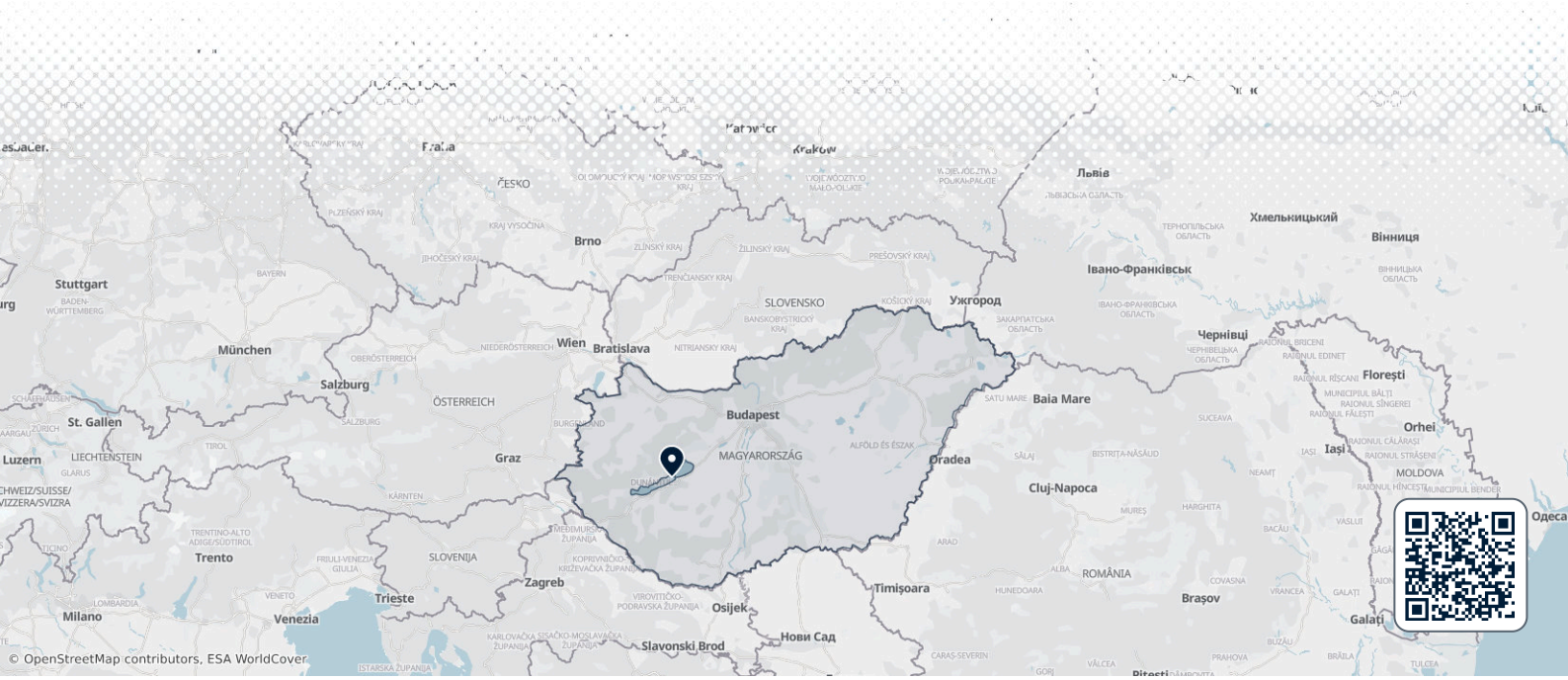


Lake Balaton

Hungary

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Lake Balaton is the largest lake in Central Europe, a long, shallow stretch of warm water that Hungarians simply call the "Hungarian Sea." Its two shores feel like different worlds: the north shore is volcanic hills, vineyards, and old spa towns tucked below wooded slopes, while the flatter south shore is lined with wide sandy beaches, marinas, and a livelier holiday scene.

A trip here suits travelers who want a slower pace than Budapest — swimming, cycling, wine tasting, and small-town strolling rather than a checklist of museums. Most visitors base themselves in one or two towns and explore the rest by car, bike, or the passenger ferries that cross the lake.

When to visit

Late spring and early autumn are the most pleasant times to visit — mild days, fewer crowds, and the vineyards and lavender fields at their best. Summer is warm and busy, with the shallow water reaching comfortable swimming temperatures by July. Winter is quiet; many lakeside restaurants and hotels close, and some towns feel half-asleep until spring.

The **Anna Ball** in Balatonfüred, held every year on the Saturday closest to July 26th since 1825, is the region's most iconic date on the calendar — a formal gala with roots in the reform era that's worth timing a late-July trip around, even just to watch the town dress up for it. Outside that, July and August afternoons can bring sudden, sharp storms — the lake is famous for them, so keep an eye on the sky if you're out on the water.

