

Chapter 12

SIDE TRIPS FROM
BUDAPEST

Updated by
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 Sights

★★★★★

 Restaurants

★★★☆☆

 Hotels

★★★☆☆

 Shopping

★★★☆☆

 Nightlife

★★★☆☆

WELCOME TO SIDE TRIPS FROM BUDAPEST

TOP REASONS TO GO

★ **Step back in time.**

Explore 1,000 years of Hungarian history at the immense Esztergom Basilica.

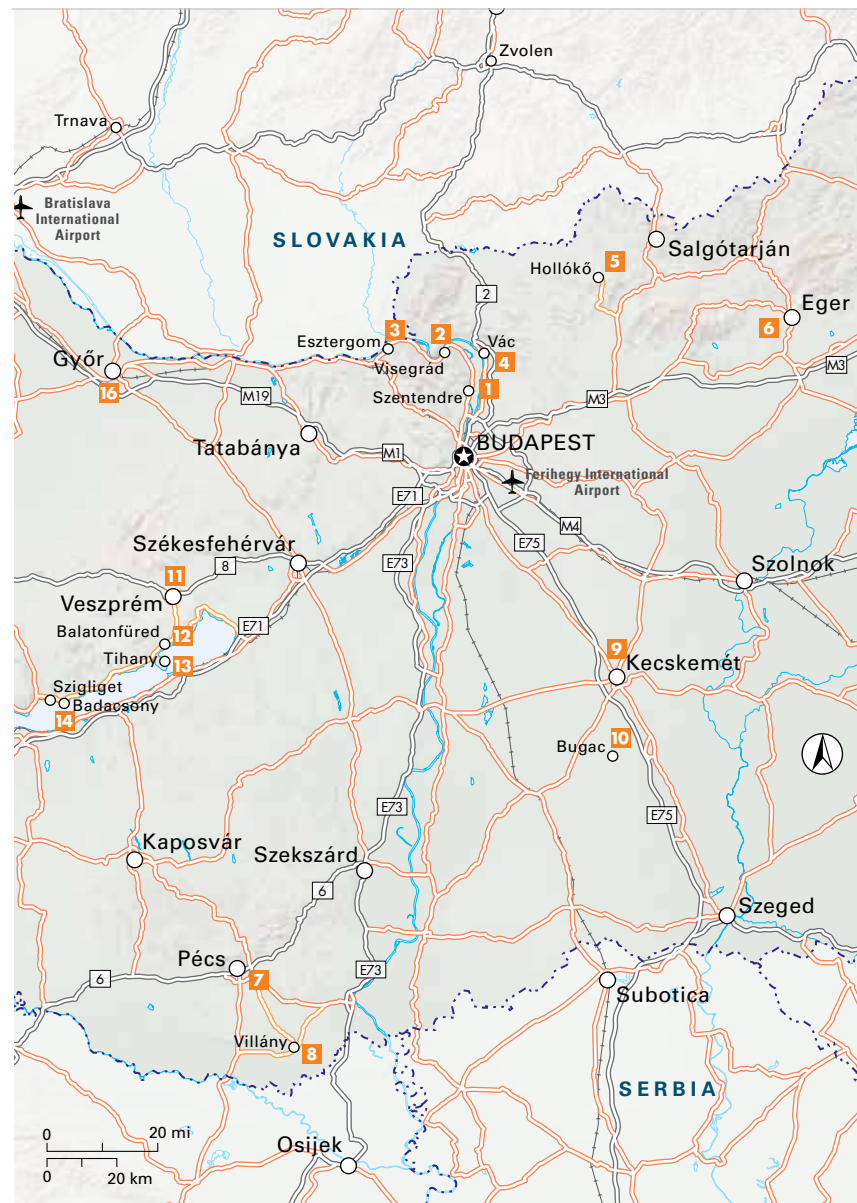
★ **Take the waters.** Drink the sulfuric spring water in Balatonfüred, or soak in a thermal spa in Hévíz.

★ **Sample the wine.** Taste a selection of Hungary's finest vintages in the pretty wine town of Villány.

★ **Meet the locals.** Visit Vác to come face-to-face with perfectly preserved 200-year-old mummies.

★ **Stay in a monastery.** Spend the night in an old monk's cell at Sopron's spectacular abbey-turned-hotel.

- 1 Szentendre.** Gateway to the Danube Bend.
- 2 Visegrád.** A 13th-century fortress.
- 3 Esztergom.** Hungary's first capital.
- 4 Vác.** Best known for its macabre mummies.
- 5 Hollókő.** A UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- 6 Eger.** Stunning architecture.
- 7 Pécs.** Roman ruins and piles of Zsolnay porcelain.
- 8 Villány.** Hungary's southernmost wine region.
- 9 Kecskemét.** A city of vineyards and orchards.
- 10 Bugac.** Center of the Kiskunság National Park.
- 11 Veszprém.** Gateway to the Balaton region.
- 12 Balatonfüred.** An ancient spa resort town.
- 13 Tihany.** A grand hilltop abbey.
- 14 Badacsony and Szigliget.** Trails, castles, and wine.
- 15 Keszthely and Hévíz.** Famed for its magnificent palace.
- 16 Győr.** A lovely north-western city.
- 17 Sopron.** Hungary's most faithful town.
- 18 Bratislava.** Slovakia's lovely Old Town.



As one of Europe's most beautiful cities, Budapest naturally hogs the limelight. But those who venture a little farther afield—and in this compact country, it is only a little—soon find themselves richly rewarded with a host of Hungarian highlights, from ancient castles, majestic palaces, and imposing basilicas to lakeside resorts, thermal baths, and award-winning wine.

Some of the side trips from Budapest, such as the towns around the Danube Bend and Hollókő, are within quick and easy reach of the capital so can be visited in a day. At a push, you could even manage them in half a day, though if you have the time it's better to make a day of it with multiple stops. Other Budapest side trips, such as the major (and more distant) cities of Pécs and Sopron, will require a weekend or more to fully explore.

For fans of architecture, there are many reasons to venture outside of Budapest. First there are the castles: Visegrád's enormous 13th-century citadel is the one big must-see, but other picturesque castles and ruins can be found in Eger, Szigliget, and Siklósi (close to Villány). And just across the border lies Bratislava's iconic white renaissance castle. Next there are the abbeys: the world-famous Pannonhalma Abbey near Győr is the country's finest, but the Benedictine Abbey overlooking Lake Balaton in Tihany is pretty special, and there's a majestic monastery-turned-hotel in Sopron, too. Then there are the churches: the

enormous Esztergom Basilica is the big-ticket draw, but there are historic cathedrals, churches, and chapels (as well as mosques and synagogues) in pretty much every Hungarian town and city. And that's before we mention all those other gorgeous Gothic, beautiful baroque, remarkable rococo, and incredible Islamic buildings dotted throughout the country.

Outdoorsy types will love to stay on Lake Balaton, with the area's countless opportunities for hiking, biking, fishing, and all manner of water sports, from windsurfing to sailing. Wine lovers will relish a leisurely tour around Villány, home to big-name Hungarian wine producers like Bock and Gere. And foodies will get a real kick out of the countryside's exceptional, traditional Hungarian restaurants, from Macok in Eger to Villa Medici in Veszprém, as well as the never-ending supply of excellent bakery-cafés.

Traveling around Hungary is safe and simple, with the cities and bigger towns easily reached by public transport. However, it is always helpful to have a car

for more remote sites. There are fewer tourist facilities and English speakers outside of the capital, but you'll get far more bang for your buck at hotels and restaurants—as well as the satisfaction of really getting to know the country.

MAJOR REGIONS

Within easy reach of Budapest, the **Danube Bend** curves gracefully past a string of postcard-perfect towns. Proximity to the city combined with a high “cute quotient” (think cobblestone squares, candy-colored houses, and a surfeit of crafts shops) makes **Szentendre** the most popular stop, but **Visegrád** (with its pretty 13th-century citadel), **Esztergom** (with its enormous and imposing basilica), and **Vác** (with its macabre mummified remains) are also rewarding destinations. Of course, none of these villages can be classified as well-kept secrets, so expect to encounter crowds.

To the east of Budapest lies **Heves County** and its beautiful capital, **Eger**. One of the country's best-known wine centers, where tasting opportunities abound, Eger is also a popular jumping-off point to explore the world-famous Tokaj wine region. It also appeals to teetotalers thanks to the wealth of baroque and rococo buildings in its well-preserved Old Town. A lovely stop between Budapest and Eger is **Hollókő**, a picture-perfect Hungarian village (and UNESCO World Heritage Site) topped by a dramatic ruined castle.

Head all the way south to reach the beautiful **Baranya County**. Although it only has 145,000 inhabitants, regional capital **Pécs** packs quite a punch, with attractions including Christian sites that run the gamut from a 4th-century mausoleum to a stellar 19th-century basilica, and some of Hungary's best Ottoman architecture. It also has more museums, symphonies, theaters, and ballet companies than you'd expect from a city of this size. A short way south of here lies **Villány**, perhaps Hungary's most appealing wine-growing

region thanks to its welcoming wine cellars offering excellent tastings, good food, and even hotel accommodation.

Southwest Hungary is home to one of its most famous attractions: **Lake Balaton**. Central Europe's largest lake is seen as prized real estate in landlocked Hungary, and in summer it seems as if the entire populace congregates here. Stick to the more attractive north shore, where the lakeside boulevards in **Balatonfüred**, **Tihany**, and **Keszthely** are backed by scenic hills. In places like **Veszprém**, **Szigliget**, and **Badacsony**, discerning guests have an opportunity to explore traditional hillside villages, hiking trails, and vineyards as well as the waterfront. The upscale spa resorts in **Hévíz** are an added bonus.

To the northwest of Budapest lies the **Small Golden Triangle**, containing three ancient and appealing cities. **Győr** is the largest city in Western Hungary and has 2,000 years of history and conflict etched into its architecture, from its 12th-century cathedral to its beautiful baroque palaces and squares. Pretty **Sopron** also welcomes history buffs, with a remarkably high concentration of antique buildings and monuments (355 to be exact) tucked within its city walls. And **Bratislava**, just across the border in Slovakia, has a spectacular Old Town and grand renaissance castle that showcase a mix of Hungarian, Austrian, German, and Czech influences.

Planning

Getting Here and Around

Most of Hungary's biggest cities and towns are well connected to Budapest by public transport, which is efficient and inexpensive. Intercity travel is most common with buses (run by Volánbusz) and trains (run by MÁV), but the most fun way to reach the Danube Bend is by hydrofoil boat (run by Mahart).

The country's village, town, and city centers are generally quite compact and so eminently walkable. However, there are local bus, tram, and trolleybus services for weary travelers. Getting to more rural or remote areas, including Lake Balaton and the Villány wine region, is trickier by public transport, so it's easiest to have your own car (the only downside is that you'll need to agree on a designated driver during vineyard visits). All the big international car hire brands, including Avis, Hertz, and Sixt, have a presence in Hungary.

BUS

CONTACTS Volánbusz. ☎ Üllői út 131, Budapest ☎ 1/382-0888 🌐 www.volanbusz.hu 📠 M3: Népliget.

BOAT

CONTACTS Mahart. ☎ Sales Office, Belgrád rakpart, Belváros ☎ 1/484-4013 🌐 www.mahartpassnave.hu 📠 M3: Ferenciek tere.

TRAIN

CONTACTS MÁV. ☎ 1/349-4949 🌐 www.mavcsopot.hu.

Hotels

In general, lodging is cheaper outside Budapest, though some establishments in more tourist-heavy destinations may be comparable. There are some fine hotels but few international five-star brands. Staff are less likely to speak English, too—but that's all part of the adventure.

Restaurants

While you can find excellent Hungarian restaurants all over the country, there are less international options once you leave Budapest.

HOTEL AND RESTAURANT PRICES

Hotel prices in the reviews are the lowest cost of a standard double room in high season. Restaurant prices in the reviews are the average cost of a main course at dinner, or if dinner is not served, at lunch. Restaurant and hotel reviews have been shortened. For more information, visit fodors.com.

What it Costs in forints

\$	\$\$	\$\$\$	\$\$\$\$
RESTAURANTS			
under 1,500 HUF	1,500–3,000 HUF	3,001–5,000 HUF	over 5,000 HUF
HOTELS			
under 31,000 HUF	31,000–44,000 HUF	44,001–56,000 HUF	over 56,000 HUF

Tours

There are several tour companies operating out of Budapest that offer trips to the Danube Bend and Lake Balaton, as well as to wine regions like Eger and Villány. It's a little harder to find tours to places like Pécs and Sopron, but these are easily reached by train.

CityRama

EXCURSIONS | As well as offering a host of Budapest city tours, CityRama also offers half- and full-day tours outside the capital, from the Danube Bend to Lake Balaton. It's also possible to order cars or coaches with a driver, which will allow you to travel where you want at your own pace. ☎ Báthory utca 22, Budapest ☎ 1/332-5344 🌐 www.cityrama.hu.

Taste Hungary

SPECIAL-INTEREST | This Budapest-based tour company specializes in wine and culinary tours. They offer regular full-day tours to Eger and Villány, as well as a “wine transfer” between Budapest and Bratislava (in either direction). You can

also arrange customized tours with their expert team of guides and sommeliers. ☎ 1/701-1886 🌐 www.tastehungary.com.

Szentendre

21 km (13 miles) north of Budapest.

A romantic, lively little town with a flourishing artists' colony, this is the gateway to the Danube Bend from Budapest. With its profusion of enchanting church steeples, colorful baroque houses, and winding, narrow cobblestone streets—as well as its myriad art museums—it's no wonder Szentendre attracts swarms of visitors, tripling its population in peak season.

Named for St. Andrew, Szentendre was first settled by Serbs and Greeks fleeing the advancing Turks in the 16th and 17th centuries. They built houses and churches in their own style; rich in reds and blues seldom seen elsewhere in Hungary. From town, a short drive or ferry brings you to the amazingly untouched green paradise that is Szentendrei-sziget (Szentendre Island).

As Szentendre is within easy reach of Budapest, some choose to make it their base while exploring the Hungarian capital. Accommodation is cheaper and the town is empty of tourists by the evening, offering a peaceful night after a long day's sightseeing.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

If you have access to a car, you can drive to Szentendre from Budapest. It's a relatively short trip (30 minutes), straight up Route 11 on the west bank of the river. There are also three to five local commuter trains (HÉV) an hour from Batthyány Tér Metro station (line M2); the journey takes around 40 minutes.

From mid-April to September, the most interesting way to get to Szentendre is by ferry. Leaving from a dock off Budapest's Vigadó Square at 10 am, the journey

takes 1½ hours. Return ferries leave Szentendre at 5 pm, taking just an hour. Round trip tickets cost 3,830 HUF; you'll find a full list of prices and timetables at 🌐 www.mahartpassnave.hu.

Once in Szentendre, ditch the vehicles and simply stroll along the town's lovely cobblestone streets. If this proves tiring (or you wore heels) you can always explore the town by horse-drawn carriage, which you'll see hitched up near the main town square (Fő tér).

Sights

Ferency Múzeum

MUSEUM | The museum honors the work of Impressionist Károly Ferenczy (1862–1917), an important leader in the Nagybánya Artist Colony and a Szentendre native. There are a number of his artworks on display, though many of his most famous are in Budapest's Hungarian National Gallery. The exhibition also features the work of his three children, all of whom were popular artists of the early modern era: the expressionist painter Valér, the pioneering tapestry artist Noemi, and the sculptor and graphic artist Beni. ■ **TIP** → Pay a little extra for a combined FMC ticket, which also gets you into the Kmetty Múzeum and the Kovács Margit Ceramic Museum. ☎ Kossuth Lajos utca 5 ☎ 20/779-6657 🌐 www.muzeumicentrum.hu ☎ 1,400 HUF; combined ticket with Kmetty and Kovács museums 1,700 HUF ☺ Closed Tues.

Fő tér

PLAZA | Fő tér is Szentendre's colorful main square, the centerpiece of which is an ornate **Memorial Cross** erected by Serbs grateful that their town was spared from a plague. The cross displays a painted crucifixion and stands atop a triangular pillar adorned with a dozen icon paintings. Every single house on Fő tér is a designated landmark. The **Szentendrei Képtár** serves as an information center and also has its own excellent

Szentendre



Sights

- 1 Ferenczy Múzeum..... D6
2 Fő tér..... D3
3 Kovács Margit
Kerámiamúzeum..... E3
4 Szentendrei Szabadtéri
Néprajzi Múzeum..... A1

5 Szentendrei-sziget..... A1

- 6 Templom tér..... C2

Restaurants

- 1 Aranyasszony..... D3
2 Mjam..... C3
3 Pótkulcs Bisztró..... D3
4 Promenade..... E3

Hotels

- 1 Bükös Hotel..... C5
2 Centrum Hotel..... E2
3 Dunakovics
Apartmans..... A2

collection of local contemporary artists and revolving exhibits of international art. Cross the square and check out the **Kmetty Múzeum**, featuring the work of János Kmetty (1889–1975), a pioneer of Hungarian avant-garde painting. Kmetty tried his hand at everything from Impressionism to Cubism, and his absorbing self-portraits utilize a fascinating mix of styles. Gracing the corner of Görög utca is the Serbian Orthodox church

Blagoveštenska templom, with its elegant 18th-century edifice built on the site of a wooden church dating from the Great Serbian Migration (around AD 690). Its greatest glory—a symmetrical floor-to-ceiling panoply of stunning icons—was painted between 1802 and 1804. Behind the church lies the **Szerb Egyházi Múzeum**, with its exquisite assemblage of ecclesiastical art and artifacts relating to the history of the church in Hungary. ☒ *Szentendre*.

Kovács Margit Kerámiamúzeum (Margit Kovács Ceramic Collection)

MUSEUM | If you have time for only one of Szentendre's myriad museums, make it this extraordinary exhibition showcasing the works of the renowned Budapest ceramics artist. Kovács, who died in 1977, left behind a wealth of richly textured works that range from ceramic figurines to life-size sculptures and draw inspiration from folk history, Christianity, and 20th century life. Look out for the tiny but wonderful Beggar Woman with Forget-Me-Not Eyes, half-hidden in a wall recess. ☒ *Vastagh György utca 1* ☎ 20/779-6657 🌐 www.muzeumicentrum.hu ☎ 1,400 HUF; 1,700 HUF combined ticket with *Ferenczy* and *Kmetty* museums.

Szentendrei Szabadtéri Néprajzi Múzeum (Szentendre Skanzen Village Museum)

MUSEUM VILLAGE | Szentendre's farthest-flung museum is also the largest open-air museum in the country. Located 5 km (3 miles) northwest of the city center, it is a living re-creation

of 18th- and 19th-century village life from different regions of Hungary—the sort of place where blacksmith shops and a horse-powered mill compete with wooden farmhouses and folk handicrafts for your attention. A heritage train takes you around the site. The museum is accessible by bus 230 from stand 7 of the Szentendre terminus of the HÉV suburban railway. Guided tours in English are available if booked in advance. ☒ *Sz-taravodai út 75* ☎ 26/502-537 🌐 www.skanzen.hu ☎ 2,000 HUF ☹ Closed Mon.

★ **Szentendrei-sziget (Szentendre Island)** **ISLAND** | Looking for some tranquility after squeezing through the crowds in downtown Szentendre? The answer is this lush green island oasis, right across the river but surprisingly untouched and ripe for exploration. At the time of the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin in AD 896, the flat island—33 km (21 miles) long and up to 3.8 km (2.4 miles) wide—was used as pasture land. It subsequently became a key agricultural, ship-building, and fishing center that helped link the otherwise hilly Danube Bend with Buda to the south. Only after the end of the 120-year Turkish occupation of Hungary in the late 17th century did a loose-knit web of settlements develop, and from the mid-19th century on, resort districts began to spring up for city-weary Budapesters.

Most of Szentendre Island comprises nature preserves and bucolic countryside—this is a rich habitat and stopping-off point for waterfowl—but there are also four villages, from quaint Kisoroszi (with its gorgeous golden beach) on the island's northern tip, to the larger but lovely Szigetmonostor in the south. To get to the island from Szentendre, hop on a ferry from the docks, or cross the bridge at Tahitótfalu, 10 km (6 miles) north of town. ☒ *Szigetmonostor*.

