

Hungary

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Budapest** One of Europe's most exciting capital cities, Budapest (p560) will enthral you with its excellent nightlife, history and culture
- **Eger** Taste some of Hungary's greatest wines (p574)
- **Kiskunság National Park** It ain't *Brokeback Mountain*, but the cowboys still ride at Bugac (p573), at the heart of the Hungarian Plain
- **Pécs** Feel a bit Mediterranean in this southern town (p571), roaming the 16th-century Mosque Church and many other Turkish sights
- **Best journey** Hopping on a train from Budapest and going around the Danube Bend (towards Slovakia), where hills and forests wrap themselves around the beautiful Danube River. Gaze at the remains of Visegrád Cittadella (p569) high on one hill and the colossal cathedral glistening at Esztergom (p570)

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 93,000 sq km (similar size to Portugal)
- **ATMs** Widespread, even in smaller towns
- **Budget** 5000-10,000Ft per day
- **Capital** Budapest
- **Country Code** ☎ 36
- **Famous for** Paprika, goose-liver pâté and *csardas* music
- **Heads of State** President Laszlo Solyom, Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány
- **Language** Hungarian (Magyar)
- **Money** Hungarian forint (Ft); A\$1 = 161Ft, CA\$1 = 192Ft, €1 = 274Ft, ¥100 = 184Ft, NZ\$1 = 143Ft, UK£1 = 407Ft, US\$1 = 216Ft
- **Phrases** *Jo napot kívánok* (Good day/hello), *szia* (hi/bye), *köszönöm* (thank you)
- **Time** GMT/UTC + 1



- **Visas** Most foreign nationals don't need a visa if staying for less than 90 days.

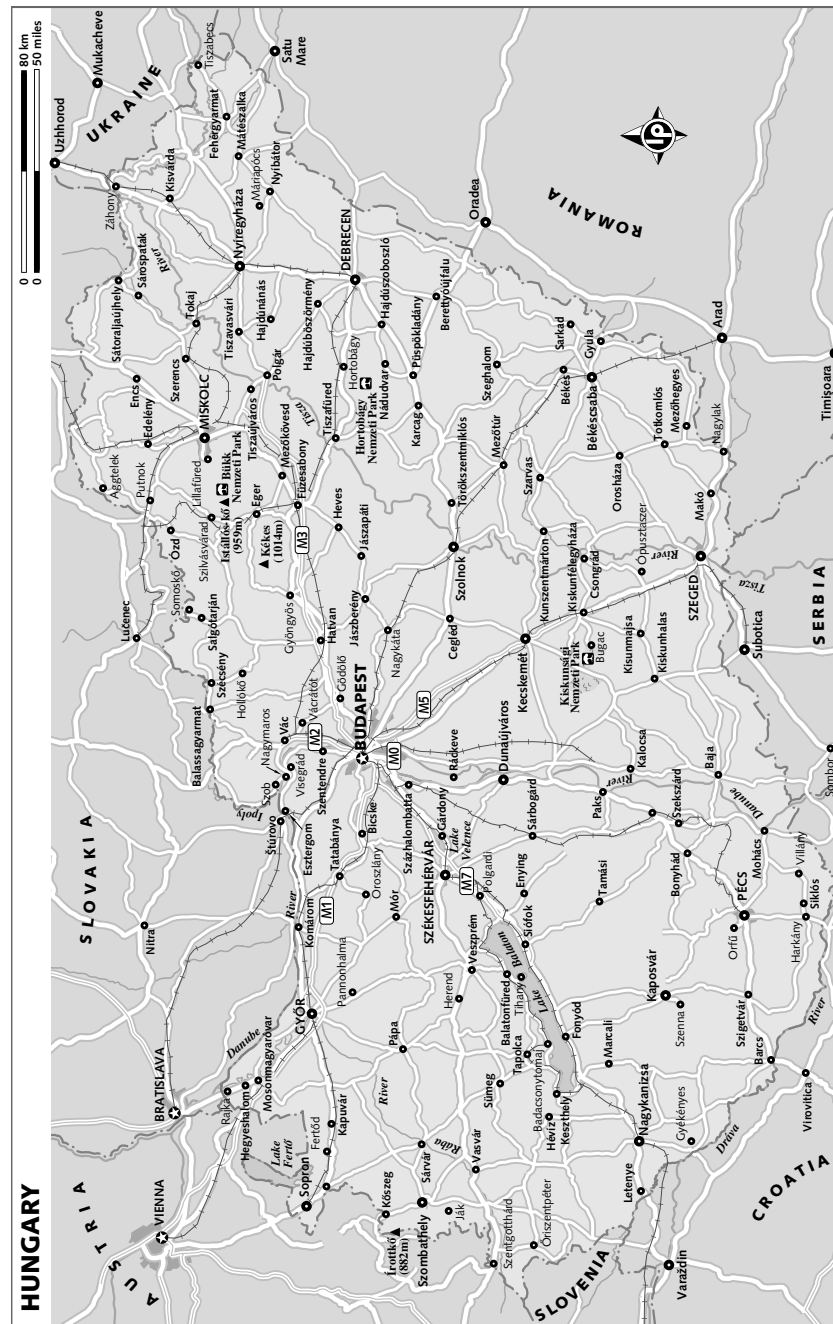
TRAVEL HINTS

Look out for shops with the word *pék* (baker) in their name: they sell fresh-daily sweet and savoury pastries (110Ft to 230Ft).

ROAMING HUNGARY

Most shoestringers base themselves in Budapest and take day trips around the country. Nothing is more than five hours away from Budapest by train.

Hungary's uniqueness doesn't stop at its incomprehensible tongue. Here's your chance to experience soaking in an open-air thermal spa while snow patches glisten around you. Following that, you could go to a smoky bar where a Gypsy band yelps while a crazed crowd whacks its



boot-heels as commanded by Hungarian dance tradition. Or, indeed, go clubbing in an ancient bathhouse, where all dance in swimsuits, waist-deep in healing waters.

Barring any of those, you can see Roman ruins, ancient castles, Turkish minarets and baroque cities, or experience the more rural pleasures of cowboys riding astride five horses, storks nesting on street lamps, and a sea of apricot trees in bloom.

Cosmopolitan Budapest is a capital to rival any on the continent – with world-class operas, monumental historical buildings, and the Danube River flowing through the middle of it all. Prices remain somewhere in the middle: not nearly as high as Austria or nearly as reasonable as Romania. Having established itself as a state in the year 1000, Hungary has a long history, a rich culture and folk traditions that are well worth exploring in more depth. So go ahead, dive in.

HISTORY

In the early centuries of the Common Era, Rome extended its influence far enough to include Pannonia, all of today's Hungary west of the Danube (Transdanubia). By 451 the Huns, under Attila and his brother Bleda, had ended Roman rule in the area.

The Huns' short-lived empire did not outlast Attila's death, leaving space for Avars, Franks and Slavs.

Historians usually date the Magyar (Hungarian) conquest to around 896, when Árpád led the alliance of seven tribes in the region. In the year 1000, Hungary's first king and patron saint, Stephen (István), was crowned, marking the foundation of the Hungarian state.

Medieval Hungary was powerful until 1526 when the Turks defeated the Hungarian army and occupied lands that included Budapest for 150 years. After the Turks' expulsion from Buda in 1686, the Habsburgs annexed the lands that had been under Turkish rule. Autonomy as half of the Austro-Hungarian empire (1867) did not evolve until years after the 1848 revolt for independence led by Transylvanian princes.

After WWI ended, with Hungary on the losing side, the 1920 Trianon Treaty stripped the country of more than two-thirds of its territory. Hungary's ambition to recover its loss drew the nation into WWII on the Axis side. When leftists tried to negotiate a separate peace in 1944, the Germans occupied Hungary and brought the fascist Arrow Cross Party to power. The Arrow Cross immediately began deporting hundreds of thousands of Jews to Auschwitz. By early April 1945, Hungary had been liberated by the Soviet army. In 1947 the communists took complete control of the government.

On 23 October 1956 anti-Soviet student demonstrations caused Soviet tanks to move into Budapest, and by the end of the fighting, more than 25,000 people had died. Still,

Soviet control was not as tight in Hungary as in its Slavic satellite states, and the ruling system that emerged is often labelled 'Goulash Communism'.

Hungary began moving towards full democracy in 1989. The Republic of Hungary was proclaimed in October, and democratic elections were scheduled for March 1990. The last Soviet troops left the country in June 1991. The painful transition to a market economy resulted in declining living standards for most people, but the late-20th and early-21st centuries have seen astonishing economic growth. Hungary became a full member of NATO in 1999 and joined the European Union on 1 May 2004.

THE CULTURE

Just over 92% of Hungary's population is ethnically Magyar (2001 census). Non-Magyar minorities are Germans (2.6%), Serbs and other South Slavs (2%), Slovaks (0.8%), Romanians (0.7%) and others. The number of Roma is officially put at 1.9% of the population (or 193,800 people), though in some sources the figure is twice as high.

READING UP

National poetry taught in schools has a huge influence on the Hungarian psyche. The overall mood in the renowned 18th- and 19th-century poems is one of *honfűbű*, literally 'patriotic sorrow', which amounts to a penchant for the blues. You can read a sample in the bilingual anthology *The Lost Rider* by Corvina Books. The 2002 Nobel prize-winner, Imre Kertész, writes about the Holocaust and its after-effects in the novels *Fateless* and *Kaddish for a Child Not Born*.

For an easy introduction to the nation's past, check out *An Illustrated History of Hungary* by István Lázár or László Kontler's *A History of Hungary*.

NO HUNS HERE

Hungarians have had a reputation for being an aggressive, warlike people ever since Attila the Hun.

The only problem is that Attila wasn't Hungarian. Although they were able warriors, the ancient ancestors of modern-day Magyars (what Hungarians call themselves in their native language) did not arrive in the Carpathian Basin until at least 400 years after the Huns had dispersed among other populations or fled back over the hills toward the Volga River.

The Indo-European root for what foreigners call the Magyar people (Hungarian, *Ungarn*, *Hongrie*) comes from the Latin word *ungri* ('Onogur' in Turkic). Before the Magyar tribes crossed the Carpathian Mountains, they are thought to have lived for centuries near or among Turkic peoples and were part of the tribal alliance of Onogur (Ten Peoples). The earliest confirmed Western writing (839) refers to the Magyars as *ungri*, or *Onogur*. So not even the European name for the Magyars has anything to do with the Huns.