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Poor Poor for watersports	4° / 11° Feels like 0°	-2° / -9°	Dry air · Calm winds
February	Poor Poor for watersports	6° / 13° Feels like 2°	-1° / -9°	Dry air · Calm winds
March	Good Good for cycling	11° / 18° Feels like 7°	3° / -4°	Dry air · Calm winds
April	Great Great for cycling	16° / 23°	8° / 2°	Dry air · Calm winds
May	Great Great for sightseeing	21° / 28°	13° / 9°	12 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
June	Great Great for sightseeing	25° / 32°	17° / 12°	Calm winds
July	Great Great for sightseeing	27° / 33°	19° / 15°	Humid air · Calm winds
August	Great Great for watersports	27° / 33°	19° / 15°	Humid air · Calm winds
September	Great Great for sightseeing	21° / 28°	14° / 9°	Dry air · Calm winds
October	Great Great for cycling	16° / 22°	10° / 4°	Dry air · Calm winds
November	Good Good for cycling	10° / 17° Feels like 7°	5° / -1°	Dry air · Calm winds
December	Poor Poor for watersports	4° / 10° Feels like 1°	0° / -7°	Dry air · Calm winds

Best months: May, June, July, August, September

Climate data: NASA POWER + Copernicus ERA5-Land · 1996–2025

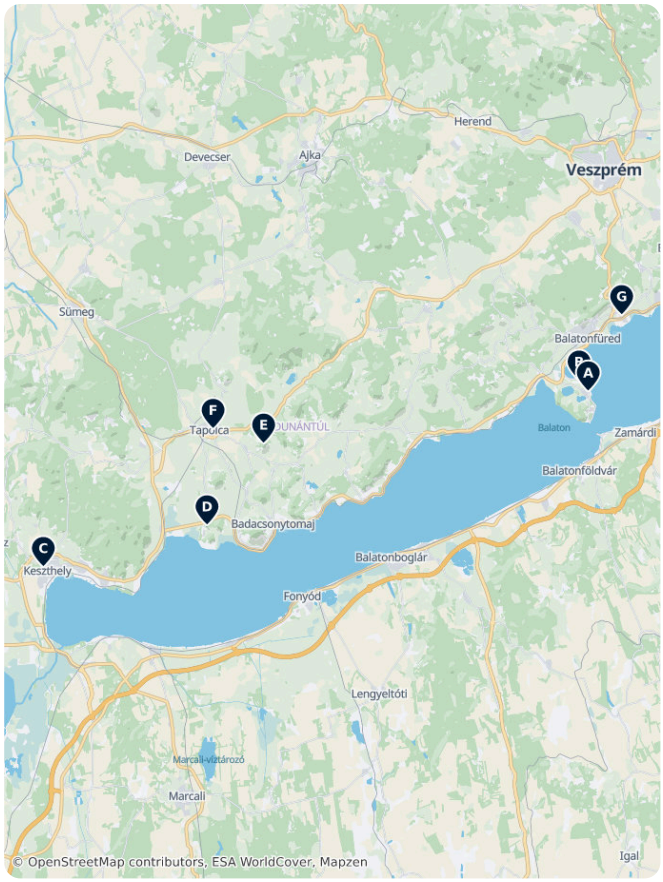
Top sights

On the Tihany peninsula, the twin-towered A Tihany Abbey sits high above the water and is the lake's most photographed landmark — its baroque interior and crypt date back to the 11th century, when the peninsula's founding charter became one of the earliest surviving documents to include Hungarian words. A short walk away, the B Tihany Hermit Colony are a cluster of cells cut into the volcanic rock by Orthodox monks centuries ago, reached by a short hiking trail with fine views over the peninsula.

At the lake's western tip, C Festetics Castle is a grand baroque palace built by one of Hungary's leading aristocratic families — inside is an opulent library and a music room still used for concerts.

The north shore's volcanic hills carry a string of ruined hilltop castles worth the climb for the views alone. D Szigliget Castle looks out over vineyards and the lake from its cone-shaped hill, and it's the only lakeside castle still open to visitors. E Csobánc Castle, on a neighboring peak, holds the ruins of a fortress that held off Ottoman sieges.

For something underground, the F Tapolca Lake Cave near Tapolca lets you drift by boat through a cave system carved by an ancient thermal spring — a cool, quiet detour from the summer heat. And for the region's wilder side, the G Balaton Uplands National Park protects the volcanic cones, wetlands, and wildflower meadows scattered around the lake's basin, with marked trails through several of them.



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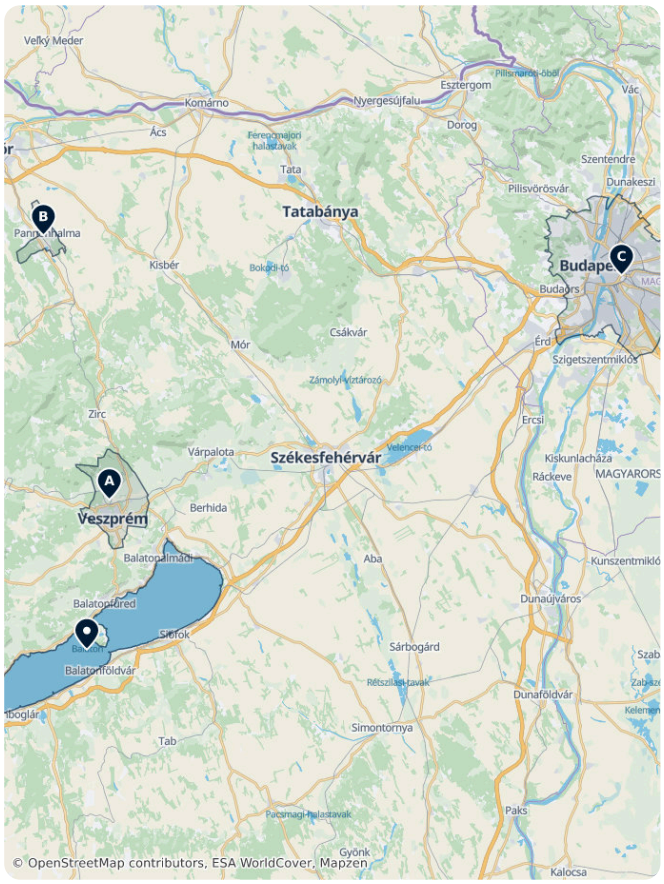
What to experience