Templom tér (Church Square)

PLAZA | Climb the narrow steps up Váralja lépcső, located near the corner of Fő tér



Szentendre Island, located in the Danube River, is home to a number of villages including Kisoroszi and Horány.

and Görög utca, to reach this cobblestone hilltop square. Once the site of a medieval fortress, it is today home to the baroque **Szentendrei Keresztelő Szent János Plébánia** (Church of St. John the Baptist), famed for its enormous, dark frescoes. But the real reward for the climb comes in the form of spectacular views over the town's angular sile rooftops and steeples, and of the Danube beyond. ☒ *Szentendre.*

🍴 Restaurants

★ Aranysárkány

\$\$\$ | **EASTERN EUROPEAN** | A favorite of early-20th-century Hungarian writer Frigyes Karinthy, the Golden Dragon restaurant has been welcoming locals and tourists for decades. Set within a small, sloped-roof house, it's known for its charming Hungarian decor and its meat- and fish-heavy menu; highlights include the *velős pirítós* (bone marrow on toast), *sárkányerőleves* (dragon's bouillon) with quail eggs, and *mézes-mázás libasteak* (honey-glazed goose steak). **Known for:**

serves international cuisine (not, as the name suggests, Chinese food); extensive wine list with many Hungarian choices; reservations a must in summer. ☎ *Average main: 4,500 HUF* ☒ *Alkotmány utca 1/a* ☎ 26/301-479 ☎ www.aranysarkany.hu ☺ *Closed Mon.*

Mjam

\$\$\$ | **CARIBBEAN** | This cute little café-restaurant is billed as a Caribbean restaurant, yet among signature dishes like seafood curry and mango salad you'll find a whole host of international fare, from rice noodle soups to roasted duck legs. They also do a mean burger. **Known for:** juicy burgers with homemade sauces; colorful decor; lovely tree-shaded courtyard. ☎ *Average main: 4,000 HUF* ☒ *Városház tér 2* ☎ 70/440-3700 ☎ www.facebook.com/Mjam-1382578311969323 ☺ *Closed Mon. year-round; closed Tues.–Fri. in winter.*

Pótkulcs Bisztró

\$\$ | **HUNGARIAN** | Whether you are looking for a cozy place for a quick *forrált bor* (mulled wine) on a rainy winter day, or

a hearty meal to tide you over between your museum visits, Pótkulcs Bisztró serves a wide variety of traditional Hungarian dishes. Everything is fresh, homemade, and includes a slight modern-fusion touch. **Known for:** traditional Hungarian paprika-filled stews; friendly staff; local art on the walls (which is for sale). ☎ *Average main: 2,500 HUF* ☒ *Fő tér 11* ☎ 70/240-1424 ☎ www.facebook.com/PotkulcsSzentendre.

Promenade

\$\$ | **HUNGARIAN** | Endowed with an elegant-country dining room, a 16th-century vaulted wine cellar for tastings, a sprawling garden terrace with stunning views of the Danube, and a menu of enticing farm-to-table dishes, what's not to love? The rather limited menu highlights Hungarian game and fish, with traditional dishes such as venison goulash with potato fritters, crispy roast duck with baked apples, and panfried trout with parsley potatoes. **Known for:** locally sourced game and lamb; few options for vegetarians; extensive menu of 60 Hungarian wines. ☎ *Average main: 2,750 HUF* ☒ *Futó utca 4* ☎ 26/312-626 ☎ www.promenade-szentendre.hu.



Hotels

Bükkös Hotel

\$\$\$\$ | **RESORT** | Offering half-board stays in spacious and stylishly appointed rooms, this romantic, centrally located hotel is renowned for two things: its peaceful and plant-filled rooftop terrace overlooking the Bükkös creek, and its soothing spa facilities, which include a jacuzzi, Finnish saunas, infrared sauna, steam room, and multiple massage treatment rooms. **Pros:** excellent spa with Jacuzzi and saunas; five minutes' walk from Fő tér; tasty breakfast and dinner included. **Cons:** no tea or coffee in standard rooms; minimum two-night stay at peak times; parking costs 2,500 HUF a night. ☎ *Rooms from: 82,000 HUF* ☒ *Bükkös*

part 16 ☎ 26/501-360 ☎ www.bukkoshotel.hu ☎ 22 rooms ☎ ☎ *Free breakfast.*

Centrum Hotel

\$ | **B&B/INN** | As the name suggests, this charming little bed-and-breakfast has a conveniently central (and Danube-facing) location, but remains far enough off the tourist drag to offer some peace and quiet. **Pros:** four-bedroom villa with sauna is a great option for groups; free parking for guests; cheap accommodation option. **Cons:** bedroom decor is quite old-fashioned; thin walls mean you can hear neighbors; breakfast isn't included (extra 1,800 HUF). ☎ *Rooms from: 18,000 HUF* ☒ *Duna korzó 5* ☎ 26/302-500 ☎ www.centrumhotelszentendre.hu ☎ 9 rooms ☎ ☎ *No meals.*

Dunakovics Apartmans

\$\$ | **RENTAL** | **FAMILY** | With five centrally located and individually designed apartments spread across two nearby buildings, Dunakovics is a great option for groups and, in particular, families—it's one of the few hotels in town that actively welcomes kids. **Pros:** each apartment has its own unique style; key code entry means you can come and go as you please; free Dunakovics candies for guests. **Cons:** property is hard to find (look for a small wall sign); not all apartments are to all tastes; no breakfast. ☎ *Rooms from: 39,000 HUF* ☒ *Szent István utca 2* ☎ 30/747-7060 ☎ www.dunakovicsapartman.hu ☎ 5 apartments ☎ ☎ *No meals.*



Shopping

Flooded with tourists in summer, Szentendre is saturated with the requisite souvenir shops, selling dolls dressed in traditional folk costumes, wooden trinkets, and colorful hand-embroidered tablecloths. But look around and you'll find some more authentic shopping options, even along touristy Bogdányi Street.

Bogdányi út

SHOPPING NEIGHBORHOODS | Bogdányi Street is one of Szentendre's main shopping streets, where you'll find the usual tourist fare interspersed with art galleries and folk art, but don't restrict yourself to this one area. Flooded with tourists in summer, Szentendre is saturated with the requisite souvenir shops. Among the attractive (but overpriced) goods sold in every store are dolls dressed in traditional folk costumes, wooden trinkets, pottery, paprika, wine, and colorful hand-embroidered tablecloths, doilies, and blouses. The best bargains are the hand-embroidered blankets and bags sold by dozens of elderly women in traditional folk attire, who stand for hours on the town's crowded streets. Many Szentendre stores stay open all day on weekends, unlike those in Budapest. ☒ *Bogdányi.*

Ecclesia galéria

CERAMICS/GLASSWARE | This charming little ceramics shop sells all manner of hand-made pottery, from plant pots to dinner plates, often with traditional Hungarian folk designs. Head out into the garden to peruse the ceramics at leisure (you can also see it from Templom tér above, if you want to avoid the crowds). ☒ *Bogdányi út 2.*

Szamos Marcipán Cukrászda

FOOD/CANDY | This quaint little bakery-café and store is the place to indulge your sweet tooth, with a selection of delicious almond-meal candies and other confections; try the orange marzipan bonbons. It also has a small exhibition (500 HUF) with a zany selection of all-marzipan figures: a life-size Princess Diana holds court among animals, flower arrangements, and more. ☒ *Dumtsa Jenő utca 14* ☎ 26/310-545 ☉ www.szamos.hu/uzletek/muzeum-cukraszda.

Activities

BICYCLING

The waterfront and streets beyond Szentendre's main square are perfect for a bike ride—free of jostling cobblestones and relatively calm and quiet. The town's tourist information center (at Dumtsa Jenő utca 22) offers rentals, or you can bring a bike from Budapest on the train (there are designated bicycle cars). Many people make the trip between Budapest and Szentendre on bicycle along the designated bike path; it runs on busy roads in some places but is mainly pleasant and separate from the road.

Visegrád

20 km (12½ miles) northwest of Szentendre, 40 km (25 miles) north of Budapest.

Visegrád was the seat of the Hungarian kings during the 14th century, when a fortress built here by the Angevin kings became the royal residence. Today, the imposing fortress at the top of the hill towers over the peaceful little town of quiet, tree-lined streets and solid old houses. The forested hills rising just behind the town offer popular hiking possibilities. For a taste of Visegrád's best, climb to the Fellegvár, and then wander and take in the views of the Danube curving through the countryside. Do make time to stroll around the village center a bit—on Fő utca and other streets that pique your interest.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

Visegrád is best reached by car from Szentendre, as you can go directly up to the citadel and park. To get to the town from Szentendre, simply head northwest on Szarvashegyi út/Szentendrei utca (from Budapest, you'll need to follow Route 11 north to Szentendre before heading northwest from there).

The best public transport option to Visegrád is Bus 880, which leaves every hour

from Budapest's Batthyány tér station (90 minutes) and goes via Szentendre (40 minutes). There are also hourly trains from Budapest–Nyugati station (45 minutes), but these drop off at Nagymaros–Visegrád station on the wrong side of the river, so you'll need to walk down from here to catch the hourly car ferry.

If you're coming directly from Budapest in spring or summer, the quickest (and most fun) option is the hydrofoil. Boats leave from a dock off Budapest's Vigadó Square at 9:30 am and the journey takes just one hour. There's also a return ferry at 3:30 pm. A one-way trip costs 4,300 HUF, while a round trip is 6,500 HUF. You'll find a full list of prices and timetables at ☉ www.mahartpassnave.hu.

Those without a car should pack comfortable shoes for the 40-minute climb up to the citadel—or prepare to pay for a taxi.

Sights

★ Fellegvár (Citadel)

CASTLE/PALACE | Crowning the top of a 1,148-foot hill, Visegrád's dramatic citadel was built in the 13th century and served as the seat of Hungarian kings in the early 14th century. In the Middle Ages, this was where the Holy Crown and other royal regalia were kept, until they were stolen by a dishonorable maid of honor in 1440; 23 years later King Matthias had to pay 80,000 HUF to retrieve them from Austria. Today, the crown is safe and sound in Budapest's Parliament building. There are some interesting exhibits and artifacts inside the castle, including coats of arms, hunting trophies, models of the castle through history, and waxwork recreations of Renaissance feasts and balls, but most people's abiding memory of the site is the breathtaking views it offers of the Danube Bend below. It's certainly ample reward for the strenuous 40-minute hike up, which starts from the back gate of Salamon Tower. Then again, you can always drive up the hill from the

center of Visegrád in five minutes and park (for a fee). ■ **TIP** → Only interested in the view? Come after 6 pm for free access to the terrace. ☒ *Fő utca 31* ☎ 26/398-101 ☉ www.visitvisegrad.hu ☎ 1,700 HUF ☹ Closed weekdays Jan. and Feb.

Mátyás Király Múzeum (Museum of Matthias Rex)

CASTLE/PALACE | In the 15th century, King Matthias Corvinus had a separate, 350-room palace built on the bank of the Danube below the citadel. It was eventually razed by the Turks, and not until 1934 were the ruins finally excavated. Now, after extensive reconstruction, it's possible to visit about 20 of the rooms—including the royal bed chambers, the kitchen, and the chapel—which are spread throughout the **Királyi palota** (Royal Palace) and its **Salamon torony** (Salamon Tower). Come during summer to see medieval games and craft demonstrations. ☒ *Fő utca 23* ☎ 26/597-010 ☉ www.visegradmuzeum.hu ☎ 1,400 HUF castle; 700 HUF Salamon Tower ☹ Closed Mon.; closed Oct.–Mar.

Hotels

★ Hotel Silvanus

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Situated high up on Fekete Hill, with commanding forest and Danube views, this is Visegrád's highest-altitude hotel—and one of its finest, incorporating a large wellness center with indoor and outdoor pool, Jacuzzis, saunas, steam rooms, salt chambers, and more. **Pros:** unbeatable views over the Danube Bend; half-board buffet breakfasts and dinners are great; superb pool and spa facilities. **Cons:** some of the decor is a little dated; only accessible by car; parking costs 1,000 HUF a night. ☎ *Rooms from: 55,000 HUF* ☒ *Panoráma út 2* ☎ 26/398-311 ☉ www.hotelsilvanus.hu ☎ 151 rooms ☹ All-inclusive.

Thermal Hotel Visegrád

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | A half-hour walk from the center of town, this larger than life



Located to the north of the capital city on the enchanting Danube Bend, Visegrád's Fellegvár was built on a hilltop which affords stunning views over the countryside.

hotel isn't much to look at (one might even be tempted to call it a blight on an otherwise idyllic landscape) but it offers a comfortable stay. **Pros:** great views; most rooms have terraces; comfortable.

Cons: perfectly fine but nothing special; some rooms are a little small; not all rooms face the Danube. 📍 *Rooms from: 55,000 HUF* ✉ *Lepencevölgy hrsz. 1213* ☎ *26/801-900* 🌐 *www.thv.hu* 🚗 *164 rooms* 🍳 *Free breakfast.*

Activities

HIKING

Visegrád makes a great base for exploring the trails of the Visegrád and Pilis hills. A hiking map is posted on the corner of Fő utca and Rév utca, just above the pale-green Roman Catholic Parish Church. A well-trodden, well-marked hiking trail (posted with red signs) leads from the edge of Visegrád to the town of Pilisszentlászló, a wonderful 8½-km (5-mile) journey that takes about

three hours, through the oak and beech forests of the Visegrád Hills into the Pilis conservation region. Deer, wild boar, and mouflon roam freely here, and there are fields of yellow-blooming spring pheasant's eye and black pulsatilla.

TOBOGGAN SLIDE

Visegrádi Bobpálya (*Visegrad Bobsled*) **SNOW SPORTS | FAMILY** | Winding through the trees on Nagy-Villám Hill, high above the town (and just beyond the Silvanus Hotel), is this all-year-round toboggan run, one of the longest slides you've ever seen. You ride on a small cart that is pulled uphill by trolley, then careen down the slope in a small, steel trough that resembles a bobsled run. It's 600 HUF per ride, 3,000 HUF for six, and 4,800 HUF for 10. ✉ *Nagyvillám 1* ☎ *26/397-397* 🌐 *www.bobozas.hu* 🎫 *600 HUF.*

Esztergom

26 km (16 miles) west of Visegrád, 50 km (31 miles) northwest of Budapest.

The impressive Esztergom Basilica, dramatically reflected in the Danube River, takes front and center in this ancient river town. Small though it may be, Esztergom has proved a major force in Hungary's history: St. Stephen, the first Christian king and founder of the nation, was crowned here in AD 1000. This established Esztergom as Hungary's first capital, which it remained for the next 250 years. It also made Esztergom the seat of the Roman Catholic Primate of Hungary, which it has remained for more than a thousand years.

While the town's main attractions can be visited in a day, Esztergom is also home to a fine selection of restaurants and (in particular) bars and music clubs, as well as some decent accommodation options, so consider staying overnight.

GETTING AROUND

You can drive from Visegrád to Esztergom in less than 30 minutes by following the Danube-hugging Route 11 west. There's also a regular bus (number 880) that takes around 45 minutes. From mid-April to September, you can also take a hydrofoil boat trip from Visegrád to Esztergom; it departs at 10:30 am and returns at 3 pm; return tickets cost 4,250 HUF. The boat starts and ends in Budapest and also goes via Vác; there's more information at 🌐 *www.mahartpassnave.hu*.

To reach Esztergom from Budapest by car, simply drive an hour northwest along Routes 10 and 11. There are also hourly trains from Budapest-Nyugati, which take 90 minutes.

Once you're in town, everything can be visited on foot; though prepare for some climbing up and down from the basilica. If you enjoy strolling, leave yourself a little

time to explore the narrow streets of Viziváros (Watertown) below the basilica, lined with brightly painted baroque buildings.

Sights

Esztergomi Bazilika

RELIGIOUS SITE | This immense basilica, the largest in the country and visible from miles around, is the seat of the cardinal primate of Hungary. Completed in 1856 on the site of a medieval cathedral and recently restored, the basilica's most wondrous feature is the **Bakócz Chapel** (1506). Named for a primate of Hungary who only narrowly missed becoming pope, the chapel—on your left as you enter—is the most beautiful work of Renaissance architecture in all of Hungary; note its red marble, magnificent carvings, and enormous altar painting. Other highlights to look for are the **sacristy**, which contains a valuable collection of medieval ecclesiastical art; the vast and deep **crypt**, where the cathedral's builders and key priests are buried; and the **treasury**, containing a trove of precious ecclesiastical objects. For a great view of Esztergom, climb the long, winding staircase up to the observation platform in the cathedral's **cupola**, or take a stroll around the back of the building to the impressive **Szent István megkoronázása** (St. Stephen's Coronation) sculpture. Each section of the basilica's interior requires an entrance fee, from 300 to 900 HUF, so your best bet is to purchase the combination ticket. ✉ *Szent István tér 1, Esztergom* ☎ *33/402-354* 🌐 *www.bazilika-esztergom.hu* 🎫 *1,500 HUF combo ticket.*

Keresztény Múzeum (Christian Museum)

MUSEUM | Considered by many to be Hungary's finest art gallery, the Christian Museum is located in the Primate's Palace in the pretty riverside Viziváros district. It's home to the country's greatest collection of medieval Hungarian religious art, as well as Dutch, German,

and Italian master paintings; the 14th- and 15th-century Italian collection is unusually large for a museum outside of Italy. The museum's showstopper is the intricately carved 15th-century Holy Sepulchre of Garamszentbenedek, depicting the 12 Apostles clustered around Christ's tomb, which was wheeled through the town during Easter processions. You can reach the museum from the basilica via the steep Macskalépcső, or Cat Stairs. ☒ *Mindszenty tér 2, Esztergom* ☎ 33/413-880 ☉ www.kereszteny-muzeum.hu ☎ 900 HUF ☹ Closed Mon., Tues., Jan., and Feb.

Vármúzeum (Castle Museum)

MUSEUM | Situated right beside the basilica, the Castle Museum is housed in the former Royal Palace, built in the 12th century when Esztergom was the country's capital but later ransacked by the Turks. Today, it's an intriguing jumble of modern and medieval, with a historic collection of archaeological finds from the area, including pottery and artifacts dating from the 11th century. Visitors can also explore the remaining rooms of the Royal Palace, including the gorgeous chapel with its 13th-century frescoes. ☒ *Szent István tér 1, Esztergom* ☎ 33/415-986 ☉ www.varmegom.hu ☎ 1,600 HUF ☹ Closed Mon.

🍴 Restaurants

★ Csülök Csárda

\$\$\$ | **HUNGARIAN** | With its hearty Hungarian fare, rustic atmosphere, and unbeatable location in full view of the basilica, the Pork Knuckle Tavern has long been popular with locals and visitors alike. Knuckles are, of course, the specialty here, and if you've never tried this succulent dish, now's your chance. **Known for:** pork knuckle in many varieties and forms; basic tavern atmosphere; few options for vegetarians. ☎ *Average main: 3,500 HUF* ☒ *Batthyány Lajos utca 9, Esztergom* ☎ 33/412-420 ☉ www.csulokcsarda.hu.

Mediterraneo

\$\$ | **HUNGARIAN** | Nothing about the menu accounts for the name, but this pleasant eatery is popular for generous portions of homey, unpretentious traditional Hungarian dishes. Meat lovers will appreciate a hearty steak or veal chops, fish fans will favor the baked salmon with steamed veggies, and vegetarians and vegans will find a limited selection of salads and side dishes. **Known for:** homey Hungarian fare (despite the name); meatless salads and sides but few other veggie options; central location with views of the bridge. ☎ *Average main: 2,950 HUF* ☒ *Helischer József út 2, Esztergom* ☎ 33/311-411 ☉ www.facebook.com/MediterraneoVendegfogado.

★ Prímás Pince

\$\$\$ | **HUNGARIAN** | Its dramatic setting under soaring vaulted ceilings in the old basilica's cellar is just one of this contemporary dining room's many attractions. Add an enticing menu of Hungarian and international dishes, the city's best wine selection (with information boards on all of the country's distinct wine-growing regions), and surprisingly low prices, and you've got the top choice in town. **Known for:** spectacular cellar setting with shimmering chandeliers; dishes like roast duck leg and baked trout; draws crowds but never feels crowded. ☎ *Average main: 3,750 HUF* ☒ *Szent István tér 12, Esztergom* ☎ 33/541-965 ☉ www.primaspince.hu ☹ No dinner Sun.

🏨 Hotels

Hotel Adalbert - Szent Tamás Ház

\$ | **HOTEL** | The newer and smarter outpost of the long-established Hotel Adalbert, St. Thomas House is set within an old monastery building within sight of the basilica, and offers a selection of simple but comfortable rooms and apartments. **Pros:** simple but stylish decor; free parking and secure storage for bikes; super-friendly staff. **Cons:** no tea and coffee facilities; some rooms are small;

crucifixes hanging everywhere may put some off. ☎ *Rooms from: 19,000 HUF* ☒ *Batthyány Lajos utca 6, Esztergom* ☎ 33/541-972 ☉ www.hoteladalbert.hu ☎ 56 rooms ☹ Free breakfast.

Portobello Hotel

\$\$\$ | **RESORT** | **FAMILY** | Billing itself as a "Wellness and Yacht Hotel," this resort-style building overlooks the Little Danube (a tiny tributary of the main river) and is directly connected to the Aquasziget water park with its multiple swimming pools, flumes, and wellness areas—making it a perfect option for families. **Pros:** access corridor to a fun water park; breakfast included and half board available; bikes available to rent. **Cons:** the green glass-covered exterior isn't very appealing; water park often busy with nonguests; minimum three-night stay in summer. ☎ *Rooms from: 49,000 HUF* ☒ *Táncsics Mihály utca 5, Esztergom* ☎ 30/335-6518 ☉ www.portobello.hu ☎ 95 rooms ☹ Free breakfast.

🍷 Nightlife

All in Music Café

MUSIC CLUBS | The centrally located All in Music Café is Esztergom's go-to spot for an instant party and features both live music and an enormous selection of wine and brandy. ☒ *Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út 37, Esztergom*.

Kaleidoszkop Ház

MUSIC CLUBS | This many-faceted art gallery and cultural center hosts a Friday-night series of live concerts featuring indie bands, jazz, folk, and contemporary experimental music by Hungarian and European talents. Concerts are held in the garden in warm weather and in the center's spacious vaulted cellar in the cooler months. ☒ *Pázmány Péter utca 7, Esztergom* ☎ 30/334-6024 ☉ www.kaleidoszkophaz.hu.

