



Hungary

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Why Go?

Where else but Hungary can you laze about in an open-air thermal spa while snow patches glisten around you, then head to a local bar where a Romani band yelps while a crazed crowd whacks its boot heels? Or follow that spa visit with a trip to a wine cellar to taste the local vintage alongside arguably the region's best, and spiciest, cooking?

If these pursuits don't appeal, there are always Roman ruins, ancient castles and even the occasional Turkish minaret, holdovers from centuries of Ottoman rule, in cities like Pécs and Eger. In the countryside, you can see 'cowboys' riding astride five horses, storks nesting on streetlamps and a sea of apricot trees blooming.

Cosmopolitan Budapest is filled with world-class opera, great clubs, monumental buildings, and the mighty Danube River flowing through its centre.

Best Places to Stay

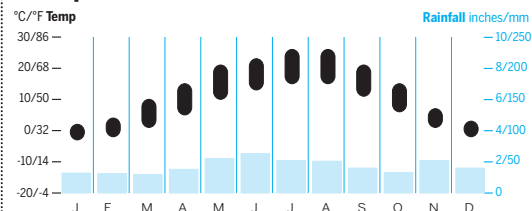
- » Lánchíd 19 (p393)
- » Fábián Panzió (p431)
- » Hotel Korona (p434)
- » Mala Garden (p419)
- » Hotel Senator Ház (p437)

Best Places to Eat

- » Köleves (p399)
- » Csalogány 26 (p398)
- » Váci Remete (p409)
- » Matróz (p415)
- » Ferenc Pince (p423)

When to Go

Budapest



May Spring is in full swing, which means reliable weather, cool temperatures and flowers.

July-August Sunny, but can be unbearably hot, so decamp to the countryside or Lake Balaton.

September Sunshine, mild temps and grape-harvest festivals; this may be the best time to visit.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Hungarian forint (Ft)
- » **Language** Hungarian
- » **Money** ATMs abundant
- » **Visas** None for EU, USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand

Fast Facts

- » Area: 93,000 sq km
- » Capital: Budapest
- » Telephone area code: 36
- » Emergency: 112

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	194Ft
Canada	C\$1	187Ft
euro	€1	264Ft
Japan	¥100	218Ft
New Zealand	NZ\$1	143Ft
UK	UK£1	296Ft
USA	US\$1	178Ft

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** 14,000Ft Budapest, 9000Ft outside Budapest
- » **Two-course meal** 4500Ft
- » **Museum entrance** 800Ft
- » **Beer** 450Ft
- » **City transport ticket** 320Ft

Resources

- » **Budapest Times** (www.budapesttimes.hu)
- » **Disappearing Budapest** (<http://disappearingbudapest.blogspot.com>)
- » **Hungarian National Tourism** (www.hungary.com)

Connections

Hungary lies at the centre of Central Europe and is easy to get to by rail, road or even boat. Rail connections are particularly good to and from Vienna. The Austrian Federal Railway's high-speed Railjet covers the distance between Vienna and Budapest in under three hours and includes a stop in Győr. Rail connections are also good to Bratislava and Prague, with continuing service to popular travel destinations like Berlin and Kraków. Rail connections to other neighbouring states, including Croatia, Serbia and Romania, are less frequent, though they're also reliable with some advance planning. Buses fan out in all directions from Budapest and nearly all corners of the Europe can be reached within 24 hours. Regular hydrofoil service links Budapest to Bratislava and Vienna. Budapest is the country's only practical destination by air but is well served by commercial and budget carriers.

ITINERARIES

One week

Spend at least four days in Budapest, checking out the sights, museums and cafes. On your fifth day take a day trip to a Danube Bend town: see the open-air museum in Szentendre or the cathedral at Esztergom. Day six can be spent getting a morning train to Pécs to see the lovely Turkish remains and check out the many galleries in town. If you've still got the travel bug, on day seven try some local wine in Eger, a baroque town set in red-wine country.

Two weeks

If you're here in summer, make sure you spend some time exploring the towns around Lake Balaton, or just chill out on the beach by the side of this popular lake. Tihany is a rambling hillside village filled with craftsmen's houses set on a peninsula that is a protected nature zone. Keszthely is an old town with a great palace in addition to a beach. Alternatively, head south to Pécs and see more of the Great Plain. Szeged is on the Tisza River, and Kecskemét is further north. Finish your trip in Tokaj, home of Hungary's most famous wine.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Gulyás** (goulash) Hungary's signature dish, though here it's served more as a soup than a stew and made with beef, onions and tomatoes.
- » **Pörkölt** Paprika-infused stew; closer to what you might imagine when you think of goulash.
- » **Galuska** Small, gnocchi-like dumplings that make a good accompaniment to soak up the sauce in a pörkölt.
- » **Halászlé** Highly recommended fish soup made from poached freshwater fish, tomatoes, green peppers and paprika.