- Cycle a stretch of the lake circuit. The paved path around Balaton is one of Europe's great lakeside rides — even a short afternoon section between two towns gives a feel for how the shore changes from hill to flatland.
- Taste your way through the Badacsony hills. The volcanic slopes around Badacsonytomaj are lined with small family wineries, many with a terrace looking straight down over the lake — an afternoon of tastings here is a local ritual, not a tourist add-on.
- Take a lavender walk in early summer. The Tihany peninsula's lavender fields bloom in late June and July, drawing visitors for the color and the scent alike.
- Cross the lake by ferry instead of driving around it. The passenger boats between the two shores are a genuine way locals get around, not just a sightseeing cruise, and the crossing itself is part of the fun.
- Soak at a thermal bath. Beyond the swimming lake itself, the region's natural thermal waters — most famously at Hévíz — are a year-round local habit, not just a summer activity.

Day trips

- A Veszprém — ≈30 min by car or bus from the north shore. A hilltop baroque old town with a castle district, cathedral, and views over the Bakony hills; easily combined with a morning at Tihany.
- Kis-Balaton — ≈45 min by car from Keszthely. A wetland nature reserve at the lake's western end, once part of Balaton itself, now a haven for herons, egrets, and other waterbirds — good for a few hours of birdwatching or a quiet walk.
- Sümeg — ≈1 hour by car from Keszthely. A small town below one of Hungary's best-preserved hilltop castles, with sweeping views over the Bakony forests.
- B Pannonhalma — ≈1.5–2 hours by car or train from the north shore. A UNESCO World Heritage Benedictine monastery founded over a thousand years ago, with a working library and vineyard open to visitors.
- C Budapest — ≈1.5–2 hours by car or train from Siófok. Worth the longer trip for travelers who haven't already seen Hungary's capital.



Where to explore

North shore — hillier, greener, and built around wine and spa towns. Balatonfüred is the north shore's grand old resort, with a lakefront promenade and Hungary's oldest medicinal spring; Tihany, on its

peninsula, is the postcard village of the whole lake. Csopak is a small, low-key wine village worth a stop for a cellar tasting, and Badacsonytomaj, at the foot of the flat-topped volcanic hill of the same name, is the heart of the region's white wine country.

South shore — flatter, sandier, and livelier. Siófok is the south shore's biggest resort town, with the widest beaches and busiest nightlife on the lake. Balatonlelle is a quieter, family-friendly alternative a short drive west.

At the lake's western end, Keszthely is the largest town on Balaton and a good base for exploring both the lake and its wine hills, while Hévíz, just inland, sits over the world's largest natural thermal bathing lake.

Getting there

- By air: Budapest's Liszt Ferenc International Airport is the main gateway, about 1.5–2 hours by car or shared shuttle from the lake's south shore. A small regional airport near Sármellék, on the southwest shore close to Keszthely and Hévíz, handles a handful of seasonal charter flights in summer — check current routes before relying on it.
- By train: Direct trains run from Budapest to the south shore (Siófok and on to Keszthely) and to the north shore (Balatonfüred and on to Badacsony and Tapolca), each taking roughly 1.5–2.5 hours depending on the stop.
- By bus: Long-distance coaches connect Budapest with the main lakeside towns on both shores, a practical backup when trains are full in peak summer weeks.

Getting around

- Train: A railway line runs along each shore, linking the main towns — the easiest way to move between lakeside destinations without a car. Buy tickets at the station counter or machine, or online in advance through MÁV, the national rail operator.
- Passenger ferry: The year-round Szántód–Tihany crossing links the two shores in about 8 minutes, and seasonal scheduled boats connect several other town pairs in summer. Buy tickets at the pier or in advance through BAHART, the lake's ferry operator.
- Car: Useful for reaching the wine villages and hilltop castles above the shore, which trains don't serve. Expect heavy traffic on the main shore roads on summer weekends.
- Bicycle: A paved cycle path circles almost the entire lake — one of the best ways to see it, and bike rental is available in every town.

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

Moderate

Towns along the shore are compact and walkable, but the distances between them call for a bike, train, or car.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

High

A paved path circles almost the entire lake, and bike rental is available in every town.