★ Pálinka Patika

BAR/PUBS | As the name suggests, this charming little bar specializes in *pálinkas*

(Hungarian fruit brandies) with more than 120 different varieties on offer. Sit inside to enjoy the retro decor, including the apothecary-style cabinets, or sit out on the terrace to people-watch as you drink. ☒ *Széchenyi tér 25, Esztergom* ☎ 30/336-3474 ☉ www.palinkapatika.com.

Vác

42 km (26 miles) east of Esztergom, 42 km (26 miles) north of Budapest.

Located on the Danube's east bank, the sleepy town of Vác is well worth a short visit. Its attractive main square is towered over by the pale yellow baroque facade of the Fehérek temploma (Church of the White Friars), and is also home to Memento Mori, the town's macabre headline attraction. Yet visitors who wander onto Vác's narrow cobblestone side streets will be rewarded further with pretty baroque buildings in matte yellows and reds.

The promenade along the Danube is a wonderful place to stroll or picnic, looking out at the glistening river or back toward the pretty historic town. The main entrance to the riverfront area is from Petrőczy utca, which begins at the cathedral on Konstantin tér and feeds straight into the promenade. If you arrive by train in late April or early May, you'll be greeted outside the station by a lovely pink promenade of cherry blossoms.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

To reach Vác by car from Esztergom, you will need to cross the river. The quickest way (just over an hour) is to drive over the bridge in Esztergom, heading north on Route 564 then east on Route 12, but this involves a foray into neighboring Slovakia. A simpler, if slightly longer, option is to head east along Route 11 to Tahitőtfalu, then hop on a car ferry across to Vác; if you're lucky with ferry crossings, this can take as little as 1¼ hours.

There are no direct bus or train connections from Esztergom to Vác. But from mid-April to September, a hydrofoil boat sails from Esztergom to Budapest every day, with a stop at Vác. It departs at 3 pm and takes 50 minutes; a single ticket costs 3,300 HUF.

If you're coming from Budapest, you can drive north along the river-hugging M2 highway (40 minutes), or take a regular direct train from Budapest-Nyugati (25 minutes).

Sights

★ Memento Mori

MUSEUM | The fascinating (if somewhat macabre) discovery of the Memento Mori was made in 1994 during renovation work on the Church of the White Friars, when workers happened upon the largely forgotten, sealed entrance to a crypt that had been used by the Dominicans to bury clergy and local burghers from 1731 to 1801. Inside were numerous ornately decorated coffins with surprisingly well-preserved, still-clothed mummies and their burial accessories, including rosaries and crucifixes. The coffins have now been moved to a nearby cellar on the same square, with three open caskets displaying the eerie mummified remains of a nine-year-old girl, a woman in her 50s, and a man in his 60s. The museum starts with some interesting above-ground exhibits on the discovery, as well as the history of church and the town at large, before a steep staircase leads downstairs to the cold exhibit room. ☎ *Március 15 tér 19, Vác* ☎ 27/200-868 🌐 www.muzeumvac.hu ☎ 1,400 HUF ☺ Closed Mon.

Nagyboldogasszony-székesegyház (Assumption Cathedral)

RELIGIOUS SITE | A short walk from Vác's main square, this 18th-century cathedral is an outstanding example of Hungarian neoclassicism. It was built between 1763

and 1777 by Archbishop Kristóf Migazzi to the designs of the Italian architect Isidor Carnevale; the most interesting features are the murals by the Austrian Franz Anton Maulbertsch, both on the dome and behind the altar. Exquisite frescoes decorate the walls inside. Due to break-ins, you can view the interior only through a locked gate, except during the twice-daily masses. ☎ *Schusztar Konstantin tér 11, Vác* ☎ 27/814-184.

Vácrátóti Nemzeti Botanikus Kert (National Botanical Garden)

GARDEN | **FAMILY** | Around 14 km (9 miles) southeast of Vác, on the road to Gödöllő, lies Hungary's biggest and best botanical garden. Home to more than 12,000 plant species, the arboretum's top priority is botanical research, and the collection falls under the auspices of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. You're welcome to stroll along the paths and sit on benches in the leafy shade. The greenhouse opens a bit later and closes earlier than the surrounding garden. ☎ *Alkotmány utca 2-4, Vác* ☎ 28/360-122 🌐 www.botanikuskert.hu ☎ 1,000 HUF.

Restaurants

Adullam Coffee House

\$ | **CAFÉ** | Venture down an unassuming side street off the main square and you will stumble across this tiny subterranean cellar café. It's situated at the bottom of what was once a public well, and the exposed brick walls, vaulted ceilings, and candlelit tables make a lovely setting for sipping a coffee or soda. **Known for:** the very definition of a hidden gem; Adullam was a biblical cave and means "refuge" in Arabic; good selection of coffee and sodas. ☎ *Average main: 350 HUF* ☎ *Március 15. tér 8, Vác* ☎ 30/370-6488 🌐 www.adullam.hu.

Hotels

★ Natura Hill

\$\$ | **HOTEL** | If you've come to the Danube Bend to enjoy the stunning natural landscapes and river views, book a stay at this gorgeous hillside hotel (which also happens to have the region's finest restaurant). **Pros:** stylish rooms and apartments; slow-living concept restaurant offers innovative tasting menus; zero plastics and no-waste philosophy. **Cons:** hard to reach (but totally worth it); breakfast only included if you book directly; no TVs in rooms won't suit everyone. ☎ *Rooms from: 42,000 HUF* ☎ *Off Szarvas utca, Vác* ☎ 30/599-5732 🌐 www.naturahill.hu 🚗 11 rooms 🌱 Free Breakfast.

Hollókő

77 km (66 miles) northeast of Vác, 97 km (48 miles) northeast of Budapest.

UNESCO lists this tiny village in the hills close to the Slovakian border as one of its World Heritage Sites because of its unique medieval structure and its indigenous Palóc cultural and handcrafting traditions, still practiced by its 400 inhabitants today. The most famous of these traditions is its Easter celebration, when villagers dress in colorful embroidered costumes and thousands of visitors descend upon the village.

Pocket-size though it may be, Hollókő (which literally translates as "Raven Stone") is authentically enchanting. Old whitewashed, wattle-and-daub houses, some of them built in the 17th century, cluster together on narrow cobblestone pathways. And directly above them loom the hilltop ruins of a 13th-century castle.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

You will need a car to reach Hollókő. To get here from Vác, head north on Route 2, which merges into Route 22 as it heads east to Szécsény. From here,

follow Kossuth út down into Hollókő. From Budapest, head west on the M1 then north on Route 21.

On arrival in the village, you will probably be directed up to a parking area on the hillside a short walk from the village's historical center (which is closed to traffic). Expect to pay around 400 HUF an hour for the privilege.

Restaurants

Muskáti vendéglő

\$\$ | **HUNGARIAN** | Named for the bright red and pink flowers lining its windowsills, the Geranium Restaurant is a cozy little eatery on Hollókő's main street. It's a great stop for quick and tasty lunches, with specialties including *palócgulyás* (a rich local goulash thick with chunks of pork, potatoes, and carrots) and *nógrádi palócspecsenye* (pork cutlets bathed in mustard-garlic sauce). **Known for:** traditional Hungarian decor and outfits; tasty strapachka (mini dumplings) with curds or cabbage; closes by 6 pm so no dinner. ☎ *Average main: 2,900 HUF* ☎ *E Kossuth utca 61, Hollókő* ☎ 30/206-5968 🌐 www.muskatlivendeglo.hu ☺ Closed Mon. and Tues.

Eger

87 km (54 miles) east of Hollókő, 132 km (82 miles) northeast of Budapest.

With vineyard surroundings and more than 175 of Hungary's historic monuments—a figure surpassed only by Budapest and Sopron—the picture-book baroque city of Eger is ripe for exploration. The city, which lies in a fertile valley between the Mátra Mountains and their eastern neighbor, the Bükk range, has borne witness to much history, heart-break, and glory. It was settled quite early in the Hungarian conquest of the land, and it was one of five bishoprics created

Sights

- 1 Bazilika..... A5
- 2 Dobó István tér..... B2
- 3 Egri Vár..... C1
- 4 Minaret..... B1
- 5 Szépasszony-völgy..... A5

Restaurants

- 1 HBH Bajor Sörház..... B3
- 2 Macoc..... D3
- 3 Palacsintavár..... C2

Hotels

- 1 Hotel Senator-Ház..... C2
- 2 Imola Udvarház.... D2



by King Stephen I when he Christianized the country almost a millennium ago.

In 1552 the city was attacked by the Turks, but the commander, István Dobó, and fewer than 2,000 men and women held out for 38 days against 80,000 Turkish soldiers and drove them away. One of Hungary's great legends tells of the women of Eger pouring hot pitch onto the heads of the Turks as they attempted to scale the castle walls (the event is depicted in a famous painting now in the National Gallery in Budapest). Despite such heroism, however, Eger fell to the Turks in 1596 and became one of the most important northern outposts of Ottoman power until its reconquest in 1687.

Today, restored baroque and rococo buildings line Eger's cobblestone streets, making for excellent strolling and

sightseeing. Wherever you wander, make a point of peeking into open courtyards, where you may happen upon otherwise hidden architectural gems.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

Driving to Eger from Hollókő takes around 1½ hours; simply head east on Routes 21 and 23. From Budapest, it only takes 15 minutes longer: follow the M3 east for around 108 km (67 miles) then head north on the M25.

Another easy option from Budapest is the train, with direct service every hour from Budapest-Keleti station. The journey takes a little over two hours. Check train schedules at www.mav-start.hu.

Once in the downtown area (about a 20-minute walk from the train station), you'll find most attractions are within walking distance. A fun alternative way

to get around is the Kisvona (www.kisvona.hu), a miniature land train that leaves from Március 15 tér every hour for a 40-minute tour of Eger's historical sights. It costs 1,200 HUF per person.

Sights

Bazilika

RELIGIOUS SITE | The grand, neoclassical Eger Bazilika, built in the center of town early in the 19th century, is the second-largest cathedral in Hungary after Esztergom (which was built later by the same architect, József Hild). It is approached by a stunning stairway flanked by statues of four saints—Stephen, László, Peter, and Paul—and filled inside and out with 22 carved biblical reliefs; all the work of Italian sculptor Marco Casagrande. From June through October, delightful half-hour organ recitals are held every day in the church; it's at noon on weekdays and 12:45 pm on Sunday. ☎ Pyrker János tér 1 ☎ 36/420-970 www.eger-bazilika.plebana.hu 🆓 Free (suggested donation 300 HUF).

Dobó István tér

PLAZA | Eger's picturesque main square is marked by two intensely animated statues produced in the early 20th century by a father and son: *Dobó the Defender* by Alajos Stróbl, and the sculpture of a Magyar battling two Turks is by Stróbl's son, Zsigmond Kisfaludi-Stróbl. Dobó tér's famous statues flank the pale-pink **Minorita templom**. With its twin spires and finely carved pulpit, pews, and organ loft, this Minorite Church is considered one of the finest baroque buildings in Central Europe. ☎ Eger.

★ Egri Vár (Eger Castle)

CASTLE/PALACE | **FAMILY** | Built after the devastating Tatar invasion of 1241–42, Eger's castle is inspired by the mighty fortresses seen by Béla IV in Italy and the West. Within the castle walls, an imposing Romanesque **cathedral** was built, and then later rebuilt in Gothic style, though

today only its foundations remain. Inside, you can explore the castle's **catcombs**, hewn in the 16th century by Italian engineers. It was by racing back and forth through this labyrinth of underground tunnels and appearing at various ends of the castle that the hundreds of defenders tricked the attacking Turks into thinking there were thousands of them. The Gothic-style **Püspök Ház** (Bishop's House) contains the castle history museum and, in the basement, a numismatics museum where coins can be minted and certified (in English). Other highlights here include the **statue of St. Stephen** watching over the city; a popular **art gallery** displaying Italian and Dutch Renaissance works; and (for an extra fee) a **wax museum**, depicting characters from the Hungarian historical novel *Eclipse of the Crescent Moon*.

■ **TIP** → Not interested in the exhibitions? Come after 5:30 pm in high season (or 3:30 pm in low season) when they're closed and you'll pay half the entrance fee. ☎ Vár 1 ☎ 36/312-744 www.egrivar.hu 🎫 2,000 HUF; evening ticket 1,000 HUF.

Minaret

RELIGIOUS SITE | A long-standing reminder of Ottoman rule in Hungary, this 40-meter-high minaret was originally built in the early 1600s as part of the larger Djami of Kethuda mosque. Today it stands all alone, capped with an obvious Christian cross. Meanwhile, the platform once used for the Muslim call to prayer is instead crowded with tourists, who have climbed the 97 spiral stairs to enjoy fine panoramic views of the city. ☎ Knézh Károly utca ☎ 70/202-4353 www.minareteger.hu 🎫 400 HUF.

Szépasszony-völgy

WINERY/DISTILLERY | Eger wine is renowned within and beyond Hungary, and the place to sample the best vintages is the Szépasszony-völgy (literally "Valley of the Beautiful Woman"), a wine-growing area on the southwestern edge of Eger's city limits. More than 200 small wine cellars (some of them literally

holes-in-the-wall) stand open and inviting in warm weather, and a few are open in winter, too. You may be given a tour of the cellar, and wines will be tapped from the barrel into your glass by the vintners themselves at the tiniest cost (but it's prudent to inquire politely how much it will cost before imbibing). Make sure you sample the area's best-known variety, *Egri Bikavér* (Bull's Blood of Eger), a full-bodied red wine, as well as other outstanding vintages like the delightful dry white Leányka, the dark red dessert wine Medoc Noir, and the sweeter white Muskotály. ☒ *Szépasszony Völgy*.

🍴 Restaurants

HBH Bajor Sörház

\$\$ | GERMAN | For substantial German-style cuisine and frothy beer, head for the popular HBH Bavarian Brewery, which has a great location just off Dobó tér. The cuisine ranges from traditional Hungarian fare such as veal paprikash to Bavarian-style knuckle of ham. **Known for:** beer brewed under a Bavarian license; hearty tavern fare; boisterous atmosphere. ☎ *Average main:* 3,000 HUF ☒ *Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út 19* ☎ 36/515-516 ☉ *www.hbh-eger.hu*.

★ Macok

\$\$\$ | HUNGARIAN | Considered one of the best restaurants not only in Eger but in the whole of Hungary, Macok is the city's most coveted dining experience. Yet it isn't formal and stuffy: this is a playful, colorful, and elegant bistro offering a menu full of upscale comfort food, including confit duck leg with cabbage-flavored pasta, Angus sirloin steak with toasted potatoes, and risotto with porcini mushrooms. **Known for:** best dining option in Eger; great location at the foot of the castle; wines from the renowned St. Andrea vineyards. ☎ *Average main:* 4,500 HUF ☒ *Imola Udvarház, Tinódi Sebestyén tér 4* ☎ 36/516-180 ☉ *imolaudvarhaz.hu*.

Palacsintavár

\$\$ | EASTERN EUROPEAN | This hip little cellar establishment, adorned with funky wall (and ceiling) art from Dalí prints to cigarette packs, is *the* place to have your fill of Hungary's famous rolled-up pancake, the *palacsinta*. You can choose from any of more than two dozen varieties, from the "Boss's Favorite" (with a filling of pork knuckle, beans, cabbage, and sour cream) to the "Spring Pancake" (sheep's cheese with dill and chives), to banana pancakes with vanilla cream. **Known for:** both savory and sweet pancakes; cellar is pleasantly cool on a hot summer day; food can be a little salty. ☎ *Average main:* 2,300 HUF ☒ *Dobó István utca 9* ☎ 36/413-980 ☉ *www.palacsintavar.hu*.

🏨 Hotels

★ Hotel Senator-Ház

\$ | HOTEL | This little inn, a lovely 18th-century town house, sits on Eger's main square. **Pros:** historical building has lots of character; infrared sauna available to guests; bike rental included in price. **Cons:** service in restaurant can be slow; can hear street noise from some rooms; no elevator. ☎ *Rooms from:* 18,750 HUF ☒ *Dobó tér 11* ☎ 36/411-711 ☉ *www.senatorhaz.hu* ➔ 11 rooms 🍳 *Free breakfast*.

Imola Udvarház

\$\$ | HOTEL | The rooms and apartments at Eger's most upmarket small hotel are pricey by local standards, but the excellent location, stylish decor, and superior facilities justify the premium rates. **Pros:** good value single rooms available for solo travelers; free garage parking for guests; on-site store sells fine local wines. **Cons:** hot options at breakfast are limited; service can be hit-and-miss; beds may be a little firm for some. ☎ *Rooms from:* 26,000 HUF ☒ *Tinódi Sebestyén tér 4* ☎ 30/207-8085 ☉ *www.imolaudvarhaz.hu* ➔ 15 rooms and apartments 🍳 *Free breakfast*.



The Cella Septichora is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a series of tombs from the late Roman and Paleochristian eras.

Pécs

346 km (215 miles) southwest of Eger,
200 km (124 miles) southwest of
Budapest.

Pécs (pronounced "paytch"), the southern capital of *Transdanubia* (the area south and west of the Danube), dates back to the Roman period. For centuries it was a frontier province and an important stop along the trade route; today it is far richer in Roman ruins than the rest of Hungary. The city played an important role during the Middle Ages as well; in 1009 St. Stephen set up a diocese in Pécs to help cement Christianity among the Magyar tribes. In fact, it was a thriving city right up until the Turkish Conquest in 1543, and the Turks' 143-year rule left its own distinct imprint on the city. While the Habsburgs later destroyed or converted many of the Ottoman buildings, Pécs is home to many of Hungary's most important remaining Turkish-era sites. The latter half of the 19th century

was most notable for the rise of local hero Vilmos Zsolnay, whose Secession-style ceramics company would go on to define the city and become one of Hungary's national treasures.

Today Pécs is a vibrant and dynamic university town, rich with historic (and often UNESCO-listed) sites, including early Christian tombs, a magnificent basilica, two mosques, and a handsome synagogue—as well as a half-dozen museums. What's more, Pécs's status as European Capital of Culture in 2010 led to an extreme makeover and the creation of new attractions like the remarkable Zsolnay Cultural Quarter. Add it all together, and you can easily justify a two- or three-day stay here.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

Driving to Pécs from Budapest involves a straight trip down the M6 and takes two hours. From Eger, you will need to drive west to Budapest on the E71/M0, before joining the M6 south (four hours in total).



Sights		Restaurants		Hotels	
1 Cella Septichora.....	B4	1 All'Elefante.....	C5	1 Adele Hotel.....	D4
2 Ferencesek utcája.....	C5	2 Bagolyvár Restaurant... E3		2 Corso.....	E6
3 Jakováli Hasszán-dzsámi.....	A5	3 Blöff Bisztró.....	C5	3 Palatinus Grand Hotel.....	D4
4 Pécs-Belvárosi templom.....	D4	4 Reggeli.....	E4		
5 Pécsi Bazilika.....	B3	5 Trüffel Cukrászda.....	E3		
		6 Vasarely Múzeum.....	C3		
		7 Zsolnay Kulturális Negyed.....	E6		
		8 Zsolnay Múzeum.....	C3		

Trains leave from Budapest-Keleti every hour and take between three and four hours. From Eger, add on another train to Budapest, and another two hours.

Pécs itself is best explored on foot, as some of the downtown area is blocked off to cars. The city is small enough to tour in a day but rich enough with attractions that you could spend a leisurely weekend exploring the area. Take time to meander through the side streets for glimpses of the Zsolnay tiles that adorn random buildings throughout the city.

Sights

Most of the city's biggest sights are located downtown, the area within the old city walls. But one of its newest—the remarkable Zsolnay Cultural Quarter—is a 20-minute walk east of the center. If you have time, it's also worth exploring the hillside district of Tetye, home to the medieval ruins of a bishop's palace as well as stunning city views.

★ Cella Septichora

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE | Situated in a serene little park in front of Pécsi Bazilika, this subterranean museum—and UNESCO World Heritage Site—is home to a series of burial chambers, many with remarkably well-preserved religious murals. The burial site dates back to when Pécs was a Roman outpost called Sopianae, though it was located just outside the city walls (as was the custom). Today, the excavated crypts are linked with a series of suspended metal walkways to help preserve them from damage. Two are of particular note: the beautifully decorated **Wine Pitcher Burial Chamber**, with its paintings of vines and drinking vessels (best seen from above); and the chapel-like **Peter and Paul Burial Chamber**, covered in Christian symbols and colorful frescoes (best seen from below). A ticket for Cella Septichora also gets you into the nearby **Early Christian Mausoleum**, a tomb with stunning murals of Adam

and Eve, Daniel in the Lion's Den, and the Resurrection. **TIP→** Download the **"VisitorGuide" app for a free audio guide of the museum.** ☒ Sétatér 7621, Pécs ☎ 72/224-755 ☎ www.pecsorakseg.hu ☎ 1,900 HUF (inc. Early Christian Mausoleum) ☺ Closed Mon.