Not that historical figures haven't tried to make the leap. Medieval chroniclers propagated the myth that heroic twin brothers Hunor and Magor, descendants of Noah, were the progenitors of the Huns and Magyar people. That way, the Magyars had a historical connection with the land they inhabited, and their kings had a link with the greatness of Attila. It's been an enduring legend...

Hungarians speak Magyar, which, unlike most tongues you'll hear in Europe, is not an Indo-European, but a Finno-Ugric language. Many young people speak at least some English, and retirees often understand German.

The current prime minister, Ferenc Gyurcsány, took office in April 2006, making the Socialist-led coalition government the first to win consecutive terms since the restoration of democracy in 1990.

FOOD & DRINK

The omnipresent seasoning in traditional Hungarian cooking is paprika. *Pörkölt*, a paprika-infused stew, can be made from different meats, including *borju* (veal), but usually has no vegetables. *Galuska* (gnocchili-like dumplings) are the usual accompaniment. *Halászlé* (fisherman's soup) is a rich mix of several kinds of poached freshwater fish, tomatoes, green peppers and...paprika. Although served as a stew outside the country, inside Hungary *gulyás* (goulash) is a beef soup prepared with a paprika roux.

For dessert try the cold *gyümölcs leves* (fruit soup) or *palincinta* (crêpes) with jam, sweet cheese or chocolate sauce. A good food-stand snack is *langos*, fried dough that can be topped with cheese and/or *tejföl* (sour cream).

Two Hungarian wines are known internationally: the sweet, dessert wine Tokaji Aszú and the full-bodied red, Egri Bikavér (Eger Bull's Blood). For the harder stuff, try *pálinka*,

a strong, firewater-like brandy most commonly made out of plums or apricots.

TRANSPORT

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air
International carriers fly from Budapest's Ferihegy 2 airport to destinations throughout mainland Europe, the UK, Russia and beyond. Low-cost airlines fly out of the older Ferihegy 1, a few kilometres down the road. EasyJet flies to Budapest, whereas Ryanair lands at Balaton. Hungary's national carrier is **Malév Hungarian Airlines** (code MA; ☎ 1-235 3888; www.malev.hu). Low-cost airlines flying to Hungary include:

Air Berlin (code AB; ☎ 49-1805 737 800; www.airberlin.com)

easyJet (code U2; www.easyjet.com)

Ryanair (code FR; www.ryanair.com)

SkyEurope (code NE; ☎ 777 7000; www.skyeurope.com)

Wizz Air (code W6; ☎ 36 1 470 9499; www.wizzair.com)

Boat

There are international Mahart PassNave hydrofoil services on the Danube daily from April to early November between Budapest and Vienna (5½ hours), stopping in Bratislava (3½ hours). Adult one-way/return fares for Vienna are €75/99; for Bratislava €68/93. Students with ISIC cards pay €59/84. Boats leave from the Nemzetközi Hajóállomás (International

Ferry Pier), next to the **Mahart PassNave Ticket Office** (☎ 1-484 4010; www.mahartpassnave.hu; Belgrád rakpart, Nemzetközi hajóállomás).

Bus

Most international buses arrive at the Népliget Bus Station in Budapest. **Eurolines** (☎ 1-219 8080; www.eurolines.com), in conjunction with its Hungarian affiliate, **Volánbusz** (☎ 1-485 2162; www.volánbusz.hu), is the international carrier. Two of the closest destinations from Budapest are Vienna (5490/7990Ft, 3½ hours, four daily) and Bratislava (Pozsony; 3400/5400Ft, four hours, one daily).

Car & Motorcycle

At the time of writing, border controls with Austria and Slovakia were scheduled to remain in place, despite Hungary's entry into the EU. Third-party car insurance is compulsory for driving in Hungary. If your car is registered in the EU, it's assumed you have it. Other motorists must show a Green Card or buy insurance at the border.

Train

The Hungarian State Railways, **MÁV** (☎ international information 1-461 5500; www.elvira.hu), links up with international rail networks in all directions; the schedule is available online. Eurail passes are valid in Hungary. EuroCity (EC) and Intercity (IC) trains require payment of a supplement. Sample destinations from Budapest include Vienna (6600Ft, 3½ hours, five daily); Bratislava (Pozsony; 3100Ft, 2½ hours, eight daily); Arad, Romania (7400Ft, 4½ hours, six daily); and Prague (11,400Ft, nine hours, two daily). Most of the larger train stations have left-luggage rooms open at least 9am to 5pm.

GETTING AROUND

Bus

Volán buses are a good alternative to trains, and might be the only option if you are travelling between cities outside the capital. Bus fares average 1400Ft per 100km. Timetables

are posted at stations and stops. Common footnotes you might see are *naponta* (daily) and *munkanapokon* (on work days). A few large bus stations have luggage rooms, but they generally close by 6pm.

Car & Motorcycle

All the big international car-rental firms have offices in Budapest, and there are local companies throughout the country, but don't expect many bargains. Motorways (M1, M3, M7) require toll passes (10-day pass costs 2300Ft) that can be purchased at petrol stations and at some motorway entrances; rental cars usually come with them.

Hitching

In Hungary, hitchhiking is legal except on motorways. **Ken guru** (Map p564; ☎ 1-266 5837; www.ken guru.hu; VIII Köfáragó utca 15, Budapest; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) is an agency that matches riders with drivers who want to take a paying passenger. Check the website for fares.

Local Transport

Public transport is efficient and extensive, with city bus and, in many towns, trolleybus services. Budapest and Szeged also have trams, and there's an extensive metro (underground or subway) and a suburban commuter railway in Budapest. Purchase tickets at newsstands before travelling and validate them once aboard.

Train

MÁV (Map p564; ☎ domestic information 1-461 5400; www.elvira.hu) operates a reliable train service on its 8000km of track. Second-class train fares are 946Ft per 100km. Intercity (IC) trains are the most comfortable and the newest. *Gyorsvonat* (fast trains) take longer and use older cars; *személyvonat* (passenger trains) stop at every village along the way. Seat reservations (*helyjegy*) are required on IC and some fast trains, which is indicated on the timetable by an 'R' in a box or a circle.

BUDAPEST

☎ 1 / pop 1.8 million

Budapest is like a fruit basket of history, seductively displaying its cultural influences and remains: the sensible Germanic logic of its layout, the decadent opulence of its

GETTING INTO TOWN

The train and bus stations are all quite central, with metro stops signposted, so it's easy to navigate. The airport is a bit further afield, 24km outside the city. To get into town, the cheapest way is to take the BKV Ferihegy bus (from outside the baggage claim at Ferihegy 2, or on the main road outside Ferihegy 1) to the end of its run, which is at the blue-line metro terminus, the Kobany-Kispest stop. The bus ride takes about 25 minutes, as does the metro ride to the centre (Deák tér). You need a 185Ft ticket, available at newsstands or vending machines, validated on the bus and in the metro, or if you want to switch metro lines, buy a 200Ft ticket.

A simpler way is to take the **Airport Minibus** (☎ 296 8555; one-way/return 2300/3900Ft; ☎ 5am-1am) directly to the place you're staying (the bus will take you wherever you need to go). Buy tickets at the clearly marked stands near arrivals.

Turkish baths, the Viennese coffee houses, the straight lines of the sober Socialist structures, the Habsburg elegance and the silent old Jewish quarter, the Balkan smokiness of its bars and above all, the unique Magyar spirit.

In summer, Budapest is a hot spot with crowds drinking and clubbing in the boat bars or getting into the bohemian coffee-house lifestyle. During the chilly months, the city transforms into a winter resort with its many bathhouses. Or, regardless of the season, you could plunge in and explore Budapest's rich cultural heritage of architecture, museums, art galleries and Roman ruins. Budapest also has some of the more exciting nightlife spots in eastern Europe, with excellent DJs, live music, and more bars than you'll be able to crawl around.

ORIENTATION

Budapest straddles a gentle curve in the Danube (Duna) River, with hilly, house-filled Buda to the west, suburban Óbuda to the northwest and flat, commercial Pest across the river to the east. The most central square in Pest is Deák tér, the hub where the three metro lines meet. Buda is dominated by Castle Hill and Gellért Hill; the main square is Moszkva tér.

The city is divided into 23 districts; a Roman numeral before or after the street address indicates the district. The Castle Hill district in Buda is district I, and the central pedestrian area of Pest is district V.

INFORMATION

Discount Card

The **Budapest Card** (www.budapestinfo.hu; 48hr card 5200Ft, 72hr 6500Ft) gives you free access to many museums and free transport on city trams, buses and metros, as well as discounts on

other traveller services. You can buy the card at hotels, travel agencies, large metro kiosks and some tourist offices.

Internet Access

Most year-round hostels offer internet access.

Ami Internet Coffee (Map p564; ☎ 267 1644; Váci utca 40; per hr 700Ft; ☎ 9am-2am) Tons of terminals, super central but also super busy.

CEU NetPoint (Map p564; ☎ 328 3506; Oktober 6 utca 14; per hr 400Ft; ☎ 11am-10pm) A dozen terminals, CD writing, fax, webcams and wi-fi connection for your own laptop.

Medical Services

American Clinics (Map p563; ☎ 224 9090; 1 Hattyú utca 14, 5th fl; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-6pm Fri, 8am-noon Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) On call for emergencies 24/7.

Money

ATMs are quite common, especially on the ring roads and large arteries. Most banks have both an ATM and an exchange service.

American Express (Map p564; ☎ 235 4330; V Deák Ferenc utca 10; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- Ambulance (nationwide) ☎ 104
- Budapest crime hotline (English spoken) ☎ 1-438 8080
- Car assistance (24hr; nationwide) ☎ 188
- Fire (nationwide) ☎ 105
- National emergency number (English spoken) ☎ 112
- Police (nationwide) ☎ 107

THEFT WARNING

There are regular reports about thefts on the overnight Sarajevo-Budapest train. Keep your doors locked, check on who wants to enter your compartment and of course lock up your valuables.

Will change its own travellers cheques without commission. Rates aren't the best.

OTP Bank (Map p564; V Nádor utca 6) Good rates.

Post

Main post office (Map p564; V Városház utca 18)

Tourist Office

Tourinform (Map p564; ☎ 24hr 06 80 630 800; www.hungarytourism.hu; Sütő utca 2; ☎ 8am-8pm)

Travel Agencies

You can get information, arrange a tour and book all kinds of accommodation at travel agencies in Budapest. You can also buy discount cards here.

Best Hotel Service (Map p564; ☎ 318 4848; www.besthotelservice.hu; V Sütő utca 2; ☎ 8am-8pm) Can arrange accommodation.

