

To see Budapest is to believe it:  
Old World architecture of the Fishermen's  
Bastion translates into modern awe at beauty  
that endures through centuries.

# HUNGARY

*for a*

# Holiday

*Many people think that Hungary was;  
I like to believe she will be!*

—Count István Száchenyi, 1830

Are you to meet me in Hajdusoboszló? It's a gobbledygook of a word, for sure. But as a place? Superb. The very heart and soul of Europe. Found in the land of Franz Liszt, spicy goulash and the beautiful Danube River, the "H-place" is a town in a country of outstanding wine, therapeutic spas, Old World palaces; it is an adventure of romance and magic. In fact, get my tongue to twist around Badacsonyi Olaszrizling and flip-flop over Soproni Kékfrancos (local wines both), and it will be happy to straighten out to tell it like it is: I, Pilot Michael, have landed in an experience as unique as unique can be: Hungary.



Chain Bridge links Pest with Buda, where the Buda Castle stately presides, across the glittering Danube (left); The Palace (right) erected in the 14th century and rebuilt in Baroque style 400 years later was the residence of Hungarian kings for 700 years.

*S* Hungary! This former Soviet Bloc darling of Eastern European enthrall has Slovakia to the north, Yugoslavia to the south, Romania to the east, and the Ukraine, Croatia, Slovenia and even Austria sharing one border or another, which means this hard-working, fun-loving country, rich in culture and buzzing with progress, delights in being the center of it all. From the “Queen of the Danube,” Budapest, a city reminiscent of Paris and Prague in its beauty and grandeur, to the hilly, forested region of western Transdanubia, dotted with ancient fortresses and medieval villages, Hungary is a visiting flyer’s date with people and places unlike any other in today’s “new Europe.” I’ve got 100,000 square km of country to discover and you can bet I plan to eat it up. I hope to fly home stuffed not only with the traditional goulash and goose liver patés (and surely some of that Szilvászárád trout I hear is so incredible at the gorgeous Gundel restaurant in Budapest, but also sated with Hungary’s other joys.

*I have landed in an experience as unique as unique can be:*

*Hungary.*

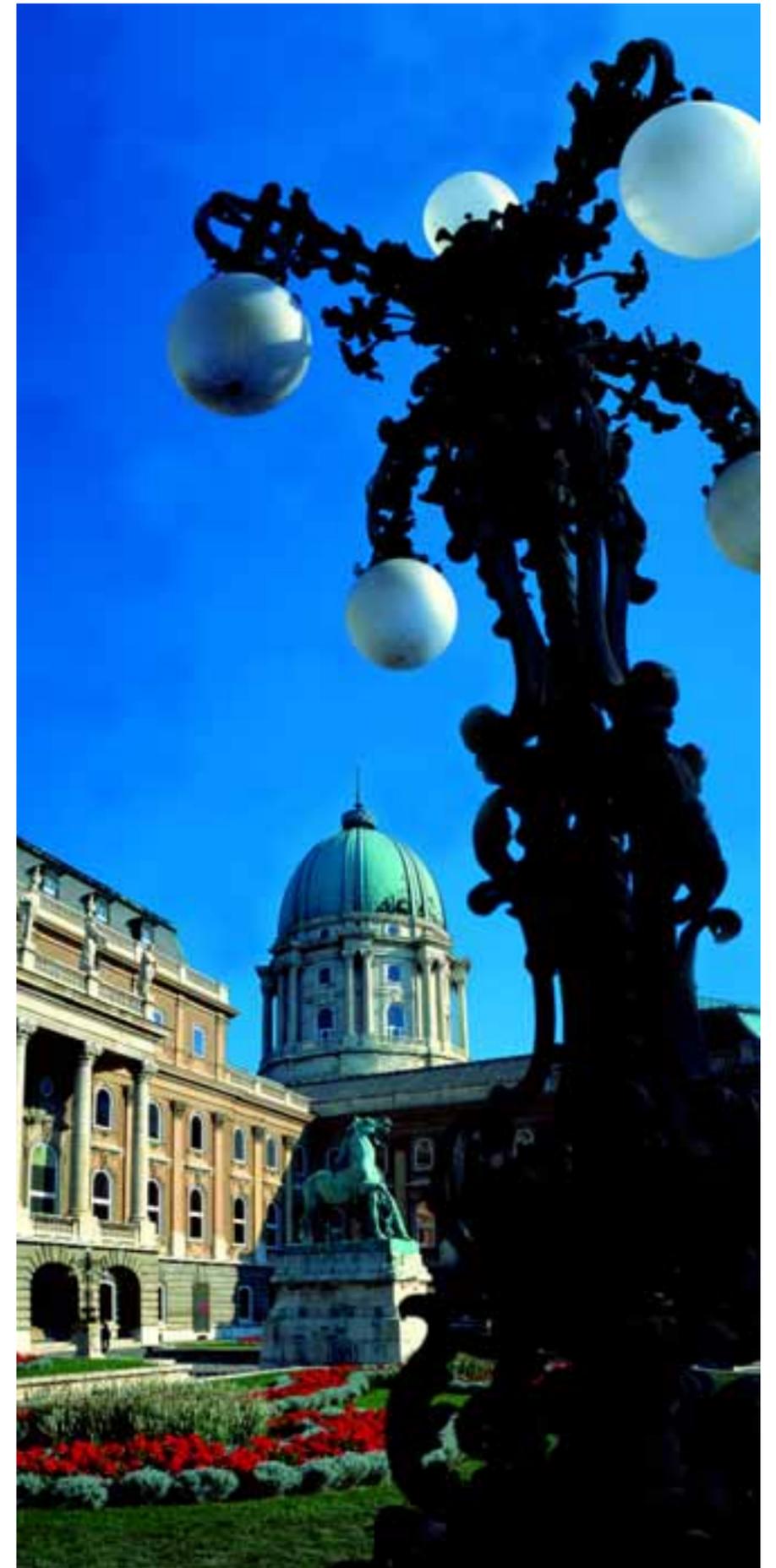
Honestly, whose appetite for adventure *wouldn't* be revved to ravenous here? Hungarians, says my *Fodor's* guide, are a “hypersmart, multilingual and deeply sensual people who enjoy the finer things in life”; their hospitality, it adds, “knows no limits.” Calling themselves “Magyars,” they rode in on horseback 1100 years ago and despite being invaded pre-18<sup>th</sup> c. by the Turks and since the late '80s answerable to



