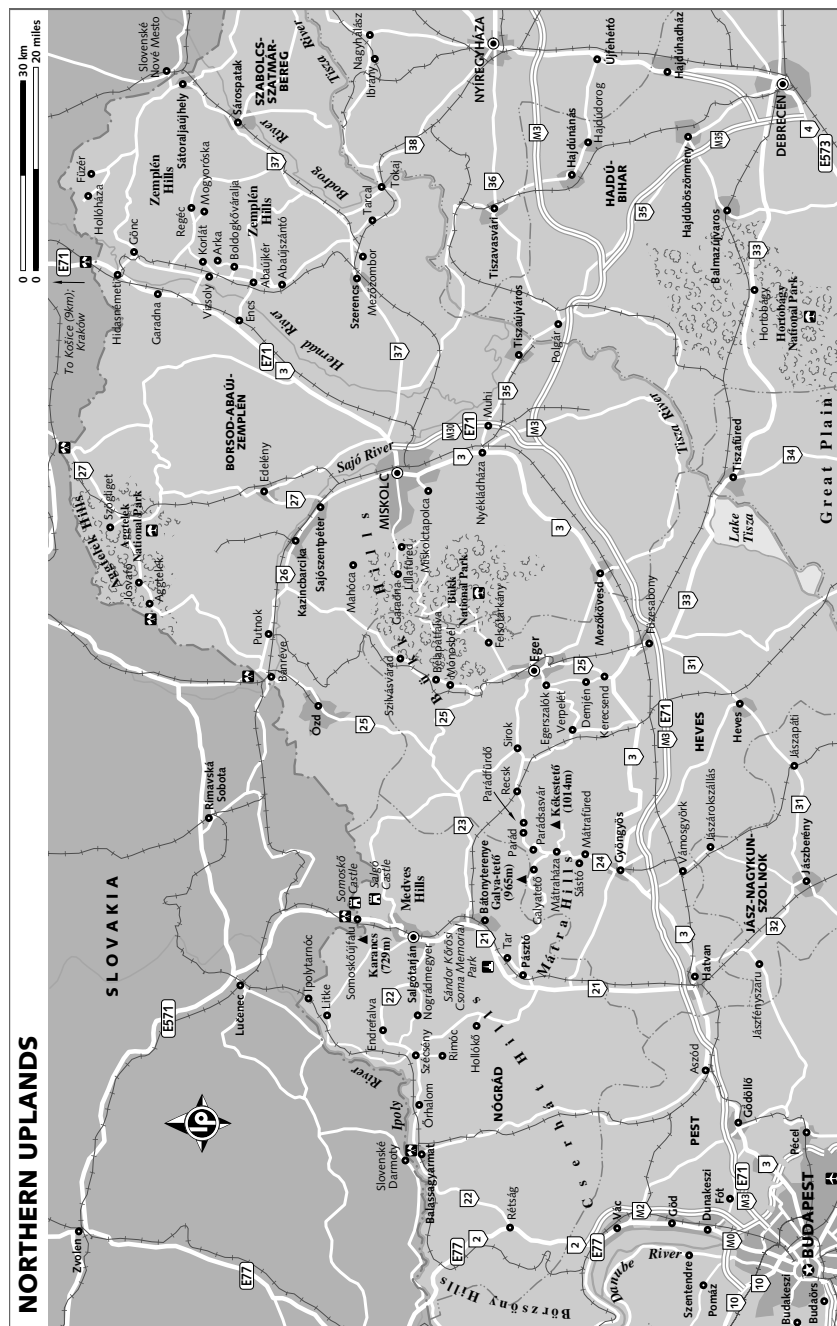
But it's not all about nature. This is a land where far too many battles were won and lost, and their reminders – aging castles and evocative ruins – sprinkle the landscape like hundreds-and-thousands on a birthday cake. Eger, a city in constant battle with Pécs for provincial Hungary's 'Best in Show' ribbon, will wow even the most hardened traveller with its Bull's Blood wine, baroque architecture and laid-back feel. The last vestiges of traditional folk life are found here, especially among the Palóc people of the Cserhát Hills and the Matyó of Mezőkövesd.

The Northern Uplands include five ranges: the Cserhát, the Mátra, the Bükk, the Aggtelek (in reality, an adjunct to the eastern Cserhát region) and the Zemplén.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Visiting castles, castles, and more castles – from Füzér's lonely edifice, **Füzér Castle** (p353), to Boldogkőváralja's strong defender, **Boldogkő Castle** (p344)
- Exploring **Eger** (p327), a town of legendary wine, baroque architecture and easy-going temperament
- Hiking through the lush green forests of the **Zemplén** (p344), **Mátra** (p322) and **Bükk Hills** (p327)
- Wandering through **Hollókő** (p317), a tiny village where folk tradition is very much alive and still kicking up its heels
- Spelunking in **Aggtelek National Park** (p342), home to Europe's largest stalactite caves





CSERHÁT HILLS

The Cserhát Hills are a rather unimpressive entry to the Northern Uplands; none of them are higher than 650m, much of the area is cultivated and densely populated, and Hungary's serious hiking options are further to the east. But while they may not be graced with soaring peaks and dense forests, they are cloaked in a rich folk-culture tapestry belonging to the Palóc people. Hollókő, a tiny village snuggled into a remote valley, may for some be Hungary's folk 'Disneyland', but there's no denying the beauty of its quaint cottages and old ways. To the west is Balassagyarmat (a mouthful in its own right), home to the best museum of Palóc culture the country has to offer.

BALASSAGYARMAT

☎ 35 / pop 18,500

As the centre of the Cserhát region, Balassagyarmat bills itself as the 'capital of the Palóc' and, while other places may look more folksy, the town's excellent Palóc Museum gives it the leading edge. Lying just south of the Ipoly River and the Slovakian border, Balassagyarmat suffered more than most towns in the region during the Turkish occupation. Its castle was reduced to rubble and its houses were abandoned for decades. It regained stature late in the 18th century as the main seat of Nógrád County, but even that was taken away after WWII in favour of the 'new town' of Salgótarján. Today Balassagyarmat's few baroque and neoclassical buildings and the odd monument don't pull in the crowds; it's the town's link with Palóc culture that beckons.

Orientation

The train station is about 600m south of the town centre at the end of Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca. The bus station is behind the town hall on Köztársaság tér, which splits Rákóczi fejedelem útja, the main drag, in two.

Information

Library (☎ 300 622; Rákóczi fejedelem útja 50; per hr 100Ft; ☎ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 1-5pm Sat) Has Internet access.

OTP bank (Rákóczi fejedelem útja 44) Has a secure 24-hour ATM.

Post office (Rákóczi fejedelem útja 24) On the main drag, near the Roman Catholic church.

Tourinform (☎ 500 640; balassagyarmat@tourinform.hu; Köztársaság tér 6; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep-mid-Jun) Housed in the old county hall.

Sights

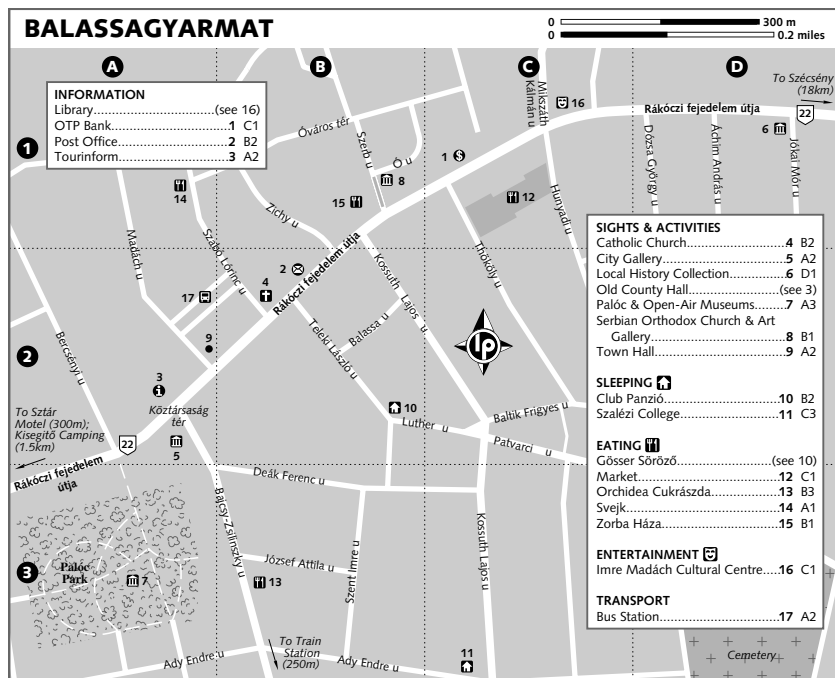
The **Palóc Museum** (☎ 300 168; Palóc liget 1; adult/child 500/250Ft; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Sat Oct-Apr) in Palóc Park (a lovely green space of mature trees and grassy corners, and perfect for a picnic) was purpose-built in 1914 to house Hungary's richest collection of Palóc artefacts and is a must for anyone planning to visit traditional villages in the Cserhát Hills.

The standing exhibit 'From Cradle to Grave' on the 1st floor takes you through the important stages in the life of the Palóc people, and includes pottery, superb carvings, mock-ups of a birth scene, a classroom and a wedding. There are also votive objects used for the all-important *búcsúk* (church patronal festivals; see p290). But the Palóc women's needlework – from the distinctive floral embroidery in blues and reds to the almost microscopic white-on-white stitching – leaves everything else in the dust.

An **open-air museum** (adult/child 300/150Ft; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun May-Sep), including an 18th-century Palóc-style house, stable and church, stands in the garden behind the main museum.

THE GOOD PALÓC PEOPLE

The Palóc people are a distinct Hungarian group living in the fertile hills and valleys of the Cserhát Hills (Cserhátalja). Ethnologists are still debating whether they were a separate people who later mixed with the Magyars, or a Hungarian ethnic group that, through isolation and Slovakian influence, developed its own ways. What's certain is that the Palóc continue to speak a distinct dialect of Hungarian (unusual in a country where language differences are virtually nonexistent) and, until recently, clung to their traditional folk dress, particularly in such towns as Hollókő, Bugac, Rimóc and Órhalom. Today, with the Matyó people of Mezőkövesd, they are considered the guardians of living folk traditions in Hungary.



OTHER SIGHTS

The **City Gallery** (Városi Képtár; ☎ 300 186; Köztársaság tér 5; adult/child 150/100Ft; ☎ 10am-noon & 12.30-5pm Tue-Sun), housed in a very run-down building opposite the old county hall, is devoted to contemporary Nógrád painters, sculptors and graphic artists from the 1960s onward, and is worth a look around.

The **Local History Collection** (Helytörténeti Gyűjtemény; ☎ 300 663; Rákóczi fejedelem útja 107; admission free; ☎ 8am-4.30pm), in an 18th-century noble's mansion called Csillagház (Star House), honours more locals, including the artist Endre Horváth, who lived here and designed some of the forint notes in circulation.

The cute and amazingly tiny **Serbian Orthodox church** (Szerb templom; ☎ 300 622; Szerb utca 5; admission free; ☎ 2-6pm Tue-Sun), which you can enter through an archway at Rákóczi fejedelem útja 30, features temporary exhibitions from local artists.

Sleeping

Club Panzió (☎ 301 824; nyirjes@axelero.hu; Teleki László utca 14; r 10,000Ft, apt for 4 people with kitchen 20,000Ft; P) Of Balassagyarmat's meagre

accommodation options, Club is the best and most central. Rooms are in OK condition, but could do with a spruce up.

Sztár Motel (☎ 301 152; Kővári út 12; r 5500Ft; P) Sztár is a mediocre place to the west of the town centre, but it does have the added advantage of a restaurant on the premises.

Szalézi College (☎ 301 765; szalezikollegium@free mail.hu; Ady Endre utca 1; dm 2000Ft; P) With 50 rooms and not a lot going on over the summer break in town, you'll be guaranteed of a bed at this basic student dorm between mid-June and August.

Kisegítő Camping (☎ 300 404; Kővári út 13; camp sites per adult/child/tent 700/350/700Ft, cabins 3000Ft; ☎ mid-Jun-Aug; P) This small and simple camp site, with tent sites and three small cabins, is on the main road leading west out of town.

Eating

Svejk (☎ 300 999; Szabó Lőrinc utca 16; mains around 1000Ft) With the Slovakian border so close, it's surprising there aren't more restaurants like Svejk serving Czech and Slovakian dishes. The large covered inner courtyard is made for sampling a proper Budvar.

Zorba Háza (☎ 315 976; Rákóczi fejedelem útja 28; mains 600-1000Ft; ☎ 10am-midnight Mon-Sat, 2-11pm Sun) Housed in a small shopping centre away from loud Rákóczi fejedelem útja, Zorba serves a mix of Greek and Italian food in blue-and-white surroundings.

Orchidea Cukrászda (☎ 311 450; Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca 12; ice cream 90Ft; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-7pm Sat & Sun) Opposite Palóc Park, this place makes such excellent ice cream and cakes that locals cross town to pick up the goodies.

Gösser Söröző (lunch menu 500Ft, mains around 1000Ft) This place at Club Panzió is not overly inviting, but it does serve solid Hungarian fare.

Market (Thököly utca) The town's large market has plenty of food stalls and stand-up places to eat.

Entertainment

Imre Madách Cultural Centre (☎ 300 622; Rákóczi fejedelem útja 50; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 1-8pm Sat & Sun) This is the place to find out what's on.

Also check out the free biweekly *Nógrádi Est* magazine, which includes coverage of Balassagyarmat.

Getting There & Away

Some 12 daily buses link Budapest with Balassagyarmat via Vác (968Ft, 1¼ hours, 76km). There is one daily bus to Gyöngyös (907Ft, 2¼ hours, 72km), and plenty to Salgótarján via Litke or Endrefalva (665Ft, 1¼ hours, 52km). Nine buses go daily to Szécsény on Monday to Friday and three or four daily on the weekend (241Ft, 25 minutes, 18km); Szécsény is the place to change for Hollókő. There are three buses daily Monday to Saturday to Hont (363Ft, 50 minutes, 28km) on the Slovakian border at 6am, 11.50am and 4.50pm.

Balassagyarmat can be reached throughout the day via a snaking train line from Vác (658Ft). The trip takes over two hours; the bus will cut that time in half. If coming from Budapest (1212Ft, 2½ hours, 110km) or the east by train, change at Aszód.

SZÉCSÉNY

☎ 32 / pop 6600

Just 18km east of Balassagyarmat in the picturesque Ipoly Valley, Szécsény is a town bordering on comatose and usually given a miss by travellers headed for its tiny, but much better-known, neighbour to the

southeast, Hollókő. But while Hollókő has folklore, Szécsény has history. In 1705, in a camp behind where Forgách Manor now stands, the ruling diet made Ferenc Rákóczi II of Transylvania the prince of Hungary and the commander in chief of the *kuruc* (anti-Habsburg mercenaries) fighting for independence from the Austrians.

Orientation

The train station is about 1.5km north of the town centre just off Rákóczi út en route to Litke. The bus station is on Király utca, east of the firewatch tower on Fő tér.

Information

Tourinform (☎ 370 777; szecseny@tourinform.hu; Ady Endre utca 12; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri Jun-Sep, 8am-4pm Mon-Fri Oct-May) has an office in the same building as the cultural centre. The **OTP bank** (Rákóczi út 86) is northwest of the town hall, and the **post office** (Dugonics utca 1) is to the south of the OTP bank.

Sights

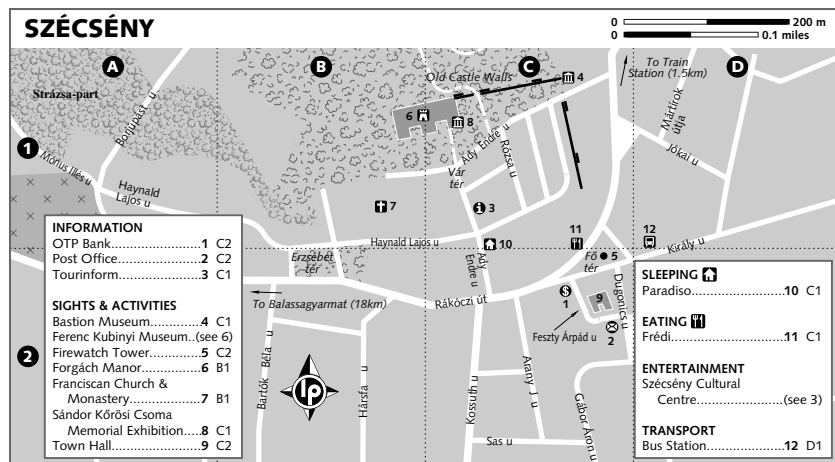
FORGÁCH MANOR & MUSEUMS

Forgách Manor (Ady Endre utca 7) was constructed around 1760 from the remains of a medieval border fortress. In the mid-19th century it passed into the hands of the aristocratic Forgách family, who made further additions, and today it houses a motley assortment of exhibits, such as the **Ferenc Kubinyi Museum** (☎ 370 143; adult/child 300/150Ft; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun).

On the ground floor there's a pharmaceutical exhibit, as well as a few rooms done up much the way the Forgách family would have liked to see them. Upstairs, beyond the Stone Age bones and chips, the reconstructed Neolithic house and the Bronze Age jewellery, is a ghastly hunting exhibit, with any number of 'useful' items (napkin rings, cups, pistol butts, umbrella handles) carved and whittled from the carcasses and coats of our furred and feathered friends.

Only a little less frightening is the **Bastion Museum** (Bástya Múzeum) located in the north-east tower, from where part of the original 16th-century castle wall is seen to the west and south. Exhibits include an all-too-complete collection of torture implements: racks, yokes, stocks and a flogging bench.

Those of a nervous disposition will seek refuge in the **Sándor Körösi Csoma Memorial**



Exhibition (Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Emlékiállítás) in the manor's gate house. Kőrösi Csoma (1784–1842) was a Hungarian Franciscan monk who travelled to Tibet and wrote the first Tibetan-English dictionary.

FRANCISCAN CHURCH & MONASTERY

Parts of the Gothic **Franciscan church and monastery** (Ferenccs templom és kolostor; ☎ 370 076; Haynald Lajos utca 7-9; adult/child 300/150Ft) date from the 14th century, and the latter has been restored to its former glory after years of neglect. In the church sanctuary (the oldest section) a guide will point out the 500-year-old carvings of saints, flowers and fruits on the vaulted ceiling (the carvings on the pillars were destroyed by the Turks when they occupied Szécsény in 1552). You can also see where Muslims carved out a mihrab (prayer niche) in the south wall.

In the baroque monastery (essentially dating from the 17th century, with parts of the Gothic church incorporated into it), you'll see the monks' cells and, depending on what's open, the library, dining hall, Gothic oratory overlooking the church's interior, and/or the Rákóczi Room, where the newly appointed prince and military commander met with his war cabinet in 1705. Tours of the church and monastery depart at 10am, 11am, 1pm, 2pm, 3pm and 4pm Tuesday to Saturday.

FIREWATCH TOWER

You may think you're seeing things but, yes, the 19th-century **firewatch tower** (tűztorony);

Rákóczi út 86; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr), on Fő tér in the centre of town, is leaning (by three degrees) – the result of shelling and bombing in 1944, and clay subsidence. You can climb to the top for views of the town.

Sleeping & Eating

Paradiso (☎ 372 427; Ady Endre utca 14; s/d 5500/8300Ft; mains 900-1800Ft; ☎ restaurant Mon-Sat; (P)) Paradiso, with its welcoming staff and comfortable and spacious – if uninspiring – rooms, is the best bet in town. Its restaurant is quite good, serves local specialities and has outside seating in a lovely courtyard with a fountain. The complex is the former servants' quarters of Forgách Manor.

Frédi (☎ 370 372; Rákóczi út 85; pizza & mains 500-1100Ft) This is a decent restaurant and *cukrászda* (cake shop); specialities are all meat-based, and its attractive garden overlooks Fő tér.

Entertainment

The staff at the **Szécsény Cultural Centre** (Szécsényi Művelődési Központ; ☎ 370 494; Ady Endre utca 12) may have information on what's on in Szécsény; otherwise, consult the free biweekly *Nógrádi Est* magazine which includes Szécsény.

Getting There & Away

Some seven buses depart daily for Hollókő on Monday to Friday (241Ft, 30 minutes, 17km), with up to nine on Saturday and five

on Sunday. You shouldn't have to wait more than a half-hour for buses to Balassagyarmat (241Ft, 25 minutes, 18km) or Salgótarján (with a possible change for the latter at Litke, Endrefalva or Nógrádmegyér; 423Ft, one hour, 34km). There are seven daily buses to Budapest (1150Ft, two hours, 94km).

Szécsény is on a minor train line linking it with Balassagyarmat (182Ft, 30 minutes, 19km) and Aszód to the west and southwest, and Ipolytarnóc to the north on the Slovakian border, where you can board trains for Lučenec. To get to Vác (890Ft, three to four hours, 89km) from Szécsény by train, you must change at Balassagyarmat.

