



Understand Hungary

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Orbán's back with a vengeance, the economy is shot but all is not rotten in the erstwhile kingdom.

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It's all about visitors who overstayed their welcome – from the Romans and the Turks to the Germans and the Russians.

THE ARTS 284

Hungary does not live by bread alone – there's music, literature, painting and some of the finest architecture in Europe.

THE HUNGARIAN PEOPLE 289

What makes the Magyars tick and what makes them talk that funny language? Let's ask Mr and Mrs Kovács.

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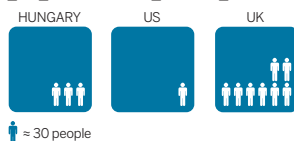
There's a whole lot more to Hungarian wines than ruby-red Bull's Blood and 'the king of wines', honey-sweet Tokaj.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES 297

When and where and how to get down and dirty across Hungary before stepping into a nice hot bath.



population per sq km



Hungary Today

Change of Guard

In 2010 Viktor Orbán once again became prime minister after his Fidesz-MPP party won a decisive victory in the parliamentary elections. Viktátor (as he's known in certain circles) moved quickly to make his mark. He has changed the constitution: Hungary is no longer 'the republic of', and an extended preamble called the National Creed dispenses with the period from March 1944 (the Nazi occupation of Hungary) to May 1990 (the first free election since 1945) simply by declaring it legally nonexistent. Orbán has weakened the national press with a controversial media law and was read the riot act for that in public by MEP Daniel Cohn-Bendit – known as 'Danny the Red' for his revolutionary activities in Paris in 1968 – as Hungary took control of the EU presidency in 2011. To add to his misery, the right-wing Jobbik (which is a kind of pun on the word 'right') garnered over 16% of the vote in the national elections and its uniformed militia wing, Magyar Gárda (Hungarian Guard), resumed bullying and intimidating Roma people in villages of the northeast. And those rumours about Orbán's Roma ancestry just won't go away.

Economic Woes

It seems the bad news just won't go away... Hungary was badly affected in the last recession, and with the world's financial markets in what looks like a trampoline trip to hell at press time, the economy, already on its knees, was in danger of meltdown. It's a position Hungarians call *a béka segge alatt* ('under the arse of the frog'). Think about it – you can't get much lower than that. Growth is in the negative numbers (in fact, at -0.5%, the lowest among the 10 Central and Eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004), inflation is at 4% and unemployment

- » Population: 9.96 million
- » Area: 93,028 sq km
- » GDP: US\$195.6 billion
- » GDP per capita: US\$19,600 (ranked 63 in world)
- » GDP growth: -0.5%
- » Inflation: 4%
- » Unemployment: 11%

Who-Knew Hungarians

- » **Laszlo Biro** (Bíró László) Ballpoint pen inventor
- » **Brassaï** (Halász Gyula) French photographer
- » **Robert Capa** (Friedmann Endre Ernő) US photojournalist
- » **Tony Curtis** (Bernard Schwartz) US actor
- » **Harry Houdini** (Weisz Erich) American escape artist
- » **Estée Lauder** (Josephine Esther Mentzer) US cosmetics baroness
- » **Bela Lugosi** (Blaskó Béla) American 'Dracula' actor
- » **Ernő Rubik** Puzzle cube inventor

Top Films

- » **Moszkva tér** (2001) End-of-communism comedy with kids
- » **Children of Glory** (Szabadság, Szerelmem; 2006) About the 'blood in the water' water-polo match in 1956
- » **Zimmer Feri** (1998) Jokes about German tourists on the Balaton