Ferencesek utcája

NEIGHBORHOOD | This pedestrianized street in the heart of downtown Pécs is a particularly pleasant place for a stroll. Walking west to east (toward Széchenyi tér), you'll see the beautiful baroque **Szent Ferenc-templom** (St. Francis Church), which dates back to 1760; **A Pécsi Villamos**, a lovely old yellow tram with an exhibition on street vehicles; **Memi Pasa Fürdője** (Memi Pasha's Baths), the ruins of a 16th-century Turkish bathhouse; and **Jókai tér**, a pleasant Mediterranean-style public square with one of the city's best *cukrászdas* (cake shops). ☒ Pécs.

Jakováli Hasszán-dzsámi (*Yakovali Hasan Paşa Mosque*)

RELIGIOUS SITE | Just beyond the ancient city wall to the west and unceremoniously sandwiched by two larger and more modern buildings, this beautiful 16th-century Turkish mosque is the only Ottoman-era religious building in Hungary with its original minaret and architecture intact. The interior has a museum with a few artifacts from the Turkish period and some Iznik ceramics; however, it is currently closed for restoration with no firm date for reopening. ☒ Rákóczi út 2, Pécs.

★ **Pécs-Belvárosi templom** (*Inner Town Parish Church*)

RELIGIOUS SITE | Crowning the city's main square, Széchenyi tér, this delightful 16th-century Turkish mosque-turned-church is a Pécs landmark. Dating from the years of Turkish occupation (1543–1686) when it was known as the Mosque of Pasha Qasim, the building was converted into a Catholic church in 1702; a fact you might infer from the cross that surmounts the gilded crescent atop the dome. Despite the fierce religious war

raging on its walls—Christian statuary and frescoes beneath Turkish arcades and *mihrabs* (prayer niches)—this church remains the largest and finest relic of Turkish architecture in Hungary. Look out in particular for the enormous painting above the gallery, showing the defeat of the Turks: while triumphalist, the defeated soldiers are depicted rather sympathetically. ☒ *Széchenyi tér, Pécs* ☎ 30/373–8900 🌐 www.pecsiegyhaz-megye.hu/en/attractions/mosque-of-pasha-gazi-kassim 💵 1,800 HUF.

Pécsi Bazilika (Pécs Basilica)

RELIGIOUS SITE | Also known as Sts. Peter and Paul's Cathedral, though it was promoted to basilica rank after Pope John Paul II's visit in 1991, this is one of Europe's most magnificent churches with foundations dating back 1,000 years. At the beginning of the 19th century, Mihály Pollack directed the transformation of the exterior, changing it from baroque to neoclassical; its interior remained Gothic. Near the end of the 19th century, Bishop Nándor Dulánszky decided to restore the cathedral to its original, Árpád-period style—the result is a four-spined monument that has an utterly breathtaking interior frescoed from floor to ceiling in shimmering golds, silvers, and blues. It's so light and colorful that it feels brand-new. Climb the **lookout tower** for a beautiful view over Pécs, including the nearby city walls. ☒ *Dóm tér 2, Pécs* ☎ 72/513–030 🌐 www.pecsiegyhaz-megye.hu 💵 1,900 HUF.

Vasarely Múzeum

MUSEUM | **FAMILY** | The pioneer of Op Art (who left Hungary as a child and spent the rest of his life in Paris), Victor Vasarely was born Gyozo Vásárhelyi in 1908 in this house, which has been turned into something wild, as much a fun house as a museum. The first hall is a corridor of 3D visual tricks devised by his disciples, at the end of which hangs a hypnotic canvas of shifting cubes by Jean-Pierre Yvaral. Upstairs, the illusions grow

profound: a zebra gallops by while chess pieces and blood cells seem to come at you. ☒ *Káptalan utca 3, Pécs* ☎ 30/934–6127 🌐 www.pecs.varosom.hu 💵 1,500 HUF ☺ Closed Mon.

★ Zsolnay Kulturális Negyed (Zsolnay Cultural Quarter)

NEIGHBORHOOD | You can easily spend half a day exploring this sprawling complex, a city within a city that was opened in 2010 to mark Pécs's status as European Capital of Culture. Built on the site of the old Zsolnay porcelain factory, which was established by Miklós Zsolnay in the 19th century, the streets and squares are adorned with a host of colorful ceramic-tiled features, from industrial chimneys to charming pavilions. Many of the buildings are home to Zsolnay-related exhibits, including the **Pink Exhibition**, showcasing the factory's early rose-tinted output like the decorative Lotus series; the **Golden Age Collection**, a series of more than 600 pieces revealing Zsolnay's evolution towards the Art Nouveau style; and the **Live Manufactory**, where brand-new ceramic creations are molded, painted, and fired. The quarter also has a shopping street, some excellent cafés and restaurants, and even rental apartments. As well as Zsolnay exhibits, it's also home to **1861 Kesztyűmanufaktúra**, the factory, shop, and exhibition space of luxury glove brand Hamerli, as well as the **Bóbita Bábszínház** (Bóbita Puppet Theater) and a **Planetárium**. ■ **TIP→ Head to the cigar room of the Zsolnay Restaurant to see one of Zsolnay's most beautiful and innovative creations; a gorgeous black-and-gold fireplace.** ☒ *Felsővámház utca 52, Pécs* ☎ 72/500–350 🌐 www.zsolnaynegyed.hu.

Zsolnay Múzeum

MUSEUM | **FAMILY** | If you haven't had your fill of Zsolnay, make a beeline for this museum. Occupying the upper floor of the oldest surviving building in Pécs, which dates from 1324 and has been built and rebuilt over the years in



When Pécs was awarded the title of European Capital of Culture in 2010, the former Zsolnay family factory and the surrounding grounds were rebuilt, and now include attractions, shops, and restaurants.

Romanesque, Renaissance, and baroque styles, this museum is a merry show-and-tell waltz through a revolution in pottery that started in 1851. That's when local merchant Miklós Zsolnay bought the site of an old kiln and set up a stone-ware factory for his son Ignác to run. Ignác's brother, Vilmos, a shopkeeper with an artistic bent, bought the factory from him in 1863, imported experts from Germany, and (with the help of a Pécs pharmacist for chemical glaze experiments and his daughters for hand-painting) created the distinctive namesake porcelain. Today, the museum's collection includes Vilmos's early efforts at Delft-blue handmade vases, cups, and saucers; his two-layer ceramics; examples of the gold-brocade rims that became a Zsolnay trademark; and table settings for royal families. Look up on your tour to see the unusual Zsolnay chandeliers lighting your way. ☒ *Káptalan utca 2, Pécs* ☎ 72/514–045 🌐 www.jpm.hu 💵 1,500 HUF ☺ Closed Mon.

🍴 Restaurants

All'Elefante

\$\$\$ | **PIZZA** | This bustling Italian restaurant and pizzeria, with a huge terrace that opens onto the bustling Jókai tér (Jókai Square), is a perennial Pécs favorite. The menu includes some 20 kinds of pizza, all cooked in an authentic wood-burning stove, along with a huge choice of pastas, risottos, and salads. **Known for:** the best pizza in Pécs; delicious home-made lemonades; can get very busy on weekends. 📍 *Average main: 3,500 HUF* ☒ *Jókai tér 6, Pécs* ☎ 72/216–055 🌐 www.elefantos.hu.

★ Bagolyvár Restaurant

\$\$\$ | **HUNGARIAN** | For dinner with a view, it's hard to beat the Owl Castle, an unusual, pseudo-cellar restaurant that is not only above ground but situated high up on the hill in the Tettey district of Pécs. Take a seat in the brick-vaulted interior to enjoy the carved columns, decorative furniture, and folksy bric-a-brac, or sit out on the terrace surrounded by orchards—the

fruit from which is used to make those potent house *pálinkas* (fruit brandies)—for spectacular city views. **Known for:** 900,000-brick interior with folksy decor; gorgeous city views from terrace; steep drive or a bus then 10-minute uphill walk. ☎ *Average main:* 4,500 HUF ☎ *Felsőhavi dűlő 6, Pécs* ☎ 72/513-213 🌐 www.bagolyvarpecs.hu.

Blöff Bisztró

\$\$ | **MEDITERRANEAN** | It doesn't look like much from outside, but this conveniently located downtown diner has gained a loyal following for its simple but satisfying cuisine. The menu mainly comprises delicious grilled meat and fish dishes, though there are some other Balkan specialties on offer, including *lepények* (a pizza-like pastry stuffed with meat or cheese). **Known for:** tasty (and meaty) Balkan cuisine; stylish and cozy interior; service can be curt or even downright rude. ☎ *Average main:* 2,600 HUF ☎ *Jókai tér 5, Pécs* ☎ 72/497-469 🌐 www.facebook.com/Blöff-Bisztró-122505751420351 ☺ *No dinner Sun.*

Reggeli

\$\$ | **MODERN EUROPEAN** | Billinging itself as a breakfast and coffee specialist, Reggeli serves a nutritious and delicious brunch menu every day from 8 am to 3 pm. Order a coffee or cold-press juice then take your pick from the lengthy, egg-heavy menu, which includes American pancakes, French toast, and English breakfasts. **Known for:** best breakfasts and brunches in town; decor is a hipster's dream; lots of veggie and vegan options. ☎ *Average main:* 1,600 HUF ☎ *Király utca 23-25, Pécs* ☎ 72/529-910 🌐 reggelipecs.business.site ☺ *No dinner.*

★ Trüffel Cukrászda

\$ | **BAKERY** | This out-of-the-way bakery, a good 20-minute walk from the center, has display cabinets crammed with mouthwatering confections, from honey cream slices to chocolate profiteroles, apple poppy cake to smoked cheese scones. Inside, it appears to be just a

small take-out place, but stroll around the back to discover a lovely, sprawling terrace and garden, complete with kids' play area. **Known for:** a bit of a walk from downtown Pécs; lemon ice cream is to die for; tasty vegan cakes available. ☎ *Average main:* 700 HUF ☎ *Hársfa út 34, Pécs* ☎ 70/409-6661 🌐 www.truffel.hu.

Hotels

Adele Hotel

\$ | **HOTEL** | This charming boutique hotel, a two-minute walk from Széchenyi tér, is set within a protected building dating back over 200 years, yet it's one of the city's most modern and elegant accommodation options. **Pros:** convenient central location; great little wellness center in the cellar; delicious breakfasts with fresh orange juice (a rarity here). **Cons:** sauna gets busy so pre-booking advised; room service has an additional fee; nude photographs in public areas are tasteful but might bother some. ☎ *Rooms from:* 28,500 HUF ☎ *Mária utca 15, Pécs* ☎ 72/510-226 🌐 www.adelehotel.hu ➡ 25 rooms 🍷 *Free breakfast.*

Corso

\$ | **HOTEL** | Popular with couples, this out-of-the-center hotel has a wide choice of comfortable and well-equipped bedrooms with large bathrooms, but it's the surprisingly affordable suites that make this place stand out. **Pros:** great value suites with saunas and terraces; decorative Zsolnay ceramics outside and in; has a wheelchair-accessible room. **Cons:** a 15-minute walk from the downtown; no gym or wellness (though they partner with a nearby resort); breakfast isn't included. ☎ *Rooms from:* 15,000 HUF ☎ *Koller utca 8, Pécs* ☎ 72/421-900 🌐 www.corso.accenthotels.com ➡ 81 rooms 🍷 *No meals.*

★ Palatinus Grand Hotel

\$ | **HOTEL** | While art nouveau architecture is found throughout Hungary, for some pure art deco, check out this hotel in

downtown Pécs. **Pros:** stunning art deco entrance and grand ballroom; excellent breakfast with attentive service; standard rooms are very good value. **Cons:** rooms are poor compared to public areas; shower gel dispensers instead of bath products; can get busy (and loud) with wedding parties. ☎ *Rooms from:* 28,000 HUF ☎ *Király utca 5, Pécs* ☎ 72/889-400 🌐 www.palatinusgrandhotel.hu ➡ 100 rooms 🍷 *Free breakfast.*

Nightlife

Tüke Borház

WINE BARS—NIGHTLIFE | Located in the hillside Tettye district, this charming wine bar features a lovely terrace with panoramic views of the center and beyond. There's a huge selection of hard-to-find Hungarian wines here, with around 90% coming from small, local winemakers (within 50 miles) and the rest from other regions of the country. Depending on the season, you can enjoy your wine with barbecued steaks or cold cuts. ☎ *Böck János utca 39, Pécs* ☎ 20/317-8178 🌐 www.tukeborhaz.hu.

Performing Arts

Pécsi Nemzeti Színház (*National Theater of Pécs*)

CONCERTS | This pretty baroque theater is the main venue for regular performances by the Pécs Symphony Orchestra and the theater's own opera and modern ballet companies. ☎ *Színház tér 1, Pécs* ☎ 72/512-660 🌐 www.pnsz.hu.

Villány

34 km (21 miles) southeast of Pécs, 216 km (314 miles) south of Budapest.

The sleepy town of Villány, a short detour south of Pécs and nestled in the low, verdant Villányi Hills, is the center of one of Hungary's most famous wine regions. Roman ruins uncovered in the region

attest to a long history of wine production here, and today the Villány-Siklós wine region covers more than 2,000 hectares. Its exceptional red wines are heralded both here and abroad, with local varieties like Kékoportó and Kékfrankos complemented by Merlots and Cabernets that give the French a run for their money. The town itself is clustered with friendly *pincék* (cellars) and *panziók* (pensions) offering wine tastings, and most owners will be happy to tell you about winemaking in the region as you taste.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

Getting to Villány is easiest by car. From Pécs, simply head southeast on Route 578 (35 minutes). From Budapest, drive straight down the M6, then briefly switch to the M60 before taking exit 6 and following signs into the village (2¼ hours).

There is a direct bus from Pécs, but this is infrequent and takes over an hour. There's also a train (40 minutes), though finding your way into town from the station can be a headache: you'll need to go left on the main road that passes by the station (i.e., in the direction of the train) and keep walking for around 20 minutes as the road curves right and finally enters the surprisingly small, wine-cellar-dominated town center. Trains from Budapest-Keleti go via Pécs (4¼ hours in all).

Sights

★ Bock Pince

WINERY/DISTILLERY | One of Villány's most celebrated wine producers, the Bock family has been in business here for more than 200 years. Today, they produce more than a million bottles a year to sell them all over the world. A visit here is a chance to sample Bock's selection of spectacular (mostly red) wines, from award-winning classics to untraveled vintages, during one of the twice-daily tastings. Visitors can also get a glimpse behind (or rather under) the scenes with a tour of the atmospheric wine cellar every

day at 2 pm and 5 pm. The main feature of the cellar is an extraordinary central vault (known as the “Bock Chapel”) that looks like a Turkish baths and has some bizarre acoustics: stand in the middle to have your own voice reflected back at you, or talk to a friend across the room with just a whisper. As well as welcoming day-trippers, Bock Pince also has 33 comfortable and stylish bedrooms—usually, the standard rooms are nicer than the deluxe ones—with prices starting from 26,000 HUF a night. ☒ *Batthyány Lajos utca 15, Villány* ☎ 72/492–919 🌐 *pince.rock.hu*.

Siklósi vár (Siklósi Castle)

CASTLE/PALACE | Situated 13 km (8 miles) west of Villány—though still within the famous Villány-Siklós wine region—this enormous 13th-century castle is well worth a half-day detour. First mentioned in 1294, when it was the property of the Soklyosi family, the castle now stands at the southernmost point of Hungary, just 10 km (6 miles) from the Croatian border. A single ticket (1,900 HUF) will get you into all the castle’s exhibitions, including the prison and torture chamber, the medieval weapons exhibition, and the wine museum, or you can opt for a 90-minute English-language tour (7,000 HUF). ☒ *Vajda János tér 8, Villány* ☎ 72/579–090 🌐 *www.siklosivar.hu* 🕒 1,900 HUF 🕒 Closed Mon. in Jan. and Feb.

Villányi Bormúzeum (Villány Wine Museum)

MUSEUM | If you wish to learn about the local wine before imbibing, stop in at this fascinating museum. Set within a former grape press-house, the museum details the history of the Villány-Siklós region’s viticulture over the last 2,000 years, with exhibits ranging from Roman artifacts to 19th-century coopers’ tools. The impressively deep cellar is a great place to cool off on a hot day. ☒ *Bem József utca 8, Villány* ☎ 30/335–5343 🌐 *www.villany.hu* 🕒 600 HUF.

Hotels

Crocus

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Owned by the renowned Gere Winery, this beautiful Villány resort offers a slice of luxury and a whole heap of peace and quiet in the heart of town. **Pros:** hotel has a peaceful garden and vineyards; award-winning fine dining restaurant; funky wine barrel light fittings in hallways. **Cons:** some rooms have an older (and less appealing) style; gets very busy in harvest season; minimum two-night stay in summer. ☎ *Rooms from: 55,000 HUF* ☒ *Diófás utca 4-12, Villány* ☎ 72/492–195 🌐 *crocus-hotel.gere.hu* 🕒 34 rooms 🍳 Free breakfast.

★ Palkonya

\$ | **HOTEL** | The small lakeside village of Palkonya is renowned for its streets lined with tiny, turf-covered wine cellars, and this charming little hotel and restaurant—a pun on “Palkonya” and “konyha” (kitchen)—is within easy reach of all of them. **Pros:** traditional Swabian architecture; “slow food” restaurant serving five-course meals; has a swimming pool and sauna. **Cons:** restaurant open weekends only; a short drive from Villány; breakfast costs 2,900 HUF extra. ☎ *Rooms from: 16,000 HUF* ☒ *Fő utca 76, Villány* ☎ 30/630–0401 🌐 *www.palkonya.hu* 🕒 6 rooms 🍳 No meals.

Kecskemét

191 km (118 mi) southwest of Debrecen,
85 km (53 mi) east of Budapest

With a name roughly translating as “Goat County,” this sprawling city of 120,000 smack in the middle of Hungary never fails to surprise unsuspecting first-time visitors with its elegant landmark buildings, interesting museums, and friendly, welcoming people. As far back as the 14th century, Kecskemét was a market town, and under Turkish rule in 1439 it was a *khas* (exclusive) city, which meant

it received favorable treatment and was spared much of the devastation rendered on other Hungarian cities at the time. Thus, Kecskemét was able to flourish as other cities were destroyed and deserted. That said, as a votive pillar in front of the Katona József Theater attests, an 18th-century plague claimed the lives of two-thirds of the city’s population.

A 10-minute walk from the train station will get you to the splendid and verdant main square, Szabadság tér (Liberty Square). This soon becomes Kossuth tér, which is marred only by two faceless but incredibly well-kept cement-block buildings, one of which houses the city’s McDonald’s (a true sign this is not just a dusty prairie town anymore); the other with lovely flowers all over its balconies. Home of the elite Kodály Institute, where famous composer and pedagogue Zoltán Kodály’s methods are taught, the city also maintains a fairly active cultural life.

Although raising goats was an economically viable livelihood early on for many in this region of formerly none too fertile soil, Kecskemét and environs ironically came to distinguish itself eventually not so much for goats as for fruit. Although climatic conditions and the soil today are not nearly as ideal as they once were for producing apricots, Kecskemét still milks its reputation as the fruit center of the Great Plain for all it’s worth—in particular when it comes to producing barack pálinka, a smooth yet tangy apricot brandy that can warm the heart and blur the mind in just one shot. Ask for home-brewed házi pálinka, which is much better (and often stronger) than the commercial brews.

A short drive from town takes you into the expansive sandy grasslands of Kiskunság National Park, the smaller of the two protected areas (the other is Hortobágy National Park) of the Great Plain. You can watch a traditional horse show, do some riding, or immerse yourself in

the experience by spending a night or two at one of the inns out on the prairie.

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Tavaszi Fesztivál

(*Spring Festival*) Kecskemét’s annual Tavaszi Fesztivál (Spring Festival) is held from mid-March to early April, and includes concerts, dance performances, theater productions, and art exhibits by local and special guest artists from around the country and abroad.

Sights

Cifrapalota (Ornamental Palace)

BUILDING | Kecskemét’s most famous building is the Cifrapalota (Ornamental Palace), a unique and remarkable Hungarian-style art nouveau building built in 1902. A three-story cream-colored structure studded with folksy lilac, blue, red, and yellow Zsolnay majolica flowers and hearts, it stands on Liberty Square’s corner like a cheerful cream pastry. Once a residential building, it now houses the Kecskeméti képtár (Kecskemét Gallery), with an excellent display of artwork by Hungarian fine artists as well as occasional international exhibits and some space devoted to local history and traditions. The ceiling of the main room on the second floor is something to behold, not least its peacocks: imagine what it was like for the family that lived here. ☒ *Rákóczi út 1, Kecskemét* ☎ 76/481-350 🌐 *muzeum.kecskemet.hu/cifrapalota* 🕒 700 HUF.

PIAC

MARKET | Kecskemét is Hungary’s fruit capital, and it’s worth experiencing the region’s riches firsthand by visiting the bustling market, where—depending on the season—you can indulge in freshly plucked apples, cherries, and the famous Kecskemét apricots. Provided there is no sudden spring freeze, apricot season is around June through August. It’s about 2 km from the city center. ☒ *Along Budai utca ➔ near corner of Nagykőrösi út.*

Szent Miklós templom (Church of St. Nicholas)

RELIGIOUS SITE | The oldest building on Kossuth tér is the Szent Miklós templom (Church of St. Nicholas), known also as the Barátság templom (Friendship Church) because of St. Nick's role as the saint of friendship. The church, the oldest in the city, was built in Gothic style in either the 13th or 15th century (a subject of debate). What is not debated is that it was rebuilt in baroque style during the 18th century. Once you pass through the elaborate wrought-iron gate and through an attractive little courtyard out front, note the interior's apricot hues, which are typical of many an edifice in downtown Kecskemét. ☒ *Kossuth tér 5, Kecskemét* 🌐 *kecskemet.hu* 🆓 Free.