HOLLÓKŐ

☎ 32 / pop 375

People either love Hollókő (Raven Rock) or they hate it. To some, the two-street village nestling in a valley 16km southeast of Szécsény is Hungary's most beautiful, and deserves kudos for holding on to its traditional architecture and a few old customs. Others see it as a staged tourist trap run by Budapest entrepreneurs with paid 'performers'. Unesco agreed with the former view in 1987 when it put Hollókő on its World Heritage List of cultural sites – the first village in the world to receive such an honour. What sets Hollókő apart is its restored 13th-century castle and the architecture of the so-called Old Village (Ófalu), where some 60 houses and outbuildings have been listed as historic monuments.

The village has burned to the ground many times since the 13th century (most recently in 1909), but the villagers have always rebuilt their houses exactly to plan

with wattle and daub – interwoven twigs plastered with clay and water.

Today few women wear the traditional Palóc dress – wide, red-and-blue, pleated and embroidered skirts, and ornate headpieces. Still, on Sunday mornings, important feast days, such as Easter and Assumption Day (15 August), or during a wedding, you may get lucky and catch some in fancy garb.

Orientation

The bus will stop on Dózsa György utca at the top of Kossuth Lajos utca; from there walk down the hill to the Old Village.

Information

The **post office** (Kossuth Lajos utca 72; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) will provide cash advances on credit cards, and **Tourinform** (☎ 579 011; holloko@tourinform.hu; Kossuth Lajos utca 68; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun May-Sep, 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat & Sun Sep-May) can supply as much information as you need about Hollókő. For general information on the town, see www.holloko.hu/.

Sights

The Old Village's **folk architecture** is its main attraction. Stroll along the two cobblestone streets, past the whitewashed houses with carved wooden gables and porches and red-tiled roofs. Wine is stored in the small cellars that open onto the streets.

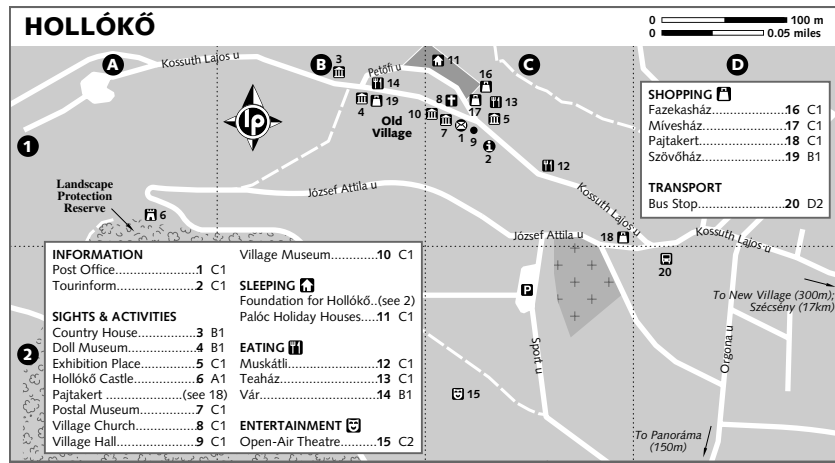
VILLAGE CHURCH

A little wooden **church** (Kossuth Lajos utca), the focus of the village's spiritual and social life, is on the corner where Petőfi utca, the Old Village's 'other' street, branches off from Kossuth Lajos utca. Built as a granary in the

IPOLYTARNÓC PRESERVE

Squeezed between the Ipoly River and the Slovakian border, some 25km northwest of Salgótarján, is the town of Ipolytarnóc and its unusual **preserve** (☎ 32-454 113; adult/child 500/350Ft; ☎ 9am-4pm Apr-Oct, 9am-3pm Nov-Mar). Graciously nicknamed 'ancient Pompeii' by all and sundry, the preserve is home to prehistoric finds dating back 20 million years. It seems that around this time a volcano decided to blow its top, and the subsequent lava flows and ash fall sealed for all prosperity animal footprints, subtropical trees and leaves, and even shark teeth. While many other such fossilised remains are located across the continent, Ipolytarnóc is particularly celebrated for its diversity of flora and fauna; there are an impressive 5000 leaf prints and 2000 animal footprints (including those of an ancient rhinoceros). It is widely believed that the area was once the site of a river flowing into a tropical sea. Tours of the preserve depart every hour on the half-hour.

Ipolytarnóc is best reached by train from Balassagyarmat (430Ft, 1¼ hours, 41km) or Szécsény (264Ft, 39 minutes, 22km, up to 10 daily).



16th century and sanctified in 1889, it is a fairly austere affair both inside and out, and like most churches throughout the country, a locked gate bars entry to the main nave.

MUSEUMS

Five small museums in traditional houses line Kossuth Lajos utca. The **Postal Museum** (Postamúzeum; ☎ 379 288; Kossuth Lajos utca 80; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct) is a branch of the one in Budapest. Next door, the **Village Museum** (Falumúzeum; ☎ 379 258; Kossuth Lajos utca 82; adult/child 150/100Ft; ☎ 10am-4pm Apr-Oct) is the usual three-room Hungarian setup, with folk pottery, painted furniture, embroidered pillows and, in the back yard, an interesting carved wine press dating from 1872. A nature exhibition at the **Country House** (Tájház; ☎ 06 30 529 6439; Kossuth Lajos utca 99-100; adult/child 250/150Ft; ☎ 10am-4pm) deals with the flora, fauna and human inhabitants of the Eastern Cserhát Landscape Protection Reserve, part of which surrounds the village.

The **Exhibition Place** (Kiállítóhely; ☎ 370 547; Kossuth Lajos utca 79; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) spotlights the work of a local master woodcarver and a photographer. The **Doll Museum** (Babamúzeum; ☎ 379 088; Kossuth Lajos utca 96; adult/child 150/100Ft; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) exhibits some 200 porcelain dolls in traditional dress.

HOLLÓKŐ CASTLE

On Szár-hegy (Stalk Hill), **Hollókő Castle** (Hollókői Vár; ☎ 06 30 968 1739; adult/child 400/200Ft;

☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct) can be reached by following the trail up the hill across from the Country House or from the bus stop by walking up to József Attila utca and then following the west-bound trail from the car park. At 365m, the castle has a commanding view of the surrounding hills.

The castle was built at the end of the 13th century and strengthened 200 years later. It was captured by the Turks and not liberated until 1683 by the Polish king Jan Sobieski (r 1674-96). It was partially destroyed after the War of Independence early in the 18th century but is, in fact, one of northern Hungary's most intact fortresses. The views from the top of the pentagonal keep, across fields and forested hills without a trace of human occupation, are stunning.

Activities

Pajtakert (☎ 379 273; www.hollokotourism.hu; Kossuth Lajos utca 46; ☎ 9am-4pm Apr-Sep, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar), based in the shop and gallery of the same name, can organise **folk-craft lessons**, such as weaving, woodcarving, pottery and egg painting; while lessons are for groups only, you may be able to tag along if you're at the right place at the right time. There are some gentle **walks** into the hills and valleys of the 140-hectare landscape protection reserve to the west and south of the castle. A **Cserhát**, the 1:60,000 Cserhát map (No 8; 800Ft) from Cartographia, will help you plan your route.

Festivals & Events

Hollókő marks its calendar red for the annual **Easter Festival** in late March or April, the **Nógrád Folklore Festival** and **Palóc Home-spun Festival** held at the open-air theatre in July, and the **Castle Days**, a touristy medieval tournament at the castle in late June, August and September.

Sleeping

Hollókő is a day-trippers village, and after the last tour bus leaves you'll have the place to yourself. This, of course, has its advantages and disadvantages; you'll have a supremely restful night, but don't count on food being served after 8pm.

Tourinform can organise private rooms (from 3000Ft per person), but it's not the norm.

Panoráma (☎ 378 077; Orgona utca 31; camp sites per person/tent/car 500/450/200Ft, r 5000Ft, bungalows 6000Ft; (P)) On the hill off Sport utca south of the village, this holiday complex has a small *pen-sion*, four-bed bungalows and a camp site. There is a campfire area set up for outdoor feasts, and good views of the village.

Eating

Vár (☎ 379 029; Kossuth Lajos utca 93-95; mains 1500-2000Ft; ☎ 11am-8pm) This is one of the few places to eat in Hollókő (remember it closes early). It serves venison specialities in season, and has a shady courtyard.

Muskátli (☎ 379 262; Kossuth Lajos utca 61; mains 1000-2000Ft; ☎ 11am-5pm Wed-Fri & Sun, 11am-6pm Sat) Housed in a traditional cottage, Muskátli

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Palóc Holiday Houses (☎ 579 010; holokozal@mail.datanet.hu; houses around 8000Ft; (P)) Throughout the village some 17 traditional houses (the largest concentration is along Petőfi utca), which could easily double as folk museums, are available for rent throughout the year. They're basically squat cottages, with whitewashed walls, traditional furniture with beds wide enough to lose your partner in, wood-beamed ceilings and small gardens.

Rental can be arranged through the Foundation for Hollókő (book ahead in the high season), which shares the same building and opening hours as Tourinform.

is more like a coffee shop that serves full meals. It frequently caters to groups.

Teaház (Teahouse; ☎ 380 016; Petőfi utca 4; cakes 400Ft) This little place tucked away off Petőfi utca is good for snacks during the daytime, and has a small wine bar in its cellar.

Shopping

Hollókő is a shopper's paradise for Hungarian folk art. Shops generally only open from 10am to 5pm unless there is a bus load of tourists expected.

Szövőház (Loom House; ☎ 379 273; Kossuth Lajos utca 94) This is a good place for hand-woven and embroidered goods. It's interesting to watch the women demonstrate how their enormous loom works, and you can give it a go yourself (adult/child 150/100Ft).

Művesház (Craft House; ☎ 380 016; Petőfi utca 4) This artisans' workshop is an excellent place to admire and buy Palóc folk dress and costumes.

Fazekasház (Pottery House; ☎ 379 252; Petőfi utca 6) Folk-art pottery – and colourful nontraditional pieces – in the shape of hand-thrown vases, jugs, candlesticks and decorative items are all available here.

Pajtakert (☎ 379 273; www.hollokotourism.hu; Kossuth Lajos utca 46; ☎ 9am-4pm Apr-Sep, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar) The decorated *mézeskalács* (honey cakes) on sale make great gifts.

Getting There & Away

Szécsény is the gateway to Hollókő, with some buses heading there twice an hour (241Ft, 30 minutes, 17km, up to 20 daily) Monday to Friday; there are 17 buses on Saturday and nine on Sunday. You can also catch one of about six weekday buses (five on Saturday, four on Sunday) to Salgótarján via Pásztó (605Ft, 1½ hours, 50km).

SALGÓTARJÁN

☎ 32 / pop 45,000

After an idyllic day in Hollókő or any of the rural villages of the Cserhát, arriving in the modern city of Salgótarján, 25km east of Szécsény, is like stepping into a cold shower. This is a town where the communist's idealism of architecture lives on, and a place to see its sharp corners and strong lines first hand. Ravaged by fire in 1821 and by serious flooding 70 years later, Salgótarján can boast almost no buildings that predate last century.

The surrounding Medves Hills have been mined for coal since the 19th century, and it's on this that Salgótarján's success is based. As in Miskolc, the Communists found the coal miners and steelworkers here sympathetic to their cause, and were supported both during the Republic of Councils and after WWII (though this didn't stop the dreaded ÁVH secret police from shooting over 100 citizens here during the 1956 Uprising). For its support, Salgótarján was made the county seat in 1950 and rebuilt throughout the 1960s.

Orientation

Because it has virtually swallowed the village of Somoskőújfalú some 10km to the north, Salgótarján feels like a large city. The train and bus stations are a short distance apart to the southwest of the city centre.

Information

Ibusz (☎ 421 200; Fő tér 6)

OTP bank (Rákóczi út 12) Below the Catholic church.

The second branch is on Rákóczi út 22.

Post office (Fő tér 1) Located closer to the end of Klapka György tér, despite its official address.

Tourinform (☎ 512 315; salgotarjan@tourinform.hu; Fő tér 5; ☎ 9am-6pm mid-Jun-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat & Sun Oct-mid-Jun) In the same building as the Attila József Cultural Centre, the staff are helpful and friendly, and can provide information on the surrounding area.

Sights

The **Mining Museum** (Bányászati Múzeum; ☎ 420 258; Zemlinszky Rezső utca 1; adult/child 400/200Ft;

☎ 9am-3pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-2pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar), the city's only real sight, is a short walk southwest of the train and bus stations. Filled with geological maps and samples, old uniforms and a statue of St Barbara (the patron of miners) standing proudly next to old communist banners calling for the nationalisation of the mines, the museum's style is somewhat outdated and is not particularly interesting. Across the street a 280m-long **mine** continues to be 'worked' by performers in unrealistically clean overalls; you can wander through the pits.

Aside from the museum, the city's attractions amount to a plethora of communist architecture, if you can call that an attraction. The **Town Hall** is a particular marvel, which closely resembles a Spam can, but at least it has curves. Salgótarján is also one of the few cities in Hungary that still has **socialist monuments** prominently displayed, and both of these monuments are in Fő tér; Budapest put its own collection in the 'zoo' that is Statue Park (p127) years ago. The monument to the west of the square depicts a supporter of Béla Kun's 1919 Republic of Councils running with a rifle in hand; the other, to the east, in front of the cultural centre, shows a couple of socialist youths looking rather guilty as they set doves free.

Festivals & Events

Dixie jams resound off Salgótarján's communist façades during the **International Dixie-land Festival** held in May.

Sleeping

There's no real need to overnight in Salgótarján unless you're stuck without any options. Aside from the hotels listed here, Tourinform has a list of rural accommodation that may be more appealing. For private rooms (from 5000Ft) in one of the city's many high-rises, contact Ibusz.

Galcsik (☎ 422 660; www.galcsikhotel.hu; Alkotmány út 2; s 3380-7900Ft, d 5280-10,900Ft; (P)) Galcsik is a well-maintained *pension*, with bright rooms and sparkling bathrooms. Near the bus station, it's the best deal in the city centre.

Hotel Tó-Strand (☎ 432 400; tó-strand; s/d 5480/7990Ft; (P)) Next to a small fishing pond north of the city is this modern hotel, with comfortable if not spartan rooms, a restaurant and sauna (1300Ft) for guest use.

Tó-Strand Camping (☎ 430 168; Kemping út; camp sites per person/tent 600/750Ft, bungalows per person 1200Ft, heated motel r 4300Ft, unheated motel r 3200Ft; (P)) About 5km northeast of the city centre, off the road to Somoskő, is this green oasis in a sea of characterless buildings. Aside from the shaded tent sites, there are two year-round motels, and bungalows that are available from April to September. Pools, tennis courts and a boating lake are nearby. You can reach Tó-Strand on bus 46 or 63 from Rákóczi út.

Eating

Galcsik (☎ 422 660; Alkotmány út 2; mains around 1000Ft; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Sat, 7am-8pm Sun) At the *pension* of the same name, this small restaurant has a solid Hungarian menu and a terrace for warm summer days.

Czikora (CZ) (☎ 311 384; Fő tér 1; mains 690-980Ft; ☎ 7.30am-9pm Mon-Sat) Almost directly opposite the cultural centre is CZZ, a simple eatery with outdoor seating in a shady spot.

Godó Cukrárszda (☎ 416 068; Rákóczi út 12; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-9pm Sun) For cake and ice cream just north of Fő tér, join the queues at Godó and then plonk yourself down on its terrace to enjoy the summer treat.

Yellow (☎ 310 480; Rákóczi út 11; pizza 380-700Ft; ☎ 8.30am-midnight Mon-Fri, 9.30am-midnight Sat) An unimaginative pizzeria in an ugly square block, but if you don't fancy Hungarian, there isn't any other choice.

Entertainment

Attila József Cultural Centre (☎ 310 503; Fő tér 5; ☎ 8am-7.45pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) Salgótarján's premier cultural venue.

Laguna Club Café (☎ 06 20 936 7072; Füleki út 56; ☎ 9am-5am Wed-Sat) A popular club to the north of the city centre.

Other entertainment spots can be found in the free biweekly *Nógrádi Est*.

Getting There & Away

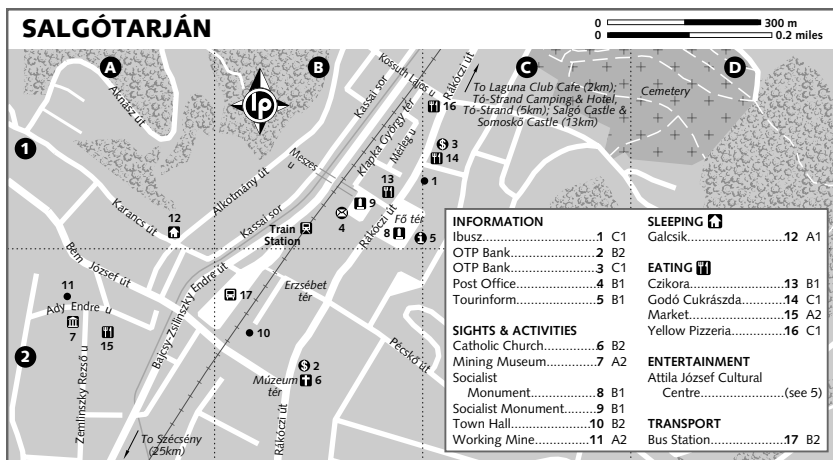
Buses leave Salgótarján hourly for Balassagyarmat (665Ft, 1½ hours, 52km) and Szécsény via Endrefalva (423Ft, one hour, 34km). You can also get to Budapest (1330Ft, 1½ hours, 109km, half-hourly; some via route No M3), Eger (846Ft, two hours, 66km, 11 daily Monday to Friday, seven on Saturday, five on Sunday), Gyöngyös (786Ft, 1½ hours, 62km, twice daily) and Parádfürdő (544Ft, 1½ hours, 44km, twice daily).

A train line links Salgótarján with Hatvan (544Ft, 1½ hours, 59km) and the main Budapest-Miskolc trunk line to the south and, to the north, Somoskőújfalú (100Ft, 10 minutes, 6km), and Lučenec, in Slovakia.

AROUND SALGÓTARJÁN Salgó & Somoskő Castles

Eight kilometres northeast of the city centre is **Salgó Castle** (admission free; ☎ dawn-dusk), built in the 13th century atop a basalt cone some 623m up in the Medves Hills. After Buda Castle fell to the Turks in 1541, Salgó served as an important border fortress but it, too, was taken 23 years later and fell into ruin after the Turks abandoned it in the late 16th century. The castle is best remembered for the visit made by Sándor Petőfi in 1845, which inspired him to write *Salgó*, one of his best loved poems. Today you can make out the inner courtyard, tower and bastion from the ruins, but views of Somoskő and into Slovakia are excellent from this peaceful spot.

To visit the interior of **Somoskő Castle** (admission 160Ft; ☎ 8am-8pm Apr-Oct, 8am-4pm Nov-Mar), which is in Slovakian territory, you must cross the border at Somoskőújfalú – don't forget your passport – and follow a path east on foot for about 3km to the castle. Built in the 14th century from basalt blocks, Somoskő was able to hold off the Turkish onslaught longer than Salgó Castle, not falling until 1576. Ferenc Rákóczi used it during the independence war in 1706, and for that reason it was partially destroyed by the Austrians, although, with its semi-complete walls and turrets, it remains a more solid edifice than Salgó.



Adventurous souls who have time on their hands might want to follow the marked trail westward from Somoskőújfalu along the Slovakian border for 4km to **Mt Karancs** (729m); you'll see the High Tatra from the lookout tower on top of what's known locally as the 'Palóc Olympus'. Cartography's 1:60,000 *A Karancs, a Medves és a Heves-Borsodi-dombság* map (No 11; 800Ft) covers these hills.

To get to Salgó Castle, catch bus 11/b (at least 12 daily) anywhere along Rákóczi út in Salgótarján to the Eresztvény recreational area; the castle is up the hill to the southwest. An easier way to reach it, though, is to stay on the same bus to the terminus in Salgóbánya, the city's old mining district, and follow the path leading off Vár út to the west. Bus 11/a (at least three daily) also goes to Eresztvény and then heads for Somoskő.

Buddhist Stupa

Travelling along Rte 21 towards Pásztó, some 22km south of Salgótarján, you might think you've driven through a black hole and arrived in Southeast Asia. There, on a hillside to the north of the village of **Tar**, is a full-sized Buddhist stupa (the largest of its kind in Europe), its little chimes tinkling and coloured pendants fluttering in the gentle breeze. It's all part of **Sándor Kőrösi Csoma Memorial Park**, consecrated in 1992 by the Dalai Lama in memory of the early 19th-century Hungarian Franciscan monk who became a Hungarian Bodhisattva (Buddhist saint). The stupa, with a revolving prayer wheel containing sacred texts, has become something of a local tourist attraction, and there's a gift shop selling Indian crafts and a **snack bar** (☎ 9am-7pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar). Buses to Tar, a couple of kilometres to the south, and to Pásztó stop along the highway just below the stupa.

MÁTRA HILLS

The Mátra Hills, which boast Hungary's highest peaks, are the most developed and easily accessible of the Northern Uplands ranges. And with all the recreational options – from hiking and picking wild mushrooms in the autumn to hunting and skiing in winter – there's enough here to satisfy all tastes.

