

Western Transdanubia



A visit to Western Transdanubia is a boon for anyone wishing to see remnants of Hungary's Roman legacy, medieval heritage and baroque splendour.

This swathe of land bordering Austria, Slovenia and Slovakia was more fortunate than its neighbours to the south and east, largely avoiding the Ottoman destruction wrought on the country in the 16th and 17th centuries. Its seminal towns – Sopron, Kőszeg and Győr – all managed to save their medieval centres from total devastation, and exploring their cobble streets and hidden courtyards is a magical experience. These same towns, along with a handful of tiny settlements like Fertőd, also house a cornucopia of baroque architecture, something rare in much of Hungary.

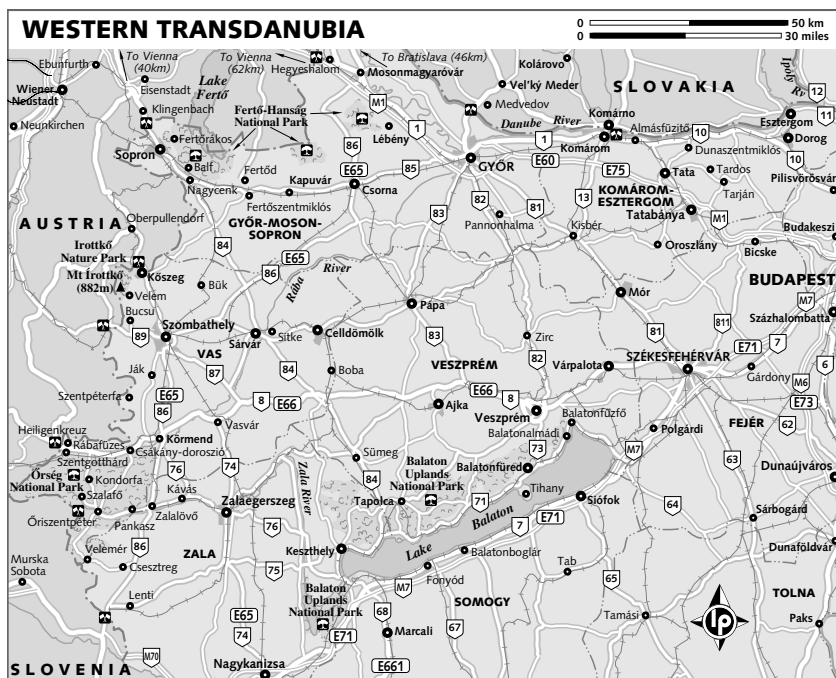
Equally rewarding are reminders of Roman settlement. Szombathely, the former Roman capital of Upper Pannonia, has a rich collection of ruins, and Sopron coughs up its fair share of the Italians' enduring handiwork. Even the Romanesque period has its say in these parts – the Benedictine Abbey Church of Ják is among the finest examples of 13th-century architecture in the country.

Not to be overlooked is the region's natural beauty. Órség, for many centuries the nation's sentry in the far southwest, is an untouched rural paradise, where pristine forests, rolling farmland and folk traditions are protected under the blanket of national park status. Further north the Fertő-Hanság National Park, a wetland/lakeland area beloved for its birdlife and cycling and walking opportunities, spills over into Austria.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring **Pannonhalma Abbey** (p169), a deserved Unesco World Heritage Site
- Wandering the Inner Town of **Sopron** (p171), a district unchanged for centuries
- Calling in at **Ják** (p185) to admire the Romanesque handiwork of the town's abbey church
- Stopping for coffee and cake at Kőszeg's **Jurisics tér** (p189), arguably Hungary's finest medieval centre
- Hiking in the **Órség National Park** (p192), a region of unspoilt rural beauty where three countries meet





History

The Danube River was the limit of Roman expansion in what is now Hungary, and most of today's Western Transdanubia formed the province of Pannonia Superior, or 'Upper Pannonia'. The Romans built some of their most important military and civilian towns here, including Arrabona (Győr), Scarbantia (Sopron), Savaria (Szombathely), Adflexum (Mosonmagyaróvár) and Brigetio (Komárom). Because of their positions on the trade route from northern Europe to the Adriatic Sea and Byzantium, and the influx of such ethnic groups as Germans and Slovaks, these towns prospered in the Middle Ages. Bishops were established, castles were built and many of the towns were granted special royal privileges.

A large part of Western Transdanubia remained in the hands of the Habsburgs during the Turkish occupation, and it was thus spared the ruination suffered in the south and on the Great Plain. As a result, some of the best examples of Romanesque and Gothic architecture in the country can be found here. Because of Vienna's author-

ity and influence throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, Western Transdanubia received Hungary's first baroque churches and civic buildings.

TATA

☎ 34 / pop 24,100

There is no escaping water in Tata (German: Totis), a small, historical town in the northeast of Western Transdanubia. Its urban centre, complete with proud castle and smattering of neoclassical mansions, is squeezed between two lakes – one big, one small – from which canals drain in all directions.

Along Tata's eastern horizon lies a long stretch of wooded hills that only add to the town's aesthetic appeal; they make a fine destination for a day's hiking.

History

Tata's Öregvár (Old Castle), perched on a rock at the northern end of a large lake, has been the focus of the town since the 14th century. It was a favourite residence of King Sigismund, who added a palace to it in the early 15th century, and his