

Welcome to Budapest & Hungary

Stunning architecture, vital folk art, thermal spas and Europe's most exciting city after dark are the major drawcards of Hungary and its capital, Budapest.

Super Structures

The beauty of both Hungary and Budapest is not all God-given; humankind has played a role in shaping these pretty faces too. Architecturally, Hungary is a treasure trove, with everything from Roman ruins and medieval townhouses to baroque churches, neoclassical public buildings and art nouveau bathhouses and schools. And you won't just find all that in Budapest. Stroll through Szeged or Kecskemét, Debrecen or Sopron and you'll discover an architectural gem at virtually every turn.

In Hot Water

Hungarians have been 'taking the waters' supplied by an estimated 300 thermal springs since togas were all the rage and Aquincum (Roman Budapest) was the Big Smoke. They still do – for therapeutic, medicinal and recreational purposes – but the venues have changed somewhat. Today they range from authentic bathhouses dating from the Turkish occupation and art nouveau palaces to clinical sanatoriums straight out of a Thomas Mann novel. More and more popular are ultra-modern wellness centres offering myriad treatments.

Eat, Drink & Be Magyar

Hungarian food remains the most sophisticated in Eastern Europe. Magyars even go so far as to say there are three essential world cuisines: French, Chinese and their own. That may be a bit of an exaggeration, but Hungary's – and especially Budapest's – cuisine is, despite a fallow period under communism, once again commanding attention. So too are the nation's world-renowned wines, from the big-bodied reds of Eger and Villány and white *olaszrizling* from Badacsony to honey-sweet Tokaj.

Folk Culture

Hungary has one of the richest folk traditions still alive in Europe. With exquisite folk paintings found in the tiny wooden churches of the Bereg region and the wonderful embroidery that the women of Hollókő stitch to decorate smocks, skirts and slippers, this is often where the country comes to the fore artistically. Traditional music, played on a five-tone diatonic scale on a host of unusual instruments, continues to thrive as well, especially at *táncházak* (dance houses) – peasant 'raves' take place regularly in Budapest and other cities, where you'll hear Hungarian folk music and learn to dance too.



Why I Love Budapest & Hungary

By Steve Fallon, Writer

I love both Budapest and Hungary for so many reasons that it's impossible to put them into any order. Is it the capital's art nouveau architecture or the Turkish-era baths that are God-given cures for too much *pálinka* (fruit brandy)? Is it the gentle landscape, the rolling hills of the north or the sight- and fun-filled cities like Budapest, Szeged and Debrecen? Maybe it's the Jókai-style bean soup... But taking pride of place with all those reasons is Hungarian itself. When I sing a song of Hungary today it may be in a beautiful language that I once considered impenetrable, but no longer do.

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