The Mátra Hills can easily be reached from Eger, but Gyöngyös is its real springboard. It is also the centre of the Mátraalja wine-growing region, noted especially for Hárslevelű (Linden Leaf), a green-tinted white wine that is spicy and slightly sweet at the same time.

For general information on the Mátra Hills, see www.matrahegy.hu.

GYÖNGYÖS

☎ 37 / pop 33,500

A colourful, small city at the base of the Mátras, Gyöngyös, from the Hungarian word meaning 'pearl', is the gateway to the hills. With its museum, abundance of churches (the largest Gothic church in Hungary is here) and rich medieval library, it's easy to let the delights of the hills wait while exploring the city's nooks and crannies, or simply kicking back on its pastel-shaded square and sampling a glass or two of the region's finest wines.

Orientation

The bus station is on Koháry út, a 10-minute walk southeast of Fő tér, the main square. The main train station is on Vasút utca, near the eastern end of Kossuth Lajos utca. The Előre station, from where the narrow-gauge trains depart (p324), is next to the Mátra Museum at the start of Dobó István utca.

Information

ibusz (☎ 311 861; Kossuth Lajos utca 6) The town's best travel agency.

OTP bank (Fő tér 1)

Post office (Páter Kiss Szaléz utca 9-11) Accessed from Mátyás király utca.

Tourinform (☎ 311 155; gyongyos@tourinform.hu; Fő tér 10; ☎ 7.30am-4pm Mon-Thu, 7.30am-1pm Fri)

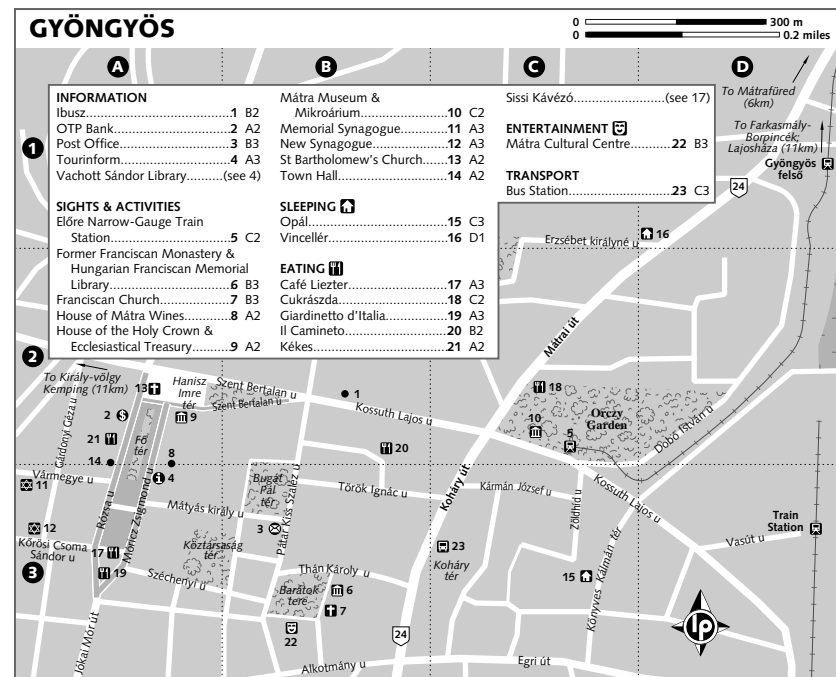
Opposite the Town Hall.

Vachott Sándor Library (☎ 311 883; Fő tér 10; per hr 100Ft; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Wed, 9am-6pm Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Offers Internet access.

www.gyongyos.hu This website should be in English and German, but don't be surprised if it isn't.

Sights

The **Mátra Museum** (☎ 311 447; Kossuth Lajos utca 40), in an old manor house in Orczy Garden, was closed at the time of research for major renovations. Expect to find spruced-up exhibitions on the history of Gyöngyös,



with much emphasis on Benevár – a 14th-century castle northeast of Mátrafüred and now in ruins – and the natural history of the Mátra region, including a 'baby' mammoth. City lore has it that the wrought-iron railings enclosing the garden were made from gun barrels taken during the *kuruc* uprising. The downstairs section originally housed the **Mikroárium**, an aquarium-terrarium full of snakes, lizards and tropical fish, but this may change with the renovations.

St Bartholomew's Church (Szent Bertalan templom; Szent Bertalan út 1; admission free; ☎ services only) is on the east side of Hanisz Imre tér. It was built in the 14th century and is the largest Gothic church in Hungary. You'd hardly know it though, with the baroque restoration (including an unusual upper-storey gallery inside) that was carried out 400 years later. To the southeast the so-called **House of the Holy Crown** (Szent Koronaház), which served as a safe house for the St Stephen's Crown three times from 1806 to 1809 during the Napoleonic Wars, contains the city's **Ecclesiastical Treasury** (Egyházi Kinctár; ☎ 311 143; adult/child 300/150Ft; ☎ 10am-noon &

2-5pm Tue-Sun), a rich collection of liturgical objects and church plate.

The **Franciscan church** (Fereses templom; Barátok tere 1; admission free; ☎ services only) was built around the same time as St Bartholomew's but it, too, has undergone some major changes, with the light frescoes and baroque tower added in the 18th century. The church's most celebrated occupant – well, second-most famous to the faithful – is János Vak (Blind) Bottyán, a heroic but sight-challenged commander who served under Ferenc Rákóczi II during the War of Independence. The former **Franciscan monastery** (built 1730), which is attached to the church, contains the **Hungarian Franciscan Memorial Library** (Magyar Ferencesek Műemlék Könyvtára; ☎ 311 361; Barátok tere 2; admission free; ☎ 2-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Sat, 9am-noon & 3-6pm Sun), the only historical archive in Hungary to have survived the Turkish occupation intact. Among its 14,000 volumes are some of the rarest books written in Hungarian.

Gyöngyös was home to a relatively large Jewish community from the 15th century to WWII, and two splendid synagogues

bear witness to this. The older of the two, the neoclassical **Memorial Synagogue** (Müemlék zsinagóga; Vármegye utca), built in 1820, faces Gyöngyös Stream and now houses the city's TV studios. The Moorish-Secessionist **New Synagogue** (Új zsinagóga; Kőrösi Csoma Sándor utca), on the corner with Gárdonyi Géza utca, was designed by Lipót Baumhorn in 1930, two decades after he completed his masterpiece in Szeged. Unfortunately it is now a warehouse and in need of some repair.

Activities

The **House of Mátra Wines** (Mátrai Borok Háza; ☎ 302 226; Fő tér 10; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), in a courtyard by Tourinform, showcases local and regional wines and offers tastings. If you're interested in trying the region's Rieslings, Leányka and Hárslevelű, ask Tourinform for a copy of *A Mátraaljai Borút* (The Mátraalja Wine road) map and a list of cellars offering tastings.

Two **narrow-gauge trains** (☎ 302 025) depart from Előre station just beyond the Mátra Museum. One heads 7km northeast to Mátrafüred and the other goes to Lajosháza, 11km north of Gyöngyös; these are easily the most enjoyable way to enter the Mátra Hills. The latter offers no real destination, except a place to begin hiking, but the slow ride gives you a good feel for what's on offer further into the hills. A fine hiking excursion, for example, leads east along the Nagy-völgy (Big Valley) past a series of water catchments or north as far as Galyatető, at 965m Hungary's second-highest peak. If you take the little train back from Mátrafüred, get off at Farkasmály-Borpincék, where there's a row of wine cellars. To return, you can wait for the train (6.37pm May to September, 4.23pm October to April) or jump onto a bus coming down Rte 24, but it's an easy 4km walk (or crawl) back to Gyöngyös.

Be advised that trains to Lajosháza (adult/child one way 260/130Ft, return 500/250Ft) run only on the weekend and holidays from May to September (maximum four trains daily in each direction, five from June to August). Up to 10 trains daily make the run to Mátrafüred (adult/child one way 260/130Ft, return 500/250Ft) from April to October. During the rest of the year, count on five trains daily on Monday to Friday and seven daily on the weekend.

Sleeping

For such a pretty town, there's a surprising lack of accommodation in the centre. Both Tourinform and Ibusz can book you a private room (from 2500Ft per person) in Gyöngyös or the Mátra Hills.

Vincellér (☎ 311 691; Erzsébet királyné út 22; s/d 6800/7600Ft, apt 11,000-13,000Ft; ☎ ☎) A way from the town centre on the road to Mátrafüred is this quiet *pension*, with an attractive and secluded courtyard-restaurant, large rooms and accommodating staff.

Opál (☎ 505 400; www.hotelopal.hu; Könyves Kálmán tér 12; s/d 8000/11,000Ft; ☎ ☎) Housed in a former college, this small hotel has a slightly clinical feel to it, but staff are friendly, rooms are basic and clean, and added extras, such as a fitness room, sauna and bar, add to Opál's overall good value.

Király-völgy Kemping (☎ 364 185; www.kiralyvolgykemping.hu; Táncsics Mihály út 40; camp sites per adult/child/tent €2.50/1.50/3.50; ☎ May-Sep) The closest camp site to town is in Sástó (p326), but this fine option lies 11km northwest in Gyöngyöspata. It's a small site on the southern edge of the hills, with two dozen sites and its very own babbling brook.

Eating & Drinking

Kékes (☎ 311 915; Fő tér 7; mains 1000-2000Ft) Kékes is the town's top restaurant, with a big soup selection, plenty of game, fish and regional specialities, and a lovely terrace looking onto the main square.

Giardinetto d'Italia (☎ 300 709; Rózsza utca 8; pasta & pizza 1000Ft) With a terrace in a little park south of Fő tér, a healthy range of Italian cuisine and statues of the Blues Brothers guarding the entrance, Giardinetto is good for both drinks and food.

Il Camineto (☎ 312 652; Kossuth Lajos utca 19; pizza from 300Ft) This small pizzeria, tucked away in a quiet corner, serves pizza from its clay oven on its shaded terrace. Take away is also available.

A nameless *cukrászda* (cake shop) and **ice-cream parlour** (Mátrai út; ice cream 100Ft; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon, Wed & Thu, 9am-7pm Fri-Sun) in Orczy Garden, north of the Mátra Museum, is worth going out of your way for; its terrace is normally swamped with locals in summer.

Also worth a look: **Café Liezter** (☎ 304 591; Mórícz Zsigmond utca 5; mains around 800Ft) Convivial spot serving snack food, such as pizzas and hamburgers; doubles as a popular bar on weekends.

Sissi Kávézó (Mórícz Zsigmond utca 7; ☎ 7.30am-10pm Sun-Thu, 7.30-1am Fri & Sat) Café devoted to Sissi, Austria's former Habsburg empress, with a relaxed air and plenty of beer.

Entertainment

Mátra Cultural Centre (Mátra Művelődési Központ; ☎ 312 281; Barátok tere 3; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Sat) Described as a 'Finnish functionalist-style building', with huge colourful stained-glass windows, this is where Gyöngyös entertains itself.

For entertainment listings, pick up a copy of the free biweekly *Gyöngyösi Est* magazine.

Getting There & Around

BUS

You won't wait for more than 20 minutes for buses to Budapest (968Ft, 1½ hours, 79km), Eger (665Ft, one hour, 52km, three daily via Parád-füred), Mátrafüred (133km, 10 minutes, 6km) and Mátraháza (182Ft, 15 minutes, 15km).

Further destinations from Gyöngyös:

Destination	Price	Duration	Km	Frequency
Parád & Parád-füred	363Ft	1¼hr	30	9 daily
Recsk	423Ft	1½hr	34	8 daily
Sirok	544Ft	1¾hr	42	5 daily
Szolnok	1210Ft	2hr	98	5 daily
Salgótarján	786Ft	1¾hr	62	3 daily
Tiszafüred	1330Ft	2½hr	106	2 daily

TAXI

You can book a taxi on ☎ 312 222.

TRAIN

Gyöngyös is on a dead-end spur some 13km from the Vámosgyörk stop on the Budapest-Miskolc trunk line. Nine trains a day connect the city with Vámosgyörk (182km, 14 minutes, 13km), six of which carry on to Keleti train station in Budapest (1004Ft, 1½ hours to two hours, 100km).

GYÖNGYÖS TO EGER

Rte 24 wends its way through the Mátra Hills north of Gyöngyös to Parádsasvár and then cuts eastward onto Eger (60km); if you're travelling under your own steam, it's one of the prettiest routes in the country. The section to Mátraháza is popular with

bikers, who constantly attack the road and its hairpin corners with wanton abandon, especially on weekends. Excellent if you're into bikes, but annoying (and loud) if you're not.

Buses to Mátrafüred, Mátraháza, Parád and Parád-füred are frequent, but the best approach is by the narrow-gauge train that terminates in Mátrafüred.

Mátrafüred

☎ 37

Mátrafüred is a pleasant little resort at 340m. Though there is a small **Palóc ethnographic private collection** (Palóc néprajzi magányújtemény; ☎ 320 137; Pálosvörösmarti út 2; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 9am-5pm May-Sep, 9am-4pm Oct-Apr) of dolls, textiles and carvings not far south of the narrow-gauge train, the many easy walks in the area are the main attraction. Buy a copy of Cartographia's 1:40,000 *A Mátra* map (No 14; 800Ft) before setting out.

You can change money at the **post office** (Béke utca 5; ☎ 8am-noon & 12.30-3.30pm Mon-Fri) or use the ATM on the same road nearby. For general information on Mátrafüred, see www.matrainfo.hu (in Hungarian).

SLEEPING & EATING

There are lots of signs advertising private rooms (per person from 2000Ft) along most streets in Mátrafüred, but Béke utca has the bulk of them.

Gyöngyvirág (☎ 520 001; zsapek@axelero.hu; Béke utca 8; s/d 6500/8500Ft, apt 12,000Ft; ☎ ☎) Wheelchair access, a heated pool, mini golf, a playground for kids and an outside grill in summer help make this the best accommodation choice in Mátrafüred. Rooms are suitably modern and tastefully furnished.

Diana (☎ 06 30 565 8320; Turista utca 1; s/d/tr 6000/9000/10,000Ft, apt 15,000Ft; ☎) A basic but comfortable 12-room hotel on a quiet street just off Béke utca. Its apartment has cooking facilities.

There are plenty of food stalls and the like on Parádi utca opposite the train station, but for something more substantial, try Gyöngyvirág or **Fekete Rigó** (Blackbird; ☎ 320 052; Avar utca 2; mains 800-1200Ft, apt per 1/2/3/4 people 2500/3600/4800/5400Ft), a relaxed choice with a lovely beer garden nestled in among trees; its upstairs apartment sleeps eight and is an absolute bargain for groups who want to cook for themselves.

Sástó

☎ 37

Three kilometres north of Mátrafüred, **Sástó Camping** (☎ 374 025; www.sasto.elpak.hu; camp sites per adult/child/tent 1300/700/1000Ft, r from 4500Ft, comfortable/uncomfortable houses from 8200/3450Ft, bungalows from 5200Ft; ☞ mid-Apr–mid-Oct) is the highest camp site in Hungary (520m). Centred on a small lake with rowing boats, fishing and a 54m-high lookout tower, the complex offers a wide range of accommodation, including bungalows that sleep up to four people and motel rooms for two people. Its ‘comfortable’ houses come with bathrooms, while the ‘uncomfortable’ (as they put it) variety have shared facilities; both sleep up to three people. The site would improve greatly if the tacky stalls and snack bars on the lake were relocated. There is also the **Sástó Vendéglő** (☎ 374 061; mains 1000Ft), quite a decent restaurant, and a small grocery shop here.

Mátraháza

☎ 37

Mátraháza is built on a slight incline 715m above sea level and is about 5km north of Sástó. It has an alpine feel and is an attractive spot to base yourself for short walks in the immediate area or more adventurous hiking further afield. The **post office** (☞ 8am–3.30pm Mon–Fri) is at the start of the road to Kékestető, the country’s highest point and centre for winter sport, and there’s an OTP bank ATM at the bus station along the main road through the village.

SLEEPING & EATING

Pagoda Pihenő Panzió (☎ 374 023; www.hotels.hu/pagoda; s/d from 5700/9200Ft; ☎) This is an old hotel with a pagoda-like roof in the centre of Mátraháza village. Situated among pine trees, it exudes an alpine feel and its rooms come with a balcony. Breakfast is served in Borostyán.

Bérc (☎ 374 102; berchotel@axelero.hu; s/d from 7000/10,000Ft; ☎) About halfway between Sástó and Mátraháza is this communist eyesore, an imposing edifice of odd angles. It does, however, have loads of sports facilities, extensive views of the Kékes Hills (top-floor rooms with balcony are the best) and simple yet functional rooms.

Borostyán (☎ 374 090; mains 1200Ft; ☞ 9am–10pm in summer, 9am–10pm Tue–Sun winter) Opposite the car park at the start of the ascent to

Kékestető, this place has very good food and service, and a lovely pavilion with seating for watching the bikes zip up and down.

Kékestető

☎ 37

Next to the Pagoda pension in Mátraháza, you’ll see the end of a ski trail that runs down from Kékestető and Mt Kékes. In the absence of a lift, skiers wanting another go hop on the bus, which continuously covers the 4km to the top. The modern nine-storey **TV tower** (☎ 367 086; adult/child 400/200Ft; ☞ 9am–6pm May–Sep, 9am–5pm Oct–Apr) at the top is open to view-seekers; the old tower in front of it houses the **Hegycsúcs** (☎ 567 004; www.hotels.hu/hegycsucs; r from 6000Ft; ☎), a down-on-its-luck hotel, with sauna and gym. Choose one of the two rooms on the 7th floor (No 13 is a twin, No 14 a double), and you’ll be sleeping at the highest point in Hungary.

You won’t exactly be on top of the world, but the nearby **Kékes Fogadó** (☎ 0670 217 9954; s/d with shared bathroom 2500/5000Ft, apt 10,000Ft; ☎) is still very high; it is, however, not in good shape and is a last resort for overnighing.

Parádsasvár

☎ 36 / pop 586

Parádsasvár is where the country’s most effective – and most odoriferous – *gyógyvíz* (medicinal drinking water) is bottled. Stop for a glass if you can stand the stench of this sulphuric brew. The **Parád Crystal Factory** (Parád Kristály Manufaktúra; ☎ 06 30 290 9584; Rákóczi utca 46-48; including entry to gallery 7 adult/child 500/300Ft), which produces Hungary’s highest-quality crystal and glassware, can be visited on a guided tour. Get in quick, though; it’s soon to be sold or closed down. Some of the factory’s arty creations are on display in its **Sasvár Gallery** (Sasvár Galéria; ☞ 9.45am–12.30pm & 1.30–2.30pm Mon–Fri), while more run-of-the-mill pieces are for sale at the **factory shop** (☎ 20-358 7991; ☞ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–3pm Sat & Sun).

The 58-room hotel **Sasvár Kastélyszálló** (Sasvár Castle Hotel; ☎ 444 444; www.sasvar.hu; Kossuth Lajos utca 1; r 56,200–216,200Ft; ☎) is a restored Renaissance-style hunting lodge, was built in 1882 by Miklós Ybl, the same man responsible for the Hungarian State Opera House in Budapest. It has every mod con and facility you could possibly wish for (including Secret Service-style security), and is surrounded by 2.5 hectares of parkland.

Across the road from the grand Sasvár is the small *pension*, **St Hubertus** (☎ 544 060; Rákóczi út 2; s/d 7100/9700Ft; ☎), with attic rooms featuring plenty of natural wood. Its downstairs restaurant features a very Hungarian menu and often caters to tour groups.

Parád & Parádfürdő

☎ 36 / pop 2200

Parád and Parádfürdő run into one another and effectively make up one long town. You can’t miss the **Coach Museum** (Kocsimúzeum; ☎ 364 387; Kossuth Lajos utca 217; adult/child 380/250Ft; ☞ 9am–5pm Tue–Sun Apr–Oct, 10am–4pm Tue–Sun Nov–May), housed in the red marble Cifra Istálló (Ornamental Stables) of Count Karolyi, one of the most interesting small museums in Hungary. (For the record, the word ‘coach’ comes from Kocs, a small village in Transdanubia, where these lighter horse-drawn vehicles were first used in place of the more cumbersome wagons.) Inspect the interiors of the diplomatic and state coaches, which are richly decorated with silk brocade, especially the closed coach used by 19th-century philanderers on the go, and the brides containing as much as 5kg of silver. There are **horse riding** possibilities here as well.

The lovely **Erzsébet Királyné Park Hotel** (Queen Elizabeth Park Hotel; ☎ 444 044; www.erzsebetpark hotel.hu; Kossuth Lajos utca 372; s/d from 15,000/17,800Ft; ☎) at the eastern end of Parádfürdő was designed by Miklós Ybl in 1893 and still exudes an air of grace. Rooms are surprisingly modern and tasteful, the best of which face away from the road towards the woods.