Ibusz (Map p564; ☎ 485 2716; www.ibusz.hu; V Ferenctek tere 10; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat Jul-Aug) A national agency. Deals with money exchange, air and train tickets, private rooms, pensions – the works.

Mellow Mood Ltd (Map p563; ☎ 413 2065; www.melwood.hu; Keleti & Déli train stations; ☎ 7am-8pm) Staff at the train-station stands will help you find accommodation, as well as providing information. Affiliated with Hostelling International.

To-Ma Travel Agency (Map p564; ☎ 353 0819; www.tomatour.hu/beut; V Október 6 utca 22; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) Can arrange accommodation.

Vista Visitor Centre (Map p564; ☎ 268 0888; www.vista.hu; VI Paulay Ede utca 2; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) Book flats here. Internet access is available, and there is a café on site.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Buda

Most of what remains of medieval Budapest is on **Várhegy** (Castle Hill), perched above the Danube. Start at **Moszkva tér** metro station, and continue up **Várfook utca**, or cross the street and board the **Vár bus** (a minibus with a picture of a castle on the sign). You can't miss the neo-Gothic **Mátyás Templom** (Matthias Church; Map p563; ☎ 489 0717; I Szentháromság tér; adult/student 600/300Ft; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun), which has a colourful, tiled roof and lovely murals inside. Across the square is **Halászbástya** (Fishermen's Bastion; Map p563; adult/student 330/160Ft; ☎ 8.30am-11pm), a neo-Gothic arcade built in 1905. To the southeast is the entrance for the **Sikló** (Funicular; Map p563; uphill/downhill ticket adult 600/500Ft, child 3-14yr 350Ft; ☎ 7.30am-10pm) in Szent

György tér, which can take you back down the hill to **Clark Adam tér**. The massive **Királyi Palota** (Royal Palace; Map p563;) occupies the far end of Castle Hill; inside are the **Magyar Nemzeti Galéria** (Hungarian National Gallery; Map p563; ☎ 375 7533; I Szent György tér 6; admission free, special exhibitions adult/child/family 1500/800/3000Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) and the **Budapesti Történeti Múzeum** (Budapest History Museum; Map p563; ☎ 375 7533; I Szent György tér 2; adult/student 900/450Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm daily mid-May–mid-Sep, 10am-4pm Wed-Mon mid-May–mid-Sep).

The city's most famous thermal spa is the **Gellért Fürdő** (Gellért Hotel Baths; Map p563; ☎ 466 6166; XI Kelenhegyi út; thermal baths & swimming pool 2700Ft; ☎ 6am-7pm Mon-Fri, 6am-5pm Sat & Sun May-Sep; baths only Oct-Apr), south of Castle Hill.

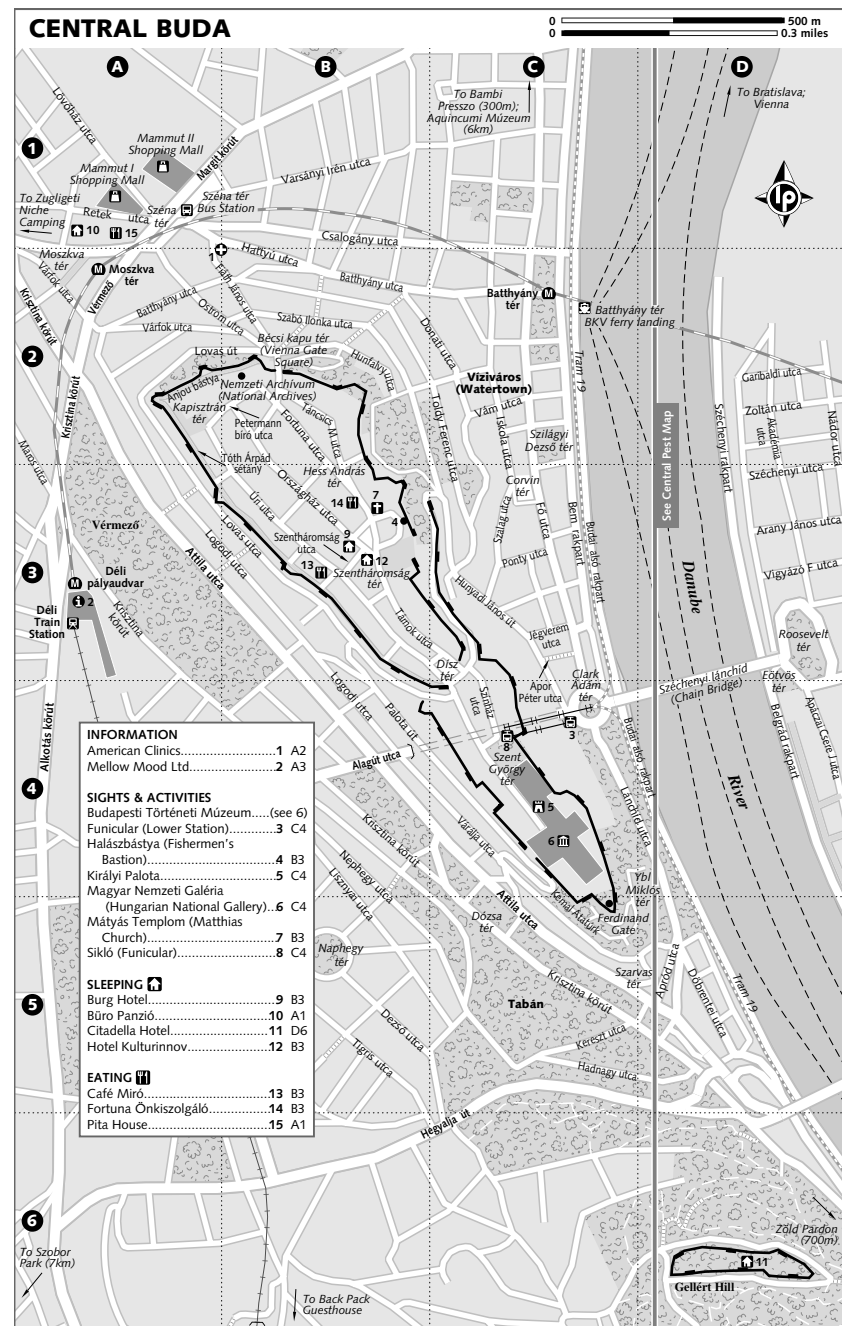
Many of the statues that once commemorated Soviet liberators, socialist ideals and Communist leaders are now on display at **Szobor Park** (Statue Park; ☎ 227 7446; www.szoborpark.hu; XXII Szabadkai út; admission 600Ft; ☎ 10am-dusk) in far southwest Buda. Take tram No 19 from **Clark Adam tér** to the **XI Etele tér** terminus, then catch a yellow **Volán** bus to **Diósd-Érd**. A direct bus goes from **Deák tér** in Pest at 11am daily (2450Ft return, including admission).

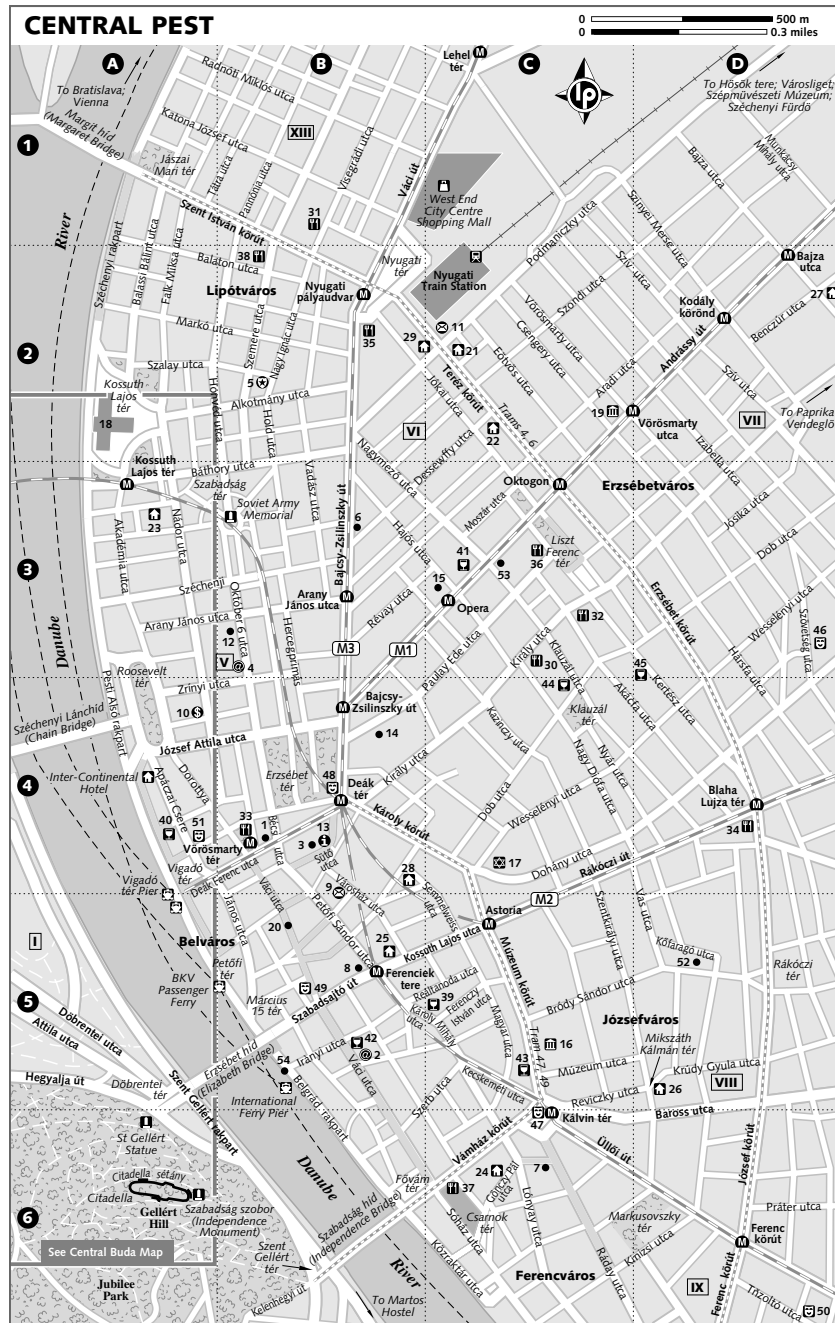
Aquincum Múzeum (☎ 430 1563; III Szentendre út 139; adult/student 700/300Ft; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-6pm May-Sep) contains the heart of the most complete 2nd-century Roman civilian town ruins left in Hungary. Catch the train out to Aquincum station.