Szórakoténusz Játékmúzeum és Muhely (Szórakoténusz Toy Museum & Workshop)

MUSEUM | FAMILY | The unusual, one-of-a-kind Szórakoténusz Játékmúzeum és Muhely (Szórakoténusz Toy Museum & Workshop) chronicles the history of Hungarian toys with almost 18,000 archaeological pieces such as stone figures and clay toys from medieval guilds. The museum also hosts changing international exhibits. In the workshop, artisans create traditional toys and invite you to try to make toys yourself. Next door to the toy museum (in the same building) is the small Magyar Naív Művészek Múzeum (Hungarian Naive Art Museum), where you can see a collection of this simple style of painting and sculpting created by Hungarian artists. You can get here via a 5-minute walk to a less than inspiring neighborhood of concrete apartment blocks on the outskirts of downtown. ☒ *Gáspár András utca 11, Kecskemét* ☎ *76/481-469* 🌐 *www.szorakatenusz.hu* 🎫 450HUF.

Városház (Town Hall)

HOUSE | Built between 1892 and 1896 by Ödön Lechner in the Hungarian Art Nouveau style that he created, the Városház

(Town Hall) is one of its finest examples. Window frames are arched here, pointed there, and the roof, peppered with tiny copper- and gold-color tiles, looks as if it has been rained on by pennies from heaven. In typical Lechner style, the outlines of the central facade make a curving line to a pointed top, under which 37 little computer-driven bells in a screened-in balcony of sorts add the finishing visual and aural touch: every hour from 9 AM to 4 PM (hours may vary on Fridays and weekends), they flood the main square with the ringing melody of the "Rákóczi March," a patriotic 18th-century tune later orchestrated by Berlioz and adapted by Liszt in one of his Hungarian Rhapsodies. Note also the goat occupying center stage in the city's coat of arms on the building's facade. The building's Dísz Terem (Ceremonial Hall), on the second floor, is a spectacular palace of glimmering gold-painted vaulted ceilings, exquisitely carved wooden pews, colorful frescoes by Bertalan Székely (who also painted the frescoes for Budapest's Matthias Church), and a gorgeously ornate chandelier that floats above the room like an ethereal bouquet of lights and shining brass. The hall is open only to tour groups that have made prior arrangements. ☒ *Kossuth tér 1, Kecskemét* 🌐 *kecskemet.hu*.

🍴 Restaurants

Kisbugaci Étterem

🇵🇸 **HUNGARIAN** | This cozy, csárda-style eatery tucked away on a side street a 10-minute walk from the main square is warm and bright. The inner area has wood paneling and upholstered booths; the outer section has simple wooden tables covered with locally embroidered tablecloths and matching curtains. **Known for:** traditional Hungarian fare; old-school feel; large portions. 📍 *Average main: 1200 HUF* ☒ *Munkácsy utca 10, Kecskemét* ☎ *76/322-722* 🌐 *kisbugaci.hu*.

Bugac

46 km (29 miles) south of Kecskemét, 120 km (74 miles) southeast of Budapest.

The Bugac puszta, declared by UNESCO as a bioserve for its unique flora and fauna, is the central and most-visited section of the 127,200-acre Kiskunsági Nemzeti Park (Kiskunság National Park)—the smaller sister of Hortobágy National Park (farther northeast); together they compose the entire Great Plain. Bugac puszta's expansive, sandy, impossibly flat grassland scenery has provided Hungarian poets and artists with inexhaustible material over the centuries. Although the dry, open stretches may seem numbingly uniform to the casual eye, the Bugac's fragile ecosystem is the most varied of the entire park; its primeval juniper trees, extremely rare in the region, are the area's most protected and treasured flora. Today Bugac continues to inspire visitors with its strong equestrian traditions and the fun but touristy horse shows and tours offered within its boundaries. The park's half-hour traditional horse show takes place twice daily, around 11 and 2. You can also wander around the area and peek into the Kiskunság National Park Museum, which has exhibits about pastoral life on the prairie. ■ **TIP → Note that areas of the park farther away from Bugac can be accessed for free; the park center in Kecskemét has maps (with English text) that describe the various short trails (whose signs also include English text).**

🍴 Restaurants

★ **Bugaci Csárda**

\$\$ | **HUNGARIAN** | Bugac's most famous and popular restaurant is a tour-bus magnet, but is still considered a mandatory part of a puszta visit. It's at the end of a dirt road just past the park's main entrance, in a traditional whitewashed, thatch-roof house decorated inside with cheerful red-and-white folk embroideries.

Known for: hearty Hungarian classics; picnic tables outside; kitschy. 📍 *Average main: 3,000 HUF* ☒ *Rte. 54, Nagybugac 135, Bugac* ➔ *at the entrance to Kiskunság National Park* ☎ *30/4166439* 🌐 *www.bugacpuszta.hu/karikas-csarda-bemutakozas.html* ☹ Closed Mon.–Wed.

Veszprém

208 km (129 miles) north of Villány, 115 km (71½ miles) southwest of Budapest.

Lake Balaton, the largest lake in Central Europe, stretches 80 km (50 miles) across western Hungary. Its vast surface area contrasts dramatically with its modest depths, which average out at 10 feet. As the most popular playground of this landlocked nation, the lake's sandy beaches can be packed on a hot summer's day, though many family groups and partygoers set up camp in Siófok on the southern side of the lake. We have focused on Balaton's northern shores, which offer its most interesting cultural attractions.

Most culture-focused tours of Lake Balaton begin in hilly Veszprém, even if it is a little removed from the lake itself. One of Hungary's oldest cities, Veszprém was established during the 11th century during the rule of St. Stephen, but it was destroyed by the Turks during their occupation—and then again during Hungarian-Austrian independence battles. The city was rebuilt in the early 18th century, but its castle was never reconstructed. Nevertheless, its Castle Hill remains home to historic churches, museums, and statues, while the area around has some lovely pedestrian squares with cafés and outdoor seating. Veszprém will be the official European Capital of Culture in 2023, so expect to see construction and renovation works in preparation for a bumper year of cultural events.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

The only reasonable way to reach Veszprém from Villány is by car (2¾ hours): head north on the M6, then west on Routes 61, 64 and 710. However, most visitors come from Budapest, which is an easier and quicker drive southwest on the M7 and Route 8 (1½ hours). It's also possible to get to Veszprém by direct bus every hour from Budapest's Népliget station (2½ hours).

The city center (including Castle Hill) is largely pedestrianized, so park your car in one of the designated lots and continue on foot.



Herendi Porcelánművészeti Múzeum (*Herend Porcelain Museum*)

MUSEUM | Hungary's reputation for creating fine pieces of porcelain was sparked by the purchase of a dinner set by Britain's Queen Victoria in 1851 (the chosen pattern of colorful and detailed butterflies and flowers was later coined the "Victoria" collection). Some 600 mold-makers, potters, and painters are still trained here to craft Herend's high quality dinnerware, decorative items, and figurines, while the porcelain-prone public are welcomed to share the experience in the Porcelanium Visitor Center. You can see how products are made in the Minimanufactory and check out a treasure trove of precious pieces in the Museum of Porcelain Art. In the adjoining Apicius Restaurant and Café you can even experience dining off their collection of dinnerware. The town of Herend lies 16 km (10 miles) northwest of Veszprém on Route 8, and regular buses ply the route all day (40 minutes each way). ☎ *Kossuth Lajos utca 140, Herend* ☎ 88/523-190 🌐 www.herend.com/visit-herend/information 📞 3,500 HUF ☺ Closed mid-Dec.–Mar.

Várhegy (*Castle Hill*)

NEIGHBORHOOD | The cobblestone Vár utca, north of Szabadság tér, runs through the

most picturesque part of town. It also has most of the sights worth seeing in Veszprém. The **Hosök kapuja** (Heroes' Gate) at the entrance commemorates those who died during World War I and has a small exhibit on Hungary's history. Farther up, **Szent Mihály-bazilika** (St. Michael's Basilica) is a beautifully light and colorful cathedral that's been rebuilt many times since the 11th century. Nearby, the **Gizella kápolna** (Gisele Chapel), named for St. Stephen's wife, is home to gorgeous Byzantine-style frescoes of the apostles from the 13th century. From here, walk to the top of the hill to see giant stone **statues of St. Stephen and Gisele**, as well as lovely views out to a rocky outcrop with a crucifix; a popular Easter procession stop. On the way back down the hill, stop in to see **Ferences-templom** and **Piarista templom**, two churches with very different depictions of St. Stephen (his outfits reflect the fashions of the time), as well as some interesting museums and galleries, including **Vass László** and **Dubniczay Palota**. Finally, just before you are back at Szabadság tér, you'll pass by the half-medieval and half-baroque **Tűztorony** (Fire Tower). ☎ *Vár utca, Veszprém*.

Restaurants

Elefánt

\$\$ | **ITALIAN** | Situated on Óváros tér at the foot of Castle Hill, this charming little bistro offers an extensive menu of Italian favorites, including pizzas, pastas, and risottos, alongside some distinctly Hungarian grilled and fried meat dishes. If you come at lunchtime, you'll also find a great value three-course daily menu on offer, typically priced between 2,500 and 3,000 HUF. **Known for:** tasty poppy seed bread pudding; lovely street terrace in summer; central location means slightly higher prices. ☎ *Average main: 2,500 HUF* ☎ *Óváros tér 5, Veszprém* ☎ 88/329-695 🌐 www.elefantterem.hu.

★ Oliva

\$\$ | **MEDITERRANEAN** | In the heart of downtown Veszprém, this restaurant is a little tricky to find—look for the covered alley off the southeastern edge of Óváros Tér—but it's as charming as they come, with dim lighting and stylish decor, fine Mediterranean-inspired cuisine, and unfailingly friendly staff. The interior of the establishment is decorated in soft Mediterranean colors, including olive-green banquettes and funky artworks, while the lovely, leafy terrace has live music several nights a week. **Known for:** creative Mediterranean dishes; colorful decor and inviting terrace; attached hotel includes an outdoor Jacuzzi. ☎ *Average main: 2,990 HUF* ☎ *Buhim utca 14-16, Veszprém* ☎ 88/403-875 🌐 www.oliva.hu.

★ Villa Medici Restaurant

\$\$\$\$ | **HUNGARIAN** | Tucked away in a pretty valley to the west of Castle Hill, Villa Medici is widely considered to be one of the region's best restaurants—and for good reason. The setting is simply beautiful, whether you dine in the beautifully appointed interior, featuring walls lined with original artworks, or out on the charming lamplit garden terrace, set around a lily pond. **Known for:** beautifully presented set menus; formal service and smart casual dress code; a 10-minute walk from center. ☎ *Average main: 10,800 HUF* ☎ *Kittenberger Kálmán utca 11, Veszprém* ☎ 88/590-072 🌐 www.villamedici.hu.

Nightlife

Papírkutya

BAR/PUBS | Billing itself as a "kultúr bisztró," the Paper Dog not only serves hot meals and ice cold drinks from early until late, but also prides itself on being a cultural hub, with regular performances of live music, theater, and even performance poetry. The glass-fronted bar displays a vast selection of rums, and there's a quirky, arty vibe throughout the

place, from the off-the-wall paintings to the Shrek-themed pinball machine. ☎ *Szabadság tér 9, Veszprém* ☎ 20/241-0074 🌐 www.facebook.com/papirkutya.veszprem.

Balatonfüred

19 km (12 miles) south of Veszprém, 124 km (77 miles) southwest of Budapest.

Fed by 11 medicinal springs, Balatonfüred first gained popularity as a health resort (the lake's oldest) where people with heart conditions and fatigue would come to take (or, more accurately, to drink) a cure. The waters, said to have stimulating and beneficial effects on the heart and nerves, are still an integral part of the town's identity and consumed voraciously, but only the internationally renowned cardiac hospital has actual bathing facilities.

Today Balatonfüred, also known simply as Füred, is one of the Balaton's most popular destinations. Above its busy boat landing, beaches, and promenade lined with great plane and poplar trees, the twisting streets of the Old Town climb hillsides that are thickly planted with vines. The climate and landscape also make this one of the best wine-growing districts in Hungary. Every year in July the most elaborate of Lake Balaton's debutante cotillions, the Anna Ball, is held here.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Veszprém, it's a 30-minute drive south along Route 73 to reach Balatonfüred. Regular buses also connect the two urban areas via the same route (45 minutes).

From Budapest, it's a 1¾-hour drive down the M7 and along Route 710. There are no direct public transport links between the capital and Balatonfüred, so you're best off coming via Veszprém.

Sights

★ **Balácsa római villagazdaság** (*Villa Romana Balácsa*)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE | Take a short detour off the road from Veszprém to Balatonfüred to find this impressive archaeological site, once a large Roman farmstead covering a sprawling 55 hectares. The site today barely covers two, but this includes a partially reconstructed central residential building, as well as the ruins of baths and burial sites and a host of carved stone monuments. Head down into the cellar of the main building to see four well-preserved mosaic floors, and keep an eye out for an almost-complete peacock frieze. The whole site is brought to life through models and interactive exhibits. Balácsa is set a little way back from the road, so look for a small concrete car park; it's a five-minute walk from here to the entrance.

☒ **Nemesvámos-Balácsa, Veszprém** ➔ *On the road between Nemesvámos and Veszprémfajsz* ☎ 88/265-050 🌐 www.balaca.hu 🚗 800 HUF ☺ Closed Mon.

Gyógy tér

PLAZA | The center of town is this small square, where the bubbling waters from five volcanic springs rise beneath a slim, colonnaded pavilion. The square's centerpiece is the neoclassical **Well House of the Kossuth Spring**; from here you can sample the water, which has a pleasant, surprisingly refreshing taste, despite the sulfurous aroma. Note that there's a strict, 30-liters-per-person limit (good luck trying to break that rule). All the buildings on the square are pillared like Greek temples. At No. 3 is **Horváth Ház**, a former sanatorium that hosted the first of what was to become the Anna Ball in 1825. The ball now takes place every July in another colonnaded building on the square, and also a former sanatorium, the **Anna Grand Hotel**. On the north side of the square is the **Balaton Pantheon**: aesthetically interesting tablets and reliefs honoring Hungarian and foreign

notables who took the waters here. From Gyógy tér, you can stroll east along Blaha Lujza utca to see several landmarks, such as the **Blaha Lujza Ház**, a neoclassical villa built in 1867 (and, later, the summer home of the eponymous actress), and the sweet little 19th-century **Kerek templom** (Round Church). ☒ *Balatonfüred*.

Tagore sétány (*Tagore Promenade*)

PROMENADE | Trees, restaurants, and shops line this busy waterfront promenade, which is named after the Nobel Prize-winning Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore. Why? Because he came to one Balatonfüred's sanatoriums in 1926 to get treatment for a heart condition. You will find a bust of Tagore in front of a lime tree along the promenade; the poet planted it himself following his recovery. The promenade begins near the boat landing and runs for nearly a kilometer (½ mile) to the east. ☒ *Balatonfüred*.

Vaszary galéria

MUSEUM | With connections to both Kolos Ferenc Vaszary (1832–1915), the former Archbishop of Esztergom and Prince-Primate of Hungary who summered in Balatonfüred, and his renowned painter nephew János Vaszary, this eye-catching 19th-century building houses the town's best art gallery. Come to see everything from paintings by Old Masters to works by contemporary artists. There's also a lovely art-filled garden terrace with a good café. ☒ *Honvéd utca 2–4, Balatonfüred* ☎ 87/950-876 🌐 kultura.balatonfured.hu ☺ Closed Mon.

Restaurants

★ **Bistro Sparhelt**

\$\$\$\$ | **MODERN EUROPEAN** | This modern European bistro is considered one of Hungary's best restaurants, so it's well worth the 25-minute walk from the lake-side. The stylish, stripped-back interior—all exposed brick walls, wooden-beamed ceilings, and distressed leather chairs—makes the perfect setting for a culinary

adventure. **Known for:** popular poppy-seed soufflé; exposed brick walls and wooden beams; terrace dining in the summer. ☎ *Average main:* 5,500 HUF ☒ *Szent István tér 7, Balatonfüred* ☎ 70/639-9944.

Kedves Cukrászda

\$ | **BAKERY** | Need something to take the taste of Kossuth Spring water out of your mouth? Stroll to this nearby café and patisserie, once a popular haunt of actress Lujza Blaha (who lived opposite), to sample its fine selection of homemade cakes, pastries, and pies. **Known for:** the city's oldest bakery café; delicious homemade cakes (try the plum pie); tree-shaded terrace in summer. ☎ *Average main:* 600 HUF ☒ *Blaha Lujza utca 7, Balatonfüred* ☎ 20/471-2073 🌐 www.facebook.com/KedvesCukraszda ☺ Closed Mon.

Hotels

★ **Anna Grand**

\$\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | This centuries-old sanatorium-turned-hotel is Balatonfüred's grandest accommodation option, though its rooms vary dramatically in quality. **Pros:** spacious and well-appointed suites; fantastic swimming and spa facilities; Anna Café serves scrumptious cakes. **Cons:** suites face the street (though it's quiet at night); fitness center costs extra to use; older rooms are far less appealing. ☎ *Rooms from:* 67,000 HUF ☒ *Gyógy Tér 1, Balatonfüred* ☎ 87/581-200 🌐 www.annagrandhotel.hu ➔ 108 rooms 🌞 Free breakfast.

Nightlife

★ **Petrányi Pince**

WINE BARS—NIGHTLIFE | The village of Csopak, just to the northeast of Balatonfüred, is at the heart of the region's wine-growing industry, and a number of local producers—from Jásdi to Szent Donát—now offer wine tastings on their properties. The best of the bunch is Petrányi thanks to its large hillside terrace with sweeping views of the lake,

its great selection of wines for tasting (mostly from their own vineyards, which spread out below), and its menu of delicious Hungarian and international dishes. Ask nicely and you might get a tour of the chapel-like cellar, complete with a hidden room once used to hide bottles from the taxman. ☒ *Balatonfüred* ☎ 30/515-7953 🌐 www.petranyipince.hu.

SpiccBistro

BARS/PUBS | This fashionable end-of-the-pier bar is a lovely place to enjoy a drink, especially in the evening. Watch the sun set over the lake as you sip one of many locally produced wines, from signature Olaszrizlings to sparkling rosés, or just a homemade lemonade. The food is good, too. ☒ *Balatonfüred vitorláskikötő, Balatonfüred* ☎ 20/418-3132 🌐 www.facebook.com/spiccbistro.

Tihany

8 km (5 miles) south of Balatonfüred, 130 km (81 miles) southwest of Budapest.

The famed town of Tihany, with its twisting, narrow cobblestone streets and hilltop abbey, sits on a peninsula of the same name. Joined to the mainland by a narrow neck and jutting 5 km (3 miles) into the lake, Tihany Peninsula is not only a major tourist resort—it is, after all, Hungary's closest approximation of a Mediterranean or Adriatic experience—but perhaps the most historic part of the Balaton area. In 1952 the entire peninsula was declared a national park, and because of its geological rarities, it became Hungary's first nature conservation zone. Explore its smooth Belso Tó (Inner Lake), 82 feet higher than Lake Balaton, as well as its endless lavender fields (aided by the sun coming from three directions) and historic caves.

The town itself is best known for its Benedictine Abbey, but you can easily spend half a day here strolling its winding

streets, enjoying stunning lake views, and eating lavender-flavored ice cream.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

Tihany is easily reached by car (15 minutes) or by bus (30 minutes) from Balatonfüred, both via Route 71 and the lakeside street Lepkesor. If you are driving from Budapest, follow directions to Balatonfüred then simply continue on Route 71.

Once in town, park in the lot behind the Tihany Posta (post office) and explore on foot.

Sights

Barátlakások (Friar's Caves)

CAVE | This network of hillside caverns, carved out of the basalt rock between the 11th and 14th centuries but only rediscovered in the 20th century, was once home to a group of Greek Orthodox hermit-monks. A mix of living quarters, chapels, and dining rooms, the caves have since been restored and stabilized with columns, making them safe to visit. You'll find them on the eastern slopes of Óvár hill; follow the green hiking route through the forest from Tihany town, or park your car at the *kiinduló pont* (starting point) and walk 300 meters downhill to the biggest cave. ■ **TIP** → Access is via a steep woodland path, so you'll need hiking boots and should avoid visiting during or after heavy rain. ☒ *Kecskeköröm utca 28, (starting point car park), Tihany.*

★ **Bencés Apátság** (Benedictine Abbey)
RELIGIOUS SITE | On a hilltop overlooking the Old Town is this twin-spired abbey, whose foundations were laid by King András I in 1055. Today, his body lies in the 11th century crypt, along with a replica of the abbey's charter, the oldest written source of the Hungarian language (the original is in Pannonhalma). The contrast between the simple crypt, where a small black crucifix hangs over the king's tomb, and the abbey's lavish 18th century baroque interior—all gold, gilded

silver, and salmon—is vast. The altar, abbot's throne, choir parapet, organ case, and pulpit were all the work of Sebestyén Stuhloff, and it's said he immortalized his doomed sweetheart as the angel kneeling on the right-hand side of the altar to the Virgin Mary. A magnificent organ, adorned by stucco cherubs, can be heard during evening concerts in summer. In a baroque house adjoining—and entered through—the abbey is the **Bencés Apátság Múzeum**. The best exhibits are in the basement lapidarium: relics from Roman colonization, including mosaic floors; a relief of David from the 2nd or 3rd century; and 1,200-year-old carved stones. Get a joint ticket for the abbey and museum from the modern visitor center, where you can watch a short introductory video. ☒ *András tér 1, Tihany* ☎ 87/538-200 ☕ www.tihanyiapatsag.hu ☎ 1,000 HUF (abbey and museum).