Recsk

☎ 36 / pop 3000

From Parádfürdő the road continues on for 2km to Recsk, a place that lives on in infamy as the site of Hungary’s most brutal forced-labour camp, set up by Mátyás Rákosi in 1950 and closed down by the reformer Imre Nagy in 1953. In honour of those who slaved and died here, the **Recsk Forced-Labour Death Camp** (Recski Kényszermunka Haláltábor; ☎ in Budapest 1-312 6105; admission 200Ft; ☞ 9am–5pm May–Sep, 9am–3pm Sat & Sun Oct–Apr) has been partially reconstructed near the quarry, about 5km south of the village. It’s now a peaceful spot, which makes it all that more poignant.

Sirok

☎ 36 / pop 2070

Sirok, 8km to the east of Recsk, is effectively the last town in the Mátra Hills. The ruins of an early-14th-century **castle** (admission free; ☞ dawn–dusk) perched on a mountain top due north of the village provide superb views of the Mátra and Bükk Hills and the mountains of Slovakia. **Vár Camping** (☎ 361 558; Dobó István utca 30; camp sites per person/tent/car 650/600/350Ft; ☞ mid-May–Sep; ☎) is a laid-back, quiet and basic camping ground at the foot of the castle ruins.

BÜKK HILLS

The Bükk Hills, which take their name from the many ‘beech trees’ growing here, are a green lung, buffering baroque Eger and industrial Miskolc. Although much of the area has been mined for ore for the ironworks of Miskolc and other towns of the scarred Sajó Valley to the east, a large tract – over 430 sq km, in fact – is a national park. The Bükk teems with wildlife, and is popular with cyclists and hikers. If you’re looking to do either – or both – check out Cartographia’s three 1:40,000 maps (800Ft each) of the region: *A Bükk-fennsík* (Bükk Plateau; No 33); *A Bükk – északi rész* (Bükk – northern section; No 29) and *A Bükk – déli rész* (Bükk – southern section; No 30). For information contact the **Bükk National Park Directorate** (Bükk Nemzeti Park Igazgatósága; ☎ 36-411 581; Sánc utca 6) in Eger.

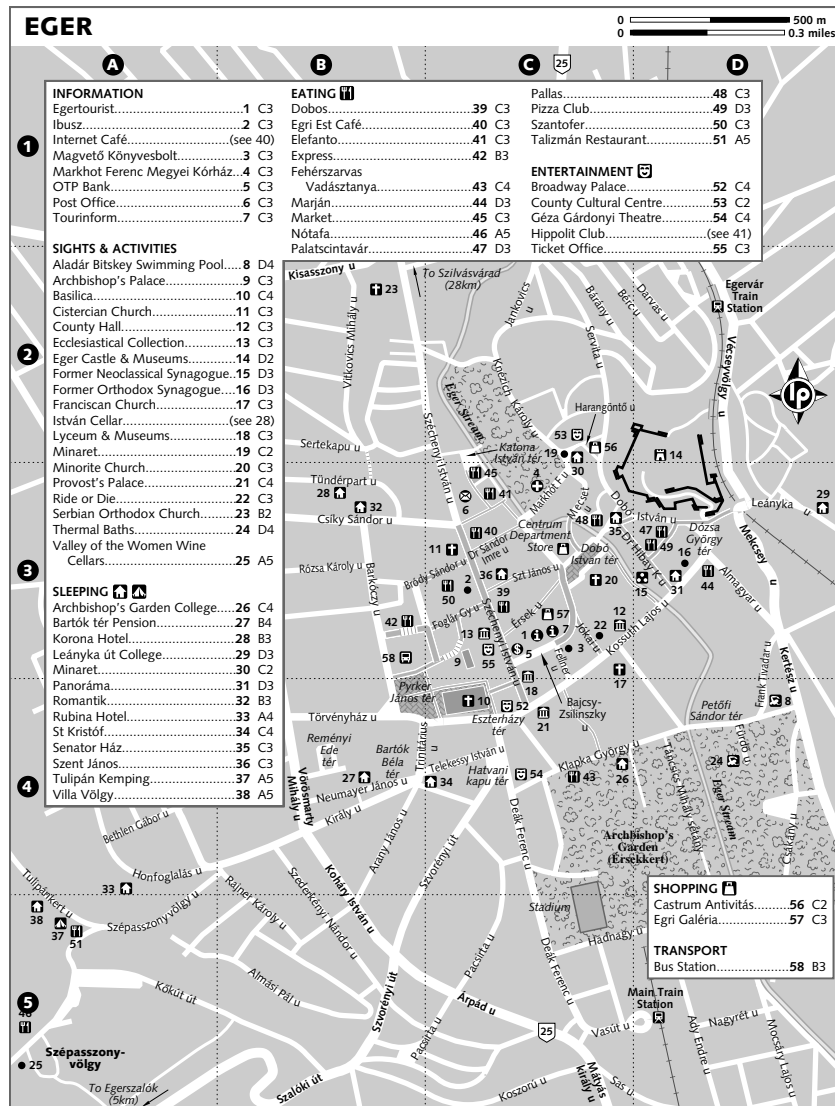
EGER

☎ 36 / pop 58,300

Everyone loves Eger, and it’s immediately apparent why: the beautifully preserved baroque architecture gives the town a relaxed, almost Mediterranean, feel; it is the home of the celebrated Egri Bikavér (Eger Bull’s Blood) wine known the world over; and it is flanked by two of the Northern Uplands most inviting ranges. But these aren’t the only reasons Hungarians visit Eger: it was here that their forebears fended off the Turks for the first time during the 170 years of occupation in 1552 (see boxed text, p330).

History

The Turks came back to Eger in 1596 and this time captured the city, turning it into



a provincial capital, and erecting several mosques and other buildings until they were driven out at the end of the 17th century. All that remains of this architectural legacy is a lonely little minaret pointing its long finger towards the heavens in indignation.

Eger played a central role in Ferenc Rákóczi II's attempt to overthrow the

Habsburgs early in the 18th century, and it was then that a large part of the castle was razed by the Austrians. Having enjoyed the status of an episcopate since the time of King Stephen in the 11th century, Eger flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries, when the city acquired most of its wonderful baroque architecture.

Orientation

Dobó István tér, the centre of Eger, is just a couple of minutes on foot to the east of the renovated bus station on Pyrker János tér. To reach the city centre from the main train station on Vasút utca, walk north on Deák Ferenc utca and then head along pedestrian Széchenyi István utca, Eger's main drag. The Egervár train station, which serves Szilvásvárad and other points north, is on Vécseyvölgy utca, and about a five-minute walk north of Eger Castle.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Magvető Könyvesbolt (☎ 517 757; Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca 4; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Small selection of English titles, and maps.

INTERNET ACCESS

Tourinform has Internet access for 400Ft per hour.

Egri Est Café (☎ 411 105; Széchenyi utca 16; per hr 300Ft; ☎ 11am-midnight Sun-Thu, 11am-4am Fri & Sat) A café-bar that offers Internet access.

INTERNET RESOURCES

For general information on Eger, consult www.eger.hu (in Hungarian) or www.eger.city.hu (in English and Hungarian).

MEDICAL SERVICES

Markhot Ferenc Megyei Kórház (☎ 411 444; Markhot Ferenc utca 1/3; ☎ 24hr)

MONEY

OTP bank (Széchenyi István utca 2)

POST

Post office (Széchenyi István utca 20-22; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourinform (☎ 517 715; eger@tourinform.hu; Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca 9; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat mid-Sep-mid-Jun) Has more than enough information on the town and its surrounds, including the handy *Insight to Eger* magazine in a number of languages.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Egertourist (☎ 510 270; Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca 9; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)
Ibusz (☎ 311 451; Széchenyi István utca 9)

Sights

EGER CASTLE

The best view of the city can be had by climbing up the cobblestone lane from Dózsa György tér to **Eger Castle** (Egri Vár; ☎ 312 744; Vár 1; adult/child combined ticket 900/450Ft, grounds only 400/200Ft; ☎ 8am-8pm Apr-Aug, 8am-7pm Sep, 8am-5pm Oct-Mar), erected in the 13th century after the Mongol invasion. Much of the castle is of modern construction, but you can still see the foundations of 12th-century **St John's Cathedral**. Models and drawings in the **István Dobó Museum** (☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-3pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar), housed in the former Bishop's Palace (1470), show how it once looked. On the ground floor, a statue of Dobó takes pride of place in the **Heroes' Hall**. The 19th-century building on the northwestern side of the courtyard houses the **Eger Art Gallery**, with several works by Mihály Munkácsy.

Beneath the castle are **casemates** (☎ 9am-5pm) hewn from solid rock, which you may tour with a Hungarian-speaking guide included in the admission price (English-language guide 600Ft extra). Other exhibits, including the **Waxworks** (adult/child 350/250Ft) and **Minting Exhibit** (adult/child 240/120Ft) cost extra. You can tour the castle grounds, Heroes' Hall and casemates on Monday, when all the other exhibits are closed.

ESZTERHÁZY TÉR

Begin a walking tour of the city at the **Basilica** (Bazilika; Pyrker János tér 1; admission free; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri), a neoclassical monolith completed in 1836 and designed by József Hild, the same architect who later worked on the cathedral at Esztergom. Despite the cathedral's size and ornate altars, the interior is surprisingly light and airy. Northeast of the cathedral in the **Archbishop's Palace** (Érseki Palota; Széchenyi István utca 5) is the **Ecclesiastical Collection** (Egyházi Gyűjtemény; ☎ 421 332; adult/child 300/200Ft; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat Apr-Oct, 8am-4pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar), with priceless vestments, church plate and liturgical objects.

Directly opposite the Basilica is the sprawling Zopf-style **Lyceum** (Liceum; ☎ 520 400; Eszterházy tér 1; ☎ 9.30am-3.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 9.30am-1pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar), dating from 1765. The 20,000-volume **library** (adult/student 500/350Ft), on the 1st floor of the south wing, contains hundreds of priceless manuscripts and codices. The **ceiling fresco** (1778) here is a *trompe l'oeuil* masterpiece depicting the

THE SIEGE OF EGER

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

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

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

Counter-Reformation's Council of Trent (1545–63) and a lightning bolt setting heretical manuscripts ablaze.

The **Astronomy Museum** (adult/student 500/350Ft), on the 6th floor of the east wing, contains 18th-century astronomical equipment and an **observatory**; climb three more floors up to the observation deck for a great view of the city and to try out the **camera obscura**, the 'eye of Eger', designed in 1776 to spy on the town and to entertain townspeople.

OTHER SIGHTS

Walk north along Széchenyi utca to the **Cistercian church** (Ciszterek temploma; Széchenyi István utca 15) built in 1743. The theatrical baroque altar sculpture of St Francis Borgia in gilt and white stucco is well worth a look. The **Serbian Orthodox church** (Ráctemplom; ☎ 320 129; Vitkovics Mihály utca 30; admission 300Ft; ☎ 10am–4pm Tue–Sun) and its enormous iconostasis of gold leaf and braid is further north; enter from Széchenyi utca 59.

Retrace your steps to the Cistercian church and turn east onto Dr Sándor Imre utca and Markhót Ferenc utca to the **minaret** (☎ 410 233; Knežich Károly utca; admission 200Ft; ☎ 9.30am–6pm Apr–Oct), topped with a cross. Only nonclaustrophobes will brave the 97 narrow spiral steps to the top.

Mecset utca south of the minaret leads to central Dobó István tér, site of the town's market in medieval times. On the southern side of the square stands the **Minorite church** (Minorita templom; ☎ 312 744; Dobó István tér 6; admission free; h 9am–5pm Tue–Sun), built in 1771 and one of the most glorious baroque buildings in Hungary. The altarpiece of the Virgin

Mary and St Anthony of Padua is by Johann Kracker, the Bohemian painter who also did the fire-and-brimstone ceiling fresco in the Lyceum library. Statues of István Dobó and his comrades-in-arms routing the Turks in 1552 fill the square in front of the church.

From Dobó István tér cross the little Eger Stream to Dózsa György tér and turn south-west onto Kossuth Lajos utca, a fine, tree-lined street with dozens of architectural gems. The first of interest is the former **Orthodox synagogue** (Ortodox zsinagóga; 17 Kossuth Lajos utca), built in 1893 and now a furniture store backing onto a shopping mall. (A **neoclassical synagogue** (Dr Hibay Károly utca 7) dating from 1845 and now partly renovated is around the corner.) You'll pass several outstanding baroque and Eclectic buildings, including the **county hall** (megyeháza; 9 Kossuth Lajos utca), with a wrought-iron grid above the main door of Faith, Hope and Charity by Henrik Fazola, a Rhinelander who settled in Eger in the mid-18th century. Walk down the passageway, and you'll see two more of his magnificent works: baroque wrought-iron gates decorated on both sides that have superseded the minaret as the symbol of Eger. The gate on the right shows the seal of Heves County and has a comical figure on its handle. The more graceful gate on the left is decorated with grapes. The **Franciscan church** (Ferenccs templom; 14 Kossuth Lajos utca) was completed in 1755 on the site of a mosque. The wrought-iron balcony and window grids of the rococo **Provost's Palace** (Kisréposti palota; 4 Kossuth Lajos utca) were also done by Fazola.

Activities

WINE TASTING

You can sample Eger's famous wines at many places around town, including a couple at the base of the castle, and in the **István Cellar** (☎ 313 670; Tünderpart 5; ☎ 1–10pm Tue–Sun Apr–Oct, 2–9pm Tue–Sun Oct–Mar) below the Korona hotel; Tourinform has an extensive list.

But why bother drinking in town when you can do the same in the wine cellars of the evocatively named **Valley of the Beautiful Women** (Szépasszony-völgy) so close by? The best time to visit the valley on a warm day is the late afternoon.

From the western end of the Basilica, walk south on Trinitárius utca to Bartók Béla tér and then west along Király utca to Szépasszonyvölgy utca. Veer to the left as you descend the hill past the large Talizmán restaurant into the valley, and you'll see dozens of cellars. Alternatively take the train on wheels from Dobó tér to the valley's entrance-way (one way 450Ft; running from 10am to 6pm April to October).

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

OTHER ACTIVITIES

After sightseeing in the **Archbishop's Garden** (Érsek-kert; enter from Petőfi Sándor tér 2), once the private reserve of papal princes, unwind in the nearby **thermal baths** (☎ 413 356; Fürdő utca 1–3; adult/child 900/650Ft; ☎ women noon–6pm Wed & Fri, men noon–6pm Tue, Thu & 10am–2pm Sat), which date from Turkish times.

The stunning **Aladár Bitskey Swimming Pool** (☎ 511 810; Frank Tivadar utca; adult/senior or student 700/400Ft; ☎ 6am–9pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 6am–10pm Tue & Thu, 8am–8pm Sat, 8am–6pm Sun) nearby was designed by maverick Hungarian architect Imre Makovecz.

Bicycles can be rented from **Ride or Die** (☎ 413 903; Jókai utca 6; per hr/day 300/3000Ft; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm Sat), but requires a 25,000Ft deposit.

Tours

Tourinform organises walking tours (adult/child 700/350Ft) of the city in both English and German from July to September.

Festivals & Events

Annual events include the **Spring Festival** in late March/April, the **Border Fortress Mermaking Festival and Games** at the castle at the end of July, **Baroque Weeks** in late July/August, the **Agria International Folkdance Meeting** in August and the **Feast of Eger** in mid-September.

Sleeping

Tourinform has a booklet of accommodation available not only in the city, but also in the surrounding area.

BUDGET

Egertourist and Ibusz can all organise private rooms (2500Ft to 4000Ft per night per person). You might also look for a room along Almagyar utca or clumped together on Mekksey István utca (Nos 10/a, 13, 14, 14/a and 14/b). You'll also see 'szoba kiadó' (room for rent) signs to the northeast of the castle along Vécseyvölgy utca.

Tulipán Kemping (☎ 410 580; Szépasszonyvölgy utca 71; camp sites per person/tent/car 600/500/300Ft, 4–5-bed bungalows 6000/10,000Ft; ☎ year round; ☎) Tulipán occupies a quiet spot with its back

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Senator Ház (☎ 320 466; www.senatorhaz.hu; Dobó István tér 11; s/d €52/72; ☎) András Cseh, the owner and manager of Senator Ház, has created what we consider to be the finest small hotel in provincial Hungary. Its warm and cosy rooms fill the upper floors of this delightful 18th-century inn on Eger's main square, while its ground floor is shared between a quality restaurant and a reception that could easily moonlight as a history museum (Cseh has been collecting – and displaying – all sorts of bric-a-brac for the past 15 years). With only 11 rooms, it's advisable to book ahead.

to the cellars and vineyards of the Valley of the Beautiful Women; there's not a lot of shade for those tenting, but the five-bed bungalows come with plenty of comforts.

A number of colleges offer accommodation for around 2500Ft per person from mid-June/July to August. We recommend: **Leányka út College** (Leányka úti Kollégium; ☎ 520 430; Leányka utca 2; (P)) East of the castle, with 300 beds. **Archbishop's Garden College** (Érsekkerti Kollégium; ☎ 520 432; Klapka György utca 12) An even more central option in a house full of character, with 132 beds.

MIDRANGE

Villa Völgy (☎ 321 664; www.hotels.hu/villavolgy; Tulipánkert utca 5; s/d 8200/13,600Ft; (P)) This immaculate hotel in a modern villa is an excellent place to stay near the Valley of the Beautiful Women. Its bright rooms are tastefully designed and feature plenty of wood, and there's a sauna, solarium, fitness room and restaurant on site.

Bartók tér Pension (☎ 515 556; ca7566@axelero.hu; Bartók Béla tér; s/d 7000/9000Ft; (P)) This colourful pension between the Valley of the Beautiful Women and the city centre has big rooms, a quiet location and a friendly welcome.

St Kristóf (Arany János utca 1; s/d 7000/9000Ft) Affiliated with Bartók tér Pension, this place is of the same standard and within eyeshot of Bartók.

Rubina Hotel (☎ 410 580; Honfoglalás utca 31/a; s/d €25/40; (P)) Rubina occupies a quiet spot high above the wine valley in Szépasszony-völgy. It has a few wellness extras, like a sauna and steam room.

Minaret (☎ 410 233; Knézh Károly utca 4; s/d €35/45; (P)) In the shadow of the minaret, this family-run hotel has good-sized rooms, a fine restaurant and is centrally located.

TOP END

Romantik (☎ 310 456; www.romantikhotel.hu; Csiky Sándor utca 26; s/d 12,000/15,500Ft; (P)) This very friendly and cosy 16-room hotel, with a pretty back garden, is an easy walk to the city centre, but far enough away to escape any noise in the summer months.

Korona (☎ 313 670; www.korona-hotel.hu; Tündérpárt utca 5; s/d from €60/75; (P)) On a quiet side street off Csiky Sándor utca, this place has a wellness centre, as well as a 'wine museum' in its 200-year-old wine cellar called István Cellar (p331), where you can sample wines from all regions.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Palatscintavár (☎ 413 986; Dobó István utca 9; mains around 1200Ft) Palatscintavár is one of the very few restaurants in provincial Hungary touting a contemporary art theme, let alone a veg-heavy menu. Pop art and postcards line the walls, glass cabinets filled with cigarette packets from makers long extinct catch your eye and groovy music fills the restaurant. Pancakes are served with an abundance of fresh vegetables, and range in flavour from Asian to Italian and back again.

Panoráma (☎ 412 886; panhotel@lelender.hu; Dr Hibay Károly utca 2; s/d from 15,000/17,500Ft; (P)) Panoráma aims its services at business clientele, with conference rooms, fitness areas, and a bar and restaurant on site.

Szent János (☎ 510 350; www.hotelszentjanos.hu; Szent János utca 3; s/d 12,000/15,300Ft; (P)) This supremely central hotel in a baroque town-house has all the added extras of a top-of-the-line establishment, but lacks a bit of warmth.

Eating & Drinking

RESTAURANTS

Szántófer (☎ 517 298; Bródy utca 3; mains 1000Ft; ☎ 8am-10pm) With farming equipment and cooking utensils hanging like prize kills on its walls and hearty peasant cuisine filling its menu, Szántófer oozes in rustic charm. The covered courtyard out back is perfect for escaping the summer heat.

Elefanto (☎ 411 031; Katona István tér 2; mains 1000-2000Ft) Perched high above the market, this is a great place, with a nonsmoking interior and covered balcony for alfresco dining.

Senator Ház (☎ 320 466; www.senatorhaz.hu; Dobó István tér 11; entrées 350-500Ft, mains 1000-2000Ft) The café-restaurant at the Senator is a delightful place for a meal or just a snack of *palacsinta* (pancakes).

Fehérszarvas Vadásztanya (☎ 411 129; Klapka György utca 8; mains 1500-3000Ft) This is the city's silver-service restaurant. But the 'White-Deer Hunters' Farm', as its name literally translates, with its game specialities and cellar setting, is really a place to enjoy in autumn and winter.

There are several *csárdák* (Hungarian-style inns) amongst the wine cellars in

Szépasszony-völgy, which at the end of the day are much of a muchness, but if you sit down to a meal here you'll most certainly be serenaded by Imré, an old, round chap who churns out Gypsy ballads on his whiny violin. We recommend **Nótafa** (☎ 313 484; Szépasszony-völgy; mains 1000-2000Ft) because it pays homage to the man, Imre; his photo takes pride of place over the dining area.