Pest

Start at **Hősök tere** (Heroes' Sq), above the metro station of the same name, to see the monument constructed to honour the 100th anniversary (1896) of the Magyar conquest of the Carpathian Basin. The **Szépművészeti Múzeum** (Museum of Fine Arts; ☎ 469 7100; www2.szepmuveszeti.hu; XIV Hősök tere; admission free, temporary exhibitions adult/child 1200/600; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Tue-Sun), across the street, houses a collection of foreign art, including a selection of El Grecos. To the north, in **Városliget** (City Park), is the 19th-century **Széchenyi Fürdő** (Széchenyi Baths; ☎ 363 3210; XIV Állatkerti út 11; admission 1700Ft; ☎ 6am-7pm Mon-Fri, 6am-5pm Sat & Sun), which has more than nine indoor and outdoor pools.

If you walk southwest from Heroes' Sq on **Andrássy út**, you'll pass many grand, World Heritage-listed, 19th-century buildings along the way to the **Terror Háza** (House of Terror; Map p564; ☎ 374 2600; www.terrorhaza.hu; Andrássy út 60; admission 3000Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-7.30pm





INFORMATION	Parlament.....18 A2	Nagycsarnok (Great Market)....37 C6
American Express.....1 B4	Terror Háza.....19 C2	Okay Italia.....38 B2
Ami Internet Coffee.....2 B5	Váci utca.....20 B5	
Best Hotel Service.....3 B4		DRINKING ☑
CEU NetPoint.....4 B3		Centrál Káveház.....39 C5
District V Police Station.....5 B2		Columbus.....40 A4
Hungarian Bicycle Touring Association.....6 B3		Eckermann.....41 C3
Hungarian Equestrian Tourism Association.....7 C6		Fat Mo's.....42 B5
Ibusz.....8 B5		Kálvín Ház.....24 C6
Main Post Office.....9 B4		Leo Panzió.....25 B5
OTP Bank.....10 A4		Museum Guest House.....26 D5
Post Office.....11 C2		Radio Inn.....27 D2
To-Ma Travel Agency.....12 B3		Red Bus Hostel.....28 B4
Tourinform.....13 B4		Yellow Submarine Hostel.....29 B2
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Magyar Állami Operaház.....15 C3		Cha Cha Cha.....47 C6
Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum (Hungarian National Museum).....16 C5		Gödör Klub.....48 B4
Nagy Zsinagóga (Great Synagogue).....17 C4		Music Mix.....49 B5
		Trafó Bár Tangó.....50 D6
		Vigadó Jegyiroda.....51 A4
		TRANSPORT
		Kenguru.....52 D5
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		Mahart PassNave Ticket Office.....54 B5

Sat & Sun), a museum of spying and atrocities in what was once the headquarters of the dreaded AVH, the secret police. The ornate, neo-Renaissance **Magyar Állami Operaház** (Hungarian State Opera House; Map p564; ☎ 332 8197; www.opera.hu; VI Andrásy út 22; tours 1200Ft; ☎ 3pm & 4pm), further along, was completed in 1884.

Váci utca, in Pest's touristy centre, is an extensive pedestrian shopping street. It begins at the southwest terminus of the yellow line, Vörösmarty tér. The **Nagycsarnok** (Great Market; Map p564; IX Várház körút 1-3; ☎ 6am-5pm Mon, 6am-6pm Tue-Fri, 6am-2pm Sat) is a vast steel and glass structure. There are produce vendors on the ground floor, souvenirs and snacks on the 1st floor.

The huge, riverfront **Parlament** (Parliament; Map p564; ☎ 441 4904; www.mkogy.hu; V Kossuth Lajos tér 1-3; adult/student 1700/800Ft; ☎ Hungarian-language tours 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat, 8am-2pm Sun; English-language tours 10am & 2pm), apparently modelled on London's Westminster, but with crazy spires, dominates Kossuth Lajos tér.

Northeast of the Astoria metro stop is what remains of the Jewish quarter. The twin-towered, 1859 **Nagy Zsinagóga** (Great Synagogue; Map p564; ☎ 342 8949; VII Dohány utca 2; synagoga & museum adult/child 1000/400Ft; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Thu, 10am-2pm Fri & Sun) has a museum with a harrowing exhibit on the Holocaust. A few blocks south along the *kis körút* (little ring road) is the **Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum** (Hungarian National Museum; Map p564; ☎ 338 2122; www.hnm.hu; VIII Múzeum körút 14-16; adult/student 800/400Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), with its historic relics from archaeological finds to coronation regalia.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Spring Festival Classical concerts and performances are scheduled all over town during March.

Sziget Music Festival (Óbudai hajógyár-sziget; www.sziget.hu) A week-long international jam-fest in late July or early August. Consider camping out to get the most out of the experience.

Hungaroring Formula-1 races Held at Mogyoród, 24km northeast of Budapest, in mid-August, this event attracts worldwide attention – hotels fill up and prices skyrocket.

Autumn Festival An autumn companion to the Spring Festival from mid-October to early November.

SLEEPING

For a European capital city, Budapest still offers some surprisingly good deals, except in mid-August when the Formula 1 race crowd is in town. Hostels, private rooms, pensions and guesthouses are all good alternatives to a pricey hotel, although you'll occasionally find a more reasonable place billing itself as a 'hotel' because it has satellite TV and mini-bars. Many places offer triple rooms.

Hostels

Year-round hostels, often occupying middle floors of old apartment buildings in Pest, usually have a communal kitchen, laundry and internet service available. Rooms tend to be non-smoking, but there's a lounge or a balcony nearby. Having an HI card is not required, but it might get you a 10% discount. Come summer (July to late August), basic student dormitories at colleges and universities open to all travellers.

Tourinform (www.youthhostels.hu) publishes a youth-hostel brochure. HI-affiliated Mellow Mood Ltd (see p562) runs a few hotels year-round, and many more summer hostels.

BUDA

Zugligeti Niche Camping (☎ 200 8346; www.campingniche.hu; XII Zugligeti út 101; camp site 1/2 people 1900/2800Ft, caravan site 1/2 people 2800/3700Ft; ☹ May-Oct) An excellent option for mixing a city break with a hiking holiday: the camp's location is in the Buda Hills at the bottom station of a chair lift. The camp is a bit cramped, but has good shade and there's a restaurant nearby. Take bus 158 from Moszkva tér to the terminus.

Back Pack Guesthouse (☎ 385 8946; www.backpackbudapest.hu; XI Takács Menyhért utca 33; dm 2500-3000Ft, r 7000Ft; ☒ ☑) A hippy, friendly place, offering a peaceful escape from the city's chaos. Dorm rooms have five to 11 beds, and there's one small double. Take bus 7 (Erzsébet hid or Keleti train station in Pest), tram 49 from the little ring road in central Pest, or tram 19 from Batthyány tér in Buda.

Martos Hostel (☎ 209 4883; reception@hotel.martos.bme.hu; XI Sztoczek utca 5-7; s/d with shared bathroom €16/20; ☒) Primarily student accommodation, open year-round to all. Rooms with private bathrooms are available.

Citadella Hotel (Map p563; ☎ 466 5794; www.citadella.hu; XI Citadella sétány; dm/r €10/51; ☒) Inside the old fortress atop Gellért Hill. Well worn and remote, but with great views. Take bus 27 from XI Móricz Zsigmond körtér in Buda, then hike 10 minutes up a steep hill.

PEST

Caterina Hostel (Map p564; ☎ 269 5990; www.caterinahostel.hu; VI Teréz körút 30, 3rd fl; dm/s/d €10/27/13.50; ☒ ☑) A cosy place with a clean and bright interior; excellent for travellers who want to feel at home. Rooms have TVs.

Museum Guest House (Map p564; ☎ 318 9508; www.budapesthostel.com; VIII Mikszáth Kálmán tér 4, 1st fl; dm 2600-3000Ft; ☒ ☑) Wind your way through the maze of rooms. Eclectic décor includes some bunk lofts with blanket curtains and red log beds. There are no doubles. The building is on a calm square off the main road.

Red Bus Hostel (Map p564; ☎ 266 0136; www.redbusbudapest.hu; V Semmelweis utca 14, 1st fl; dm/s/d 3000/7900/7900Ft; ☒ ☑) Congenial owners are part of the reason that the very central Red Bus has such a faithful following. Spacious rooms with colourful walls and wood floors

are another. There's a Red Bus II near Keleti train station.

Garibaldi Guesthouse (Map p564; ☎ 302 3457; baldiguest@hotmail.com; V Garibaldi utca 5; per person €20-45) Double, triple, quad and five-person guestrooms have shared kitchens and en suite bathrooms and are furnished with crazy deer-in-the-woods tapestries, plush pink draperies and odd antiques. Some small rooms with shared bathrooms (€18) are in the owners' flat.

ourpick Hotel Kulturinnov (Map p563; ☎ 224 8100; www.mka.hu; I Szentháromság tér 6; s/d €64/80; ☒) A small hotel sitting in the belly of the grandiose Hungarian Culture Foundation, with an L-shaped corridor leading to its 16 rooms. The feeling is relaxed and the décor longs for the '80s, but the surroundings are most impressive: a gorgeous stately building on top of Castle Hill. Considering the top location, the prices are a real bargain.

Station Guesthouse (Map p564; ☎ 221 8864; www.stationguesthouse.hu; XIV Mexikói út 36/b; dm 1900-2700Ft, r 6400Ft; ☒ ☑) Party house: 24-hour bar, pool table, occasional live music. Take bus 7 from Keleti train station.

Yellow Submarine Hostel (Map p564; ☎ 331 9896; www.yellowsubmarinehostel.com; VI Teréz körút 56, 3rd fl; dm/s/d 2800/7000/8000Ft; ☒ ☑) Overlooking busy ring road, near Nyugati.

Best Hostel (Map p564; ☎ 332 4934; www.besthostel.hu; VI Podmaniczky utca 27, 1st fl; dm/s/d 3000/4200/8400Ft; ☒ ☑) Closest to Nyugati Train Station, and not too noisy.

Private Rooms

Private rooms in Budapest are plentiful, and staying in one can be a great opportunity to experience Hungarian culture. Landlords are often retired and/or widowed women. Costs range from 4000 to 7500Ft for a single, 9000 to 12,000Ft for a double and 12,000Ft to 14,000Ft for a small flat, with a supplement if you stay fewer than four nights. You generally share a bathroom with the family. Check the listing of travel agencies (p562) for places to find you a room. Ibusz has the most extensive listings in town (some have photos on their website), and Vista Visitor Centre is good for flats.