Skanzen Tihany

MUSEUM VILLAGE | Tihany's open-air museum of ethnography assembles a group of old structures across a small area west of the abbey. The main two buildings are the Smallholder's House, an unplastered dwelling with basalt walls, a thatched roof, verandas, and white-framed windows dating back to the 18th century, and the Fisherman's House, the former home of the Fishermen's Guild, with all kinds of angling tools and even an ancient boat on display. ☒ *Piský sétány 12, Tihany* ☎ 30/749-7182 ☎ 350 HUF ☺ Closed Mon. and Oct.-Apr.

🍴 Restaurants

★ Apátság Rege Cukrászda

\$\$ | **CAFÉ** | Whatever you do in Tihany, don't miss this extraordinary hilltop bakery-café. Not only does it have the best coffee and cake anywhere in town, with many of the brews and bakes incorporating Tihany's signature crop lavender, but its terrace offers breathtaking views across the shimmering blue waters of Lake Balaton. **Known for:** extraordinary

Did You Know?

The founding charter of Bencés Apátság is the oldest Hungarian document preserved in its original form. The document's Latin text also uses Hungarian words, making this the oldest written record in the Hungarian language.



lake views from the terrace; lavender espressos and lavender cheesecake; can get very busy in the summer. ☑ *Average main: 2,500 HUF* ☑ *Kossuth Lajos utca 22, Tihany* 🌐 www.apatsagicukraszda.hu.

Malackrumpli

\$\$\$ | **HUNGARIAN** | Literally translated as “pig potatoes,” this popular bistro in the heart of Tihany mainly uses ingredients from its own farm—and yes, that includes pork and potatoes. While the dishes on offer are invariably simple and hearty staples, from beef goulash and chicken paprikash to burgers and pizzas, they are also uncommonly high quality and beautifully presented. **Known for:** signature Mangalica pork sausage pizza; only open on weekends; expensive by local standards. ☑ *Average main: 3,490 HUF* ☑ *Kossuth Lajos utca 14, Tihany* ☎ 30/636-5577 🌐 www.malackrumpli.hu ☹ Closed Mon.–Thurs.

Hotels

Club Tihany

\$\$\$ | **RESORT** | **FAMILY** | Picture Club Med transposed to late-1980s Central Europe, and you'll have some idea of what to expect at this 32-acre lakeside resort 3 km (2 miles) south of town. **Pros:** fantastic family holiday resort; large swimming pool with views over the lake; candlelit spa sessions every evening. **Cons:** half the rooms and suites have no A/C; expect a scramble for the breakfast buffet; parking costs 1,000 HUF a night. ☑ *Rooms from: 52,000 HUF* ☑ *Rév utca 3, Tihany* ☎ 87/538-564 🌐 www.clubtihany.hu ➡ 490 rooms 🍽 No meals.

Shopping

PaprikaHáz

FOOD/CANDY | This whitewashed, thatched-roofed building is difficult to miss, as it's almost completely covered in hanging bundles of red peppers. Naturally, the food store inside specializes in pepper products, from paprika powder

to chili beer, but it also does a good line in lavender confections. ☑ *Kossuth Lajos utca 18, Tihany*.

Badacsony and Szigliget

39 km (24 miles) west of Tihany, 168 km (104 miles) southwest of Budapest.

One of the northern shore's most treasured images is of Mt. Badacsony (1,437 feet), simply called the Badacsony, rising from the lake. The mysterious, coffinlike basalt peak of the Balaton Highlands is actually an extinct volcano flanked by smaller cone-shape hills. The masses of lava that coagulated here created bizarre and beautiful rock formations. At the upper edge, salt columns tower 180 to 200 feet like organ pipes in a huge semicircle.

As well as making Badacsony a popular hiking area, this unique volcanic landscape has also resulted in rich soils, ideal for wine growing. There are vineyards everywhere, producing much-loved Badacsony white wines like Rizlingszilváni, Kéknyelu, and Szürkebarát. Proud producers claim that “no vine will produce good wine unless it can see its own reflection in the Balaton.”

Just to the west of Badacsony lies Szigliget, a tranquil town with fine thatched-roof wine-press houses and a small beach, all overlooked by an enormous fortress.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

To get to Badacsony from Tihany, simply drive west on Route 71 for around 40 minutes. It's also possible to get here by bus, though this requires a connection in Balatonfüred, so takes close to two hours.

If you're driving from Budapest, simply follow directions to Balatonfüred then continue along Route 71 for another 40 km (25 miles). Szigliget is 7 km (4½ miles) farther west along Route 71.

Sights

Avasi templomrom (Avas Church)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE | These church ruins on the outskirts of Szigliget, right at the intersection with the road to Badacsony, are what is left of the village's oldest building. These Romanesque remains date back to the Árpád dynasty (855–1301), but the herringbone-like stones in the church walls suggest the site is even older, dating back to at least Roman times. Visit the Avas Church today to see the remaining 12th-century basalt tower with a stone spire. ☑ *Réhelyi út 67, Szigliget*.

Kisfaludy kilátó (Kisfaludy Lookout Tower)

VIEWPOINT | The steep climb to the lookout tower on Mt. Badacsony's summit is an integral part of the Badacsony experience and a rewarding bit of exercise. The trek to the tower, which climbs 455 meters—437 for the hill and a further 18 for the tower—begins behind the Kisfaludy Ház, a restaurant just above the Szegedy Róza-ház. Here stands the Rózsakő (Rose Stone), a flat, smooth basalt slab with many carved inscriptions; local legend has it that if a boy and a girl sit on it with their backs to Lake Balaton, they will marry within a year. Follow the trail marked in yellow up to the foot of the columns that stretch to the top. Steep flights of stone steps will take you through a narrow gap between rocks and basalt walls until you reach a tree-lined plateau. From here, simply follow the blue triangular markings along a path to the lookout tower. Even with time out for rests and views, the whole ascent should take less than an hour. ☑ *Egry sétány 21, Badacsonytomaj* ☎ 87/571-270 🌐 www.badacsonykilato.hu.

Szegedy Róza-ház

MUSEUM | Built in 1790, this charming baroque wine-press house features a thatched roof, gabled wall, six semicircular arcades, and an arched and pillared balcony running the length of the four

raftered upstairs rooms. It was here that Sándor Kisfaludy, a writer from Budapest, met hometown girl Róza Szegedy—the start of a fairy-tale love story. The house now serves as a memorial museum to both of them, furnished much the way it was when Kisfaludy was doing his best work immortalizing his two true loves, the Badacsony and Róza, who became his wife. Róza herself was heavily involved with wine-making, and her homemade vermouth was famous throughout Hungary. ☑ *Kisfaludy Sándor utca 17, Badacsonytomaj* ☎ 70/382-9210 🌐 www.szegedyrozahaz.hu ☎ 900 HUF ☹ Closed Tues.

Szigliget óvár

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE | Towering over the village of Szigliget, atop a 239-meter-high hill, is the ruin of the 13th-century Óvár (Old Castle). Unlike many of Hungary's fortresses, this one was so well protected that it was never taken by the Turks; in fact, it was demolished in the early 18th century by Habsburgs fearful of rebellions. A steep path starting from Kisfaludy utca brings you to the top of the hill, where you can explore the ruins and take in the breathtaking views. ☑ *Hegyaljai út 7, Szigliget*.

Restaurants

★ Hableány

\$\$\$ | **HUNGARIAN** | A restaurant since the late 1800s but most recently refurbished in summer 2019, Hableány remains a Badacsony favorite for its delicious Hungarian dishes incorporating fresh, local ingredients—think smoked catfish with sour cabbage, Mangalica pork shoulder with beetroot, and wild boar stew with mushrooms. As well as a bistro, the building incorporates a state-of-the-art winery; you can take the factory tour, sample a glass at the wine bar, or pick up a take-out bottle in the wine shop. “Hableány” means “mermaid,” and there's a large mural outside that depicts the local legend of a hill god who fell for a

mermaid; he leapt into the lake, creating a splash that extinguished the volcanic Mt. Badacsony. **Known for:** elegant interior and inviting terrace; includes a modern winery plus wine bar and shop; mermaid mural outside relates to local legend.

📍 *Average main:* 3,950 HUF 📍 *Park utca 26, Badacsony* ☎ 30/792-9131 🌐 www.hableanybadacsony.hu.

Halászkert

\$\$\$ | **HUNGARIAN** | The festive Fish Garden has won numerous international awards for its fine Hungarian cuisine. Inside are wooden rafters and tables draped with peachy-pink tablecloths; outside is a large terrace with umbrella-shaded tables.

Known for: delicious catfish stew with strapachka (mini dumplings); very friendly and attentive service; the attached hotel is uninspiring. 📍 *Average main:* 3,200 HUF 📍 *Park utca 1, Badacsony* ☎ 87/531-008 🌐 www.hotelhalaszker.hu.

Hotels

Bonvino

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | With a strong focus on wine and wellness, this conveniently located Badacsony hotel is renowned for its well-stocked wine bar, with more than 100 different vintages including local varietals like Kéknyelű, and its extensive spa facilities, including a large pool, Jacuzzi, and range of massage treatments. **Pros:** free wine tastings for guests three times a week; extensive wellness facilities; e-bikes available to rent. **Cons:** rooms are comfy but uninspired; grape-pattern carpets look more like billiard balls; minimum two-night stays in summer.

📍 *Rooms from:* 49,900 HUF 📍 *Park utca 22, Badacsony* ☎ 87/532-210 🌐 www.hotelbonvino.hu ➡ 48 rooms 🏠 *All-inclusive.*

Hotel Neptun

\$ | **HOTEL** | Directly above Bonvino, this attractive mansion-turned-hotel offers a choice of modern, stylish, and colorful

rooms, as well as a large family apartment. **Pros:** designer rooms and apartments; wine tasting at nearby Fata Pince included; free parking for guests. **Cons:** bathrooms have frosted glass walls; hot options limited at breakfast; restaurant only open weekends. 📍 *Rooms from:* 27,900 HUF 📍 *Római út 170, Badacsony* ☎ 87/431-293 🌐 www.hotelneptunbadacsony.hu ➡ 15 rooms 🏠 *Free breakfast.*

Nightlife

Istvády

WINE BARS—NIGHTLIFE | This little bar, a short walk from the center of Badacsony, is a great stop for a glass of wine. Sit in the garden to enjoy a lake panorama with your drink, or head inside for the cellar experience, often with live music. The wines come from the Istvády pincészet (winery) about 5 km (3 miles) north of here. 📍 *Római út 155, Badacsony* ☎ 30/650-2476.

★ Laposa borterasz

WINE BARS—NIGHTLIFE | This gorgeous wine terrace, situated high in the hills above Badacsony with spectacular views of Lake Balaton, is just about the most romantic spot imaginable for a wine tasting—particularly at sunset. Try three types of Laposa estate wine for 2,200 HUF, or six for 3,300 HUF. There's also a small menu of delicious meals and platters available. It's a popular spot in summer, so it's best to pre-book a table (as well as a taxi, unless you fancy the steep, 30-minute walk each way). 📍 *Bogyay Lajos út 1, Badacsony* ☎ 20/777-7133 🌐 www.laposaborterasz.hu.

Keszthely and Hévíz

15 km (9 miles) west of Badacsony, 196 km (122 miles) from Budapest.

With a beautifully preserved historic center, a spectacular baroque palace,

and a relative absence of honky-tonk, Keszthely is far more classically attractive than other large Balaton towns. It also holds regular cultural events, including an annual summer arts festival, continuing the cultural tradition begun by Count György Festetics two centuries ago. The water around Keszthely's beaches appears disconcertingly cloudy, but it's nothing to worry about: it's simply sediment churned up by water flowing from the nearby Kis-Balaton (Little Balaton) into the main lake.

Seven kilometers (4½ miles) northwest of Keszthely is Hévíz, one of Hungary's biggest and most famous spa resorts. Centered around the largest natural curative thermal lake in Europe, which offers warm water bathing all year round, this charming little town has a fine selection of high quality hotels—most of which have extensive spa facilities. So while Keszthely is a great place to spend the afternoon, either strolling around town or wading along the Balaton shore, Hévíz is a far superior place to spend the night.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

To reach Keszthely from Badacsony (via Szigliget), simply drive west along the lakeside Route 71 for 30 minutes. There are also regular direct buses that follow the same route (50 minutes).

From Budapest, the only real option is to drive. Head southwest along the M7—you'll find yourself skirting the south side of Lake Balaton—before turning off at exit 170 and following Routes 76 and 71 into Keszthely. The journey takes around two hours.

From Keszthely, it's a 10-minute drive or a 30-minute bus ride into Hévíz. Both towns are small enough to explore on foot.

Sights

Baba Múzeum (Doll Museum)

MUSEUM | Supposedly the largest of its kind in Central Europe, Keszthely's Doll Museum exhibits some 450 porcelain figurines dressed in 240 types of colorful folk dress. The building has a pastoral look, created not only by the figurines—which convey the multifarious beauty of village garb—but also by the ceiling's huge, handcrafted wooden beams. On the two upper floors are wooden models of typical homes, churches, and ornate wooden gates representative of all regions in and near present-day Hungary that Magyars have inhabited since conquering the Carpathian basin in 896. The museum's *pièce de résistance* is the life work of an elderly peasant woman from northern Hungary: a nine-yard-long model of Budapest's Parliament building, patched together over 14 years from almost four million snail shells. 📍 *Nádor utca 1, Keszthely* ☎ 30/855-6533 🌐 www.babamuzeum-keszthely.hu ➡ 600 HUF.

★ Festetics Kastély

CASTLE/PALACE | Keszthely's magnificent Festetics Palace is one of the finest baroque complexes in Hungary. Begun around 1745, it was the seat of the enlightened and philanthropic Festetics dynasty, which had acquired Keszthely six years earlier. Surrounded by manicured **gardens** with fine sculptures and a **nature reserve park** filled with rare plants, the palace's distinctive churchlike tower and more than 100 rooms were added between 1883 and 1887. A tour of the interior starts with an interactive Festetics family tree, followed by a series of remarkable rooms including the historic **Helikon Library**, home to 52,000 volumes and family history records, and the atmospheric **chapel** with its gorgeous stained glass windows and coin-covered floor. As you walk around, keep an eye out for some items that were forced into exile during communism but have

Did You Know?

The gorgeous grounds of Festetics Kastély include a protected nature reserve with a French and an English garden, fountains and statues, and a palm house where you can find the most unique tropical hibiscus collection in Europe.



recently found their way home, including a beautiful black-and-gold desk made by Louis XIV's carpenter, and a Hungarian ceremonial outfit on display in front of a portrait of a family member wearing it. A standard ticket (2,900 HUF) includes the palace plus one exhibition—choose from the **Palm House**, the **Coach Collection**, the **Hunting Exhibition**, and the **Model Railway**—while a deluxe ticket (4,400 HUF) gets you in everywhere. ☎ *Kastély utca 1, Keszthely* ☎ 83/314-194 🌐 *www.helikonkastely.hu* ☎ 2,900 HUF (palace and one exhibition) 🕒 Closed Mon. Oct–Apr.

★ Hévízi Tófürdő (Thermal Lake of Hévíz)

SPA—SIGHT | When it comes to public bathing facilities, few can match the beauty and novelty of this thermal lake in the heart of Hévíz. Covering nearly 60,000 square yards, the water never grows cooler than 33°C (91.4°F) in summer and 30°C (86°F) in winter, allowing for year-round bathing. It's also richly laced with sulfur, alkali, calcium salts, and other curative components, making a dip highly recommended for those with spinal, rheumatic, gynecological, and articular disorders (the water can also be drunk to help digestive problems and receding gums). Squeamish bathers should be forewarned that along with its photogenic lily pads, the lake naturally contains assorted sludgy mud and plant material. It's all supposed to be good for you, though—even the mud, which is full of iodine and is claimed to stimulate estrogen production in the body. Nonswimmers can also enjoy the lake, as there's special hydrotherapy equipment available. You can buy a day's entry ticket for cover either two or three hours (3,500 or 4,500 HUF), or a 10-hour lake pass if you're staying for several days (10,000 HUF). ⚠ **Bathing for more than three hours at a time is not recommended.** ☎ *Dr. Schulhof Vilmos sétány 1, Hévíz* ☎ 83/501-708 🌐 *www.hotelspaheviz.hu* ☎ 3,500 HUF.

Hotels

Hotel Bonvital

\$ | RESORT | It may have a smaller wellness area than most Hévíz hotels, but the adult-only Bonvital makes up for it with a convenient central location near Lake Hévíz, a choice of modern and spacious rooms, and one of the most popular and elegant restaurants in town. **Pros:** all rooms above standard have balconies; elegant on-site Brix Bistro; only 200 meters from Lake Hévíz. **Cons:** small spa with no thermal water; half-board is the only option; brown-heavy room decor feels a little musty. 📄 *Rooms from: 28,000 HUF* ☎ *Rákóczi utca 16–18, Hévíz* ☎ 83/900-120 🌐 *www.bonvital.accenthotels.com* ➡ 90 rooms 🕒 All-inclusive.

Lotus Terme

\$\$\$\$ | RESORT | This excellent spa and wellness hotel, which lies in 17 hectares of land south of the center, makes for a relaxing and invigorating stay. **Pros:** outdoor pool is warm year-round; stylish wine bar with pool table; bikes and e-bikes available to rent. **Cons:** decor is very 90s (though still more modern than some Hévíz hotels); a 20-minute walk to the center; very expensive. 📄 *Rooms from: 88,500 HUF* ☎ *Lótuszvirág utca 1, Hévíz* ☎ 83/500-500 🌐 *www.lotus-terme.net* ➡ 232 rooms 🕒 All-inclusive.

Zenit Hotel Balaton

\$\$\$ | RESORT | Located 5 km (3 miles) east of Keszthely, this hillside resort is more than a match for most of Hévíz's wellness hotels, with facilities including a 15-meter swimming pool, a kids' pool with slide, indoor and outdoor Jacuzzis, and massage treatments that incorporate locally sourced grape-seed oil and even red wine. **Pros:** comfortable rooms with balcony; Bock Bisztró has a lovely lake-view terrace; geothermal energy used to heat and cool the building. **Cons:** TVs in rooms are small and old; reception staff could be more helpful; no options other than half-board. 📄 *Rooms from:*

49,000 HUF ☎ *Helikon utca 22, Keszthely* ☎ 20/801-0568 🌐 *www.hotelzenit.hu* ➡ 47 rooms 🕒 All-inclusive.

Győr

129 km (80 miles) north of Keszthely, 121 km (75 miles) west of Budapest.

The largest city in western Hungary, Győr is often called the “Town of Rivers,” as it's situated at the confluence of the Rába, Rábca, and Mosoni-Duna rivers in the heart of Hungary's Kisalföld (Little Plain). Just over halfway between Budapest and Sopron, and almost exactly halfway between Budapest and Vienna, it's a pleasant and convenient stop for any long-distance travelers. The same, unfortunately, has been true for invaders: throughout its 2,000-year history, Győr has seen occupations by Romans, Tatars, Teutons, and Huns. And even though a former city fortress was built by Italian engineers, it was not strong enough to hold back the Turks, who took the city in 1594.

Downtown Győr, where the three rivers meet, is packed with baroque buildings and museums. Highlights include a 12th-century cathedral and several art museums with renowned collections. If your timing is right, you could also catch a performance by the Győri Balett, the country's most renowned ballet company.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

Driving to Győr from Keszthely takes around two hours; simply head north on Route 84, before joining the M86. There are also direct trains, which run every two hours, but these follow a more circuitous route and take 2¼ hours. Coming from Budapest? Drive west on the M1 (1¼ hours) or hop on an hourly train from Budapest-Keleti station (1½ hours).

Győr's main attractions, restaurants, and hotels are all in the center, which you can

explore on foot; there are few reasons to venture out to the industrial suburbs.

Sights

Esterházy-palota (Esterházy Palace)

MUSEUM | This historic palace, with its decorative entranceway just off the northwest corner of Széchenyi tér, was once owned by the famous Esterházy family. Today it's part of the Rómer Flóris Művészeti és Történeti Múzeum (Rómer Flóris Museum of Art and History) and home to its Radnai Collection. This includes everything from József Rippl-Rónai's resplendent Still Life with Mask to József Egry's light-pervaded Lake Balaton landscapes, alongside many other outstanding examples of 20th-century Hungarian painting, sculpture, and graphic art. ■ **TIP→ Buy a single entry ticket (800 HUF) rather than a combined ticket (2,500 HUF) as even if you visit every exhibit, the savings are negligible.** ☎ *Király utca 17, Győr* ☎ 96/322-695 🌐 *www.romer.hu* ☎ 800 HUF 🕒 Closed Mon.