CAFÉS

Café Mirador (☎ 333 301; Frank Tivadar utca 5) More of a cocktail bar than a café, this is a fine place to kick back after a hard day's sightseeing with a beer or cocktail and very smooth tunes.

Egri Est Café (☎ 411 105; Széchenyi István utca 16; ☎ 11am-midnight Sun-Thu, 11am-4am Fri & Sat) This decent café-bar is a colourful and lively place, with parties on weekends.

Marján (☎ 312 784; Kossuth Lajos utca 28; ☎ 9am-10pm May-Sep, 9am-8pm Oct-Apr) The big terrace of this cake shop south of Dózsa György tér is the place to try something sweet.

Other options:

Pallas (☎ 318 614; Dobó István utca 20; ☎ 9.30am-9pm) Coffeeshop in a small courtyard, with a classical motif.

Dobos (☎ 413 335; Széchenyi István utca 6; ☎ 9.30am-7pm) Pleasant café on Eger's main pedestrian street.

QUICK EATS

Express (☎ 517 920; Barkóczy utca 4; dishes under 800Ft; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Sat, 7am-3pm Sun) Northeast of the bus station, this large self-service restaurant is the place for a quick, cheap meal.

Pizza Club (☎ 322 914; Dr Hibay Károly utca 8; pizza 560-1000Ft) This small pizzeria is tucked away just off Dobó István tér and is good for an inexpensive bite to eat.

SELF-CATERING

Market (Katona István tér; ☎ 6am-6pm Mon-Fri, 6am-1pm Sat, 6am-10am Sun) Eger's large covered market has more fruit and vegies than you could possibly carry away.

Entertainment

Tourinform, the **County Cultural Centre** (☎ 510 020; Knézh Károly utca 8), opposite the minaret, or the city **ticket office** (☎ 518 347; Széchenyi István utca 5; ☎ 10am-1pm, 2-6pm Mon-Fri) can tell you what's on in Eger. The city's venues are the **Géza Gárdonyi Theatre** (☎ 310 026; Hatvani kapu tér 4; ☎ box office 2-7pm Mon-Fri), the Lyceum and the Basilica, where there are half-hour

organ concerts at 11.30am Monday to Saturday and at 12.45pm Sunday from mid-May to mid-October.

Broadway Palace (Pyrker János tér 3; ☎ 10pm-6am Wed, Fri & Sat) This bizarre cave-like place beneath the cathedral steps parties into the wee hours on weekends.

Hippolit Club (☎ 411 031; Katona István tér 2; ☎ 10pm-5am Fri & Sat) Eger's classic club is downstairs at the Elefanto restaurant, where the dance floor heaves until the small hours.

Eger is included in the free biweekly *Egri Est* listings magazine.

Shopping

Egri Galéria (☎ 517 518; Érsek utca 8; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) This has lovely jewellery, fine art, pottery and other collectibles for sale.

Castrum Antikvitás (☎ 311 613; Harangöntő utca 2; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) This small shop is the place to go for antiques.

Getting There & Away

Bus services are good, with buses every 30 to 40 minutes to Gyöngyös (usually via Kerecsend; 665Ft, one hour, 52km), Mezőkövesd, Szilvásvárad and Belpátfalva. Other destinations include Aggtelek (1210Ft, 2½ hours, 100km, once daily), Budapest (1570Ft, 2¼ hours, 130km, hourly via the M3), Kecskemét (2060Ft, 4½ hours, 166km, three daily), Debrecen (1690Ft, 2½ hours, 131km, seven daily), Miskolc (846Ft, 1½ hours, 68km, eight daily) and Szeged (2910Ft, 5¾ hours, 237km, twice daily) via Csongrád. The bus to Miskolc only goes through the Bükk Hills via Felsőtárkány on Sunday at 8.30am and 3.35pm from mid-April to mid-October.

Eger is on a minor train line linking Putnok and Füzesabony; you usually have to change at the latter for Budapest (1624Ft, two hours, 142km), Miskolc (774Ft, 1½ hours, 74km) or Debrecen (1212Ft, three hours, 120km). There are up to seven direct trains a day to/from Budapest's Keleti train station (2½ hours) that don't require a change.

Getting Around

From the main train station, Bus 11, 12 or 14 will drop you off at the bus station or city centre.

You can book a taxi by calling ☎ 411 222 or 555 555.

AROUND EGER Egerszalók

☎ 36 / pop 1975

By this book's publication, this quiet rural open-air **hot spring** (hőforrás; ☎ 515 300; per 15min visit 100Ft, 7am–6pm adult/child 550/400Ft, 6pm–1am adult or child 700Ft), 8km southwest of Eger, is set to become Hungary's biggest and boldest thermal resort-hotel. Set back into the hills, the multilevel hotel will dominate a tiny valley completely transformed into parkland dotted with thermal pools of all shapes and sizes. Fortunately the original spring – cascades of *very* hot water running down from what look like steaming icebergs but are in fact mounds of salt and other minerals – will remain untouched, but how aesthetically pleasing the entire complex will be is anyone's guess.

If you're looking for a cheap alternative to the resort, try **Kelemen Vendégház** (☎ 474 559; webgast@freemail.hu; Sarló út 24; per person 2500–4000Ft; **P**) close to the centre of Egerszalók. Run by the friendly Judit and András, this small guesthouse offers hearty meals, local tours, and is good value for groups of up to 10 people.

The bus to Kerecsend via Demjén will drop you off 250m north of the entrance.

Mezőkövesd

☎ 49 / pop 17,800

Some 18km southeast of Eger, Mezőkövesd (www.mezokovesd.hu) is not much of a town, but it is the centre of the Matyó, a Magyar people famous for their fine embroidery and other folk art.

From the Mezőkövesd bus station on Rákóczi utca, walk south for 50m and then east along Mátyás király út for 600m to Szent László tér, where you'll find **Tourinform** (☎ 500 285; mezokovesd@tourinform.hu; Szent László tér 23; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat mid-Jun–Aug, 10am–4pm Mon–Fri Sep–mid-Jun). There's an **OTP bank** (Mátyás király út 149) at the bus station end of town and the **post office** (Alkotmány utca 1) is behind Tourinform.

SIGHTS

Opposite Tourinform is the **Matyó Museum** (☎ 311 824; Szent László tér 8; adult/child 400/200Ft), with displays explaining the regional differences and historical development of Matyó needlework: from white-on-white stitching and patterns of blue-and-red roses, to

the metallic fringe that was banned in the early 1920s because the high cost was ruining some families. The museum was being moved at the time of research, so check with Tourinform for opening times.

From Hősök tere, a short distance southwest of Szent László tér, enter any of the small streets running southward to find the **Hadas** district, a completely different world of thatched and whitewashed cottages. Interesting lanes to stroll along are Patkó köz, Kökény köz and Mogyoró köz, but the centre of activity is Kis Jankó Bori utca, named after Hungary's own 'Grandma Moses', who lived and stitched her famous '100 roses' patterns here for almost 80 years. Her 200-year-old cottage is now the **Bori Kis Jankó Memorial House** (Kis Jankó Bori Emlékház; ☎ 411 873; Kis Jankó Bori utca 22; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 9am–7pm Jul–mid-Aug, 9am–4pm mid-Mar–Jun & mid-Aug–Oct), filled with needlework and brightly painted furniture. Other houses on Kis Jankó Bori utca that you can visit and watch the women at work are the **Folk-Art Association** (☎ 411 686; 5 Kis Jankó Bori utca), 'dance barn' (táncpajta; 7 Kis Jankó Bori utca), Nos 9 and 38. Also poke your head into Nos 1, 4, 6 and 12 of Mogyoró köz. Most of the work is for sale directly from the embroiderers; you can also buy it at the Matyó Museum.

SLEEPING & EATING

With Eger so close, there's no point in staying overnight in Mezőkövesd. But if you miss the last bus or you want to catch an early-morning one to Miskolc, **Borsod Tourist** (☎ 412 614; Mátyás király út 153; ☎ 9am–4.30pm Mon–Thu, 9am–2pm Fri), en route to/from the bus station, can organise private rooms (around 2500Ft per person around); Tourinform also has a list. Otherwise, you can overnight at the following:

Tulipános Guesthouse (☎ 06 30 228 7119; Mogyoró köz 1; d 4000Ft; **P**) In the heart of the Hadas district, this holiday home has enough room to sleep eight people, and comes with kitchen and garden.

For something to eat, your best bet are these eateries:

Hungária (☎ 416 800; Alkotmány út 2; mains 700–1000Ft) Next to Tourinform, Hungária's international food and hearty lunch menu (around 550Ft) attracts locals like bees to honey.

Pizza Néró (☎ 415 676; Eötvös utca 9; pizza 600–1000Ft; ☎ 10am–11pm Sun–Thu, 10am–2pm Fri & Sat) South of Hősök tere, this pizzeria is a simpler affair.

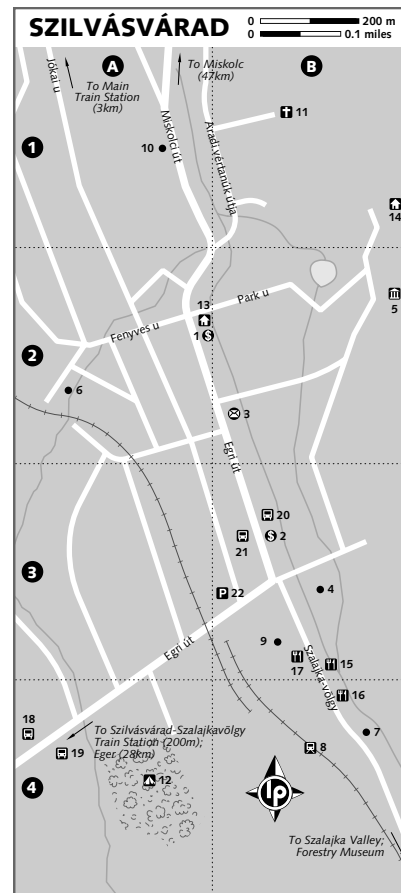
GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses run to/from Eger (241Ft, 30 minutes, 20km) and Miskolc (605Ft, one hour, 48km) at least every half-hour.

SZILVÁSVÁRAD

☎ 36 / pop 1900

The peaceful town of Szilvásvár, some 28km north of Eger, is an excellent gateway for inroads into the western Bükk region, particularly for hiking into the Szalajka Valley. It's also the centre for breeding



Lipizzaners (see boxed text, p336), and is the place to ride on one of Hungary's most delightful narrow-gauge trains.

Orientation

Get off the train at the first of Szilvásvár's two stations, Szilvásvár–Szalajkavölgy, and walk along Egri út northeast for about 10 minutes to the centre of town. The town's main train station is 3km to the north.

Information

There's an **OTP bank** (Egri út 30/a; ☎ 8am–4pm Mon–Fri) for changing money (an OTP ATM is next to the supermarket) and a **post office** (Egri út 12; ☎ 8am–4pm Mon–Fri) close by.

Sights & Activities

The open-air **narrow-gauge train** (☎ 564 004; Szalajka-völgy 6; adult/child one way 300/150Ft) chugs its way for 5km into the Szalajka Valley seven times daily from May to September (10 times daily on the weekend), with departures in April and October leaving when enough people gather.

The little open-air train stops at **Szalajka-Fátyolvízés**. From there, you can walk for 15 minutes to **Istállóskő Cave**, where Stone Age pottery shards were discovered in 1912,

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or climb 958m **Mt Istállóskő**, the highest peak in the Bükk Hills. To return to Szilvásvárad, either stay on the train for the return trip or walk back for 1½ hours along shady paths, taking in trout-filled streams and the **Forestry Museum** (Erdészeti Múzeum; ☎ 355 112; adult/child 210/120Ft; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun mid-Apr–Sep, 8.30am-3pm Tue–Sun Oct, 8.30am-2pm Nov–mid-Apr), which deals with everything the forest surrenders.

The covered and the open **racecourses** (adult/child 300/150Ft) in Szilvásvárad put on Lipizzaner parades and coach races on weekends throughout summer, but times are not fixed. Learn more about these intelligent horses by visiting the whiffy **Horse Museum** (Lovas Múzeum; ☎ 355 135; Park utca 8; adult/child 350/250Ft; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-4pm Sun-Wed), in an 18th-century stable. The **Lipizzaner Stud Farm** (Lipicai Állami Ménesgazdaság; ☎ 564 400; Fenyves utca; adult/child 300/200Ft; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-4pm Thu-Sun) can also be visited. It rents out horses (1800/2500Ft per hour in the paddock/further afield) and offers coach rides (two-/four-horse coach seating three people from 4300/7400Ft). Coach driving instruction costs 5100/9000Ft an hour for two-/four-horse coaches.

The Protestant **Round Church** (Kerektemplom; Aradi vértanúk útja 33; admission free; ☎ 9-11am & 2-5pm

Mon-Sat), with its Doric columns and dramatic dome raised in 1841, looks to some like a provincial attempt to duplicate the basilica at Eger. Displays in a 17th-century farmhouse called **Orbán House** (☎ 355 133; Miskolci utca 58-60; adult/child 200/150Ft; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-Apr–Oct) are devoted to the flora, fauna and geology of Bükk National Park.

Mountain Bike Rentals (☎ 06 30 335 2695; Szalajkavölgy; ☎ 9am-6pm Sat-Wed, 9am-1pm Thu & Fri) has a stand opposite the narrow-gauge train station in Szalajka-völgy. Bike rentals per one/two/three/four/five hours cost 800/1000/1200/1400/1600Ft and per day 2000Ft.

Sleeping & Eating

Szalajka Fogadó (☎ 564 020; szalajka.fogado@axelero.hu; Egri út 2; s/d 9000/12,500Ft; ☎) This lovely *pension* is in a renovated house/mansion, set back in mature trees near the main road. Rooms feature loads of stripped-back wood, and have shiny-white bathrooms and sun-lit balconies.

Szilvás (☎ 564 065; reserve@hotelszilvas.hunguesthotels.hu; Park utca 6; s/d from €25/35; ☎) This hotel, in an old mansion close to the woods, is the most characterful place to stay in Szilvásvárad. Prices depend on the season, whether your room has a shower or bath,

and drop the longer you linger; note that there is a minimum stay of two nights.

Hegyi Camping (☎ 355 207; www.hegyicamping.com; Egri út 36/a; camp site per tent & 2 people 1800Ft, 2-/3-/4-bed cabins 4400/5400/6200Ft; ☎ mid-Apr–mid-Oct; ☎) A small, quiet camping ground close to walks, with a variety of accommodation.

A string of food stalls and restaurants line Szalajka-völgy. Many of them serve trout (40Ft to 60Ft per kilogram), the speciality of the area, and have wine tastings. We recommend the following:

Lovas (☎ 355 555; mains 900-2500Ft; ☎ 10am-8pm)

With a covered terrace facing the racecourse.

Fenyő (☎ 564 015; mains 800-1500Ft; ☎ 8am-10pm)

Simpler, with its back to the car park and forest.

For something more upmarket, head to the quality restaurant at Szalajka Fogadó.

Getting There & Away

Buses to/from Eger (363Ft, 45 minutes, 30km) run often and, though they stop at Belpátfalva (133Ft, 10 minutes, 7km) and sometimes Mónosbél, they're faster than the train. Buses also go to Budapest (1930Ft, three hours, 152km, three to four daily) and Miskolc (665Ft, 1½ hours, 55km, once daily).

Up to six trains daily link Eger (346Ft, one hour, 34km) with Szilvásvárad. If heading for Szilvásvárad from the centre of Eger, board the train at the Egervár train station. Three of these trains carry on to Putnok, from where you can enter Slovakia via Bánréve or head southeast for Miskolc.

AROUND SZILVÁSVÁRAD Belpátfalva

☎ 36 / pop 3500

On the train or bus to/from Szilvásvárad, you'll pass through the town of Belpátfalva, which seems to stand out for no other reason than that the giant cement factory covers everything in fine white powder.

In fact, one of Hungary's most perfectly preserved Romanesque monuments is just a few minutes away. It's the **Bélháromkút Abbey Church** (☎ 354 784; adult/child 150/100Ft; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun mid-Mar–Oct), built by French Cistercian monks in 1232 and reached by walking east from the village centre for 1.5km (follow the 'Apátság Múzeum' signs) along Apátság utca. Along the way you'll see another sign giving the address for the key (*templom kulcsa*), which is at Rozsa Ferenc utca 42. The church, built in the shape of a

cross, is set in a peaceful dell just below Mt Békő. Don't miss the 19th-century painted **Calvary scene** nearby.

Most of the buses and trains linking Eger and Szilvásvárad stop at Belpátfalva.

MISKOLC

☎ 46 / pop 184,100

Miskolc, Hungary's third-largest city, is a sprawling metropolis ringed by refineries, abandoned factories and cardboard-quality housing blocks. So why come to this 'capital of the rust belt'? For one thing, its location at the foot of the Bükk Hills makes it an ideal place to start a trek or walk into the national park. The thermal waters of nearby Miskolctapolca are among the most effective in Hungary, and the western suburb of Diósgyőr boasts a well-preserved castle.

A relatively affluent mining and steel-making town under the socialist regime, Miskolc was hit harder than most by the collapse of heavy industry here in the early 1990s.

Orientation

Miskolc is a long and narrow city, stretching from the unlovely Sajó Valley in the east to the Bükk foothills in the west. The main drag, Széchenyi István út, is lined with some surprisingly interesting old buildings, especially those around the so-called Dark Gate (Sötétkapu), an 18th-century vaulted passageway.

Miskolc's main train station, called Tiszai pályaudvar, lies to the southeast on Kandó Kálmán tér, a 15-minute tram ride from the city centre. The huge bus station is on Búza tér, a short distance northeast of Széchenyi út.

Information

Borsod Tourist (☎ 312 542; Széchenyi István út 35;

☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Génius (☎ 412 932; Széchenyi István út 107) Stocks novels and travel guides on Hungary in English.

Ibusz (☎ 324 411; Széchenyi István út 14)

Main post office (Kazinczy Ferenc út 16) Located on the eastern side of Hősök tere.

OTP bank (Széchenyi István út 15) Opposite the Dark Gate.

Planet Café (Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca; per hr 360Ft;

☎ 10am-10.30pm) Internet access in the Szinvapark mall.

Post office (Széchenyi István út 3-9; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri) This branch has a convenient location on the 1st floor of a shopping block above Plus supermarket.

THE MAGNIFICENT WHITE STALLIONS

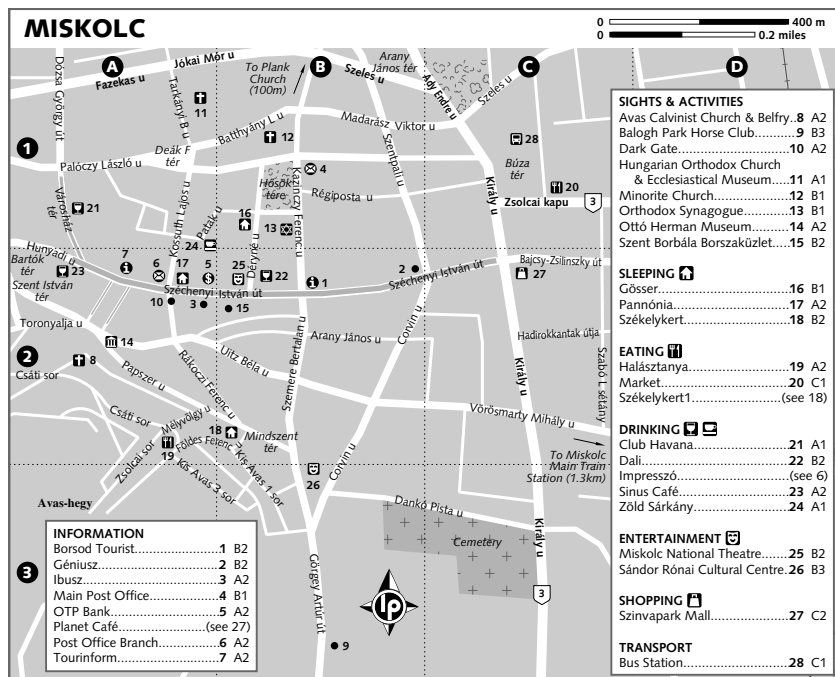
Lipizzaners, the celebrated white horses bred originally for the imperial Spanish Riding School in Vienna under the Habsburgs, are considered to be the finest riding horses in the world – the *haute école* of dressage equines. And with all the trouble that's put into breeding and training them, it's not surprising. They are very intelligent, sociable animals, quite robust and graceful.

Lipizzaners are bred for riding and show at Lipica in Slovenia; at Piber, northeast of Graz in Austria, for the Spanish Riding School; and in the US state of Illinois. The Lipizzaners at Szilvásvárad are raised as carriage horses; as a result they are bigger and stronger.

Breeding, as they say, is paramount. Some six families with 16 ancestors (including Spanish, Arabian and Berber breeds) can be traced back to the early 18th century, and their pedigrees read like those of medieval nobility. When you walk around the stables at the stud farm or the Horse Museum, you'll notice charts on each horse's stall with complicated figures, dates and names, like 'Maestoso', 'Neapolitano' and 'Pluto'. It's all to do with the horse's lineage.

