

Introducing Lake Balaton – Western Hungary

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWogefb4RjM>

Whether it's peace and quiet you're after or a calendar full of things to see and do, Lake Balaton is here to satisfy your every need. Smooth waters and fresh wines, sand and surf, fishing and frolicking, splashing and sailing, concerts and clubs, partying and paddle boating, beach volleyball and biking, elegant castles and sleepy villages, beautiful landscapes and crystal clear air, Lake Balaton has it all.

The highlights on the northern shore of Lake Balaton include romantic strolls along the pretty streets of Balatonfüred oozing 19th century charm and hiking to the top of Tihany for a breath-taking view of the lake in the lavender scented air. Just a few million years ago geysers spouted hot water into the air on the Tihany peninsula. Take a hike on the lunar landscape near the Inner Lake to see the evidence. Just a short ride from here to the west, between Balatonudvari and Örvényes, you'll find one of the most spectacular golf courses of Hungary, Royal Balaton Golf & Yacht Club.

The volcanic slopes further west along the shore are the perfect terrain for refreshing white wines. Badacsony is a perfect spot for hiking, but a local myth makes it even more worthwhile for couples. If you and your loved one sit on the Rose Stone with your backs to the lake (it's hard to turn away from the view, we know), legend has it you'll be married within a year. Now that deserves a toast, right? Explore the many wine cellars and their fabulous wines and mouth watering dishes until you find your favourite one. Behind the basalt mountain of Badacsony you can find the fairy-tale valley called the Káli Basin. Visit its lovely quiet villages and move on to the mineral waters at Kékkút, source of Theodora Quelle waters.

At the western peak of the lake, you won't only find the source of health in the largest natural medicinal thermal water lake in the world in Hévíz, but also one of the three largest baroque palaces of the country, the Festetics Palace in Keszthely. If you like great contrasts, after the grandeur and elegance of the palace, don't miss out on the area's tiny jungle, the Little Balaton. It's paradise for endangered plants and for birds, with tens of thousands arriving as if for an annual convention at migration time. Patient birdwatchers have counted 250 species, of which 100 nest here and 27 are protected.

The southern shores of Lake Balaton will lull you with their quiet charm. Small towns oozing character, living traditions of arts and crafts, spas and wineries,; exquisite castle hotels and the largest walnut plantation in Europe.. But your trip to Lake Balaton won't be complete without visiting the party capital of the area, Siófok. After chilling out on one of the many lidos or practicing your wakeboarding moves on the silky smooth water during the day, this small town caters for all your partying needs with club complexes and beachside pubs where dancing on the tables is the norm, and everything in between.

Explore the fabulous castles and palaces of the lakeside – it's going to be a royal experience. The regally restored Baroque Festetics Palace at Keszthely is a sight fit for a king. It will take you a while to see all 101 rooms, plus the newly opened Hunting Museum with 500 trophies and exhibits on wildlife and weapons. Enchant your sweetheart and take her (or him) on a candlelit tour through the palace.

Want to feel like you're on top of the world? No problem, just climb the stairs (or take the panorama-elevator) of the 100 year-old water tower of Siófok and enjoy the view - the tower has a height of 45 metres and offers the majestic panorama of the Tihany Peninsula and the lovely hills of Badacsony across the lake. The tower has just been renovated and awaits visitors in its old glory. Enjoy a coffee at the Szentkirályi Café, and make sure to try the Oxygen bar as well.

If we would have to choose the most romantic city around Lake Balaton, it would be Tihany. A large part of its appeal is its amazing position located on the Tihany Peninsula with natural lush surroundings.. The landscape was formed by volcanic forces millions of years ago and their traces can be seen today.: Ancient calderas are home to the two lakes on the peninsula, while hundreds of geysers remind visitors of old times. But it's not all about geology here – the peninsula is home to innumerable rare species of plants and animals as well – so put on your boots and head out into nature to spot them. The town itself is great for a romantic stroll as well. Head uphill to the Benedictine Abbey (founded in 1055 by Andrew I. who is buried in the crypt) and take a moment to enjoy the amazing view onto the lake. The church itself was rebuilt in Baroque style in 1754 and functions until today. How about enjoying a classical concert here? You might also wonder why this town smells like lavender. Well, Tihany is surrounded by lavender fields glowing in all shades of purple, and there are heaps of shops offering all kinds of great-smelling objects to take home with you.

Nothing's more romantic than heading out onto the glittering lake on a boat, holding hands with your love and enjoying the soft wind on your skin. Rent a sailboat and slide quietly on the water, or just take the ferry and feed the friendly seagulls flying along.

Badacsony just by Lake Balaton is one of the top wine regions of Hungary – the perfect spot to clink glasses with your loved one. For a truly noble experience, head to the former wine cellar of the Counts of the family Eszterházy. Taste some really fine wines and check out the tools of the wine makers from past centuries. In autumn everything revolves around grapes and wines in this region. Don't miss the Harvest Festival of Badacsony in the beginning of September and enjoy some great music with your wine as well.