Driving

- Is a car worth it? Not essential for staying in one or two towns — trains and the cycle path cover the shore well. A car pays off if you want to reach the hilltop wineries and castles above the lake, which public transport doesn't serve.
- Parking: Most lakeside towns charge for parking near the beaches and centers in summer, paid by app or at machines; free spots get scarce a short walk further out.
- Restrictions: None beyond the usual — main shore roads simply get congested on summer weekends, so allow extra time.

Food & drink

Fogas, a local pike-perch, is the lake's signature fish and shows up fried, grilled, or in a paprika-spiced fish soup at restaurants on both shores. The volcanic hills above the north shore — Badacsony above all — produce some of Hungary's best white wines, and a cellar-door lunch paired with the local Olaszrizling or Kéknyelű is worth planning a stop around.

For a casual meal, head for the harbor promenades in Balatonfüred or Siófok, where a cluster of restaurants and lángos stands line the waterfront — a more reliable bet than any single pub inland.

What to eat & drink

LUNCH

Gulyás
Paprika-spiced beef soup served with bread — Hungary's national dish, quite different from the thick stew known abroad.

DINNER

Pörkölt
A rich paprika stew made with pork, beef, or chicken — the thick stew version that tourists sometimes call goulash.

Halászlé
A fiery, deep-red freshwater fish soup, especially associated with the Tisza and Danube regions.

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Lángos
Deep-fried dough topped with sour cream and grated cheese — the definitive Hungarian street food.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Rétes
Strudel filled with sour cherry, poppy seed, or apple.

DRINKS

Tokaji Aszú
Hungary's famous amber sweet wine, made from botrytised grapes in the Tokaj region.

Egri Bikavér
Bull's Blood — Hungary's best-known red wine, a full-bodied blend from the hills around Eger.

Pálinka
Unaged Hungarian fruit brandy distilled from plums, apricots, or pears.

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Safety & health

Lake Balaton is very safe for tourists — petty theft around crowded beaches in peak season is the main thing to watch for, not violent crime. The bigger hazard is the weather: the lake is shallow and wide open, so summer storms can arrive within minutes and whip up dangerous waves with little warning. Yellow and red flags on the beaches signal swimming conditions — leave the water immediately when a red flag goes up, and check the forecast before renting a boat or paddleboard.

The lake itself averages only a few meters deep, so it warms quickly in summer but also means swimmers should be cautious of sudden drop-offs near a few spots rather than assuming a uniformly shallow bottom everywhere.

History

The Romans called the lake *Pelso* and built villas along its shores; later, Tihany Abbey became one of Hungary's most important religious sites after King Andrew I founded it in 1055. Its foundation charter, still preserved, is one of the earliest surviving documents to contain written Hungarian words alongside the Latin text.

The lake's modern identity as a holiday destination began in the 19th century, when Balatonfüred's mineral spring drew the country's aristocracy for the waters. Festetics Castle in Keszthely, built up by the Festetics family through that same century, also housed Georgikon, one of Europe's first agricultural academies. Under communist rule after the Second World War, the south shore in particular grew into a mass holiday belt of state-run resorts — the foundation of the busy summer scene you still find in towns like Siófok today.

Country facts

Quick practical facts for Hungary at a glance:

CURRENCY
HUF Ft

EMERGENCY
112

ELECTRICITY



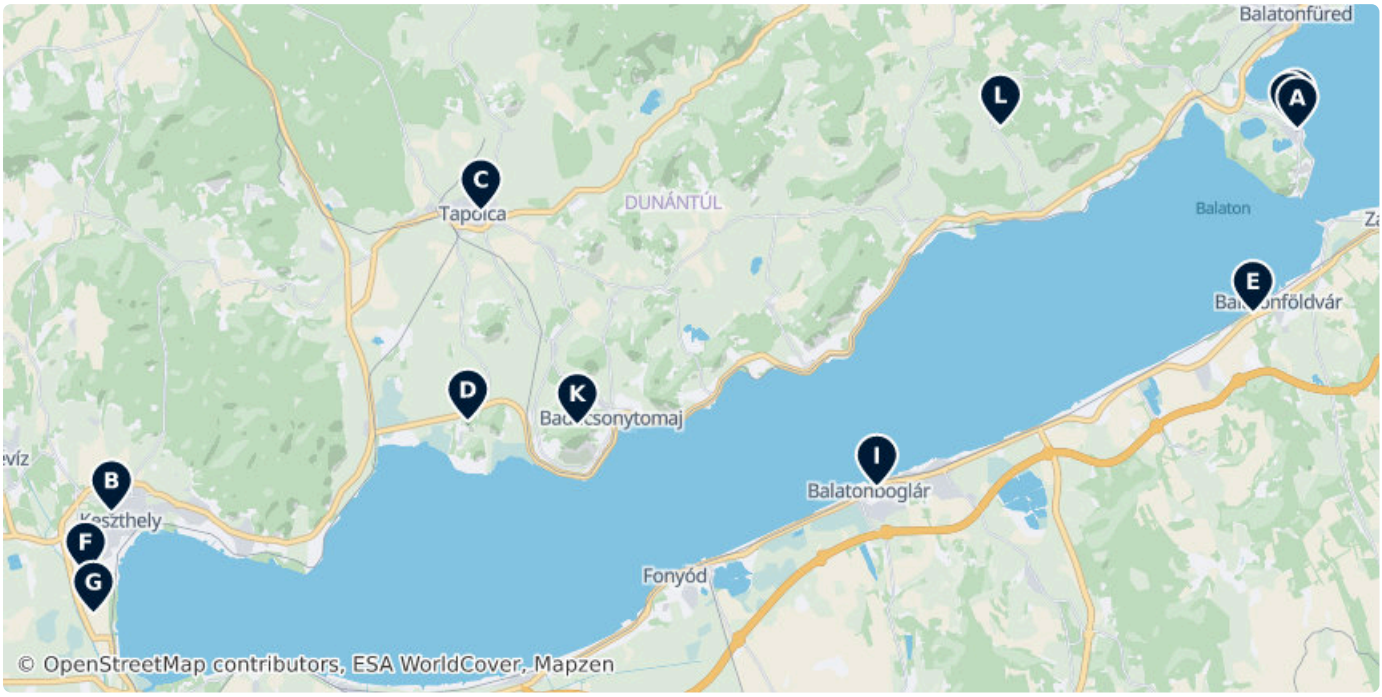
Type C / Type F
230 V · 50 Hz

LANGUAGES
Hungarian

TAP WATER
Safe to drink

Lake Balaton's Absolute Essentials

Lake Balaton, Central Europe's largest lake, features a landscape shaped by volcanic activity and centuries of Hungarian history. This collection highlights the 13th-century Szigliget fortress, the Baroque Festetics Palace in Keszthely, and the Benedictine Abbey of Tihany. Natural attractions include the Tapolca Cave Lake's subterranean waterways and the basalt peaks of Badacsony. Architectural landmarks like the mid-century Gömbkilátó and the protected black pine alleys of Keszthely provide insight into the region's diverse cultural and botanical heritage.





A Benedictine Abbey, Tihany

This Baroque monastery hides a historical treasure. Do not miss the chance to visit the crypt underneath the abbey - the Hungarian king...

András tér 1, 8237 Tihany, Hungary (46.91382, 17.88968)

tihany.osb.hu



B Festetics Castle

The Festetics Palace is a Baroque palace located in the town of Keszthely, Zala, Hungary. The building now houses the Helikon Palace Museum.

Kastély utca 1, 8360 Keszthely (46.77078, 17.24157)

Mo–Su 10:00–17:00

helikonkastely.hu, +36 83 314 194



C Tapolca Cave Lake

An unique cave warmed by volcanic action. The water inside is used for medical treatment and also as a means of getting around the cave.

Kisfaludy Sándor utca 3, 8300 Tapolca (46.88328, 17.44342)

Mar-Jun Mo–Su	09:30–16:00
Jul-Aug Mo–Su	09:00–19:00
Sep-Oct Mo–Su	09:30–16:00
Nov-Feb Mo–Su	09:00–15:30

tavasbarlang.hu, +36 87 555 291



D Szigliget Castle

13th-century fortress ruins situated on a volcanic hill. It features restored walls, a medieval kitchen, and provides panoramic views of the lake's northern shore.

8264, Hungary (46.80477, 17.43624)

Mo–Su	08:00–20:00

szigligeti-var.hu, +36703715346

E Kilátó

Known as the Soós Hill lookout, this tower provides views over the eastern basin of Lake Balaton and the distinctive high banks of Balatonkenese.

(46.84527, 17.86547)

Mo–Su	10:00–21:00

balatonfoldvarikilato.hu, +36 84 553 088

F Védett fenyősor

A protected row of black pines planted in the 1880s by the Festetics family. The alley originally linked the palace to the riding school and the lakefront.

(46.74777, 17.22739)

G védett fenyősor

Historical black pine alley in Keszthely, established in the late 19th century as part of the Festetics estate's landscape architecture.

(46.73281, 17.23169)

H harangláb

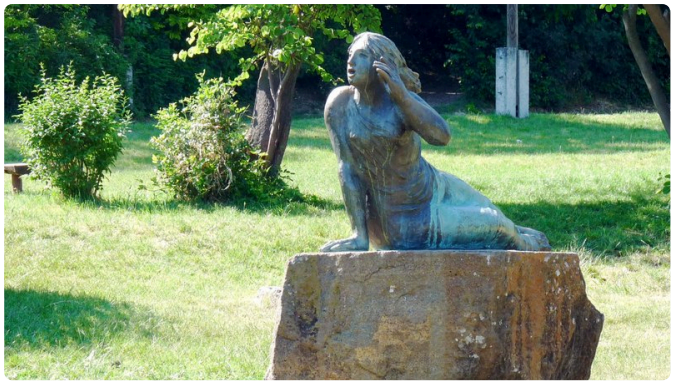
An 18th-century belfry located in Tihany. The structure is a characteristic example of local folk architecture and ecclesiastical history.

(46.91570, 17.88552)

I Gömbkilátó

A 15-meter wide aluminum sphere lookout originally built for the 1967 World Expo. It stands on a 60-meter high volcanic hill in Balatonboglár.