A fully mature Lipizzaner measures about 15 hands (that's about 152cm) and weighs between 500kg and 600kg. They have long backs, short thick necks, silky manes and expressive eyes. They live for 25 to 30 years and are particularly resistant to disease. But, like most horses, they are somewhat short-sighted (near-sighted) and will nuzzle you out of curiosity if you approach them while they graze.

Lipizzaners are not born white but grey, bay (ie reddish brown) or even chestnut. The celebrated 'imperial white' does not come about until they are between five and 10 years old, when their hair loses its pigment; think of it as part of an old nag's ageing process. Their skin remains grey, however, so when they are ridden hard and sweat, they become mottled and aren't so attractive.



Tourinform (☎ 350 425; miskolc@tourinform.hu; Városház tér 13; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat Oct-May) Very helpful, with bundles of information on the city and its surrounds. www.miskolc.hu This website is available in a number of languages.

Sights

Two houses of worship attest to the large communities of Greeks and Jews who once called Miskolc their home. The **Hungarian Orthodox church** (Magyar ortodox templom; Deák Ferenc tér 7), a splendid late-baroque structure, has an iconostasis (1793) that is 16m high with 88 icons. A guide will escort you to the **Orthodox Ecclesiastical Museum** (Ortodox Egyházi Múzeum; ☎ 415 441; adult/child 150/100Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar) near the main gate. Look out for the Black Madonna of Kazan, presented to the church by Catherine the Great, and the jewel-encrusted Mt Athos Cross, brought to Miskolc by Greek settlers in the 18th century. To the southeast stands the large and, as per the norm, crumbling **Orthodox synagogue** (Ortodox zsinagóga; Kazinczy Ferenc utca 7), designed in 1861

by Ludwig Förster, architect of the Great Synagogue in Budapest.

The Calvinist **Plank Church** (Deszkateplom; Petőfi tér) is a 1938 replica of a 17th-century Transylvanian-style wooden church. It has been completely rebuilt and renovated after being badly damaged by fire in 1997.

The **Ottó Herman Museum** (☎ 346 875; Papszer utca 1; adult/child 400/200Ft; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun), south of the city centre, has one of Hungary's richest collections of Neolithic finds (many from the Bükk region), good ethnographical and mineral collections, and an exhibit of fine art. From here, take a stroll up leafy **Avas Hill**, the best approach is via Mélyvölgy utca, off Papszer utca, or Földes Ferenc utca, off Mindszent tér. Veer to the right along the narrow lane past some of the more than 800 wine cellars cut into the limestone.

In a cemetery below the hill is the large Gothic **Avas Calvinist church** (Avasi református templom; Avas-hegy), with a painted wooden interior (1410). The bell tower dates from the mid-16th century. The key is in the parish office at Papszer utca 14.

A must-see but a bit of a journey from the city centre is the four-towered **Diósgyőr Castle** (Map p341; ☎ 533 355; Vár utca 24; adult/child 600/300Ft; ☎ 9am-6pm), in a suburb of the same name some 7km west of Miskolc. Begun in the 13th century, the castle was heavily damaged early in the 18th century and was only restored – very insensitively in some parts – in the 1950s. Tours (included in admission price), which take you through the castle's history display, wax museum and medieval weapon stash, leave at 15 and 45 minutes past the hour, and are in Hungarian and German only.

Activities

The **Balogh Park Horse Club** (☎ 712 899; Görgye Artúr utca 12) hires out horses for riding and runs a riding school south of Mindszent tér. Further afield, there's a horse-riding school at **Kováts** (Map p341; ☎ 341 656), a riding hotel in Görömböly, south of Miskolc on Rte 3 (Pesti út). Take bus 4 from the bus station.

Sample a few of the choice local wines at **Szent Borbála Borszakület** (☎ 411 188; Széchenyi István út 14; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) in a courtyard off the main street.

One of the most enjoyable forest train trips in Hungary connects Miskolc and the resort town of Lillafüred (p341). This little **narrow-gauge train** (Map p341; ☎ 530 593) departs from Kilián-Észak train station (off Kiss tábornok út in western Miskolc), almost in Diósgyőr. There is only one departure daily year-round (one way adult/child 340/220Ft), at 9.15am mid-March to mid-October, and 9am the rest of the year. Check the schedules at Tourinform in Miskolc or call for information. From Lillafüred, the train carries on another 6km to Garadna.

Another line of the narrow-gauge train branches off at Papirgyár – the paper factory that polluted the Szinva Stream – and covers the 20km between Kilián-Észak train station and Mahóca. It only runs at 9.30am on Saturday from June to August.

Festivals & Events

Several special events and festivals are held at Diósgyőr Castle, including the **Castle Games** in May, the open-air **Kalácsa International Folk Festival** in mid-July, and **Medieval Castle Days** in mid-August.

Sleeping

Miskolc is bereft of any quality accommodation, so you're better off choosing a place to stay in either Miskolctapolca (p340) or Lillafüred (p342). Tourinform has a list of private rooms (approximately 2500Ft per person), whereas Ibusz or Borsod Tourist can do bookings; the rooms will probably be in one of the housing projects ringing the city.

Székeleykert (☎ 411 222; Földes Ferenc utca 4; r 8000Ft) On the corner with Kisavas Alsó sor, this popular *pension* has a homey feel, an owner mad on ice hockey, an unusual restaurant and easy access to Avas Hill.

Gösser (☎ 505 045; gossler.panzio@axelero.hu; Déryné utca 7; s/d 8000/9500Ft) Gösser's main selling point is its central location; rooms are fairly ordinary, but staff are friendly and accommodating.

Pannónia (☎ 504 980; www.hotelpannonia-miskolc.hu; Kossuth Lajos utca 2; s/d 16,100/18,000Ft; (P)) Pannónia is Miskolc's most central option, and aims itself at business clientele, with particularly unstylish rooms and conference facilities.

Eating & Drinking

Székeleykert (☎ 411 222; Földes Ferenc utca 4; mains 1000-2000Ft) This restaurant at the *pension* of the same name serves Transylvanian specialties, dishes rarely found on restaurant menus in Hungary, in a pleasant inner courtyard.

Halásztanya (☎ 411 203; Mélyvölgy út 15; mains 1000-2000Ft; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Sat) At the foot of Avas Hill, this relaxed place specialises in fish dishes and has a larger than normal terrace.

Talizmán (Map p341; ☎ 378 627; Vár utca 14; mains around 1200Ft) This place, in Diósgyőr, can be recommended for its menu and pleasant location on a pedestrian street lined with chestnuts tree, just up from the castle.

Market (Zsolcai kapu) Miskolc's large market is east of Búza tér.

While the city centre has surprisingly few restaurants deserving of a review, the same cannot be said for its cafés and bars. The following are all worth popping into:

Zöld Sárkány (☎ 428 134; Széchenyi István út 19; ☎ 10am-8.45pm Mon-Fri, noon-10pm Sat) A rather earnest teahouse and café in a stunning courtyard.

Dali (Déryné utca 10) With big couches, a funky décor and chilled tunes, Dali is perfect for lolling around sipping coffee or cocktails.

Impresszó (Kossuth Lajos utca; ☎ 9am-midnight Tue–Thu, 9am-to late Fri & Sat) Popular for its coffee, alcoholic and non-alcoholic cocktails, and shady terrace.

Sinus Café (Hunyadi utca 3) More of a cocktail bar than a café, with a heaving terrace in summer.

Club Havana (Városház tér 3; ☎ 8am–2am) A lovely terraced café-bar, with canned Latino music.

Entertainment

Miskolc National Theatre (Miskolci Nemzeti Színház; ☎ 516 735; Széchenyi István út 23; ☎ box office 10am–7pm Mon–Fri, 3–7pm Sat & Sun) Stages plays and other performances in a new purpose-built theatre behind the original theatre (built 1857), where the beloved 19th-century actress Róza Széppataki Déryné once walked the floorboards.

There are also performances at the **Sándor Rónai Cultural Centre** (Rónai Sándor Művelődési Központ; ☎ 342 408; Mindszent tér 3). The Hungarian Orthodox Church and Orthodox synagogue are sometimes used for opera concerts.

For more listings, see the free biweekly *Miskolci Est* magazine.

Getting There & Away

Buses depart for Debrecen (1210Ft, 2¼ hours, 100km) every 30 minutes to an hour. If you're heading south, it's best to take the bus, though departures are infrequent. There are nine buses daily to Eger (846Ft, 1½ hours, 68km).

Miskolc is served by hourly trains from Keleti train station in Budapest (2030Ft, 2½ hours, 182km); about 12 trains depart daily for Nyíregyháza (890Ft, 1½ to two hours, 88km) via Tokaj (544Ft, one hour, 56km). Two of these trains carry on to Debrecen (1420Ft, 2¼ to three hours, 137km), but generally you'll have to change at Nyíregyháza. About 12 trains leave Miskolc each day for Sárospatak (774Ft, 1½ hours, 74km) and Sátoraljaújhely (890Ft, 1¼ hours, 84km).

International trains from Miskolc include those departing for Košice in Slovakia (five daily) and Kraków (one daily).

Getting Around

Tram 1 begins at the train station and travels the length of the city before turning around in Diósgyőr; Tram 2 also starts at the train station, cuts through the centre of the city, but ends up in the industrial quarter of Diósgyőr-Kóház.

Order a taxi on ☎ 333 333.

AROUND MISKOLC

Miskolctapolca

☎ 46

The curative waters of the thermal spa in this southwestern recreational suburb, 7km from the centre of Miskolc, have been attracting bathers since the Middle Ages, though the gimmicky **Cave Bath** (Barlangfürdő; ☎ 561 361; Pázar István sétány 1; adult/child/student 1600/900/1100Ft; ☎ 9am–7pm mid-Jul–Aug, 9am–6pm Sep–mid-Jul), with its earth walls, 'mildly radioactive waters' and thrashing shower at the end, is a relatively new arrival (1959). The pretty **Strand Bath** (Strandfürdő; ☎ 368 127; Miskolctapolcai út 1), in the centre of the town's large park, also has **outside pools** (adult/child 700/550Ft; ☎ 9am–6pm May–Sep).

SLEEPING & EATING

Unless you arrive on a weekend at peak holiday times, you should have no problem finding accommodation; aside from hotels, private rooms are almost everywhere you look, and are particularly prolific to the west of the Cave Bath. **Tourist Service** (☎ 363 970; Csabai utca 14; ☎ 9am–7.30pm) can help with booking such places.

Zenit (☎ 561 560; zenitpanzio@axelero.hu; Egyetem út; r 9800Ft; P) This *pension* within walking distance of the pools has cute rooms with homey touches (some with balcony) and warm staff. Cars are also available for rent.

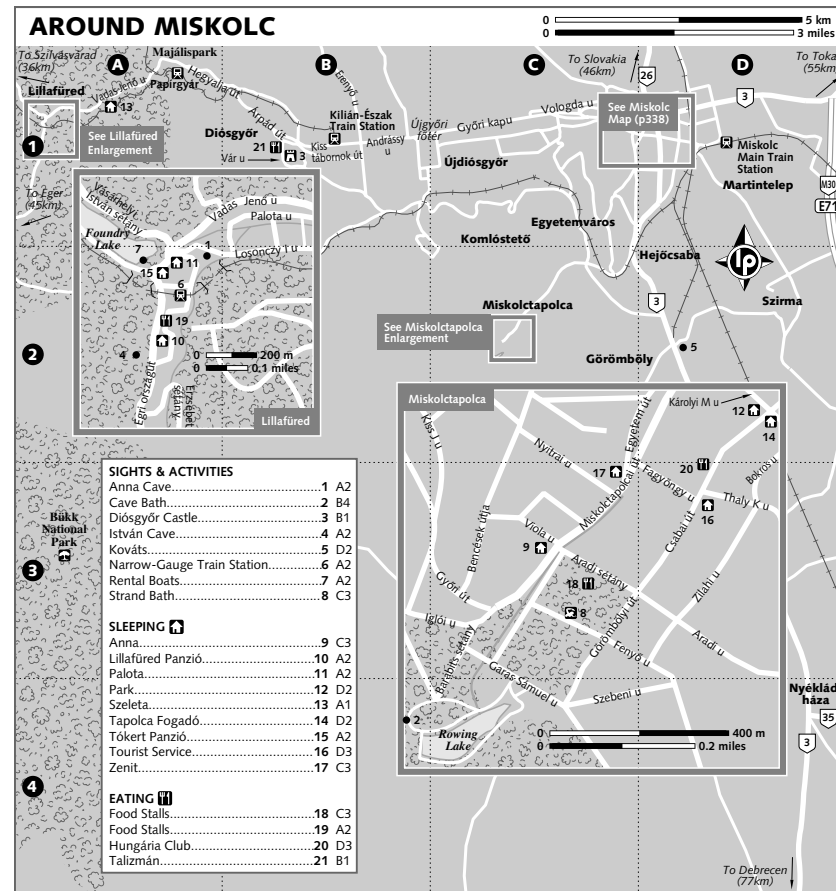
Anna (☎ 422 212; annahotel2@chello.hu; Miskolctapolcai út 7; r 10,000Ft; P) Close to the pool entrance is this modern *pension*, with friendly management and large, if not spartan, rooms. Book ahead as it is often full.

Tapolca Fogadó (☎ 562 215; www.tapolcafogado.hu; Csabai utca 36; d/t from 8000/10,000Ft; P) If you like a natural-wood finish, you'll love this place; almost every inch of this *pension* is built from the material. Rooms are simple but more than comfortable, and the structure features a turret or two.

Park (☎ 422 605; parkhotel@axelero.hu; Csabai utca 35; r 8800Ft; P) Park is not much to look at from the outside, but its rooms are bright and fresh, and some have the added bonus of a balcony. There's a sauna available for guest use.

Hungária Club (☎ 432 884; Csabai utca; mains 800–1500Ft) Set back from Csabai utca, this eatery has a menu packed with Hungarian dishes and a terrace to the rear.

There are numerous food stalls and snack bars to choose from on Aradi sétány,



and both Anna and Tapolca Fogadó have restaurants.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 2 serves Miskolctapolca and the Cave Bath from Búza tér in Miskolc.

Lillafüred

☎ 46

The alpine feel of Lillafüred, a tiny resort at the junction of two valleys formed by the Garadna and Szinva Streams, is in stark contrast to the urban sprawl of Miskolc only 12km to the east. While there are no major sights to drag you here, it's a nice spot to enjoy some fresh air, and a good springboard for walks and hikes into the eastern Bükk Hills.

ACTIVITIES

Sometimes called Petőfi Cave, **Anna Cave** (☎ 334 130; adult/child 650/450Ft, minimum 10 people) is below the Palota hotel and next to a cooling waterfall; on a 25-minute tour of the cave's labyrinth of tunnels, you'll come across fossilised leaves, branches, and even entire trees. Tours depart on the hour from 10am to 3pm from mid-April to mid-October.

István Cave (☎ 334 130; adult/child 650/450Ft, minimum 10 people; ☎ 9am–5pm mid-Apr–mid-Oct, 9am–4pm mid-Oct–mid-Apr) is about 500m up the mountain road leading to Eger; it offers one-hour tours on the hour, taking in stalagmites, stalactites, sinkholes and large chambers.

A number of lovely **walks** can be undertaken from the terminuses of the two lines of the narrow-gauge train at **Garadna** and **Taksalápa**, but accommodation is sparse in these parts and hikers had better be prepared to camp rough if they miss the train. Be sure to have a copy of the northern Bükk map (No 29) from Cartographia and carry extra water.

Jade-coloured **Hámori-tó** (Foundry Lake), named after the proto-blast furnace set up here by a German named Frigyes Fazola in the early 19th century to exploit the area's iron ore, offers **fishing** (☎ in Miskolc 324702; Corvin utca 15) and boating. **Row boats** (🚤 10am-6pm May-Sep) cost 400/200Ft per adult/child per half-hour, while paddle boats cost 600Ft per half-hour. The Palota hotel rents out bicycles for 500Ft per hour, but only to guests.

SLEEPING & EATING

Lillafüred Panzió (☎ 379 299; Erzsébet sétány 7; s/d 4300/6600Ft; 📍) Just back from the road to Eger and well hidden among lush trees is this straightforward *pension*, with clean and simple rooms, friendly staff and a basic restaurant.

Tókert Panzió (☎ 533 560; tokert@tokert.hu; Erzsébet sétány 3; s/d from 8700/10,500Ft, mains 800-1200Ft; 🍴 restaurant 7am-11pm; 📍) In the shadow (in every sense) of the Palota hotel, this place has good-sized rooms with great views of the lake and a decent restaurant serving fish dishes on its multilevel terrace.

Szeleta (☎ 530 130; www.hamorholiday.hu; Szeleta utca 12-14; camp site per person/tent 800/1500Ft, s/d from 11,500/15,000Ft; 📍) A few kilome-

tres before Lillafüred proper is this camp site/hotel, with brand-spanking-new (if not a little soulless) rooms, tent sites backing into the forest, and its own sauna and cave.

For food, take your pick from the hotel and *pension* restaurants, or sidle up to the several food stalls serving *lángos* (deep-fried dough with toppings) and sausage near the narrow-gauge train station.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

You can reach Lillafüred by bus or narrow-gauge train (p339). From the end station of Tram 1 at Diósgyőr, transfer to bus 5 or 15, which leaves for Lillafüred every half-hour or so.

AGGTELEK HILLS

It can be a little unnerving leaving Miskolc behind and heading northwest along Rte 26 towards the Slovak border. One giant chemical factory after another lines the road, and it's hard to resist turning around and looking for greener pastures. But don't be put off by all the twisted steel and rusting pipes; just to the north are the Aggtelek Hills, an area with hardly a hint of urban intrusion. Here, rolling forested hills and meadows hide the occasional rural village, and life still follows the seasons.

This region is also home to the **Aggtelek National Park**, a hilly karst region encompassing some 200 sq km, and Europe's largest stalactite caves.

AGGTELEK

☎ 48 / pop 647

The tiny town of Aggtelek is the main gateway to the Baradla-Domica caves, a network of some 25km of passageways (6km of them in Slovakia). The network was declared a dual-nation Unesco World Heritage Site in 1995, and a trip underground to see the array of red-and-black stalactite drip stones, stalagmite pyramids and enormous chambers is a highlight on most people's itineraries.

Orientation

There are three entrances to the Baradla Cave system: at Aggtelek village; at Jósvalfő, 6km to the east; and at Vörös-tó (Red Lake), just

NORTHERN UPLANDS' TOP FIVE CASTLES

- Hollókő (p318) – intact fortress with far-reaching views
- Eger (p329) – modern construction with a monumental history
- Füzér (p353) – lonely structure high above villages and pastures
- Boldogkő (p344) – classic edifice rising from solid rock
- Sárospatak (p348) – romantic stronghold in superb condition

before Jósvalfő. Guided tours of the Baradla Cave system depart from these points, but the most popular short and long tours can be joined at the Aggtelek entrance.

Information

Tourinform (☎ 503 000; aggtelek@tourinform.hu; Baradla oldal 3; 🕒 8am-6pm Apr-Sep, 8am-4pm Oct-Mar) can supply you with information and sell you a copy of Cartographia's *Aggteleki-karszt és környéke* (Aggtelek Karst and Surrounds; No 1; 720Ft), an excellent 1:40,000 hiking map. For more detailed information, contact the **Aggtelek National Park Directorate** (Aggteleki Nemzeti Park Igazgatósága; ☎ 506 000; www.anp.hu; Tengerszem oldal 1) in Jósvalfő.

The **post office** (☎ 343 156; Kossuth utca 37; 🕒 8.30am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri) in Aggtelek has an ATM. Cseppkő hotel will exchange money.

Activities

CAVING

Baradla Cave (Baradla-barlang; 🕒 8am-6pm Apr-Sep, 8am-4pm Oct-Mar) has tours that depart year-round. The temperature at this level is usually about 10°C with humidity over 95%, so be sure to bring a sweater along. Tours usually include a short organ recital or some other form of music in the Concert or Giants' Halls and, if the water is high enough, a boat ride on the Styx, an underground stream.

Short tours lasting about one hour (adult/child April to September 1900/1100Ft, October to March 1700/1000Ft; 1km) start at the Aggtelek entrance at 10am, 1pm and 3pm, with additional tours at noon and 5pm from April to September. A one-hour

tour (April to September 1900/1100Ft, October to March 1700/1000Ft; 1km) that covers a different section is available from the Jósvalfő entrance near the Tengerszem hotel at 9am and 4pm from April to September, and at 11.30am the rest of the year.

A two-hour 'middle tour' of the Jósvalfő section (April to September 2500/1500Ft, October to March 2300/1400Ft; 2.3km) departs at 9am, 11am, noon, 1.30pm, 3pm and 4.30pm from April to September, and at 10am, noon and 2pm the rest of the year from the Vörös-tó entrance; it ends at the one in Jósvalfő. You can also buy reduced-price tickets that combine the Aggtelek short and the Jósvalfő middle tours (April to September 3600/2200Ft, October to March 3400/2100Ft; 2.5km) over two consecutive days.