Hungary is all about hot springs and thermal waters – and Lake Balaton is no exception. Recharge your batteries at one of the many thermal baths and spas around the lake. To experience true Roman luxury, head to the Galerius Bath of Siófok, and lounge lazily about like those hedonists of yore. The smooth waters will ease any joint or muscle pain and do wonders for your supple skin at the same time. Perhaps steam or sauna better suits your need for heat? A whole sauna world awaits you on the upper floor.

Another option for those who'd like to heal while chilling is the mud pack offered in Hévíz. The bottom of the Lake of Hévíz is covered by a 1-7 meter thick medicinal mud, left behind by the Pannon Sea tens of thousands of years ago. The mineral composition and the radioactivity of the mud make it a remedy of all those suffering from rheumatics and gynaecological problems. The lake is a favourite spot of bathers all around the year as well – when it gets cold the lake is covered by soft steam, thus keeping a comfortable temperature.

In wine there is not only truth, but also wellness, the inventors of so-called vino therapy say. Head to the wellness centres of Balatonfüred, Hévíz or Zalakaros and choose between a wine-bath, a grape-seed mask or a grape-skin massage.

Lake Balaton was made to have fun at with the shallow water calling for sports on boards and wild rounds of Frisbee, while the shores are well-equipped with volleyball, basketball and soccer fields.

First, let us take a look at the extreme sporting possibilities on the lake. At the eastern end of the legendary Golden Shore of party-capital Siófok, you'll find **Surf beach** (www.surfbeach.hu) with all the equipment that kite and windsurfers crave for. Shallow water, soft sandy beach and a smoothly blowing wind are the perfect conditions to head out onto the open water. Better get your training started – in the wintertime you'll have the opportunity to try equally fabulous ice-kiting and ice-surfing.

No pain, no gain – true, but not when it comes to **Beach Blob**. No training, no sweat, no sore muscles needed here to get the fun flowing. It works really simple, a giant pillow-like construction is floated, you take a seat at one end of it, while another (preferably really heavy) person leaps from a high spot onto the other end of the blob.. Head to the Császtay beach in Révfülöp for the adrenalin kick.

If you're looking for simpler pleasures such as heading out onto the open water with your pals on board, head to Keszthely and rent an electrical boat – all you need is your ID. What's more fun than jumping into the deep-blue water from a rocking boat or just pushing your mates in?

The fun doesn't end when you get out of the water as the mainland around Balaton offers a huge number of sporting events and festivals. Dangerous somersaults, mad downhill races, a crazy rush on the highway – **Balaton Bike Fest** (www.balatonbikefest.com) organised every summer promises to be a true adrenalin rush. Several days of shows and competitions will make your pulse rise, whether you're a contestant or just a spectator. Road biking, off-road adventures, trials and freerides are all part of the program, usually accompanied by a Bike Expo and the opportunity to wind down by clinking glasses in the evenings with the pros.

Ok, so you prefer to be powered by petrol? Get off the road and into the dirt at Europe's biggest international **Off-Road Festival** in Somogybabod! More than 1000 4x4 vehicles meet for three days of racing at Pentecost, just 16 km south of Balaton. An exciting mix of trucks, bumper cars, dust clouds, hillside tracks, cool beers, strongman contests and spicy parties at night, among others.

As the sun sets, it's time for the heroes of the day to let loose a bit – after biking, driving, surfing and blobbing you surely need a beer. The best party near and far has to be **Balaton Sound** (www.sziget.hu/balatonound), Central Europe's biggest lake-side festival mainly focusing on electronic music, while adding some bright spots of pop as well. For those who like it a bit more quiet and intimate, **Babel Sound** (www.babelsound.hu) provides a great alternative. This place is not about the headliners, rather it's a spot where fresh talents from the world music scene meet. There are three

stages, but numerous installations and thematic sites await open-minded visitors for some joint jamming and dancing.

If you are a true party-animal, Siófok is the place to go to at the Petőfi promenade clubs and shops follow one another in a seemingly endless row. Lose yourself in the latest hits, laser lights, and possibly even a massive amount of foam at **Palace Dance Club** (www.palace.hu), a classic among the lake-side party spots. Fun of a slightly different kind, but not any less authentic is offered at the **Retro Disco Ship** (www.balatonihajozas.hu) – move your hips to the melodies of the '70s and the '80s.

Another party centre at the lake is **Sun City** at Balatonfüred. Techno, retro, funky and R'n'B – how could you possibly choose? Good news is you don't have to as all the clubs are next to each other.. Club Honey is said to attract the party-hungry like pollen attracts the bees. Hot funky and R'n'B tunes will make you stick around till the morning hours. Club Lipstick is said to be a real temptress, too – it's the most popular venue of the little party city. Moloko is a real time machine – head back to the glittery world of the '80s and '90s.

Options galore, as you can see... You won't go home short of memories, that's for sure.

<http://balaton.gotohungary.com/introducing-lake-balaton>