Kilátó utca, Balatonboglár 8630, Hungary (46.78018, 17.65985)



J Tihanyi visszhang

A famous acoustic phenomenon where sound reflects off the walls of the Benedictine Abbey. The echo is best experienced from the designated stone on Echo Hill.

25 Visszhang utca, Tihany 8237, Hungary (46.91691, 17.88846)



K Badacsony

Badacsony is the name of a region on the north shore of Lake Balaton in western Hungary, a mountain top and a town in that region.

8258, Hungary (46.80329, 17.49617)

L Church ruins

Well-preserved 13th-century Romanesque church ruins in Dörgicse. The site features a distinctive double-nave structure and remains of the original stone walls.

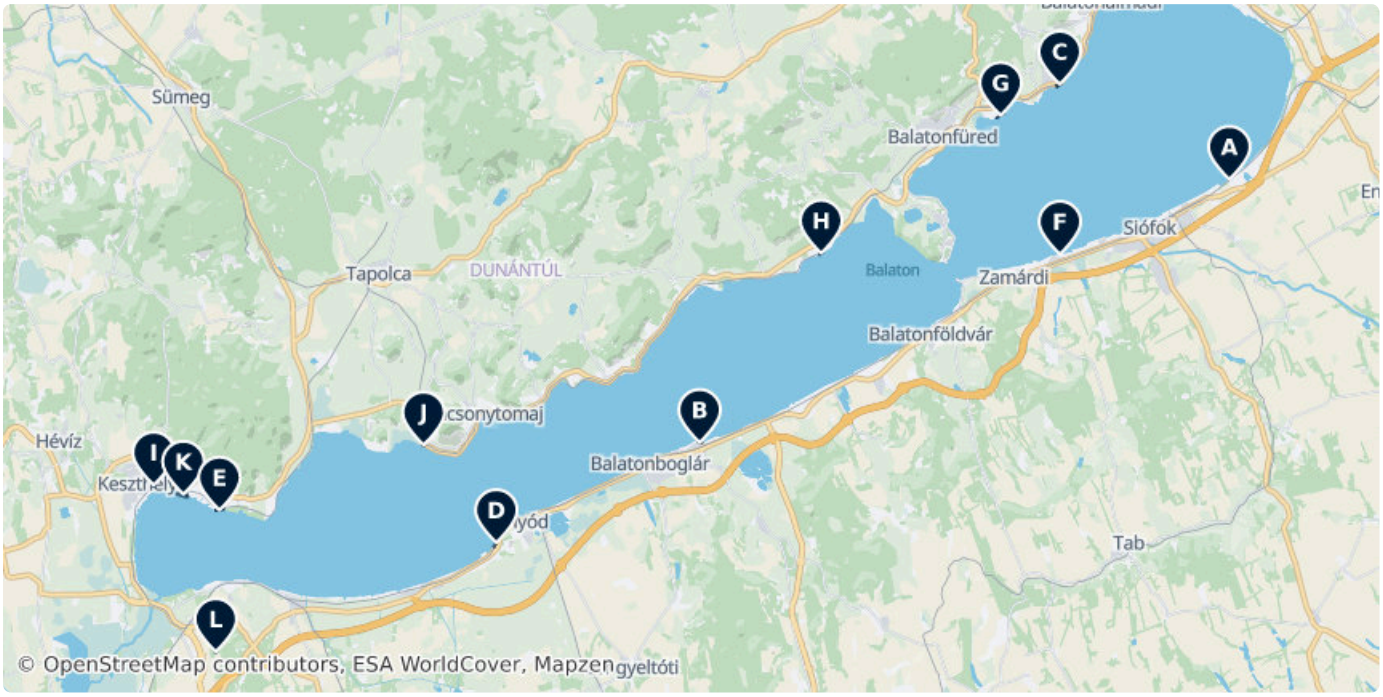
8244, Hungary (46.91486, 17.72748)

Mo–Su Open 24/7

muemlekem.hu/muemlek/show/9848

Lake Balaton Beaches & Resorts

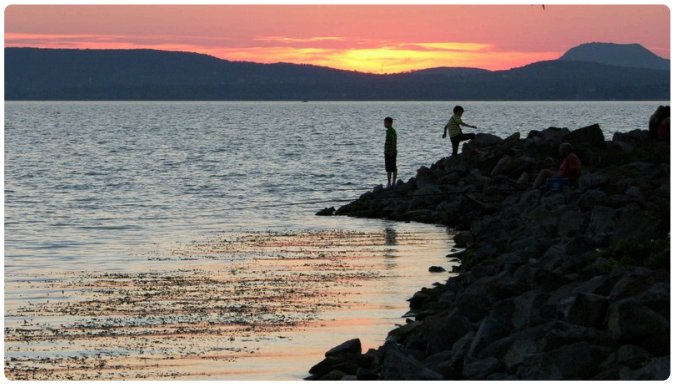
Lake Balaton, Central Europe's largest freshwater lake, features a diverse range of paid and free beaches (szabadstrand). The northern shore offers deeper waters and grassy banks, while the southern shore is characterized by shallow, sandy entries. This selection includes managed resorts with Wi-Fi and card facilities, rustic campsites at the foot of the Badacsony hills, and recreational areas like the star-shaped Csillagvár hunting lodge and the Kalandstrand adventure park.