Jedlik-csobogó

FOUNTAIN | This small but eye-catching drinking fountain, created by local glass artist László Hefter in 2012, depicts a turquoise soda bottle spurting water into a small tiled pool. A glance at any drinks menu in Hungary reveals an obsession with soda water, and this fountain commemorates its inventor (or, at least, the man who first mass produced it) Ányos Jedlik. The bottle itself weighs a toe-crushing 365 kilograms (804 pounds), one for each day of the year. ☎ *Jedlik Ányos utca 9, Győr.*

Káptalándomb (Capital Hill)

NEIGHBORHOOD | This charming neighborhood, which lies at the confluence of the three rivers, is the ancient heart of Győr. With its maze of fences and wonderfully curved gates surrounding baroque-style homes, it's a lovely area to simply stroll around, but two buildings in particular are worth a closer look. The first is the

Püspökvár (Bishop's Palace), the long-time residence of the Győr bishops. With sections that date right back to the 13th century—though it was built on the walls of an even-older Roman fort—the palace is now open as an exhibition space and lookout tower (entry costs 1,000 HUF). The second is the **Székesegyház** (Cathedral) with its heady mix of Romanesque, Gothic, and baroque features. Step inside to see the bishop's throne, which was a gift from Empress Maria Theresa; the frame of a painting depicting the Blessed Virgin and infant Jesus, which is considered a rococo masterpiece; and the 15th-century bust of St. László in his namesake chapel, which is an excellent example of medieval Hungarian goldsmithing. ☒ Győr.

★ **Pannonhalmi Főapátság** (Pannonhalma Abbey)

RELIGIOUS SITE | Perched divinely above the countryside on a hilltop roughly 20 km (12½ miles) southeast of Győr, this giant 1,000-year-old Benedictine abbey still gleams like a gift from heaven. During the Middle Ages it was an important ecclesiastical center, the location of Hungary's first school, and perhaps the first place the Holy Scriptures were read on Hungarian soil. It's still a working monastery and school; 60 monks and 320 students live here.

Come by car (there's no other way) from Győr to explore the abbey, either by yourself—make sure you pick up an audio guide at reception—or on one of the frequent English-language guided tours. While the abbey's architecture is predominantly baroque, the main **basilica** is in the early Gothic style, while the 180-foot-high **bell tower** is distinctly neo-classical. Don't miss the incredibly decorative **Porta Speciosa** (ornate entrance) or the spectacular **library** with its more than 300,000 volumes, including some priceless medieval documents like the 11th-century deed to the abbey of Tihany.

A short uphill walk from the abbey takes you to the **Millennium Monument**, erected in 1896 to mark the Magyars' settlement of the Carpathian Basin 1,000 years earlier, while a downhill stroll leads to the upmarket restaurant-with-a-view **Apátsági Viator**. ☒ *Vár 1, Pannonhalma* ☎ 96/570-100 🌐 www.pannonhalmifoapatsag.hu 🗺 2,500 HUF (incl. audio guide); 3,200 HUF guided tour in English ☺ Closed Mon. Oct.–May.

Széchenyi tér

PLAZA | Győr's main square, ringed by historic buildings, hotels, restaurants, and bars, is the life and soul of the town. It's the setting for most of the city's major cultural events, including the famous "**Baroque Marriage**," a traditional August ceremony where baroque music is played and participants dress up in ornate wedding outfits and perform. While in the square, check out the attractive, twin-turreted **Loyolai Szent Ignác bencés templom** (Benedictine Church of St. Ignatius of Loyola) and the nearby **Mária-oszlop** (Mary's Column), built in 1686 to commemorate the recapturing of the city from the Turks. It depicts the Virgin wearing the Hungarian crown and holding the infant Jesus in her arms. ☒ Győr.

Restaurants

★ **Lamareda**

\$\$\$ | **HUNGARIAN** | This elegant Győr restaurant is widely considered one of the best in Hungary, renowned for its refined dining room—all dangling chandeliers and white tablecloths—and its distinctive dishes, which take the conventions of Hungarian cuisine and give them subtle Mediterranean twists. Think beef tenderloin strips with pappardelle and porcini, duck breast with pumpkin and *pommes Anna*, and red tuna steak with garlic linguine and spinach. **Known for:** extensive and exclusive wine list; delicious flódní (a layered cake with plum jam and poppy seed); knowledgeable service staff.

☎ *Average main:* 4,600 HUF ☒ *Apáca utca 4, Győr* ☎ 96/510-982 🌐 www.lamareda.hu.

West Kiraly BRGR

\$\$\$\$ | **BURGER** | Probably the best burger joint in town, West Kiraly BRGR has a huge menu of perfectly grilled patties, from a bacon-and-truffle-cheese beast to a red-salmon-and-Gorgonzola creation. All the burgers are available in three different sizes, according to appetite, while there are also sandwiches and ciabattas available. **Known for:** delicious eight-hour-cooked pulled pork burger; whole-wheat and gluten-free buns available; very expensive by local standards. ☎ *Average main:* 7,000 HUF ☒ *Király utca 1, Győr* ☎ 30/228-8700 🌐 www.kiralybrgr.west-yburger.hu.

Hotels

Hotel Capitulum

\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Győr is not blessed with luxury five-star accommodations, but this convenient city center business hotel is one of the city's better options. **Pros:** convenient city center location; good breakfast buffet; private underground parking garage. **Cons:** decor a little dated in places; toiletries are a bar of soap and sachet of shampoo; street noise can be heard at night. ☎ *Rooms from:* 38,000 HUF ☒ *Sarkantyú köz 11, Győr* ☎ 96/512-358 🌐 capitulum.hu 🗺 44 rooms 🍷 Free breakfast.

Performing Arts

Győri zsinagóga

CONCERTS | Built in the 1860s in the neo-Romanesque style (and since renovated with a splash of art nouveau), this beautiful old synagogue building hosts regular concerts, as well as other cultural events like the MEDIAWAVE International Film and Music Festival. ☒ *Kossuth Lajos utca 5, Győr* ☎ 20/425-2660.

Sopron

92 km (57 miles) west of Győr, 214 km (133 miles) west of Budapest.

Lying in the far northwest of Hungary, close to the Austria border and within easy reach of Vienna, Sopron is one of Central Europe's most picturesque cities, packing a frankly incredible array of historic monuments into a very small area.

Sopron is often called Hungary's most faithful town, as its residents voted to remain part of Hungary (rather than join Austria) in 1921 after World War I. Today's city of 60,000 was a small Celtic settlement more than 2,300 years ago. During Roman times, as Scarabantia, it stood on the main European north-south trade route, the Amber Road, and also happened to be near the junction with the east-west route used by Byzantine merchants. In AD 896 the Magyars conquered the Carpathian basin and later named the city Suprun, after a medieval Hungarian warrior; after the Habsburgs took over the territory during the Turkish wars of the 16th and 17th centuries, they renamed it Ödenburg. The city suffered greatly during World War II, until it was "liberated" by the Soviet Red Army in April 1945. Decades of communist rule followed, until protests on the nearby Hungary-Austria border in 1989 helped to instigate the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Despite the centuries of upheaval, Sopron's historic core has survived and been painstakingly restored; the city even won a 1975 Europe Prize Gold Medal for Protection of Monuments. Today, the horseshoe-shaped Belváros (Inner Town), a wondrous mix of Gothic, Baroque, and Renaissance architecture protected by city walls (one set built by Romans, the other by medieval Magyars), attracts visitors from far and wide. It makes for a great stopover between the Hungarian and Austrian capitals.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

The easiest way to get to Sopron is by train, with regular services leaving from Győr (1 hour) and Budapest-Keleti (2½ hours). Driving from Győr is easy: simply head west on the M85/Route 85 for around 1½ hours. Driving from Budapest means heading west on the M1 to Győr, then joining the M85 (2½ hours in total).

Sopron is a small city, so it's easy to navigate on foot. Most of the city sights are in Belváros, but even those outside are still within walking distance. To get to attractions outside the city, like Eszterházy Palace and Széchenyi Mansion, you can take a bus or drive.

VISITOR INFORMATION

CONTACTS **Tourinform.** ☎ Szent György utca 2, Sopron ☎ 99/951-975 🌐 www.turizmus.sopron.hu.



Sights

Eszterházy-kastély (Esterházy Palace)

CASTLE/PALACE | A 30-minute drive east of Sopron in the town of Fertőd, and near the southern shore of Neusiedl Lake, this magnificent yellow baroque and rococo palace is often referred to as the Hungarian Versailles. Built between 1720 and 1760 as a residence for the Hungarian noble family, it was badly damaged in World War II but has since been painstakingly restored. Step through the intricate wrought-iron gate entrance to discover the palace's 126 lavishly decorated rooms, including the Banqueting Hall with its ceiling fresco of Apollo in his chariot, the beautiful library with almost 22,000 volumes, and the enormous Sala Terrena with its heated marble floor. There's also a three-story-high concert hall, where classical concerts are held throughout the summer as part of the International Haydn Festival; Joseph Haydn was the court conductor to the Eszterházy family here for 30 years. Before you leave, take a walk around the ornamental French-style gardens. ⚠ **Not**

to be confused with **Schloss Esterházy in Eisenstadt**, also a 30-minute drive but north, not east. This was the family's main residence; see the Eisenstadt section for more. ☎ Joseph Haydn utca 2, Fertod ☎ 99/537-640 📞 2,500 HUF.

Fő tér (Main Square)

PLAZA | The city's attractive main square is dominated by the early Gothic **Soproni Nagyboldogasszony templom** (Blessed Mary Benedictine Church), better known as the Goat Church for reasons both fantastical—it's said the church was financed with treasure found by a billy goat—and practical—goats feature on the coat of arms of the *actual* church financiers. It's a real mishmash of styles, with a Gothic choir, a rococo main altar, and a Baroque red-marble pulpit, along with recently discovered medieval tombs. Outside stands the 18th-century **Szentháromság-szobor** (Holy Trinity Column), Hungary's finest plague memorial and among the first anywhere to feature a twisted column.

Facing the square are three very different but equally fascinating museums. **Fabrics Ház** (Fabricius House) is a beautiful Baroque mansion with exhibits on ancient city history: highlights include the remains of a Roman bathhouse and the 1,200-year-old Cunpald Goblet. The **Storno Ház** (Storno House) is Sopron's finest Renaissance-era building with a collection of furniture, porcelain, sculptures, and paintings belonging to the Stornos, a rags-to-riches dynasty of chimney sweeps-turned-art restorers. The **Fehér Angyal Patikamúzeum** (Angel Pharmacy Museum) is a real-life 17th-century apothecary that now houses a collection of period pharmaceutical tools, books, potions, and lotions. ☎ Sopron.

Mária-oszlop (Mary's Column)

PUBLIC ART | With its finely sculpted biblical reliefs, the column is a superb specimen of Baroque design. It was erected in 1745 to mark the former site of the medieval Church of Our Lady,



The 13th-century Fire Tower has a 200-step spiral staircase to a balcony that offers lovely views of Sopron and the countryside.

which was destroyed by Sopron citizens in 1632 because they feared the Turks would use its steeple as a strategic firing tower. ☎ Várkerület 62, Sopron.

Ó-zsinagóga (Old Synagogue)

RELIGIOUS SITE | This medieval synagogue is now a religious museum complete with stunning stained-glass windows, a stone *mikvah* (a ritual bath for women), and old Torahs on display. Built around 1300, the synagogue endured several incarnations over the centuries, including a stint as a hospital (in the 1400s) and a residential building (in the 1700s); the existing facade dates from 1734. The synagogue was once at the heart of the city's Jewish ghetto, and a plaque honors the 1,640 Jews of Sopron—85% of the city's total population—who were murdered by the Nazis. ☎ Új utca 22, Sopron ☎ 99/311-327 📞 800 HUF 🕒 Closed Mon. and Oct.–Mar.

Széchenyi kastély (Széchenyi Mansion)

HOUSE | This pretty manor house, situated 13 kilometers (eight miles) southeast

of Sopron, is the family seat of the Széchenyi family. Mostly completed in the neoclassical style but heavily rebuilt after World War II, the property is now home to the Széchenyi Museum, which tells the family's story through reconstructed rooms and period furnishings. The star of the show is Count István Széchenyi, known as the "Greatest Hungarian" for his achievements as a politician, writer, reformer, and generous patron: his money helped establish the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and build the Chain Bridge in Budapest. You'll find an immodest number of István portraits throughout the property, as well as interactive exhibits on some of his projects. ■ **TIP→** Information within each room is scarce for non-Hungarian speakers, so be sure to pick up an English-language brochure on your way in. ☎ Kiscenki utca 7, Sopron ☎ 30/4471-1248 🌐 www.szechenyiorokseg.hu 📞 1,400 HUF 🕒 Closed Mon.

Szent György utca (*St. George Street*) **NEIGHBORHOOD** | This beautiful Inner Town street runs south from Fő tér to Orsolya tér, where there's an interesting fountain showing Jesus using his crucifix to pierce a snake with an apple. As you walk down the street, you will come across an eclectic mix of architecture coexisting in a surprisingly harmonious fashion. The **Erdody Vár** (Erdody Palace) at No. 16 is Sopron's richest rococo building. Two doors down, at No. 12, stands the **Eggenberg Ház** (Eggenberg House), where the widow of Prince Johann Eggenberg held Protestant services during the harshest days of the Counter-Reformation and beyond. Today, it's home to the **Macskakő Múzeum**, an interactive children's museum about the everyday lives of people living in ancient times. But the street takes its name from **Szent György templom** (St. George's Church), a 14th-century Catholic church so sensitively "Baroqued" some 300 years later that its interior is still as soft as whipped cream. ☒ *Sopron.*

★ **Tuztorony** (*Fire Tower*)

BUILDING | This symbol of Sopron's endurance—and entranceway to the Inner Town—is 200 feet high, with foundations dating to the days of the Árpád dynasty (9th–13th centuries) and perhaps back to the Romans. The tower is remarkable for its uniquely harmonious blend of architectural styles: it has a Romanesque base rising to a circular balcony of Renaissance loggias topped by an octagonal clock tower that is itself capped by a brass Baroque onion dome and belfry. The upper portions were rebuilt after most of the earlier Fire Tower was, ironically, destroyed by the Great Fire of 1676, started by students roasting chestnuts in a high wind (today a double-headed eagle weathervane helps to predict wind direction; it's said that if the eagles face north and south it's going to rain). On the inside of the gate, you'll find a depiction of "Hungaria" receiving the loyalty of Sopron's kneeling citizens. Climb the 200-step spiral staircase to the

top of the tower for lovely views of the town and surrounding countryside. It's from here that tower watchmen warned of approaching enemies and tolled the alarm for fire or the death of a prominent citizen. And occasionally, musicians would serenade the townsfolk from here. ☒ *Fő tér 5 ☎ 99/311–327 🌐 www.tuztorony.sopron.hu 🚶 1,400 HUF.*

Várfalsétány (*Bailey Promenade*) **ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE** | Starting near the Fire Tower and following the route of Sopron's medieval town walls, the Bailey Promenade makes for a lovely stroll. The oldest part of city walls were built in the 14th century but some sights along the way are even older: look out for ancient gate foundations, remnants of the Roman town of Scarbantian. Some sections of the promenade close overnight. ☒ *Sopron.*

🍴 Restaurants

Corvinus

🇹🇭 | **HUNGARIAN** | Set on the ground floor of the historic Storno House on Sopron's delightful cobblestone main square, Corvinus combines a café, pub, pizzeria, and restaurant all in one. Among the traditional Hungarian specialties are a meaty soup with a baked-on pastry cap, and roast venison goulash with porcini mushrooms. **Known for:** in beautiful 500-year-old building; cheese-heavy vegetarian options; good value for central location. 🇹🇭 *Average main: 2,000 HUF ☒ Fő tér 8, Sopron ☎ 99/505–035 🌐 www.corvinussetterem.hu.*

El Gusto

🇺🇸 | **INTERNATIONAL** | This attractive and popular café-bistro is a great stop for breakfast, brunch, lunch, and dinner or just a takeaway coffee and ice cream. Enjoy an international menu of soups, salads, pizzas, paninis, and burgers (along with a few local specialties) in the simple Scandi-style interior, or else sit outside on the pleasant street terrace.

Known for: simple but warm decor; burgers and pizza; excellent coffee and cakes. 🇹🇭 *Average main: 3,250 HUF ☒ Várkerület 79, Sopron ☎ 70/3723–961 🌐 www.elgusto.hu.*

★ **Erhardt**

\$\$\$ | **HUNGARIAN** | On a quiet side street a block from Várkerület, away from the main tourist drag, this excellent restaurant serves delicious, inventive dishes in a choice of beautiful settings: take your pick from the wood-beamed rooms upstairs, the beautiful 18th century brick-vaulted wine cellar below, or the leafy garden terrace outside. The menu features high quality, overwhelmingly meaty and fishy Hungarian fare, like roasted duck breast and paprika catfish (though vegetarian options like delicious barley-stuffed peppers do exist). **Known for:** curd-cheese dumplings with fruit; choice of beautiful settings; combined dinner and wine tasting for 11,600 HUF. 🇹🇭 *Average main: 5,500 HUF ☒ Balfi út 10, Sopron ☎ 99/506–711 🌐 www.erhardts.hu.*

Hopsz

\$\$ | **CAFÉ** | Offering something a little different, this cool café and grill is a real bright spot in a rather drab part of town. Sit in the achingly-hip interior—all funky artworks, bold patterns, and bright prints—to enjoy a menu of delicious international dishes, or sit out on the plant pot-covered terrace in summer. **Known for:** cool interior with eclectic artworks; great food early 'til late; a 10-minute walk from the center. 🇹🇭 *Average main: 2,800 HUF ☒ Gyár utca 1-3, Sopron ☎ 99/333–355 🌐 www.hopszsopron.hu.*

Jégverem Fogadó

\$\$ | **HUNGARIAN** | A short walk from the Inner Town, this charming restaurant is a perennial favorite for its cozy, rustic interior of wooden-beamed ceilings, cast iron light fittings, and checkered tablecloths, as well as for its "guzzle guts" menu of homemade Hungarian specialties, often with an inventive twist.

In warm weather, you can also sit outside in the lovely, leafy courtyard. **Known for:** gigantic portions; poppy seed bread and butter pudding; bargain lunch menus. 🇹🇭 *Average main: 3,000 HUF ☒ Jégverem utca 1, Sopron ☎ 99/510–113 🌐 www.jegverem.hu.*

🏨 Hotels

Hotel Wollner

\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Tucked inside the city center, this quiet and charming 18th century peach-colored hotel has been restored to its original splendor, with comfortable rooms boasting arched ceilings, comfy beds, and spacious bathrooms. **Pros:** a property with oodles of history; convenient Inner Town location; the garden incorporates medieval town wall. **Cons:** traditional furnishings not to all tastes; no elevator or A/C; no parking facilities. 🇹🇭 *Rooms from: 34,000 HUF ☒ Templom utca 20, Sopron ☎ 99/524–400 🌐 www.wollner.hu 🚶 18 rooms 🌐 Free breakfast.*

Pannonia Hotel

\$\$ | **HOTEL** | This elegant, antique-filled hotel has a long and illustrious past, starting in the 17th century as the Golden Hind, when it welcomed stagecoaches traveling between Vienna and Budapest. **Pros:** convenient central location; big rooftop terraces with views; rooftop basketball court. **Cons:** some stains on carpets; no tea and coffee in rooms; breakfast isn't included. 🇹🇭 *Rooms from: 26,000 HUF ☒ Várkerület 75, Sopron ☎ 99/312–180 🌐 www.pannoniahotel.com 🚶 79 rooms 🌐 No meals.*

★ **Sopronbánfalvi Kolostor Hotel** (*Pauline-Carmelite Monastery of Sopronbánfalva*)

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | If you're looking for a memorable stay in Sopron, look no further than this extraordinary 12th-century monastery-turned-hotel. **Pros:** this is a truly one-of-a-kind stay; an audio guide introduces the property; Refektórium restaurant is

one of Sopron's finest. **Cons:** some rooms have single beds; hotel services are limited; a 40-minute walk (or 10-minute taxi) from the center. **Rooms from:** 46,000 HUF **Kolostorhegy utca 2, Sopron** ☎ 99/505-895 **www.banfalvakolostor.hu** ➦ 20 rooms **All-inclusive.**

Nightlife

Cézár Pince

WINE BARS—NIGHTLIFE | Come for the wine, stay for the decor: this beautiful 17th-century wine cellar sits beneath a gorgeous Gothic building that once played host to the Diet of Hungary (the medieval kingdom's parliament). Today, you can sample a good selection of local vintages, along with a wide choice of meat and cheese platters. **Hátsókapu utca 2, Sopron** ☎ 99/311-337 **www.cezarpince.hu.**

Performing Arts

★ **Fertőrákosi Barlangszínház** (Fertőrákos Cave Theater)

CONCERTS | For a unique entertainment experience, it's hard to beat this cave theater, carved out of a limestone quarry eight kilometers (five miles) northeast of Sopron. The 760-seat theater has amazing natural acoustics, which make for memorable classical music performances, pop and rock concerts, and musical theater productions. Arrive an hour early to enjoy the walking trail around the quarry, with lovely lookout points over the southern shore of Lake Neusiedl and a fun paleontological exhibition. **Fő utca 1, Fertőrákos, Sopron** ☎ 99/530-404 **www.fertorakosikofejto.hu.**

Shopping

ART Septem

ART GALLERIES | With its name stylized as "SEP7EM" on its sign above the door, this cozy little art gallery and shop

showcases works by contemporary Sopron artists, as well as prints of classic Hungarian artworks. All are available to buy. **Kolostor utca 7, Sopron** **www.septem.hu** ☺ Closed Sun. and Mon.