Pensions & Hotels

BUDA

Büro Panzió (Map p563; ☎ 212 2929/2928; [buro-panzio@axelero.hu](http://buro-panzio.axelero.hu); II Dékán utca 3; s 6000-8000Ft, d 10,000-12,000Ft; ☒ ☑) Recently revamped, Büro now wears gleaming white walls, beds are covered

in virginal linen and small orange lamps light up the rooms.

ourpick Burg Hotel (Map p563; ☎ 212 0269; www.burghotelbudapest.com; I Szentháromság tér 7-8; s €85-105, d €99-115; ☒ ☑ ☑) A fantastic combination of location and price, the affordable Burg is at the centre of Castle Hill. Ask for a room overlooking Mátyás Templom for a truly historic wake-up view. The rooms are simple, with warm peachy walls. The reception staff are friendly and informative.

PEST

Leo Panzió (Map p564; ☎ 266 9041; www.leopanzio.hu; V Kossuth Lajos utca 2/A, 2nd fl; s €45-66, d €69-82; ☒ ☑) Just steps from Váci utca, the Leo is in the middle of everything. Rooms have an Art Deco-ish flair with dark-wood beds inset with blonde wood. Some have views of Elizabeth Bridge. The tiny bathrooms sparkle.

Kálmán Ház (Map p564; ☎ 216 4635; www.kalvinhouse.hu; IX Gönczy Pál utca 6; s €55-62, d €65-82; ☒ ☑) One of the few historic pensions in town, with Victorian antiques and high ceilings. Laundry service and internet access are a real bonus. It is near Kalvin tér metro and Ráday utca nightlife.

Radio Inn (Map p564; ☎ 342 8347; www.radioinn.hu; VI Benczúr utca 19; s €52-70, €75-86; ☒) Spacious apartments with full kitchens, sitting areas and one or two bedrooms are on offer here. Embassies are your neighbours on the quiet, tree-lined street near Bajza utca metro stop (M1 yellow line).

EATING

Fast-food restaurants, 'to go' windows and food stands abound on the ring roads of Pest and in or near train and metro stations. Two pedestrian areas in Pest, Ráday utca and Liszt Ferenc tér, are crammed with cafés, bars and eateries – all with outdoor tables in good weather. To keep prices down, look for a *grill* (generally serving gyros and other grilled meats at self-service counters), an *étkezde* (literally 'eating place', where workers lunch; can be sit-down service), an *önkiszolgáló* (self-service canteen), a *kínai gyorsbifé* (a Chinese 'fast' buffet) or a *szendvicsbar* (selling open-face sandwiches to go).

Buda

Bambi Presszó (☎ 212 3171; II Frankel Leó út 2-4; mains 500-800Ft) One of those places that keeps its traditions and décor preserved in the old

ways, which is what makes it a cult eatery among young and old Budapestians. The food is basic, but the omelettes and sandwiches taste great. Many come to just have a beer and enjoy the old times.

Café Miró (Map p563; ☎ 375 5458; I Úri utca 30; mains 690-2190Ft; ☹ 9am-midnight) Most restaurants on Castle Hill have surly service and are full of tourists. This arty café is no exception, but the soups, Greek salad and desserts are good.

For a quick bite to eat near the castle, climb the passageway stairs to **Fortuna Önkiszolgáló** (Map p563; ☎ 375 2401; I Hess András tér 4, 1st fl; ☹ 11.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri; ☒). Or if you're in Moszkva tér, try **Pita House** (Map p563; ☎ 315 1479; II Margit körút 105; mains 500-800Ft, salad bar 410Ft; ☹ 8am-midnight; ☒).

Pest

Frici Papa (Map p564; ☎ 351 0197; Király utca 55; mains 400-700Ft; ☹ 11am-8pm Mon-Sat) A popular place for a basic, hearty, no-frills Hungarian meal, and you sit elbow to elbow with workers, families and tourists.

Menza (Map p564; ☎ 413 1482; V Liszt Ferenc tér 2; mains 890-1990Ft; ☹ 11am-11pm; ☒) Probably the most popular restaurant in Budapest, and certainly one of the best in town. Try the roast pork tenderloin with rose water-and-lentil purée and roast potato wedges. The house wine is good. Eat in Menza, we implore you.

Paprika Vendéglő (☎ 06 70 574 6508; Dózsa György utca 72; mains 950-1600Ft; ☹ 11am-11pm) Step inside what looks like a rustic Hungarian farmhouse on the very urban street bordering City Park. It serves good game dishes.

Al-Amir (Map p564; ☎ 352 1422; VII Király utca 17; mains 700-1500Ft; ☹ noon-11pm Mon-Sat, 1pm-11pm Sun) Good Middle Eastern food is hard to come by in Hungary, but this place is excellent. No alcohol is served.

Angyalok Konyhája (Map p564; ☎ 412 0427; XIII Visegrádi utca; mains 1080-1480Ft; ☹ 11am-11pm Sun-Thu, 11am-midnight Fri & Sat; ☒) Formerly known as Wabisabi, the food here is organic and vegan-friendly – a rarity in meat-crazy Hungary – with strong Asian influences.

Gerbeaud (Map p564; ☎ 429 9000; V Vörösmarty tér 7; ☹ 9am-9pm) King of the genteel, Old World, coffee-and-cake culture, Gerbeaud has been serving chocolate bonbons, complex Hungarian layered cakes and simple French pastry since 1870.

Of the many Italian restaurants in town, **Okay Italia** (Map p564; ☎ 349 2991; XIII Szent István körút

20; pizzas & pasta 1280-1690Ft; ☎ 11am-11.30pm; ☒ ☒) is a reliable choices.

Stock up on picnic supplies at Nagycsarnok (p565), Budapest's biggest market. There are food stalls and a pricey cafeteria on the upper level. Large grocery stores are everywhere in Pest, including Kaiser's Supermarket, which has branches across from Nyugati pályaudvar and Blahalujza tér metro stops.

DRINKING

There are plenty of pseudo British-Irish-Belgian pubs, smoky *söröző* (Hungarian beer bars where drinking is taken very seriously) and nightclubs. However, the most pleasant place to imbibe might be in a *kávéház*. There are many along Ráday utca and Liszt Ferenc tér.

Szimpla/Dupla (Map p564; ☎ 342 8991; VII Kertész utca 48; ☎ noon-2am) The furniture is distressed, the cutlery and crockery rescued from flea-markets, and the crowd relaxed. There's live jazz on Fridays.

Eckermann (Map p564; ☎ 374 4076; VI Andrássy út 24; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10pm Sun) Part of the Goethe Institut, this café attracts a cool crowd in the day and lights up candles in the evening.

Centrál Kávéház (Map p564; ☎ 266 4572; V Károly Mihály utca 9; ☎ 7am-1am) Having been closed for a long time, Centrál Kávéház is once again one of the finest coffee houses in the city. You can have breakfast or a full-on meal, or just enjoy a beer.

Sark (Map p564; ☎ 328 0753; VII Klauzál tér 14; ☎ 10am-2am Mon-Thu & Sun, 10am-3am Fri & Sat), For great atmosphere come to where a Romani band plays every Tuesday night (gig entry 400Ft).

Of the pubs in Pest, **Fat Mo's** (Map p564; ☎ 267 3199; V Nyári Pál utca 11; ☎ noon-2am Mon-Wed, noon-4am Thu-Fri, 6pm-4am Sat, 6pm-2am Sun) is one of the best. It has live music on Sunday through Thursday. **Irish Cat Pub** (Map p564; ☎ 266 4085; V Múzeum körút 41; ☎ 11am-2am) runs a close second.

If you want to float on a boat in the Danube go to the down-to-earth and pub-like **Columbus** (Map p564; ☎ 266 9013; Vigadó tér 4; ☎ noon-midnight; ☒).

In Buda, **Zöld Pardon** (Map p563; Irini József utca at Petőfi híd; ☎ 9am-6am mid-Apr-mid-Sep) is a big beer-garden-cum-disco, popular with college students on a budget.

ENTERTAINMENT

Live Music

Tickets for concerts, performances, and operas are still quite reasonable by western European

standards, and the venues are often stunning. Tourinform (p562) can help you find out what's playing, as can the free *Programme Magazine*, available at tourist spots. The free weekly *Pesti Est* (available at restaurants and clubs) lists live-music acts and guest DJs for clubs.

Ticket offices:

Music Mix (Map p564; ☎ 266 1655; V Váci utca 33;

☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat)

Vigadó Jegyiroda (Map p564; ☎ 327 4322; V Vigadó tér 6; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri)

Nightclubs

Budapest's got a nightlife that can keep you up for days on end.

Cha Cha Cha (Map p564; V Kalvin tér metro station; ☎ 11am-5am) Dozens of jeans and corduroy trousers were sacrificed to upholster the furniture in metro station-based Cha Cha Cha, Budapest's hippest DJ bar-club.

Gödör Klub (Map p564; ☎ 06 20 943 5463; V Erzsébet tér; ☎ 2pm-2am) A large underground club (with a glass ceiling revealing the square above) provides the venue for truly eclectic live music.

Trafó Bőr Tangó (Map p564; ☎ 456 2049; IX Lilliom utca 41; ☎ 6pm-1am) An artsy crowd gets together in this underground space, beneath an exhibition space and cultural centre. Latin, jazz and disco.

Angyal (Map p564; ☎ 351 6490; VII Szövetség utca 33; ☎ 10pm-5am Fri & Sat) Budapest's flagship gay nightclub has three bars and high-energy dance mixes. Men only on Saturday (admission 800Ft).

Check out **Cinetrip** (www.cinetrip.hu), it's an amazing club night hosted inside the city's thermal spas. Cover charge ranges from 200Ft to 1000Ft.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

There is no domestic air service in Hungary. See p559 for more on international destinations.

Boat

In addition to hydrofoils that travel internationally (see p559), **Mahart PassNave ferries** (Map p564; ☎ 484 4005; www.mahartpassnave.hu; Vigadó tér pier) depart for Visegrád and Esztergom in the Danube Bend daily from April to October.

Bus

Volánbusz (☎ 485 2162; www.volanbusz.hu) is the national bus line. All international buses and

some buses to/from southern Hungary arrive at and depart from **Népliget Bus Station** (☎ 264 3939; IX Üllői út 131). **Népstadion Bus Station** (☎ 252 4498; XIV Hungária körút 48-52) serves most buses to domestic destinations. Most buses to the northern Danube Bend arrive at and leave from the **Árpád híd Bus Station** (☎ 329 1450, off XIII Róbert Károly körút). All three stations are on metro lines, and are in Pest. If the ticket office is closed, you can buy your ticket on the bus.