the Soviets, today are good and eager to make my stay a perfect pleasure. My homebase in Budapest, where Várhegy (castle hill) is a sightseer’s splendor with its palaces, museums and Baroque-style streets, and Viziváros (watertown) is a wanderer’s dream for its romantic Danube vistas. Still, the friendly Magyars are enduringly passionate horsepeople and they just won’t hear of it, I’m told, unless I experience authentic Hungary early on: at one or more of the hundreds of horse shows, carriage races, cross-country pony treks and other equestrian events happening all over, all the time. At the Gerébi Mansion & Stables a half-hour south of the city, “puszta” five-in-hand horsemanship exhibitions awe guests (like me) who afterward clink “palinka” (brandy) glasses and tap toes to a gypsy band in celebration of the country’s pride – the noble equine. What’s more, as a culture utterly owned by great music – the genius of native son Franz Liszt and vision of folk’s Béla Bartók define the fact – I am shooed

out of my hotel room to enjoy a Liszt concert, attend a Hungarian operetta, or visit a Táncház (dance house) – all the better to become a local music fan too, asap. The morning after I’ll be jazzed to surrender my overdanced self to one of the renown thermal spas. *Aahh.* Budapest is nirvana for “taking the waters,” with 70 million liters of natural spring water daily flowing into baths that at their best are relics of the Turkish period: lavish, indulgent, the quintessence of the sensual spa experience. Hajduszoboszlo also is a spa town nonpareil.

In fact, landlocked Hungary is nothing if not mad for water. Lake Tisza, for instance, is Europe’s only body approved for motorized sport. Lake Velence, near Transdanubia, and sparkling Lake Balaton, central Europe’s largest lake, beckon swimmers, sailors, kayakers, fishermen – and me. Indeed, this is a destination that takes its Great Outdoors seriously. From moor to flood plain to mountain to forest, all pristine, Hungary encompasses 10 national parks and more than 145 environmentally protected areas, among them the awesome Aggtelek caves (heads up, eager



spelunkers!) and splendid Hortobágy National Park, a UN-sanctioned biosphere reserve where 330 species of birds offer the rarest opportunity in all Europe for wildlife appreciation.

For thrills, hop the narrow gauge railway from Miskolc into the Bükk Hills. For chills, visit Eger, medieval Sopron, Hollókő and Veszprém. The Old World romance of these historic towns is brought home in breathtaking rich Baroque style. Next on the itinerary: Hungary's real jaw-droppers, its castles. The fortress at Siklós. The royal palace of Gödöllő. The stunners at Kőszeg and Szigetvár! Never mind trying to pronounce them; it's marveling at the architectural treasures they are that counts. No visiting flyer, least of all yours truly Pilot Michael, will want to miss an introduction.