A Szabadstrand

Free public beach with wheelchair-accessible facilities.

55 Baross Gábor utca, Siófok 8600, Hungary (46.93412, 18.11772)



B Sunshine Beach

The shore is easily accessible, making the beach ideal for little children.

Napospart utca 3, 8638 Balatonlelle (46.79067, 17.69503)

balatonlelle.hu/hu/varosunk/napf%C3%A9ny-strand



C Alsóörs Beach

A fabulous beach on the shores of the Balaton Lake. Many facilities are at your disposal.

(Unnamed Road), 8226, Hungary (46.98588, 17.98239)

D Fonyód – Bélatelepi szabadstrand

Grassy free beach located in the Bélatelep district of Fonyód.

(46.73591, 17.53279)

balatontipp.hu/balatoni_strandok/fonyod-belatelepi_szab...

E Lido strand

Paid beach resort in Vonyarcvashegy featuring credit and debit card payment options.

Fürdő utca 1, 8314 Vonyarcvashegy (46.75373, 17.31186)

Mo–Su 08:00–19:00

vonyarcvashegy.hu/strand

F Pici szabadstrand

Small, wheelchair-accessible free beach.

22a Pipacs utca, Zamárdi 8621, Hungary (46.89335, 17.98253)

turistautak.hu/poi.php

G Csopak strand

Managed beach facility offering public Wi-Fi and paid entry.

Örkény István sétány 1, 8229 Csopak (46.96890, 17.93530)

strand.csopak.hu/hu/content/szolgaltata... , +36 87 446 765

H Fövenyesi Strandfürdő

Paid beach resort located on the northern shore of the lake.

(Unnamed Road), Balatonudvari 8242, Hungary (46.89388, 17.79199)

strand.hu/strand/fovenyesi-strand-530



I Castrum Camping

Lakeside campsite located near the town of Keszthely.

(Unnamed Road), Keszthely 8360, Hungary (46.76741, 17.25937)

castrum.eu/keszthely, +36-83/312-120



J Eldorado Camping

Camping facility situated at the base of the Badacsony hills.

Badacsonytördemic 8263, Hungary (46.78927, 17.47473)

K Kalandstrand Ökokalandpark

Ecological adventure park featuring climbing walls and rope courses.

8315, Hungary (46.76240, 17.28306)

kalandstrand.hu

L Csillagvár

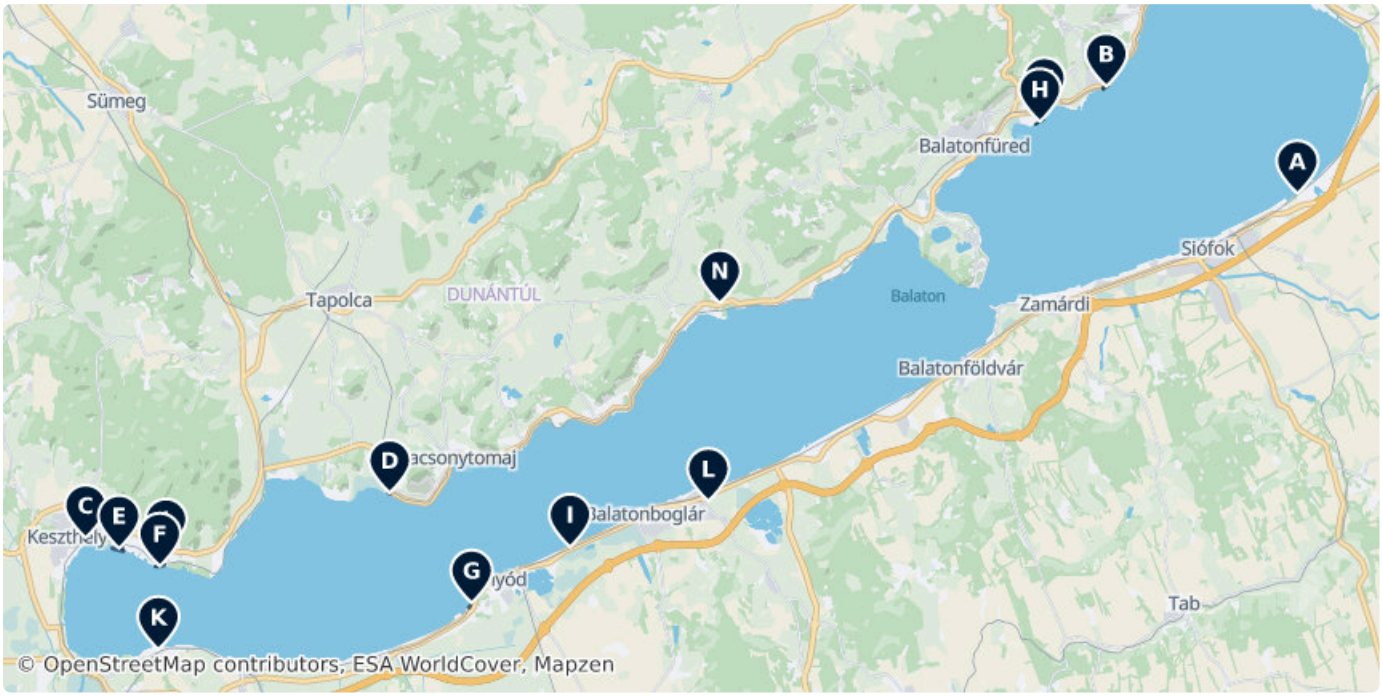
Star-shaped hunting lodge built in the 1820s, now housing a museum of border castle life.

