

Like a Local

It's not difficult to live like a local in Budapest. The natives are friendly, the food is excellent (and never too strange) and the wine even better. And there are lots of things here that everyone everywhere likes: hot mineral baths, sweet cakes and diamonds-and-rust flea markets.



Nagycsarnok (Great Market, p136)

Eating

Learn to like meat. Hungarians are big carnivores and 'meat-stuffed meat' is an actual dish here. For stick-to-the-ribs fare on the hoof try Belvárosi Disznótoros (p86), a butcher-cum-caterer who satisfies the ravenous daily. Still all the rage are retro-style *étkezdék*, diner-like eateries that serve traditional Hungarian favourites and comfort food like *főzelék* (vegetables fried or boiled and then mixed into a roux with milk). The most local of these are Kádár (p121) in Erzsébetváros and Erdélyi-Magyar Étkezde (p121), which serves both Hungarian and Transylvania specialities. The best fish soup is at the Horgásztanya Vendéglő (p59).

Drinking

Budapesters love their wine and take it seriously, but in summer spritzers of red or white wine and mineral water are consumed in large quantities. Knowing the hierarchy and the art of mixing a spritzer to taste is important and will definitely win you the badge of 'honorary local'. A *kisfröccs* (small spritzer) is 10cL wine and the same amount of mineral water; a *nagyfröccs* (big spritzer) doubles the quantity of wine. A *hosszúlépés* (long step) is 10cL of wine and 20cL of water, while a *házmester* (janitor) trebles the amount of wine. Any bar in town will serve you these but don't expect one at a *borozó*, a traditional 'wine bar' (usually a dive) where rotgut wine is ladled out by metal ladle.

For advice on stronger libations such as *pálinka* (fruit brandy) and *Unicum* (a bitter aperitif nicknamed the 'Hungarian national accelerator'), see p36. For the best traditional cafes, see p37.

Choosing Wine

Budapest-based wine critic and writer Péter Balikó says that when choosing a Hungarian wine, you should look for the words *minőségi bor* (quality wine) or *különleges minőségű bor* (premium quality wine), Hungary's version of the French quality regulation *appellation contrôlée*.

On a wine label the first word of the name indicates where the wine comes from, while the second word is the grape variety (eg Villányi Kékfrankos) or the type or brand of wine (eg Tokaji Aszú, Szekszárdi Bikavér). Other important words that you'll see include: *édes* (sweet), *fehér* (white), *félédes* (semisweet), *félszáraz* (semidry or medium), *pezsgő* (sparkling), *száraz* (dry) and *vörös* (red). Following are Peter's five top local wines:

Laposa Badacsonyi Olaszrizling Among the best dry white wines for everyday drinking in Hungary, this is a straw-blond Welschriesling high in acid that has a tart aftertaste and is reminiscent of burnt almonds.

Szepesy Tokaji Furmint With a flavour recalling apples, dry Furmint has the potential to become the best white wine in Hungary; Szepesy's version could pass for a top-notch white Burgundy.

Háspi Soproni Kékfrankos This increasingly popular red wine is known as Blaufränkisch in neighbouring Austria; its full flavour belies its light colour.

Héro Villányi Syrah Hungary's 'newly discovered' variety of grape is making quite a splash; this one is full bodied, rustic and simple.

Szepesy Tokaji Aszú (six puttonyos) Hungary's sweetest 'noble rot' wine is from the acknowledged leader of Tokaji vintners.

Entertaining

No self-respecting Budapest ever clubs outdoors in the warm summer months; that's what *kertek* – outdoor garden clubs (p10) – are for.

As for entertainment of a more, well, serious nature, while the Ferenc Liszt Music Academy (p125) and Palace of Arts (p126) are incomparable for their acoustics and talent, many Budapesters prefer to hear music in smaller, more intimate venues such as the Óbuda Society (p81) or jazz recitals in one of the city's many fine cafes such as St Michael's Inner Town Church (p39).

If you really want to see Budapest down and dirty on the playing field, attend a Ferencvárosi Torna Club (FTC) match at Ferenc Albert Stadium (p136).

Shopping

Budapest is reclaiming its title as design capital of Central Europe and no one knows that better than Judit Maróthy, whose company Underguide (www.underguide.com) specialises in lifestyle and shopping tours of the city. Her first bit of advice is to schedule your visit during WAMP (www.wamp.hu), a monthly fair usually held in either V Erzsébet tér (Map p238) in Pest or the Millennium Hall in II Millennium Park (p58) in Buda, where emerging Hungarian designers showcase their work. Check the website for details; it's a super-cool event and very popular with locals.

Away from WAMP, where would Underguide shop if looking for locally designed and – a bonus – highly sustainable goods and fashion that you just won't see anywhere else? Here are some top choices: Printa (p126), Romani Design (p126), M Lamp (p126), PannonArts Design Galéria (p104) and Mono Fashion (p89).

Marketing

The Nagycsarnok (p136) is a great place to shop, but don't expect to see peasant-women fresh in from the countryside selling snowdrops in spring or homemade tomato juice in summer. For that sort of thing head for the Rákóczi tér Market (p128) – but never on a Sunday (or a Monday for that matter) – or even the covered Lehel Market (p109) in Újlipótváros.

Locals never go to the Ecseri Piac (p137), Continental Europe's largest flea market, during the week but head out as early as they can make it on Saturday to see what treasures are coming in from the countryside or being flogged by amateurs.

Weekending

Budapesters, especially those living in Pest, love a day out in the fresh air to escape their relatively cramped quarters and the pollution, and nothing is more sacred than the *kirándulás* (outing), which can be a day of hiking in the Buda Hills (p73) or a lazy afternoon swimming and sunning at Lake Balaton (p153).