Which reminds me. Visegrád Tours conducts a swell catamaran trip

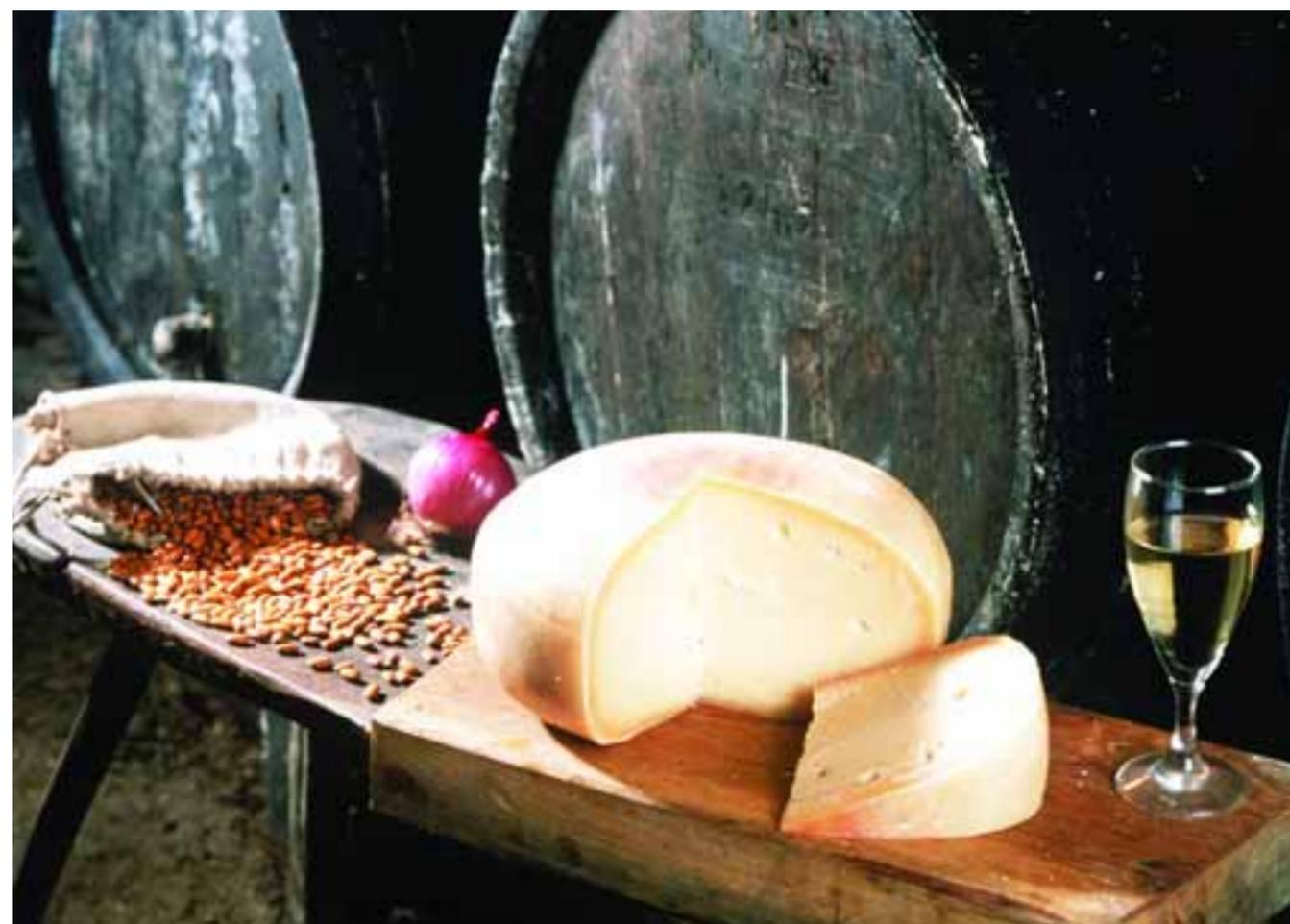
on the Danube, and Tanyacsárda in Kecskemet is a restaurant that perfects the traditional Hungarian evening: phenomenal food paired with a colorful folklore performance. Speaking of dining – and wining – Hungary one-ups all “new Europe” competition with its paprika-spiced dishes, freshwater fish, goulash (actually a rich soup), gooseliver served every which way that's delicious and – this really revs my jets – locally produced wines

*Paprika-spiced dishes,  
freshwater fish, goulash  
(actually a rich soup), goose-  
liver served every which way . . .*

like Tokaji Aszú, a consistent award winner in prestigious American contests. The Sir Lancelot medieval restaurant in Budapest boasts a “Meal of King Arthur” (first course: hen soup) that goes down simply sublime – particularly following a shot or two of Dimple, the 15-year-old Scotch of the house.

So, see? Hungary may not be a destination to leave you feeling overly suave when you talk about it (“let me tell you, it was beautiful in, uh, Haj...Hajdu..Hajduszoboszlo,” say what?), but oh, when you talk about it – as you will – the reminiscence will be something exciting, something worthwhile, something utterly wondrous. Just as Hungary itself.

For more information about traveling to Hungary, visit [www.gotohungary.com](http://www.gotohungary.com) or contact the Hungarian National Tourist Office at 212.355.0240. ✕



**Hungary's many pleasant wine cellars are the site of delicious adventures with the country's pride: its vintages (left); a typical but always exciting Hungarian dish, fish soup (below); the medieval castle of Tata and a horse show in the puszta (right) are among the country's intriguing and colorful delights**