Car & Motorcycle

Most big international car-hire chains have branches at the airports. A standard daily rate is €40 per day with unlimited kilometres. Petrol costs about 270Ft per litre.

Train

The **MÁV Ticket Office** (Map p564; ☎ domestic information 461 5400, international information 461 5500; www.elvira.hu; VI Andrásy út 35; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri Apr-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar) provides information and sells domestic and international train tickets and seat reservations. You can also buy your tickets at the stations.

Keleti Train Station (Eastern; ☎ 333 6342; VIII Kerepesi út 2-4) handles international trains from Vienna and many other points east, plus domestic trains to/from the north and northeast. For some Romanian, German and Slovak destinations, as well as domestic ones to/from the northwest and the Danube Bend, head for **Nyugati Train Station** (Western; Map p564; ☎ 349 0115; VI Nyugati tér). For trains bound for Lake Balaton and the south, go to **Déli Train Station** (Southern; Map p563; ☎ 375 6293; I Krisztina körút 37).

GETTING AROUND

Public transport

Public transport is run by **BKV** (☎ 342 2335; www.bkv.hu). The three underground metro lines – M1 yellow, M2 red, M3 blue – meet at Deák tér in Pest. The HéV above-ground suburban railway runs north from Bathányi tér in Buda. There's also an extensive network of buses, trams and trolleybuses. Public transport runs from 4.30am until 11.30pm. There are also 18 night buses (marked with an 'É') that run along main roads. A single ticket for all forms of transport is 185Ft (60 minutes of uninterrupted travel; no metro line changes). The three-day, *turista* ticket (2500Ft) makes things easier as it allows unlimited travel inside the city. Keep your ticket handy; the fine for 'riding black' is 2000Ft to 4000Ft.

Taxis

Overcharging is extremely common. Never get into a taxi that does not have a yellow licence plate, the logo of a taxi firm and a posted table of fares. If you have to take a taxi, it's best to have the place you're staying call one; this costs less than flagging one down.

AROUND BUDAPEST

Between Vienna and Budapest, the Danube breaks through the Pilis and Börzsöny Hills in a sharp bend. Here medieval kings once ruled Hungary from majestic palaces overlooking the river. Today the historic monuments, rolling green scenery and souvenir craft shops lure day-trippers from Budapest.

SZENTENDRE

☎ 26 / pop 22,700

Once an artists' colony, now a popular one-day trip from Budapest (19km north), pretty little Szentendre has narrow, winding streets, and is a favourite with souvenir shoppers. For this reason it can be best to avoid weekends.

The **Tourinform** (☎ 317 965; Dumtsa Jenő utca 22; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) has information about the many small museums in town. Outside the town is the enormous **Szabadtéri Néprajzi Múzeum** (Open-Air Ethnographic Museum; ☎ 502 500; adult/student 800/400Ft; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct). Walking through reassembled homes and villages from around the country in this *skansen* (village museum), you can see what life was – and sometimes still is – like in rural Hungary. Take the Skansen bus from stand No 7 (20 minutes).

To get to Szentendre, take the commuter HéV from Buda's Bathányi tér metro station to the end of the line (370Ft, 40 minutes). At least one of the Mahart PassNave ferries (opposite) that travel daily from Budapest to Visegrád stops at Szentendre (950Ft, 1½ hours).

VISEGRÁD

☎ 26 / pop 1540

The spectacular views from the ruins of Visegrád's (*vish-eh-grahd*) 13th-century citadel, high on a hill above a curve in the Danube, are what pull the visitors to this sleepy town. After the 13th-century Mongol invasions, Hungarian kings built mighty **Visegrád Cittadella** (☎ 398 101; Várhegy; adult/student 750/350Ft; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm)

high on the hilltop. It's a climb. The **Királyi Palota** (Royal Palace; ☎ 398 026; Fő utca 29; adult/student 50/30Ft; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) stands on the flood plain at the foot of the hills.

Buses from Budapest's Árpád híd Bus Station (463Ft, 1¼ hours), the Szentendre HÉV station (405Ft, 45 minutes) and Esztergom (405Ft, 45 minutes) are very frequent. Between mid-April and early September, at least one Mahart Pass-Nave (p568) ferry daily shuttles between Budapest and Visegrád (1050Ft, two to three hours). Some of them continue on to Esztergom.

ESZTERGOM

☎ 33 / pop 28,900

A town full of ecclesiastic wonders, Esztergom (es-ter-gohm) has been the seat of Roman Catholicism in Hungary since the 19th century.

The 2nd-century Roman-emperor-to-be Marcus Aurelius wrote his famous *Meditations* while he camped here. Stephen I, founder of the Hungarian state, was born here and crowned at the cathedral, and Esztergom was the royal seat from the late-10th to the mid-13th centuries.

Gran Tours (☎ 502 000; Széchenyi tér 25; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri) is the best source of information in town. Hungary's largest church is **Esztergom Basilica** (☎ 411 895; admission free; ☎ 7am-6pm), sitting on a hill above the Danube. At the southern end of the hill is the extensive **Vár Múzeum** (Castle Museum; ☎ 415 986; adult/student 460/240Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar), with archaeological remnants from the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

On the way to the old town from the bus and train stations, you pass by food stands and the open-air market. Buses run to/from Budapest's Árpád híd Bus Station (579Ft, 1½ hours via the shortest route) and to/from Visegrád (405Ft, 45 minutes) at least hourly. Trains to Esztergom depart from Budapest's Nyugati Train Station (512Ft, 1½ hours) up to 13 times a day. Mahart PassNave (p568) ferries travel to Esztergom from Visegrád (700Ft, 1½ to two hours) and Budapest (1200Ft, five hours) at least once a day from mid-April to early September.

WESTERN HUNGARY

Beyond the Bakony Hills is an area bounded by the Danube and the Alps. Conquered by the Romans but never fully occupied by the Ottomans, the region has a prominent, seductive atmosphere of the gilded days of the

Austro-Hungarian empire, particularly in picturesque small towns.

Lake Balaton is Hungary's seaside. This, largest freshwater lake in Europe outside Scandinavia (it's 77km long), provides locals and foreigners with summer and winter fun: the peak summer months are filled with swimming and outdoor activities, and the quiet winter months see the locals out with their skates, sliding on the frozen lake. Balaton's popularity means that accommodation, restaurants and beaches are packed with Hungarians and Austrians on holiday in summer, especially during July and August. Many towns are deserted from October to April, but Keszthely has a life independent of the holiday season.

Low-cost airlines Ryanair and Helvetic Airways both fly to Balaton.

SOPRON

☎ 99 / pop 55,400

Sopron (*shop-ron*) is one of Hungary's most beautiful towns, with a Gothic centre enclosed by medieval walls, and filled with narrow streets and mysterious passages. The Mongols and Ottomans never got this far, so many medieval structures remain intact.

From the main train station, walk north on Mátyás király utca, which becomes Várkerület, part of a loop following the line of the former city walls. **Tourinform** (☎ 338 892; www.sopron.hu; Előkapu 11; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) is at the northeastern entrance to the old town. The 60m-high **Tűztorony** (Fire Tower; ☎ 311 327, Fő tér; adult/student 500/250Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), rises above the old town's northern gate. You can climb the 154 steps for views as far as the Alps. There are several museums, monuments and churches around Fő tér.

Outside Sopron, in Fertőd, is one of the country's most impressive palaces, the 126-room, Versailles-like, baroque **Esterházy Kasthely** (☎ 537 640; Joseph Hayden út 2; adult/student 1000/600Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm daily Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar). Just 27km east of Sopron, it's easily accessible by bus (347Ft, 40 minutes).

Sleeping & Eating

Vakáció Vendégház (☎ 338 502; www.szallasinfo.hu/vakaciövendeghaz; Ade Endre út 31; per person 2150Ft; ☎) A new, clean and sparkly student-oriented youth hostel about a 20-minute walk east of the town centre. Rooms have two to 12 beds each; there's no kitchen.

Jégverem Fogadó (☎ 510 113; www.jegverem.hu; Jégverem utca 1; s/d 5000/8000Ft) Full of citrus walls, plastic plants and non-descript furniture in an 18th-century building. The steaming-hot restaurant has generous portions of fried meat cutlets (mains 850Ft to 1890Ft).

Wurst and cheese on wooden platters can be nibbled at **Cézár Pince** (☎ 311 337; Hátsókapu 2; mains 480-890Ft; ☎ 11am-11pm). Right in the middle of the Inner Town's main square **Generális-Corvinus** (☎ 505 035; Fő tér 7-8; mains 990-2100Ft; ☎ 9am-11pm) is a wonderful place in spring and summer for a pizza (650Ft to 1700Ft). Next door is a **Match supermarket** (Várkerület 100).

There are several cafés around Fő tér. **Swing** (☎ 06 20 214 8029; Várkerület 15; 5pm-midnight Sun-Fri, 5pm-2am Sat) has live jazz, county, rock or blues nightly.

Getting There & Away

There are four buses a day to Budapest (2660Ft, four hours). Trains to Vienna's Südbahnhof (€12, 80 minutes) depart at least 10 times daily and to Budapest's Keleti train station (3500Ft, 2½ to three hours) eight times a day.

KESZTHELY

☎ 83 / pop 21,800

Keszthely's (*kest-hay*) amazing Festetics Palace and a partying public beach are reasons enough to make a cross-country-and-lake trip here worth it. The town lies a little more than 1km northwest of the lake, and stays open year-round. Summer activity centres on paid-admission beaches, waterfront parks, beer gardens and cafés near the ferry pier. **Tourinform** (☎ 314 144; Kossuth Lajos utca 28; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat Sep-Jun, 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat Jul & Aug) offers excellent information on the whole Balaton area.

At the northern end of pedestrian Kossuth Lajos utca is the glimmering, white, 1745 **Festetics Kastély** (Festetics Palace; ☎ 312 190; Kastély utca 1; museum adult/student 1200/600Ft; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). Part of the former residence has been turned into a museum. Roaming the grounds is free.

János Vajda College (☎ 311 361; Gagarin utca 4; dm 1600-3000Ft) opens its dorm to all from July to August. The big, basic rooms, with shared kitchens, at **Parizi Udvar** (☎ 311 202; www.hotels.hu/parizi_udvar; Kastély utca 5; d 7900-9900Ft, tr 9600-12,600Ft, q 13,500-15,600Ft) used to be part of the Festetics Palace complex.