CERAMICS

Esterházy Márkabolt

CERAMICS/GLASSWARE | This small shop is devoted to the renowned Herend hand-painted porcelain (the company first gained international acclaim when England's Queen Victoria ordered a dinner set for Windsor Castle in 1851). **Várkerület 98, Sopron** ☎ 99/508-712 **www.herend.com** ☺ Closed Sun.

Zsolnay Porcelán Márkabolt

CERAMICS/GLASSWARE | If you can't make it to the less expensive factory outlet in Pécs, you can purchase exquisite Zsolnay porcelain here. A tiny room lined with glass cabinets displays the delicate wares. **Előkapu 11, Sopron** ☎ 99/505-252 **www.zsolnay.hu.**

COSMETICS

L'Apotheca Kozmetika

PERFUME/COSMETICS | This cute little boutique sells organic cosmetics—including face creams, shower gels, and body lotions—crafted to recipes by local pharmacist Tómea Glöckner. **Színház utca 4, Sopron** ☎ 20/298-7494 **www.lapothea.com** ☺ Closed Sun.

WINE

Natura Vinotéka

WINE/SPIRITS | Situated on Várkerület, the main shopping street that partly circles the outside of the Old Town, this is a good place to look for fine Sopron wines, whether the peppery red kéfrankos or the spicy white zöld veltelini. **Várkerület 24, Sopron** ☎ 30/986-6488 **www.sopronivinoteka.hu** ☺ Closed Sun. **☎ 9400.**

Bratislava, Slovakia

88 km (55 miles) northeast of Sopron,
200 km (125 miles) northwest of Budapest.

Slovakia may be one of the world's youngest nations, but the country—and its capital Bratislava—has a long and illustrious history. Settled since the Neolithic era, Bratislava and the area around has spent much of this time as a component of a larger state, from the Roman Empire to the Kingdom of Hungary, the Habsburg Monarchy to Czechoslovakia. In 1993, Slovakia became an independent state, and since then Bratislava has blossomed into a thriving, modern European capital—while still retaining its charming historic center.

The city's most visible attraction is its enormous white Renaissance castle, perched on a rocky hill overlooking the Danube. But head down to ground level and you'll find there are plenty of other charms to this city, from the extensive Old Town that combines medieval and Gothic architecture to the thriving restaurant and nightlife culture that seriously rivals Budapest. Most of the top attractions are free (or very cheap) to experience, but if you want to dig a little deeper, it's worth picking up a **Bratislava Card**. This will give you entry into 16 museums and galleries in the city and around, including the Museum of Viticulture and Devin Castle, as well as a one-hour guided tour of the Old Town and free public transportation. The card is valid for 24, 48, and 72 hours, at €20, €25, and €28 respectively. Pick it up at the tourist information or on the Visit Bratislava website.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

Bratislava has a small international airport served by budget airlines including Ryanair and Wizzair; a 40-minute bus brings you in the city center. For long-haul

destinations and national carriers, fly to and from Vienna.

To reach Bratislava from Sopron, drive northeast through Austria on the B50 and A6 (1½ hours) or take a train via Vienna (2½ hours). From Budapest, drive 2 hours northwest on the M1/E60 then M15/E75, or take a long-distance bus (3–4 hours).

Once you're in town, ditch the car: the Old Town is almost completely pedestrianized, and small enough to walk around, while regular buses and trams will take you to destinations farther afield.

AIRPORT INFORMATION Bratislava Airport. (Letisko M. R. Štefánika) ☎ Ivanská cesta, Bratislava ☎ 02/330-333-53 **www.bts.aero.**

RESTAURANT AND HOTEL PRICES

What it Costs in Euros				
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$	\$\$\$\$	
RESTAURANTS				
under €10	€10–€15	€16–€20	over €20	
HOTELS				
under €80	€80–€105	€106–€135	over €135	

VISITOR INFORMATION

CONTACTS Visit Bratislava. ☎ Klobučnícka 2, Bratislava ☎ 02/544-194-10 **www.visitbratislava.com.**

Sights

★ **Bratislavský hrad** (Bratislava Castle) **CASTLE/PALACE** | With roots dating back more than a millennium—it was first mentioned in 907 for its role in a battle between Bavarians and Hungarians—Bratislava Castle was significantly rebuilt in the Renaissance style in the mid-16th century. It's this enormous, rectangular form with four stocky towers that you can see today (though it incorporates architectural features from throughout its history, and the dazzling white paint

job is distinctly 20th century). Walk up the (steep) castle hill and pass through one of the four entrance gates (probably **Viedenská brána** or **Leopoldova brána**) for incredible views of the town and the Danube below. The grounds are free to enter, so you can soak up the vistas as long as you like; make sure you visit the beautiful **Baroková záhrada** (Baroque Garden) while you're at it. You only need to pay if you want to head inside, either for the **SNM-Historical Museum**, which is a little sparse but does include access to the **Crown Tower** via a narrow passageway, or any of the regularly changing temporary exhibits. ☎ *Zámocká 2, Bratislava* ☎ 02/204-831-10 🌐 www.bratislava-hrad.sk.

Devínsky hrad (Devín Castle)

CASTLE/PALACE | Located on the confluence of the Morava and Danube rivers that form the border between Slovakia and Austria, just 10½ kilometers (6½ miles) west of Bratislava, lies this extraordinary ruined castle. Built on the top of a high crag, the enormous Devín Castle is one of the oldest in the region, first mentioned in written sources in 864. You can learn about the history of the castle and the village (all the way back to Neolithic times) in a fascinating exhibition within the castle walls. Enjoy the sweeping views from the top of the ruined Upper Castle, and take a snap of the famous **Maiden's Tower**, a tiny watchtower precariously balanced on a lone rock that has spawned countless legends of imprisoned women leaping to their deaths. In summer, there are kid-friendly medieval-themed events held in and around the castle. To reach Devín, take Bus 29 from Bratislava (30 minutes) or drive west out of the city on Devínska cesta. ☎ *Muránská 1050/10, Bratislava* ☎ 02/657-301-05 🌐 www.muzeum.bratislava.sk ☎ €5 🕒 Closed Mon.

Grasalkovičov palác (Grassalkovich Palace)

GOVERNMENT BUILDING | This grand Rococo-style summer residence was built in 1780 for Count Anton Grassalkovich, advisor to Empress Maria Theresa (who was crowned in Bratislava in 1761). Today, it's the official residence of the President of the Slovak Republic so it isn't possible to see inside, but come at 1 pm any day of the week to witness the ceremonial Changing of the Guard. You can also head around the back of the palace to explore the lovely Prezidentská záhrada (Presidential Garden), a public park that's an oasis of manicured lawns, sculpted hedges, and gorgeous flower displays. It also has a number of avant garde sculptures, including the playful *Fountain of Youth* by Slovak sculptor Tibor Bártfay. ☎ *Hodžovo námestie 2978/1, Bratislava* ☎ 02/578-881-55 🌐 www.prezident.sk.

Hlavné Námestie

PLAZA | Bratislava's main square is the beating heart of the city, home to some of its most interesting history, architecture, and artworks. The centerpiece of the square is **Maximiliánova fontána** (Maximilian's Fountain), erected in 1572 as a public water supply. The knight on top is said to bow once a year, on New Year's Eve, though only for those pure of heart and born in Bratislava. The square is ringed by a number of beautiful Gothic and Baroque buildings, many of which are now embassies. The most notable of these is the **Stará radnica** (Old Town Hall), which is actually a mishmash of different houses built at various stages from the 14th century onwards; look for the cannonball embedded in the town hall's tower. Opposite, on the corner outside Café Mayer, is the **Schöne Náci** (Nice Nazi) statue, depicting a famous local eccentric who cheerfully wandered the streets in top hat and tails. As well as the permanent fixtures, the square also hosts regular markets, concerts, and political events. ☎ *Bratislava*.

Hviezdoslavovo námestie (Hviezdoslav Square)

PLAZA | This charming, tree-shaded promenade is named for renowned Slovak poet Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav and lined with some of the city's grandest buildings—now mainly embassies, hotels, and restaurants. The “square” starts with a **statue of Hviezdoslav** and ends at **Morový stĺp**, a beautiful Baroque trinity column. Just east of Hviezdoslav Square is the old **Slovenské národné divadlo** (Slovak National Theatre) building, while just around the corner crowds gather to see the popular **Čumil** (Rubberneck) sculpture; a cheeky bronze chap peeping out from under a manhole cover. ☎ *Bratislava*.

Kostol svätej Alžbety (Blue Church)

RELIGIOUS SITE | Bratislava's most striking Secession (art nouveau) style building, the Church of St. Elizabeth is noted for its powder blue exterior, which extends all the way up to its 120-foot round tower. The unusual color scheme continues throughout the early-20th-century building, from the blue ceramic roof tiles, mosaics, and maiolica (tin-glazed pottery) decorations outside, to the baby blue pews and arches inside. The church once functioned as the chapel of the school opposite, which is evident in the two buildings' similar design elements (though the school has a rather more traditional color scheme). ☎ *Bezručova 2, Bratislava* 🌐 www.modrykostol.fara.sk.

Michalská brána (Michael's Gate)

MUSEUM | The last gate standing from Bratislava's original 13th century city walls, Michael's Gate was rebuilt in the Baroque style in 1758; that's when the onion dome was added. Look up to the top of the tower to see the dome, as well as a statue of the archangel Michael slaying a dragon; or look down to see a bronze plate showing the distances to different world capitals. Also of note is the remarkably skinny house on the northwest side of the gate, now a fast food joint. For a small fee, you can climb

the tower for views over the city; your ticket also includes entry to the small Museum of Arms within the gate, as well as the nearby Pharmacy Museum, a fascinating exhibition on 16th century medicine. ☎ *Michalská ulica 22, Bratislava* ☎ 02/544-330-44 🌐 www.muzeum.bratislava.sk ☎ €4.50 (tower and museum) 🕒 Closed Mon. (tower and museum).

Primaciálny palác (Primate's Palace)

CASTLE/PALACE | This gorgeous Neoclassical building, constructed between 1778 to 1781 for the Archbishop József Batthyány—“primate” is a title given to a bishop; nothing to do with monkeys—played a vital role in European history in 1805. That's when the palace's Hall of Mirrors was used to sign the fourth Peace of Pressburg, which effectively brought an end to the Holy Roman Empire. Today, you can visit the beautiful hall, elegantly furnished with period pieces, as well as the picture gallery with portraits of Hungarian rulers. Somewhat surprisingly, the palace also contains a rare collection of exquisite English tapestries from the time of King James I (1566–1625). ☎ *Primaciálne námestie 2, Bratislava* ☎ 02/593-563-94 🌐 www.visitbratislava.com/places/primatial-palace 🕒 Closed Mon.

Slovak National Collection of Wines

WINERY/DISTILLERY | Attached to the Museum of Viticulture—which traces the long history of winemaking in the Bratislava and Lower Carpathians region—is this beautiful 16th century wine cellar offering regular tastings. The national collection is made up of Slovakia's “Top 100 Wines,” which are chosen from more than 600 entries each year; you can find everything from Tokajs to ice wines. Choose to sample two, four, or eight of the collection's wines and a professional somelier will guide you through the experience. Alternatively, opt for the self-guided, all-you-can-drink “72 wines in 100 minutes” tasting. All tastings are available

for individuals or groups, but it's best to call ahead to ensure an English-speaking guide. ☒ *Radničná 577/1, Bratislava* ☎ 918-664-992 🌐 www.salonvin.sk ☺ Closed Sun.–Mon.

★ St Martin's Cathedral (Katedrála svätého Martina)

RELIGIOUS SITE | The enormous golden crown and cushion on top of this beautiful Gothic cathedral reveals that this was once a coronation church. In fact, it was the coronation church for Hungarian (and later Austrian) monarchs for more than 250 years; 19 different royals were crowned here between 1563 and 1830, including Empress Maria Theresa. The church was also one of the city's lines of defense, which explains the chunky walls, the arrow-slit windows, and the exceptionally tall (lookout) tower. Luckily, the interior is more delicate and decorative, with dramatic rib vaults, colorful stained glass windows, and a grand altar showing St. Martin in a traditional Hungarian hussar dress. Next to the cathedral lie the remains of the **Neologická Synagóga** (Neological Synagogue), demolished by the communist government in the 1970s, and overlooked by the glorious facade of the **Lekáreň u Salvátora** (Pharmacy Salvator). ☒ *Rudnayovo námestie 1, Bratislava* ☎ 02/544-313-59 🌐 www.dom.fara.sk.

🍴 Restaurants

★ Albrecht

\$\$\$\$ | **FRENCH** | One of the city's most elegant fine dining experiences, Restaurant Albrecht near Bratislava Castle serves sumptuous, strictly seasonal French cuisine using the highest quality locally sourced ingredients; menus often list individual farms and producers. Head chef Jaroslav Židek is known for his elaborate, multicourse tasting menus, but you can also order the dishes à la carte: opt for the tuna ceviche to start, the lamb back with sheep-cheese ravioli for main, and the plum dumplings to finish.

Known for: multicourse tasting menus; great value lunch menu; five minutes by taxi from the Old Town. ☎ *Average main: €30* ☒ *Mudroňova 4237/82, Bratislava* ☎ 902-333-888 🌐 www.hotelalbrecht.sk/restauracia ☺ Closed Sun.

Roxor

\$\$ | **BURGER** | Melt-in-the-mouth eco-farm beef, crunchy double-cooked fries, and crisp craft beers are the order of the day at this excellent burger joint. There are half a dozen burger options to choose from, including veggie mushroom and vegan patty ones; all are cooked medium as standard and served with tasty sides like rosemary or garlic fries, kimchi, and coleslaw. **Known for:** Bratislava's best burgers; homemade pineapple-curry mayo; a little way out of the Old Town. ☎ *Average main: €15* ☒ *Šancová 19, Bratislava* ☎ 02/210-205-00 🌐 www.roxorburger.sk.

Zylinder

\$\$\$ | **AUSTRIAN** | With dishes based on traditional Austro-Hungarian recipes, this well-located café and restaurant makes a pleasant stop for lunch or dinner. Expect everything from traditional Austrian schnitzel and *tafelspitz* (boiled beef served with minced apples) to Hungarian beef goulash and *somlói galuska* (sponge trifle), as well as Slovakian specialties like *halušky* (small potato dumplings with sheep cheese, sautéed bacon, and sour cream). **Known for:** tasty beef broth with noodles; great location on Hviezdoslav Square; big portions and good value for area. ☎ *Average main: €16* ☒ *Hviezdoslavovo námestie 19, Bratislava* ☎ 903-123-134 🌐 www.zylinder.sk.

☕ Coffee and Quick Bites

★ Konditorei Kormuth

\$\$ | **CAFÉ** | It may look unassuming from the street, but step inside and it becomes immediately apparent why this is considered one of Europe's most beautiful cafés. The walls and ceilings

throughout the interior are plastered in majestic Renaissance-style frescoes, while seemingly every nook and cranny of the old building is filled with antiques, some dating back to the 16th century.

Known for: stunningly decorative interior; delicious cakes and pastries; entrance fee. ☎ *Average main: €10* ☒ *Sedlárska 363, Bratislava* ☎ 02/544-325-37 🌐 www.konditoreikormuth.sk ☺ Closed Mon.–Tue.

Koun

\$ | **FAST FOOD** | In recent years, Bratislava has been taken over by ice cream stores, and today it's hard to find an Old Town street without a high-quality gelato option. But if you have to choose only one scoop while you're in town, opt for Koun (pronounced "cone"). **Known for:** incredible lemon cake ice cream; sunny decor and even sunnier staff; half-hidden on a side street off Hviezdoslav Square. ☎ *Average main: €5* ☒ *Paulínyho 1, Bratislava* ☎ 948-687-795 🌐 www.koun.sk ☺ Closed Mon.

🏨 Hotels

Loft Hotel

\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Standing out from the Old Town crowd with its industrial-style decor incorporating exposed brick walls, distressed wooden floors, shabby leather sofas, and retro advertising prints, Loft offers a different kind of hotel experience. **Pros:** sixth floor rooms have gorgeous garden views; free snacks and wine for guests; popular Fabrika brewpub downstairs. **Cons:** industrial decor isn't to all tastes; underground parking is €20 a day; wood floors can be noisy. ☎ *Rooms from: €85* ☒ *Štefánikova 864/4, Bratislava* ☎ 901-902-680 🌐 www.lofthotel.sk ➡ 111 rooms 🌐 No meals.

★ Marrol's Boutique Hotel

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | A romantic boutique gem in the heart of the Old Town, Marrol's is set within a 19th century burgher's house and oozes period charm, with its opulent

chandeliers, deep leather armchairs, and charming wood paneling. **Pros:** free minibar full of drinks; lovely plant-covered Summer Terrace; underground parking available. **Cons:** breakfast is nothing special; service isn't always with a smile; noise in corridors carries. ☎ *Rooms from: €110* ☒ *Tobrucká 6953/4, Bratislava* ☎ 02/577-846-00 🌐 www.hotelmarrols.sk ➡ 54 rooms 🌐 Free breakfast.

Roset Hotel

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Built in 1903 in the Secession (art nouveau) style, this sophisticated hotel, which is conveniently located by the Old Town, offers 27 spacious and elegant suites, a spa with fitness center, sauna, and Jacuzzi, and the time-honored Tulip Café. **Pros:** beautiful turn-of-the-century building; in-suite massages available; incorporates famous old literary café. **Cons:** breakfast is underwhelming; mattresses are a little hard; some rooms need sprucing up. ☎ *Rooms from: €115* ☒ *Štúrova Ulica 10, Bratislava* ☎ 917-373-209 🌐 www.rosethotel.sk ➡ 27 rooms 🌐 Free breakfast.

🍷 Nightlife

Grand Cru Wine Gallery

WINE BARS—NIGHTLIFE | This popular Old Town bar is the perfect place to sample some high-quality Slovakian wines. Amiable owner Martin Pagáč is always on hand to talk you through individual vintages and answer questions. ☒ *Zámočnická 404/8, Bratislava* ☎ 908-656-259 🌐 www.facebook.com/GrandCruWineGallery.

KC Dunaj

DANCE CLUBS | Set within a communist-era shopping mall but now reclaimed by a younger, hipper crowd, this lively bar and club venue hosts regular live concerts, club nights, theater events, and more. ☒ *Nedbalova 435/3, Bratislava* ☎ 904-330-049 🌐 www.kcdunaj.sk.

★ Kláštorňý pivovar

BREW PUBS/BEER GARDENS | For a great-tasting, great-value beer, you won't beat the home brew at this popular brewpub—it's just €3.70 for a whole liter of Monastic Beer served straight from the tap. Enjoy it with tasty Slovak pub food like grilled sausages, baked pork knuckle, and *halušky* (potato dumplings with sheep's cheese). ☒ *Námestie SNP 469/8, Bratislava* ☎ 907-976-284 🌐 www.klastornypivovar.sk.

UFO

BARS/PUBS | Situated at the top of the observation tower on the UFO bridge, this swanky bar offers the chance to enjoy delicious cocktails, spirits, and wines while overlooking the Danube and the city below. There's also a well-regarded restaurant here, but beware: the sky-high setting also means sky-high prices. ☒ *Most SNP 1, Bratislava* ☎ 02/625-203-00 🌐 www.u-f-o.sk.



Performing Arts

Slovenské národné divadlo (*Slovak National Theater*)

THEATER | Whether at the grand, 18th-century, Neo-Renaissance building in the heart of the Old Town, or at the shiny, art-filled, 21st century building downriver, the Slovak National Theater knows how to put on a show. The regular, high-quality operas, ballets, and drama performances are typically around €20 a ticket. ☒ *New Slovak National Theater, Pribinova 17, Bratislava* ☎ 02/204-722-89 🌐 www.snd.sk.



Shopping

BEER

100 Piv

LOCAL SPECIALTIES | A small bottle shop on the edge of the Old Town, 100 Piv has hundreds of beers available to buy, with a big focus on local craft breweries. There are always some beers on tap, so you can try before you buy. ☒ *Medená 111/33, Bratislava* ☎ 948-405-409 🌐 www.100piv.sk.

FASHION

NOX Vintage

CLOTHING | A favorite with lovers of vintage and retro fashion, this Old Town store has rack upon rack of clothes, bags, and shoes, as well as a few items of furniture and homeware. ☒ *Ventúrska 3, Bratislava* ☎ 905-861-879 🌐 www.facebook.com/NOXvintage ☺ Closed Sun.

GIFTS AND SOUVENIRS

Slávica

GIFTS/SOUVENIRS | You'll find everything from clothing and jewelry to art prints and ceramics from local producers at this hip design store near Laurence's Gate. ☒ *Laurinská 19, Bratislava* ☎ 917-968-736 🌐 www.slavicadesign.sk.