If that doesn't fulfil your spelunking urges, try one of these; the three-hour Keresztély Raisz tour (5000/2400Ft; 3.6km), which includes an unpaved section without illumination (torches are provided); the Long tour (6000/3600Ft; 7km), which takes five hours and combines sections of the Aggtelek, middle and Keresztély Raisz tours; and the Special tour (7000/4200Ft; 8.3km), which consists of the Long tour plus a side trip to the Hall of Wonders. The first two leave at 9.30am on Saturday April to September, while the Special tour departs at 8.30am. From October to March advanced bookings are required; a minimum of 10 people are needed for tours to go ahead.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

You can join up with some excellent **hiking trails** above the Tourinform office in Aggtelek, affording superb views of the rolling hills and valleys. A relatively easy three-hour (7km) walk along the **Baradla Trail**, tagged yellow, will take you from Aggtelek to Jósvalfő. There are other treks lasting five to six hours, and these can be used for **cycling** and **horse riding**. A 20km **bicycle route** links Aggtelek and Szögliget to the northeast, but unfortunately you'll have to bring your own bike. The **Hucul Stud Farm** in Jósvalfő has horses for hire (1200Ft per hour) and offers hour-long carriage and, in winter, sledge (sleigh) rides for 2000Ft.

The park directorate organises a number of programs, including three-hour **guided walks** in Aggtelek and Jósvalfő (adult/child

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Palota (☎ 331 411; reserve@hotelpalota.hun.guesthotels.hu; Erzsébet sétány 1; s/d from €77/93, ste from €119; 📍 🍴 🚿) Dominating Lillafüred is Palota, a mock-Gothic structure that's a hotel again after a 40-year stint as a trade-union holiday home. With its regal air, sumptuous lounge and bar, and fully renovated rooms with views of the lake or forest, it's a piece of old-fashioned luxury in the Northern Uplands. Of its two restaurants, posh Mátyás, with stained-glass windows, an enormous fireplace and waiters who look like they're dressed to say Mass, is easily top dog.

1000/600Ft), as well as **themed tours** of the national park lasting three to six hours – from ecology (600Ft to 1500Ft) to zoology and botany (1000Ft to 3000Ft). Note that some walks can be combined with cave tours.

Festivals & Events

Main events in Aggtelek and its vicinity are the **International Opera Festival** in Baradla Cave in June, the **Gömör-Torna Festival of folk and world music** in July and **Mountaineering Day** in early September, which attracts climbers from all over Hungary.

Sleeping & Eating

Baradla Hostel (Baradla oldal 2; dm adult/student mid-Apr–mid-Oct 1800/1500Ft, mid-Oct–mid-Apr 1500/1200Ft) Offers dorm rooms with two, three and six beds.

Cseppkő (☎ 343 075; Gyömri út 2; s/d 5500/9000Ft; 📍) On a scenic hill above the cave entrance, this is the only hotel in Aggtelek. It has a restaurant, bar, a terrace with splendid views, and a bowling alley, tennis court and sauna/solarium.

Tengerszem (☎ 506 005; tengerszem_szallo@t-online.hu; Tengerszem oldal 2; d/tr/q mid-Apr–mid-Oct 13,000/15,000/17,000Ft, mid-Oct–mid-Apr 11,000/12,900/15,000Ft) At the Jósfaő end of the cave system is this renovated hotel, which is convenient if you intend on joining cave tours at both the Aggtelek and Jósfaő entrances.

Baradla Camping (☎ 503 005; hcseppko@axelero.hu; Baradla oldal 2; camp sites per person/tent/caravan 1000/1000/1400Ft, 4-person/6-person bungalows 5300/15,000Ft; 📍 mid-Apr–mid-Oct; 📍) Baradla Camping, next to the Aggtelek cave entrance, has a peaceful setting, and cute A-frame bungalows.

All sleeping possibilities have restaurants, and there are food stalls in the car park near the Aggtelek cave entrance.

Getting There & Away

Direct buses link Aggtelek with Budapest (2410Ft, four to five hours, 195km) and Miskolc (665Ft, 1½ hours, 52km). They leave Jósfaő (stopping at Aggtelek about 10 minutes later) for Budapest twice daily at 5.30am and 2.45pm (with an additional bus at 4.10pm Friday to Sunday), and for Miskolc at 4.30am and 11.30am Monday to Friday, at 5.45am Saturday and at 11.30am Sunday.

Aggtelek can also be reached from Miskolc (430Ft, 1¼ hours, 49km, five daily) by train – you want the one heading for Tornaádaska. The Jósfaő–Aggtelek train station is some 14km east of Jósfaő (and 20km from Aggtelek village); a local bus meets each of the trains to take you to either town.

Getting Around

Five buses a day link Aggtelek (stopping outside the Cseppkő hotel) and Jósfaő (stopping at the cave entrance) via Vörös-tó.

ZEMPLÉN HILLS

Wine, castles, hiking – these are three of the Zemplén Hill's most attractive possessions. Its southern and eastern slopes are dotted with market towns and vineyards of the Tokaj-Hegyalja region, where the world-renowned Tokaj wine, which attracted merchants from Greece, Serbia, Slovakia, Poland, Germany and Russia, is produced. The northern Zemplén on the border with Slovakia is the nation's 'wildest' region, full of hiking opportunities and romantic castle ruins.

BOLDGKÓVÁRALJA

☎ 46 / pop 1185

The picturesque Hernád Valley, which basically runs from Szerencs to Hidasnémeti, near the Slovakian border, is dotted with quaint wine-producing towns, perfect for sampling the region's fine vintages. Boldgkóvárálja would be just another of these charming places if it weren't for its impressive castle, seamlessly grafted to a rocky outcrop above the valley.

Orientation

Heading north from Szerencs, make sure you sit on the right-hand side of the train to see Boldgkóvárálja's dramatic castle as it comes into view. The train stops on the other side of the highway about 2.5km west of the castle.

Sights & Activities

Perched atop a basalt mountain, **Boldgkó Castle** (adult/child 500/300Ft; 📍 9am–6pm mid-Apr–mid-Oct), literally 'Happy Rock' Castle, is exactly what most people imagine a castle to be – impossibly perched on solid rock,

its strong walls and turrets command 360-degree views of the southern Zemplén Hills, the Hernád Valley and nearby vineyards. Originally built in the 13th century, the castle was strengthened 200 years later, but gradually fell into ruin after the *kuruc* revolt late in the 17th century.

There's a tiny **museum** here with exhibits on notable occupants and medieval weaponry, but walking through the uneven courtyard up onto the ramparts and looking out over the surrounding countryside in the late afternoon is much more satisfying. It's easy to see how the swashbuckling lyric poet Bálint Balassi (1554–94) produced some of his finest work here.

REGIONAL HISTORY EXHIBIT

The little **Regional History exhibit** (Tajtör-téneti kiállítás; ☎ 06 30 579 0290; Kossuth Lajos utca 32; adult/child 300/200Ft; 📍 10am–4pm Fri, Sat & Sun May–Sep) has some interesting items devoted to Balassi and local sons and daughters who made it good overseas (one set up the first Hungarian-language newspaper in the USA), as well as a display of folk dress, a fully equipped smithy, and exhibits on the flora and fauna of the Zemplén.

HIKING

Marked trails lead from the castle's northern side to **Regéc**, about 15km to the northeast via Arka and Mogyoróska, skirting mountains and 14th-century castle ruins along the way. From here you can either retrace your steps to Boldgkóvárálja or follow the road westward to the Fony train stop (some six trains a day in each direction), which is about 10km to the west. The hardy and/or prepared may want to carry on another 8km north to **Gönc**, a pretty town where the wooden barrels used to age traditional Tokaj wine have been made for centuries; it's on the main train line back to Szerencs. Depending on which way you're hiking, make sure you're armed with the northern (No 22) or southern (No 23) section of Cartographia's *Zempléni-hegység* (Zemplén Hills) 1:40,000 map (800Ft each).

Sleeping & Eating

Boldgkóvárálja is not a place to linger overnight but if you're stuck, head to **Bodóvár** (☎ 306 065; www.castles.hu/bodovar; Kossuth Lajos utca 61; s/d 6500/8500Ft, mains 1200Ft; 📍) at

the bottom of the road to the castle. Its rooms are basic but adequate, with views of the castle, and the restaurant serves solid Hungarian fare.

Getting There & Away

Boldgkóvárálja is on the train line connecting Szerencs (264Ft, one hour, 28km) with Hidasnémeti (264Ft, 38 minutes, 23km), and some six trains per day in each direction stop at the town. Only one of these is direct; the rest require a change (no wait) at Abaujszántó.

TOKAJ

☎ 47 / pop 5000

The wines of Tokaj, a picturesque little town of vineyards and nesting storks, have been celebrated for centuries; in fact, the town is so beloved for its amber liquid that it receives a mention in the national anthem. But Tokaj is just one of 28 towns and villages of the Tokaj-Hegyalja, a 66 sq km vine-growing region that produces wine along the southern and eastern edges of the Zemplén Hills and was declared a World Heritage Site in 2002.

Orientation

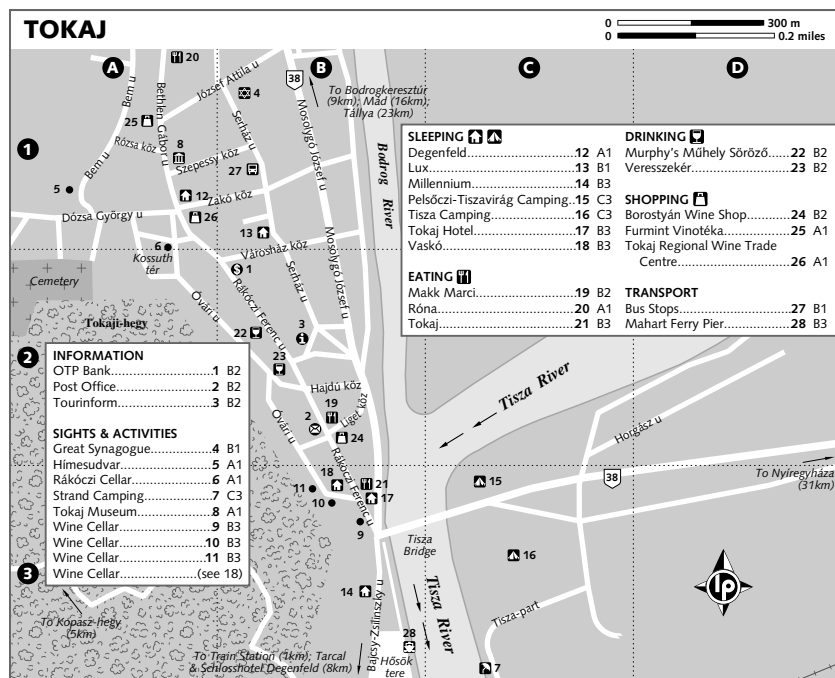
Tokaj's centre lies west of where the Bodrog and Tisza Rivers meet. The train station is 1200m south of the town centre; walk north for 15 minutes along Baross Gábor utca and Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca to Rákóczi Ferenc út, the main thoroughfare. Buses arrive and depart from along Serház utca east of Kossuth tér.

Information

OTP bank (Rákóczi Ferenc út 35; 📍 8am–4pm Mon–Fri)
Post office (Rákóczi Ferenc út 24) In the centre of town.
Tourinform (☎ 552 070; tokaj@tourinform.hu; Serház utca 1; 📍 10.30am–6pm Mon, 9am–7pm Tue–Sat, 10.30am–3.30pm Sun mid-Apr–mid-Oct, 9am–4pm Mon–Fri mid-Oct–mid-Apr) Just off Rákóczi Ferenc út.
www.tokaj.hu Check this website for general information on the town.

Sights

The **Tokaj Museum** (☎ 352 636; Bethlen Gábor utca 13; adult/child 400/200Ft; 📍 10am–4pm Tue–Sun May–Nov), in the 18th-century Greek Trading House, leaves nothing unsaid about the history of Tokaj, the Tokaj-Hegyalja region and the production of its wines.



There's also a superb collection of Christian liturgical art, including icons, medieval crucifixes and triptychs, and Judaica from the nearby Great Synagogue, and temporary exhibits by local artists.

East of the gallery, the 19th-century Eclectic **Great Synagogue** (Nagy zsinagóga; Serház utca 55), which was used as a German barracks during WWII, is once again boarded up and falling into ruin after partial renovations over a decade ago. There's a large **Orthodox Jewish cemetery** in Bodrogkeresztúr, 6km northwest of Tokaj.

Activities

WINE TASTING

Start with 100mL glasses; you may swallow more than you think you can drink. The correct order for sampling a half-dozen Tokaj wines is Furmint, dry Szamorodni, sweet Szamorodni and then the Aszú wines – from three to five or four to six *puttony* (a measure of Aszú essence added to base wines in making Tokaj; for more information, see p55). Private wine cellars offering tastings (usually 4pm to 9pm) are scat-

tered throughout town, including those at Rákóczi Ferenc út 2, Óvári utca Nos 3, 6, and 8, and Bem József utca Nos 2 and 16.

For the ultimate in tasting venues head for the 600-year-old **Rákóczi Cellar** (Rákóczi Pince; ☎ 352 408; Kossuth tér 15; ☎ 10am-7pm mid-Mar–Oct, shop year-round), where bottles of wine mature in long corridors (one measures 28m by 10m). Tastings of six Tokaj wines cost around 2100Ft; individual tastings cost 230Ft, plus a 500Ft serving fee. **Himesudvar** (Decorative Court; ☎ 352 416; www.himesudvar.hu; Bem utca 2; ☎ 9am-9pm May-Sep, 9am-7pm Oct-Apr), a 16th-century wine cellar with shop northwest of the town centre, is another option. Tastings of six wines costs 2000Ft.

Tokaj is not the only town in the region with wine cellars; nearby Tarczal has almost as many, and Mád, Tállya and Bodrogkeresztúr all have a handful. Pick up a wine-map from Tourinform for more options.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

In summer **water tours** of the Bodrog and Tisza Rivers are available from the **Mahart ferry pier** (☎ 352 937; minimum 15 people), just off

Hősök tere. Contact the **Union Federation** (Unió Alapítvány; ☎ 352 927; Bodrogkeresztúri út 5) or Tisza Camping about **canoe** and **kayak** rentals (around 250Ft per hour). There's **swimming** at **Strand Camping** (☎ 06 30 239 6300; admission 250Ft; ☎ 9am-6pm Jun-Aug) from the grassy river-front beach across the Tisza Bridge.

Kopasz-hegy (Bald Mountain) and its TV tower west of the town centre offer a stunning panorama of Tokaj and the surrounding patchwork of vineyards.

Festivals & Events

The **Tokaj Wine Festival**, held in late May, attracts oenophiles from far and wide, as does the **Vintage Days** on the first weekend of October.

Sleeping

For private rooms (double 2800Ft to 5000Ft) pick up a list from Tourinform, or take a gander at your own leisure down Óvári utca, Bethlen Gábor utca, Serház utca or Bem József utca. Rooms on offer along Hegyalja utca are convenient to the train station and are surrounded by vineyards.

Degenfeld (☎ 552 173; www.degenfeldpalota.hu; Kossuth tér 1; s/d 7300/9000Ft; (P)) This very central *pension* has bright and tasteful rooms, with polished wood floors and kitchenettes; there are only four, so book ahead. It also has an excellent restaurant.

Millennium (☎ 352 247; www.tokajmillennium.hu; Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca 34; s/d 8800/10,200Ft; (P)) One of the better central accommodation options, Millennium has large rooms with standard furniture and a restaurant in its turret. The only drawback is its location on a busy road.

Lux (☎ 352 145; Serház utca 14; s/d 2700/5400Ft; ☎ mid-Apr–Dec) This friendly and accommodating six-room *pension* has its own wine cellar, so there's not far to wander to bed after a few glasses.

Vaskó (☎ 352 107, 352 689; Rákóczi út 12; d 6000Ft) The supremely central Vaskó has eight cute rooms, with window sills bedecked with flower pots. It's above a *pince* (wine cellar).

Tokaj Hotel (☎ 352 344; Rákóczi út 5; s/d from 4600/5000Ft; (P)) Tokaj looks as though it was brought from a 1950s sci-fi movie set, but unfortunately its rooms are by no means out of this world. However, some do have a balcony looking onto the river.

Schlosshotel Degenfeld (☎ 580 400; www.hotel.grofdegenfeld.hu; Terézia kert 9; standard s/d from 23,400/25,800Ft, superior from 25,800/28,200Ft, ste s/d from 31,200/33,600Ft; (P)) This 'palace' hotel in the nearby village of Tarczal is a beautifully restored mansion with vineyards and parklands as a backdrop. Rooms are of the finest quality, with period furniture, a smattering of antique pieces and all the mod cons deserving of such a place. The owners are ranked among the top vintners in the region so there's plenty of excellent wine at hand.

Pelsőci-Tiszavirág Camping (☎ 352 626; Horgász út 11; camp site per adult/child/tent 450/300/450Ft, bungalows from 4500Ft; ☎ Apr–Oct; (P)) This secluded camping ground is near the confluence of the Bodrog and Tisza Rivers and has quiet camp sites and unfortunately, like Tisza Camping, plenty of mosquitoes.

Tisza Camping (☎ 352 012; rakamaz2@internet.hu; Tisza-part; camp site 800Ft, bungalows per person 1500Ft; ☎ Apr–Oct; (P)) Across the river and just south of the bridge, this friendly place offers shady tent sites and basic bungalows, as well as its own restaurant, boat rentals and beach.

Eating & Drinking

Degenfeld (☎ 553 050; Kossuth tér 1; mains 2000Ft) Taking as much pride as it has with its accommodation, Degenfeld has created one of provincial Hungary's finest restaurants. Housed in a lovely 19th-century town-house, it has inventive New Magyar cuisine, an excellent wine list and beautiful décor.

Róna (☎ 352 116; Bethlen Gábor utca 19; mains 800-1500Ft; ☎ 11am-9pm) Róna has more than enough fish dishes to satisfy Poseidon and a smattering of more common fare as an afterthought.

Makk Marci (☎ 352 336; Liget köz 1; pizza 500-1000Ft; ☎ 8am-8pm) This cheap and friendly pizzeria is good for a basic meal.

Tokaj (☎ 352 344; Rákóczi út 3; mains 1000-2000Ft) Next door to the hotel of the same name, Tokaj is a simple restaurant with a good fish selection and open terrace; it may be the only place open if you're dining after 9pm.

Should you get tired of all that wine, there are a couple of pubs to turn your head – or lips – to:

Veresszekér (Red Cart; Rákóczi út 30-32; ☎ 2pm-4am) A congenial pub in a little courtyard.

Murphy's Műhely Söröző (☎ 06 20 945 8562; Rákóczi út 42; ☎ 2-10pm) The first (and we assume only) Irish 'workshop pub' in the Zemplén.

Shopping

Wine, wine and more wine – from a 10L plastic jug of new Furmint to a bottle of six-*puttony* Aszú – is available in shops and cellars throughout Tokaj. For a choice of vintage wines, head to the shop at the Rákóczi cellar; the **Borostyán wine shop** (☎ 352 313; Rákóczi út 11; 🕒 10am–9pm Mon–Fri, 10am–10pm Sat & Sun); the **Furmint Vinotéka** (☎ 353 340; Bethlen Gábor utca 14; 🕒 8.30am–6.30pm), with both wine and folk art for sale; and the **Tokaj Regional Wine Trade Centre** (☎ 552 173; Kossuth tér 1; 🕒 10am–8pm), next to Degenfeld restaurant.

Getting There & Away

Five daily buses go to Szerencs (484Ft, one hour, 36km), the chocolate capital of Hungary, but it's just as easy to get there by train. There's two buses daily to Debrecen (1030Ft, two hours, 85km) and Nyíregyháza (423Ft, 45 minutes, 31km).

Up to 16 trains a day connect Tokaj with Nyíregyháza (346Ft, 30 minutes, 32km) and some 16 with Miskolc (544Ft, one hour, 56km); you'll need to change trains at the former for Debrecen (890Ft, two hours, 81km). If you want to travel north to Sárospatak (430Ft, one to two hours, 44km) and Sátoraljaújhely (544Ft, two hours, 54km), catch the Miskolc-bound train and change at Mezőzombor.

SÁROSPATAK

☎ 47 / pop 14,700

The town of Sárospatak (Muddy Stream) is renowned for its college and castle, the finest example of a Renaissance fort extant in Hungary. It is also a convenient stop en route to Slovakia.

History

A wealthy (and free) royal wine-producing town since the early 15th century, Sárospatak soon became a centre of Calvinist power and scholarship; two centuries later it was the focal point for Hungarian resistance to the Habsburgs. The list of alumni of the town's illustrious Calvinist College, which helped earn Sárospatak the nickname 'Athens on the Bodrog', reads like a who's who of Hungarian literary and political history, and includes the patriot Lajos Kossuth, the poet Mihály Csokonai Vitéz and the novelist Géza Gárdonyi.

Orientation

Sárospatak is a compact town lying on the snaking Bodrog River and its attractive backwaters. The bus and train stations are cheek-by-jowl at the end of Táncsics Mihály utca, northwest of the city centre. Walk southeast through shady Iskola-kert to join up with Rákóczi út, the main drag.