(46.67630, 17.30886)

csillagvar.hu

Lake Balaton Resorts & Campsites

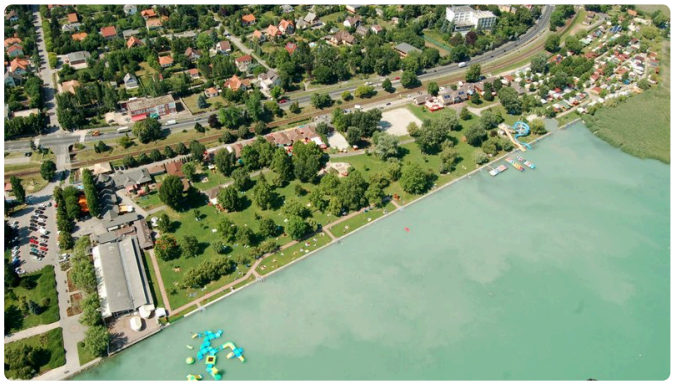
Lake Balaton features a diverse range of lakeside destinations, from the grassy shores of Csopak and Alsóörs to the climbing courses at Kalandstrand Ökokalandpark. This selection includes free public beaches (szabadstrand) and paid resorts with Wi-Fi and full facilities. Accommodation options range from traditional campsites like Castrum and Aranyhíd to specialized sites such as the Naturista Camping and the Fonyódliget youth camp. These locations provide direct lake access, recreational areas, and amenities for caravans and tents across both the northern and southern shores.



A Szabadstrand

Grassy public beach featuring wheelchair-accessible facilities.

55 Baross Gábor utca, Siófok 8600, Hungary (46.93412, 18.11772)



B Alsóörs Beach

A fabulous beach on the shores of the Balaton Lake. Many facilities are at your disposal.

(Unnamed Road), 8226, Hungary (46.98588, 17.98239)



C Castrum Camping

Campsite located near the western edge of Lake Balaton, offering pitches for tents and caravans.

(Unnamed Road), Keszthely 8360, Hungary (46.76741, 17.25937)

castrum.eu/keszthely, +36-83/312-120



D Eldorado Camping

Campsite situated at the foot of the Badacsony hills, providing access to hiking trails and local vineyards.

Badacsonytördemic 8263, Hungary (46.78927, 17.47473)

E Kalandstrand Ökokalandpark

Ecological adventure park featuring rope climbing courses and outdoor recreational activities.

8315, Hungary (46.76240, 17.28306)

kalandstrand.hu

F Lido strand

Paid beach resort featuring a sandy shore, sports fields, and payment options for credit and debit cards.

Fürdő utca 1, 8314 Vonyarcvashegy (46.75373, 17.31186)

Mo–Su 08:00–19:00

vonyarcvashegy.hu/strand

G Fonyód – Bélatelepi szabadstrand

Free public beach on the southern shore with grassy areas and views of the Badacsony mountains.

(46.73591, 17.53279)

balatontipp.hu/balatoni_strandok/fonyod-belatelepi_szab...

H Csopak strand

Well-maintained paid beach offering Wi-Fi access, children's pools, and extensive grassy sunbathing areas.

Örkény István sétány 1, 8229 Csopak (46.96890, 17.93530)

strand.csopak.hu/hu/content/szolgaltata... , +36 87 446 765

I Fonyódligeti Gyermektábor

Large youth camp and holiday facility located on the southern shore of the lake.

70 Virág utca, Fonyód 8640, Hungary (46.76301, 17.60242)

turistautak.hu/poi.php

J Eldorádó Fogadó-Kemping

Combined inn and campsite offering accommodation for travelers and outdoor enthusiasts.

(46.76069, 17.31628)

turistautak.hu/poi.php, +36 83 348714; +36 20 4761984

K Naturista Camping

Dedicated naturist campsite and beach area providing privacy for nude sunbathing and swimming.

(46.71338, 17.31100)

Mo–Su 09:00–19:00

turizmus.balatonbereny...., +36 85 377 715;+36 70 379 7901

L Aranyhíd Kemping

Lakeside campsite offering basic facilities for tents and campers.

(46.78522, 17.70042)

turistautak.hu/poi.php, +36 85 350449

M Csopaki Üdülőfalu és Kemping

Holiday village and campsite equipped with power supply, drinking water, and facilities for caravans and tents.

Sport utca 9, 8229 Csopak (46.97421, 17.93852)

csopakiudulofalu.hu, +36 20 240 3894

N Kalandpark

Outdoor adventure park featuring climbing facilities and rope courses.

(Unnamed Road), Zánka 8251, Hungary (46.88116, 17.70863)

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