Open-air, self-service food stands and bars line the trail between Kazinczy utca and the

waterfront; head east from the train station. Grab breakfast, burgers and marinated salads in town at **Hamburger Saláta Bár** (Erzsébet királyné utca at Jókai utca; breakfast 220-290Ft, burgers 330-450Ft; ☎ 7am-9pm). **Oázis** (☎ 311 023; Rákóczi tér 3; lunch 430-520Ft; ☎ 11am-4pm Mon-Fri) serves vegetarian dishes that change daily. The best food in town is in **Bacchus** (☎ 510 450; Erzsébet királyné utca 18; mains 700-1500Ft; ☎), part of a hotel, where the food consists mainly of meat and fish dishes.

In town, Kossuth Lajos utca is where to look for pubs. **Jancsi Kocsmája** (Kossuth Lajos utca 46; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Fri, 6pm-midnight Sat & Sun) is the most popular hangout, with tin advertising signs hanging on the walls.

Buses run to towns on both the northern and southern shores of Lake Balaton, as well as to Budapest (2780Ft, three hours, six daily), Sopron (1620Ft, 2½ hours, one daily) and Pécs (2430Ft, 3½ hours, two daily). Keszthely is on a branch rail line that parallels the southern shore on its way to Budapest Déli train station (2324Ft, three to four hours, 10 daily). **Mahart PassNave** (www.mahartpassnave.hu) ferries link Keszthely with other towns on the lake from late May to early September.

SOUTH HUNGARY

Straight-laced, Hungarian landscape lets loose in the more Mediterranean South. Mecsek and Villány Hills rise in isolation from the flat plain. Pécs is the largest city in this region.

PÉCS

☎ 72 / pop 158,900

Pécs's (pronounced '*paich*') sunny Jókai square, paved in white marble, embraces light and makes you think that the sea is close by. This lovely little town is going to be crowned European Culture Capital in 2010. The Ottomans left their greatest monuments here from 150 years of occupation, and Pécs has a distinct architectural feel. Ancient churches, mosques and a synagogue, small museums, bustling life and the green Mecsek Hills as a backdrop make Pécs an interesting place to spend a couple of days.

Take bus 30 the two long stops from the train station to Kossuth tér, just south of the town's heart, Széchenyi tér. **Tourinform** (☎ 213 315; www.pecs.hu; Széchenyi tér 9; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat May-Sep, 8am-4pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar) has tons

of local info, including a list of museums, and has **internet access** (per hr 100Ft). The **main post office** (Jókai Mór utca 10) is in a beautiful Art Nouveau building (1904) with a colourful Zsolnay Porcelain roof.

Sights

The bizarrely named **Mecset Templom** (Mosque Church; ☎ 321 976; Széchenyi tér; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-4pm Sun mid-Apr-mid-Oct, 10am-noon Mon-Sat, 11.30am-2pm Sun mid-Oct-mid-Apr), which dominates the city's central square, is a striking old mosque-turned-church, without a minaret to throw a shadow onto the domed roof below. The city's beautifully preserved 19th-century **Zsinagóga** (Synagogue; ☎ 315 881; Kossuth tér; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 10am-5pm Sun-Fri May-Oct), with its peach-coloured walls, is on the southern side of town. To the north, climb Szepessy Ignéc utca and turn west (left) on Káptalan utca, a street lined with museums. Famous ceramics can be seen at the **Zsolnay Porcelán Múzeum** (☎ 324 822; Káptalan utca 2; adult/student 700/350Ft; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct), which has examples from the local factory's illustrious early days in the mid-19th century to the present.

Continue west to Dóm tér and the walled bishopric complex containing the four-towered **St Peter's Bazilika** (☎ 513 030; Dóm tér; adult/student combined ticket 1000/500Ft; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun). The oldest part of the building is the 11th-century crypt below. The 1770 **Püspöki Palota** (Bishop's Palace; admission free; ☎ 2-5pm late Jun-Aug) stands in front of the cathedral, with a 15th-century **barbican**, the only stone bastion to survive from the old city walls.

Other attractions in town include the dreamy paintings at **Csontváry Múzeum** (☎ 310 544; Janus Pannonius utca 11; adult/student 600/300Ft; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct), which displays works by Tivadar Kosztka Csontváry (1853-1919), Hungary's own Van Gogh. The 16th-century **Hassan Jakovali mecset** (Hassan Jakovali Mosque; ☎ 313 853; Rákóczi út 2; adult/student 140/80Ft; 10am-1.30pm & 2-6pm Thu-Tue Apr-Sep) has a small museum of Ottoman history.

Sleeping & Eating

Ibusz (☎ 212 157; Apáca utca 1; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) arranges private rooms for an average cost of 2540Ft per person.

Mandulás Camping (☎ 515 655; Angyán János utca 2; tent sites 1200Ft, motel room 3200Ft) Up in the Mecsek Hills, this camp site is open May to October.

The place also offers basic rooms for rent, if you get tired of your tent. Catch bus 34.

Mátyás Kollégium (☎ 312 888; Széchenyi tér 11; dm 1400-4000Ft) In July and August, this central hostel is good. The rooms are basic, but quite spacious, with kitchen use and shared bathrooms, and some graffiti scribbled by a disaffected young student.

Kishotel Centrum (☎ 311 707; Szepessy Ignéc utca 4; s/d/tr 4500/5800/8750Ft) Resembles a mad Hungarian grandma's home with tons of paintings and flea market furniture.

Hotel Diana (☎ 328 594; www.dianahotel.hu; Tímár utca 4a; s/d 7700/11,000Ft; ☎) The small, immaculate guesthouse is near the synagogue. It has fun rustic accents and cosy attic rooms. Rooms with four beds are available (13,600Ft).

Aranygaluska Gyorsétterem (☎ 310 210; Irgalmasok utca 4; mains 430-640Ft; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-5pm Sat & Sun; ☎) has filling *töltöt paprika* (stuffed peppers) A cheap and cheerful cafétéria.

Az Elefánthoz (☎ 216 055; Jókai tér 6; mains 1100-2000Ft; ☎) Always popular, this Italian place serves big salads, pastas, pizzas and soups.

Király utca is lined with pubs, cafés and eateries, including **Oázis** (☎ 215 367; Király utca 17; mains 500-1000Ft; ☎ 10am-11pm), where kebabs are superb. The Co-op Szupermarket is at the corner of Irgalmasok and Tímár utca.

Los Bongos (☎ 06 20 468 9491; Jókai tér 6; 390-550Ft; ☎ 6pm-2am Mon-Sat) is the place for a Friday night Latin fiesta. Above Az Elefánthoz.

Getting There & Away

At least four buses a day travel between Pécs and Budapest (2660Ft, 4½ hours), eight go to/from Szeged (2310Ft, four hours) and two to/from Keszthely (1740Ft, three hours). Pécs is on a main rail line to Budapest's Déli train station (2610Ft, 2½ hours). One daily train departs Pécs at 8.40pm (1880Ft, two hours) for Osijek in Horvátország (Croatia).

GREAT PLAIN

The mysterious Nagyalföld (Great Plain) is an area that has been central to Hungarian myth and legend for centuries. It starts at the point where the Tisza River drainage basin meets the wide expanse of level *puszta* (prairie or steppe). Two national parks, Kiskunság in the Bugac Puszta, near Kecskemét, and

Hortobágy in the Hortobágy Puszta preserve examples of this unique environment.

KECSKEMÉT

☎ 76 / pop 108,250

Kecskemét is a green, pedestrian-friendly city, about halfway between Budapest and Szeged. It's famous for potent *barack pálinka* (apricot brandy), *libamaj* (goose liver), fine architecture and nearby horse farms, as well as a national park.

Tourinform (☎ 481 065; www.kecskemet.hu; Kossuth tér 1; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat Jul & Aug) is on the west side of the terracotta-coloured town hall, bang in the middle of the central square. It has a list of colleges offering accommodation and provides information on day trips to the horse show in **Kiskunság Nemzeti Park** (Kiskunság National Park; www.knp.hu) at Bugacs, 30km southwest of Kecskemét.

Walk around the adjacent, park-like squares, Kossuth tér and Szabadság tér, and admire the eclectic building styles, including Technicolor Art Nouveau at the **Cifrapalota** (Ornamental Palace; Rákóczi út 1). Check out the folk theme at the **Magyar Naive Művészek** (Hungarian Naive Art Museum; ☎ 324 767; Gáspár utca 11; adult/student 150/50Ft; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat), southwest of Cifrapalota.

Take bus 1 to get to **Autós Camping** (☎ 329 398; Csabai Géza körút 5; tent site s/d 1350/2100Ft, caravan site 2200Ft, bungalows 5400Ft; ☎ Apr-Oct) southwest of town, often jammed with caravans and German-speakers. For a place that feels better than home – flowery courtyard, homemade sweets with breakfast – choose **Fabián Pension** (☎ 477 677; www.hotels.hu/fabian; Kápolna utca 14; r 7500-9500Ft). They can make a cheaper double for you by putting an extra bed into a single room. A basic alternative is the **Palma Hotel** (☎ 321 045; www.holidayhungary.com; Arany János utca 3; s/d/tr 7000/9660/11760Ft).

Grab a quick bite and a beer at **Boston Grill** (☎ 484 444; Kápolna utca 2; burgers 320-550Ft; ☎ 11am-10pm) or a proper Hungarian meal at **Öregház Vendéglő** (☎ 496 973; Kólcsey utca 3; mains 600-1000Ft; ☎ 11am-10pm). **Rolling Rock Café** (☎ 06 70 335 3935; Jókai utca 44; ☎ noon-midnight Tue-Thu, noon-5am Fri & Sat), is outside the centre, but the locals swear it's the most kicking place, especially on week-ends when live music starts.

Twenty buses a day connect Kecskemét with Budapest Népliget (1040Ft, 1½ hours) and 10 a day with Szeged (1090Ft, two hours). Kecskemét is on the rail line that links Budapest's Nyugati train station (1212Ft, 1½

hours) with Szeged (1150Ft, one hour) at least eight times per day.

SZEGED

☎ 62 / pop 162,800

Szeged (*seh-ged*) is one of Hungary's best off-the-beaten-track destinations, a place that draws far fewer visitors than it should. The Maros River from Romania enters the Tisza just east of the centre. Two worldwide exports are produced here: Pick salami and Szegedi paprika.