Information

Main post office (Rákóczi út 45) Opposite the Bodrog department store.

OTP bank (Eötvös utca 3) Near the Sárospatak Cultural Centre.

Tourinform (☎ 315 316; sarospatak@tourinform.hu; Eötvös utca 6; 🕒 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm Sat mid–Jun–mid–Sep, 9am–5pm Mon–Fri mid–Sep–mid–Jun) In the western wing of the Sárospatak Cultural Centre.

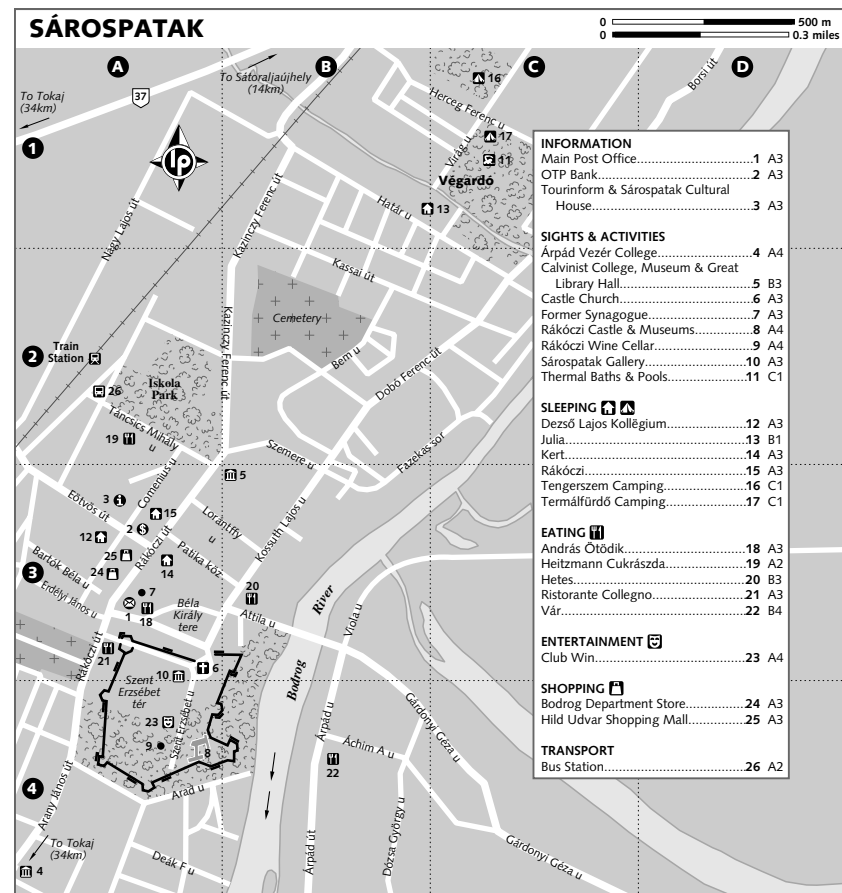
www.sarospatak.hu For general information about the town (partly in English).

Sights

The **Rákóczi Castle** (☎ 311 083; Szent Erzsébet utca 19–21; 🕒 10am–6pm Tue–Sun Mar–Oct, 10am–5pm Tue–Sun Nov–Feb) should be your first port of call. The oldest part of the castle, the renovated five-storey **Red Tower** (Vörös-torony), dates from the late 15th century – inside you'll find rooms from this period in almost immaculate condition. Note that this can only be visited by guided tour (1000Ft).

The **Renaissance palace wing** (palotaszárny), connected to the Red Tower by a 17th-century loggia known as the **Lorántffy Gallery**, was built in the 16th century and later enlarged by its most famous owners, the Rákóczi family of Transylvania. Today, along with some 19th-century additions, it contains the **Rákóczi Museum**, devoted to the uprising and the castle's later occupants, with bedrooms and dining halls overflowing with period furniture, tapestries, porcelain and glass. Of special interest is the small five-windowed bay room on the 1st floor near the **Knights' Hall**, with its stucco rose in the middle of a vaulted ceiling. It was here that nobles put their names *sub rosa* (literally 'under the rose' in Latin) to the *kuruc* uprising against the Habsburg emperor in 1670. The expression, which means 'in secret', is thought to have originated here. The museum can be visited free of charge but you need to pick up a ticket from the ticket desk.

An exhibit in the cellars of the east wing is devoted to the **history of wine and wine-making** in the surrounding Tokaj-Hegyalja



region. There's also a mock-up of a Renaissance kitchen.

The **Castle Church** (Vártemplom; ☎ 311 183; Szent Erzsébet utca 7; adult/child 200/100Ft; 🕒 9am–4pm Tue–Sat, 11.30am–4pm Sun May–Oct), north of the castle, is one of Hungary's largest Gothic hall churches (those within castle walls), and has flip-flopped from serving Catholics to Protestants and back many times since the 14th century. The enormous baroque altar was moved here from the Carmelite church in Buda Castle late in the 18th century; the 200-year-old organ from Kassa (now Košice in Slovakia) is still used for concerts throughout the year. The statue by Imre Varga outside the church depicts the Sárospatak-born and much revered

St Elizabeth, a 13th-century queen of Hungary, riding side-saddle, and her husband Louis IV on foot.

To the southwest of the church is the **Sárospatak Gallery** (☎ 511 012; Szent Erzsébet utca 4; adult/child 400/200Ft; 🕒 10am–4pm Tue–Sun), which displays the work of the sculptor János Kurta Andrassy along with some temporary exhibits.

The history of the celebrated **Calvinist College** (Református Kollégium; ☎ 311 057; Rákóczi út 1; adult/child 400/200Ft; 🕒 9am–5pm Mon–Sat, 9am–1pm Sun) is told in words and displays at the **Comenius Memorial Museum** in the last of the college's original buildings, an 18th-century physics classroom. The collection is named after János Amos Comenius, a Moravian

humanist who organised the education system here late in the 17th century and wrote the world's first illustrated textbook for children, *Orbis Pictus* (World in Pictures).

The main reason for visiting the college is to see its 75,000-volume **Great Library Hall** (Nagy Könyvtárterem) in the main building, a long oval-shaped room with a gallery and a *trompe l'oeuil* ceiling simulating the inside of a cupola. Guided library tours leave on the hour between 9am and 4pm Monday to Saturday and 9am and noon on Sunday.

Sárospatak counts a number of buildings designed by the 'organic' architect Imre Makovecz, including the anthropomorphic **cultural house** on Eötvös utca, the **Hild Udvar shopping mall** on Béla Király tere and the cathedral-like **Árpád Vezér College** at Arany János utca 3-7.

The former **synagogue** (Rákóczi út 43), near the post office, is now a shop selling electronics goods.

Activities

The **Rákóczi Wine Cellar** (Rákóczi Pince; ☎ 312 310, 311 902; Szent Erzsébet utca 26; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun May-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr), just south of the Sárospatak Gallery, has wine tastings on the hour. Tastings of one/three/four/five/six/eight wines cost 550/700/900/1200/1400/2000Ft.

The hugely popular **thermal baths and pools** (☎ 311 639; adult/senior or child 650/400Ft, after 2pm 450Ft/free; ☎ 8am-6pm Feb-Dec) are in the Végardó recreational complex about 2km northeast of the city centre.

Festivals & Events

In early June **Saint Elizabeth Days** is a popular weekend festival in the castle quarter. Sárospatak hosts some of the events of the **Zemplén Arts Days** in mid-August along with other Zemplén towns, including Sátoraljaújhely and Füzer.

Sleeping

Kert (☎ 311 559; Rákóczi utca 31; s/d 4000/5000Ft; (P)) A small family-run *penzion* with a homey feel, cute rooms and an attractive little garden.

Rákóczi (☎ 511 423; www.hotels.hu/rakoczpanzio; Rákóczi utca 30; s/d 4500/7500Ft; (P)) The town's upmarket establishment, with modern, spacious rooms centred on a quiet courtyard, as well as a sauna, solarium, fitness room and restaurant.

Júlia (☎ 312 871; enaomi@freemail.hu; Határ utca 6; s/d from 2500/5000Ft, apt from 6000Ft; (P)) A very friendly guesthouse with rooms in excellent condition. It's close to the thermal pools but a bit far from the action.

Dezso Lajos Kollégium (☎ 312 211; Eötvös utca 7; s/d 3000/5000Ft; (P)) This regal college is full of character and charm, and has 337 beds in quite basic bedrooms.

Termálfürdő Camping (☎ 311 510; Határ utca 2; camp sites per adult/child/tent/car 750/400/900/200Ft, bungalows 5500-7000Ft; ☎ Jun-Aug; (P)) Near the thermal spa in Végardó, this flat, open camp site is quite basic, with tent sites and bungalows sleeping four with shared facilities.

Tengerszem Camping (☎ 312 744; Herceg Ferenc utca 2; camp sites per person/tent/car 850/750/150Ft, bungalows 5200-8900Ft; ☎ Apr-Oct; (P)) Tengerszem is a more established camp site than Termálfürdő, with 45 bungalows that look like 1950s British holiday homes.

Eating

Vár (☎ 311 370; Árpád utca 35; mains 750-2000Ft) Across the Bodrog from the castle, this is easily the best restaurant in Sárospatak. Try one of its specialities, like *harcspaprikás* (catfish cooked with sour cream and paprika) served with pasta, which is better than it sounds, with a local wine.

Heitzmann Cukrászda (☎ 311 567; Táncsics Mihály utca; ice cream 100Ft; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Thu, 10am-8pm Fri-Sun) With the best ice cream and cakes in town, colourful surroundings and a big open terrace, Heitzmann has lickers lining up all day.

Hetes (☎ 311 228; Kossuth Lajos utca 57; mains 400-600Ft; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri) Hetes is a very cheap self-service restaurant, with good old-fashioned portions and service.

András Ötödik (Andrew V; ☎ 312 415; Béla Király tere 3; mains around 1000Ft) With its inner courtyard, quick service and healthy range of Hungarian cuisine, Ötödik is popular with both locals and visitors.

Ristorante Collegno (☎ 314 494; Szent Erzsébet utca 10; pizza 600-1600Ft) This eatery named after Sárospatak's sister town in Italy has tables both in a cellar and, in warmer months, the back courtyard.

Entertainment

The **Sárospatak Cultural House** (Sárospataki Művelődési Háza; ☎ 311 811; Eötvös utca 6; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) will fill you

in on what's on in town; be sure to ask about organ concerts at the Castle Church. Sárospatak is included in the free biweekly *Miskolci Est* magazine.

Club Win (Szent Erzsébet utca 22; ☎ 11am-midnight) This hole-in-the-wall is popular with students after dark.

Getting There & Away BUS

Most of the southern Zemplén region is not easily accessible by bus from Sárospatak, but buses do travel to Debrecen (1450Ft, 2½ hours, 119km, twice daily), Miskolc (1210Ft, 2¼ hours, 100km, one daily), Nyíregyháza (786Ft, 1½ hours, 65km, twice daily), Sátoraljaújhely (182Ft, 25 minutes, 15km, at least hourly) and Tokaj (423Ft, one hour, 34km, twice daily). Buses to Debrecen, Nyíregyháza and Miskolc can be boarded just outside the Bodrog department store on Rákóczi út; catch the bus to Sátoraljaújhely on the other side of the street in front of Rákóczi út 40.

TRAIN

To explore the southern Zemplén, you'd do better to take one of six daily trains up the Hernád Valley from Szerencs and use one of the towns along that line, such as Abaujkér, Boldogkőváralja or Korlát-Vízoly, as your base. For the northern Zemplén, take a train or bus to Sátoraljaújhely.

Up to 12 daily trains connect Sárospatak with Sátoraljaújhely (100Ft, nine minutes, 10km) and Miskolc (774Ft, 1¼ hours to two hours, 74km), and one train (10.03am) continues on to Slovenské Nové Mesto in Slovakia, from where you can board a train to Košice. If you are coming from Debrecen, Nyíregyháza or Tokaj, change trains at Mezőzombor.

Getting Around

Hourly buses link the bus and train stations and the Bodrog department store on Rákóczi út with the Végardó recreational centre to the north.

SÁTORALJAUJHELY

☎ 47 / pop 18,300

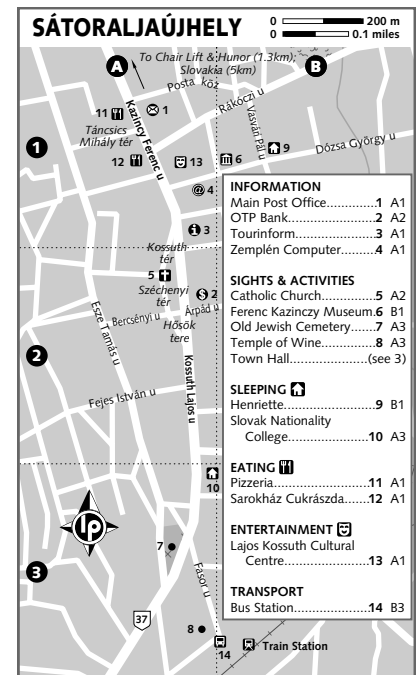
Sátoraljaújhely (roughly translated as 'tent camp new place' and pronounced *shah-toor-all-ya-oy-hay*) is a sleepy frontier town surrounded by forests and vineyards, and dominated by 514m **Magas-hegy** (Tall

Mountain). It unfortunately doesn't live up to its historical heritage, and though perhaps not worth a visit in its own right, it does make a good base for trekking into the northern Zemplén Hills and for crossing the border into Slovakia.

The town fell into the hands of the Rákóczi family in the 17th century and, like the family's base, Sárospatak, played an important role in the struggle for independence from Austria. It was not the last time the city would be a battleground. In 1919 fighting took place in the nearby hills and ravines between communist partisans and Slovaks, and broke out once again in the final days of WWII.

Orientation

The bus and train stations sit side by side 1km south of the city centre. From there, follow Fasor utca north past the old Jewish cemetery to Kossuth Lajos utca. This will lead you to Hősök tere and then Széchenyi tér. Two more squares follow – Kossuth tér and Táncsics Mihály tér – and then Kazinczy Ferenc utca. Slovakia comes next.



Information

Main post office (Kazinczy Ferenc utca 10) North of Tourinform.

OTP bank (Széchenyi tér 13) Almost opposite the Catholic church.

Tourinform (☎ 321 458; satoraljaújhely@tourinform.hu; Kossuth tér 5; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 7.30am-4pm Mon-Thu, 7.30-1.30pm Fri mid-Sep–mid-Jun) Located in the town hall.

Zemplén Computer (Dózsa György utca 2; per hr 300Ft; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri) Offers Internet access.

Sights & Activities

The decrepit neo-Gothic former **Temple of Wine** (Bortemplom), built in 1911 and decorated with seals of the Tokaj-Hegyalja towns in Zsolnay porcelain, greets you upon arrival at the bus or train station. Don't expect much from this Frankenstein's castle; it's now just used to store wine in the cellars below and has more broken than complete windows. Due north, at the top of Faszó utca, is the **old Jewish cemetery**, where the *zaddik* (miracle-working rabbi) Moses Teitelbaum (1759–1841) is buried and pilgrims pay their respects on 16 July each year.

The central **Catholic church** (Széchenyi tér 10; admission free; ☎ services only), rebuilt in the late-baroque style in 1792, has a stark interior and is not very interesting in itself, though it was here that the teachings of Martin Luther were first read aloud in public in Hungary. The same can be said for the **Town Hall** (Kossuth tér 5) but it, too, is remembered for a momentous event. In 1830 then-lawyer Lajos Kossuth gave his first public speech from the outside balcony.

The **Ferenc Kazinczy Museum** (☎ 322 351; Dózsa György utca 11; adult/child 400/200Ft; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat) covers the history of the city from the 13th to 19th centuries, with much emphasis on the illustrious Rákóczi family and the natural history of the Zemplén region. The museum is named after the 19th-century language reformer and patriot who did much of his research at the Zemplén Archives (now the town hall) from 1815 to 1831.

The **chair lift** (libegő; ☎ 322 346; Torzás utca; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Thu, 10am-6pm Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun summer, 1.30-3.30pm Tue, Wed & Fri, 8.30am-3.30pm Sat & Sun winter), to the top of Magas-hegy, is the longest in Hungary. A return trip costs 900/600Ft per adult/senior and child.

Sleeping & Eating

Tourinform has a list of private rooms (from 2000Ft per person).

Hunor (☎ 521 521; www.hotelhunor.hu; Torzás utca 1; s/d 9800/13,500Ft; mains around 1500Ft; ☎) The stone-and-wood Hunor is the town's luxury establishment, located next to the chair lift. Rooms are thoroughly modern affairs, there's fine dining to be had on the premises and excellent Tokaj wine is served in abundance.

Henriette (☎ 323 118; ignacz@enternet.hu; Vasvári Pál utca 16; r 7000Ft; ☎) Henriette looks grubby from the outside but rooms are in better condition, and it's only a short walk to the city centre.

Slovak Nationality College (☎ 322 568; Kossuth Lajos utca 31; dm 1500Ft; ☎) Accommodation is also available here in summer and on weekends throughout the year; it's within easy walking distance of the train and bus stations.

Restaurant pickings are very slim in the city centre, so you're probably better off eating at one of the hotels.

Pizzeria (Táncsics Mihály tér 4; pizza from 500Ft; ☎ 9.30am-9pm) This jack-of-all-trades pizzeria combines a large selection of pizza and ice-cream offerings.

Sarokház Cukraszda (☎ 322 742; Táncsics Mihály tér 2; cakes 100-200Ft; ☎ 7.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-4pm Sat & Sun) The right place for something sweet.

Entertainment

Consult with the staff or the listings posted at the **Lajos Kossuth Cultural Centre** (Kossuth Lajos Múvelődési Központ; ☎ 321 727; Táncsics Mihály tér 3) for what's on in Sátoraljaújhely.

For more listings, check out the free bi-weekly *Miskolci Est* magazine.

Getting There & Away

There are frequent buses to the towns and villages of the northern Zemplén Hills, including three daily Monday to Friday (four daily on the weekend) to Füzér (302Ft, one hour, 25km) and up to nine daily Monday to Friday (10 daily on the weekend) to Hollóháza (363Ft, one hour, 29km).

Up to 12 daily trains connect Sátoraljaújhely with Sárospatak (100Ft, nine minutes, 10km) and Miskolc (774Ft, 1¼ hours to two hours, 74km); for trains to Slovakia, see Getting There & Away (p351). If you're approaching Sátoraljaújhely from the south

or east (Debrecen, say, or Nyíregyháza or Tokaj), you must change at Mezőzombor.

AROUND SÁTORALJAÚJHELY Füzér & Hollóháza

☎ 47 / pop Füzér 580, Hollóháza 1020

An easy excursion, about 25km northwest of Sátoraljaújhely into the Zemplén Hills, can be made to Füzér, an idyllic little village where life is still ruled by the seasons. Aside from the chance to experience rural Hungary, the highlight here is the remains of the hill-top **Füzér Castle** (admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm), dating from the 13th century. Its position, high above the village and sticking out like a sore – but proud – thumb among lush green pastures, is arguably the most dramatic in all Hungary. To reach what's left of the castle from the village bus stop, follow the steep, marked trail and you'll soon come to the ruins sitting 370m up on a rocky crag. The castle's claim to fame is that it was chosen as a 'safe house' by Péter Perényi for the Hungarian coronation regalia from Visegrád for a year or so after the disastrous defeat at Mohács in 1526. Like most castles in the area, it was heavily damaged by the Austrians after the unsuccessful *kuruc* revolt in the late 17th century, but parts of the chapel, a tower and the outer walls remain.

Down in the village centre, the medieval **Calvinist church** (admission free; ☎ services only) has

a 19th-century painted ceiling similar to those found in the Tiszahát and Erdőhát regions of Northeast Hungary. The 50 panels were decorated with geometric patterns and flowers by a local artist in 1832.

The **Koronaőr** (Crown Guardian; ☎ 340 020; www.koronaor.hu; Dózsa György utca 2/a; s/d 2300/4600Ft; ☎), in an old and attractive peasant house, has three modern rooms and a small restaurant serving hearty meals.

From Füzér you can return to Sátoraljaújhely or catch one of several daily buses for the 9km trip to sleepy Hollóháza, Hungary's northernmost town and in third place after Herend and Zsolnay for its porcelain. The **Porcelain Museum** (Porcelánmúzeum; ☎ 505 400; Károlyi út 11; adult/child 600/300Ft; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Apr-Nov) tells the whole story. Accommodation is available at **Éva** (☎ 305 038; Szent László utca 4; r 7000Ft; ☎), a three-room *pension* backing onto woods near the centre of town.

Füzér and Hollóháza are excellent springboards for beginning a hike into the Zemplén Hills; several well-marked trails start here, including one that runs northeast to **Nagy Milic**, an 893m hill on the Slovakian border. Just make sure you're armed with drinking water and a *Zempléni-hegység – északi rész*, Cartographia's 1:40,000 map (No 22; 800Ft) of the Zemplén's northern section.

For transport details, see Getting There & Away (opposite).

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