The train station is south-southwest of town; the bus station is to the northwest. Pedestrian Kárász utca is lined with cafés and stores, leading northwest to the park-like square, Széchenyi tér. **Tourinform** (☎ 488 690; Dugonics tér 2; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) is tucked away in a quiet courtyard off the southwest end of Kárász. East, along the Tisza River, is the huge, neoclassical **Ference Mora Múzeum** (☎ 549 040; Várkert; adult/student 400/200Ft; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). There are exhibits on the Avar people (5th to 8th centuries) and archaeological finds, as well as on folk life and art.

Especially worth visiting are the 1778 **Szerb Ortodox Templom** (Serbian Orthodox Church; cnr Béla & Somogyi utca; adult/student 150/100Ft; ☎ 8am-8pm) for its fantastic folk iconostasis, and the **Új Zsinagóga** (New Synagogue; ☎ 423 849; Gutenberg utca 13; adult/student 250/100Ft; ☎ 10am-noon & 1-5pm Sun-Fri Apr-Sep, 10am-2pm Sun-Fri Oct-Mar) for the ornate, painted interior.

Plenty of student accommodation is open to travellers in July and August, including the central **István Apáthy College** (☎ 545 896; Eötvös utca 4; dm 1600-2500Ft). **Ibusz** (☎ 471 177; Oroslán utca 3; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) travel agency can find private rooms for 4000-5000Ft per person. The comfortable **Illes Panzió** (☎ 315 640; Maros utca 37; s/d 5900/6900Ft; ☎) is northeast of the centre, not far from the Tisza River. If you want pizza of any kind, **Numero Uno** (☎ 424 745; Széchenyi tér 5; mains 360-730Ft; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-11pm Sun) is the choicest pick. Check out the barrel ceilings at **Zodia'kus** (☎ 420 914; Oskola utca 13; mains 890-2100Ft; ☎ 8am-1am Mon-Sat, 11am-midnight Sun), and the super-friendly staff.

There's a vast array of bars, clubs and other nightspots, especially around Dugonics tér. The 20-somethings drink at **John Bull Pub** (☎ 484 217; Oroslán utca 6; ☎ 10am-midnight Sun-Thu, 10am-1am Sat & Sun), and **Sing Sing Disco** (cnr Mars tér & Dr Baross József utca; 500Ft; ☎ 10pm-4am Wed-Sat) has themed club nights.

Buses run to Budapest (2430Ft, three hours, six daily), Kecskemét (2430Ft, two hours, 10 daily) and Pécs (3010Ft, four hours, eight daily). Szeged is on the main rail line to Budapest's Nyugati train station (2324Ft, 2½ hours, 11 daily).

NORTHEASTERN HUNGARY

As you head north to east, the level plains and grasslands give way to a chain of wooded hills. These are the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains (in modern-day Ukraine), which stretch along the Hungarian border with Slovakia and Romania. The microclimates in this area are quite conducive to wine production. Eger and Tokaj are known worldwide for their red and sweet dessert wines.

EGER

☎ 36 / pop 57,000

After Budapest, Eger (*egg-air*) is probably next on any visitor's list. This attractive baroque city has a great hilltop castle, a walkable, quaint town centre and tons of wine-tasting opportunities. Egri Bikavér (Eger Bull's Blood), a full-bodied red wine produced in the surrounding hills, is known the world over. The friendly staff at **Tourinform** (☎ 36-517 715; www.eger.hu; Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca 9; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri & 9am-1pm Sat Sep-Jun, 9am-6pm Mon-Fri Jul & Aug) can supply all the information you need.

Egri Vár (Eger Castle; ☎ 312 744; Vár 1; adult/student combined ticket 800/400Ft; ☎ Tue-Sun 8am-8pm Apr-Aug, 8am-7pm Sep, 8am-6pm Oct & Mar, 8am-5pm Nov-Feb), up the hill off Dósa tér, was erected in the 13th century after the Mongol invasion. Inside the walled complex are several museums, the Bishop's Palace and the older foundations of St John's Cathedral, which was destroyed by the Turks. A surprise awaits you east of the castle hill: a 40m-high **Minaret** (Knézhik Károly utca; 200Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm Mar-Oct), minus the mosque, is allegedly Europe's northernmost reminder of the Ottoman invasion of the 16th century. If you suffer from claustrophobia, don't climb the 97 narrow spiral steps to the top.

Slide the door into the covered **piac** (market; Katona István tér 1; ☎ 6am-5pm Mon-Fri, 6am-1pm Sat, 6-10am Sun) and check out the produce on the ground floor and food stands upstairs. A great place for pancakes and drinks is **Palatsintavár**

(☎ 413 986; Dobó utca 9; mains around 1200Ft), with vegetarian and meat varieties and a lovely bar.

A 15-minute walk southeast of the town centre, **Szépesszony völgy** (Valley of the Beautiful Women; off Király utca; ☎ 10am-5pm) is home to dozens of small wine cellars that produce Bull's Blood and other regional wines. Stop at any cellar door that strikes your fancy and ask to taste their wares (50Ft per decilitre). Bring an empty bottle and they'll fill it up for about 600Ft per 1.5 litres.

Tourinform can help you locate student accommodation in the summer. The **Bartók Tér Panzió** (☎ 515 556, fax 515 572; Bartók Béla tér 8; s/d/tr 7000/9000/11,000Ft; ☎) has basic rooms with skylights and pastel colours in an old town building, with a central courtyard. Trains run between Eger and Budapest's Keleti train station (1968Ft, two hours) at least four times a day.

AROUND EGER

Another well-known wine destination is the smaller village of Tokaj, 43km northeast of Eger, which has long been celebrated for its legendary sweet desert wines. The **Tourinform** (☎ 47-352 258; www.tokaj.hu; Serház utca 1; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) is just off Rákóczi út. Their website lists good, cheap accommodation and can help with bookings.

HUNGARY DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION Camping

Hungary has more than 400 camping grounds, which are usually challenging to reach without a car. Tourinform's *Camping Hungary* map/brochure (www.camping.hu) lists every camp site in Hungary.

Hostels & Student Dormitories

Despite the places listed by the Budapest-based **Hungarian Youth Hostel Association** (Mellow Mood Ltd; ☎ 1-413 2065; www.youthhostels.hu; main office VII Baross tér 15, 3rd fl), from July to August the cheapest rooms are in vacant student accommodation (dorm beds and sometimes private rooms, too). Local Tourinform offices can help you locate colleges and universities.

Pensions & Hotels

Quaint, often family run, *panziók* (pensions) are abundant and usually less expensive than

hotels. They usually serve a breakfast buffet. Some hotels (*szállók* or *szállodák*) have less expensive options, if you're willing to share the toilet down the hall.

Private Rooms

Stick to travel agencies and avoid individuals at train stations in Budapest offering private rooms. Outside Budapest, you can look for houses with signs that read '*szoba kiadó*' or the German '*Zimmer frei*' (room to let, or free room). A supplement is sometimes required if you stay less than four nights.

ACTIVITIES

More than 100 thermal baths are open to the public. Request the brochure *Water Tours in Hungary* from Tourinform – it's a gold mine of information. A booklet on equestrian tourism is also available, or you could contact the **Hungarian Equestrian Tourism Association** (MLTSZ; Map p564; ☎ 1-456 0444; www.equi.hu; IX Ráday utca 8, Budapest).

Hungary now counts 2500km of dedicated bicycle lanes around the country, with more on the way. For more information contact the **Hungarian Bicycle Touring Association** (MKTSZ; Map p564; ☎ 1-311 2467; mktsz@internet.hu; VI Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út 31, Budapest).

BUSINESS HOURS

Open hours are posted on front doors. *Nyitva* means 'open' and *zárva* means 'closed'. The majority of grocery stores are open from 7am to 6pm Monday to Friday, and to 1pm on Saturday. Most towns have a 'nonstop' convenience store, and many have hyper-supermarkets that are open 24 hours. Main post offices open 8am to 6pm weekdays, to noon or 1pm Saturday. Bank hours are from 8am to 4pm Monday to Thursday and 8am to 1pm on Friday.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

To find out about Hungarian embassies around the world, or foreign ministries in Hungary, contact the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (☎ 1-458 1000; www.kum.hu; II Bem rakpart 47, Budapest).

HOLIDAYS

Hungary's public holidays:

New Year's Day 1 January

1848 Revolution Day 15 March

Easter Monday March/April

International Labour Day 1 May

Whit Monday May/June

St Stephen's Day 20 August

1956 Remembrance Day 23 October

All Saints' Day 1 November

Christmas Day 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

MONEY

The unit of currency is the Hungarian forint (Ft). Coins come in denominations of one, two, five, 10, 20, 50 and 100Ft, and notes are denominated 200, 500, 1000, 2000, 5000, 10,000 and 20,000Ft. ATMs are quite common throughout the country, and accept most credit and cash cards. Banks usually offer exchange services as well as having ATMs. Visa and MasterCard are the most widely accepted credit cards.

Although Hungary is part of the EU, it is unlikely to adopt the euro as the national currency for a number of years. Places with prices listed in euros accept either euros or forints; the price in forints will vary according to that day's euro exchange rate. Places with prices listed in forints charge a fixed price, to be paid in forints only.

POST

A *légiposta* (airmail) postcard within Hungary costs 40Ft, to neighbouring countries 50Ft, within Europe 110Ft, and to the rest of the world 150Ft. Make sure to go to a post office to send your letter or card. If you put it in a post box on the street, it could languish for weeks. Otherwise, service is pretty speedy – less than a week to Europe; less than two to the USA.

TELEPHONE

Hungary's country code is ☎ 36. To make an out-going international call, dial ☎ 00 first. To dial city-to-city (and all mobile phones) within the country, first dial ☎ 06 (dialling in from out of the country, leave off the 06), then the city code. Mobile phone numbers all use the prefix ☎ 06; no city code is necessary. Budapest numbers have seven digits; most others have six digits.

The best place to make international telephone calls is from a phone box with a phone card, which you can buy at newsstands in 2000Ft and 5000Ft denominations. Some cards, such as Neophone, get you an international call for as little as 19Ft per minute. Buy

a Matáv *telefonkártya* at newsstands (800Ft) to make domestic calls at card-operated machines. Some pay phones still take coins.

VISAS

To enter Hungary, everyone needs a valid passport or, for citizens of the European Union, a national identification card. Citizens of all EU countries, Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand and the USA do not require visas to visit Hungary for stays of

up to 90 days. UK citizens do not need a visa for a stay of up to six months. Check with the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (☎ 1-458 1000; www.kum.hu) for an up-to-date list of which country nationals require visas.

Visas are issued at Hungarian consulates or missions, most international highway border crossings, Ferihegy airport and the International Ferry Pier in Budapest. However, visas are never issued on trains and rarely on buses.