

### *Hungary: Vineyards & Riverboats* Cycling

Tour code: CHU

Revised: Oct 04

This tour has been specially designed for those who would like to enjoy a week cycling in one of Europe's most cycle-friendly countries, where the hills are of modest scale. The first part of the tour explores the beautiful hills and forests west of the wine growing area of Eger; the later part of the tour traverses the plains on either side of the River Danube. The tour ends with a riverboat trip downstream from Hungary's ancient capital, Esztergom, to the modern capital of Budapest. At almost every turn there are historic sites, and you'll want to linger a little longer in these old towns draped in history, especially Eger, Esztergom, Vac and Szentendre.

**Season:** April to mid-October.

#### Level of Difficulty

We grade the tour as A/B (easy to moderate). Clients should be able to cycle for up to between 35 miles/56 km and 45 miles/72 km per day across a mixture of level and hilly terrain in rain or sun. The terrain is gently rolling, mostly on country roads, not on biking trails. There will often be cars around and on some sections traffic may be quite heavy. You will find yourself in countryside where not much English is spoken. Young people generally understand some, but in the villages especially out of the main Summer season, communication can make this tour a little adventure! Our operator Adam will help you in case of any problems. You should also be able to affect basic repairs to your bike, exchanging inner tubes and so on.

#### The Bikes

These are normally 18-21 speed touring/hybrid style bikes, but we aim to reserve bikes to your requirements and specifications. Cycle hire fee £30 GBP per week (or equivalent amount in other convertible currency such as US dollars or Euros), payable at the start of the tour. Helmets are included but many customers prefer to bring their own – we cannot guarantee that our particular helmets will fit your particular bonce! We need to know customers' height and inside leg measurements. A basic repair kit including spare inner tube is included but it is recommended that cyclists take out a small multitool for minor adjustments enroute.

#### Baggage Transfers

Each day that you move on to new accommodation during the tour your baggage (normally up to 20kg / 44 pounds per person) will be transferred to await your arrival at the next night's stop. Please note that for cycling tours this service does not generally include bikes or riders, except on the transfer days mentioned in the text.

#### Maps & Route Notes

We provide especially written route descriptions for each day's cycling, together with a road map.

#### Accommodation & Meals

Accommodation is in country hotels and pensions. Bed and breakfasts only are included. Picnic lunches are not included, but materials for picnics can be purchased in each of the towns and villages where you stay. Evening meals are also not included, but you will be able to find places to go and eat, either at your hotel or elsewhere in the towns where you are staying. On some days there are also conveniently located restaurants en route. The hotels on nights 1 to 5 of this tour all have rooms with fully en-suite facilities.

**Night 1: Eger.** In Eger your 3\* hotel is in the centre of town, close to the fortress.

**Night 2: Matrafured.** Here your 3\* hotel has a swimming pool, a tanning saloon, and a sauna.

**Night 3: Matraszentimre.** Here you again stay at a 3\* hotel.

**Night 4: Erdotarcsa.** In Erdotarcsa you stay at an historic 3\* hotel which has been converted from an 18th century baroque mansion.

**Night 5: Szentendre.** Here your 3\* hotel is located in the small town center only five minutes walk from the Danube.

**Night 6: Esztergom.** Here you stay at a pension where not all the rooms have fully en-suite facilities, although all have shower and TV.

**Night 7: Budapest.** Our first choice accommodation is in a 3\* hotel which is housed on a ship on the Danube. Why not extend your tour by taking extra nights in Budapest?

## Arrival

Scheduled flights from London Heathrow to Budapest with British Airways.

Please note that there is a flight supplement in July and August.

## Itinerary Guide

**Day 1:** Arrival in Hungary. Transfer to Eger by train (included in tour cost). After arriving at Budapest airport you transfer by taxi to the central East station and then by train to the town of Eger. The train tickets (Budapest-Eger) are included in the tour price. Eger itself is a lovely Baroque city full of historic buildings. The town is surrounded by vineyards, which are the source of the deep red wine known as Egri Bikaver or Bull's Blood. The area called Szepasszonyvolgy, only a 20minute walk from the cathedral, has dozens of wine cellars. In Eger you are fitted out with your bicycles for the tour.

**Day 2:** Eger to Matrafured. 48km/30 miles. Today you pass through picturesque villages such as Kisnana with its 5-storey watch tower, Domoszlo with a partly Romanesque church, Markaz with the ruins of a 14th century Gothic castle and Abasar, where the 11th century national king Samuel Aba is buried in the Benedictine Abbey. The health resort of Matrafured is set in beautiful woodland with abundant wildlife.

**Day 3:** Matrafured to Matraszentimre. A short but strenuous day of 24km/15 miles. Breathtaking views over the forested Matra Hills. There may be the opportunity for some hard pedaling as you can make a diversion from Matrahaza (700m/2300 feet) to the summit of Kekesteto, Hungary's highest summit at 1014m/3326 feet. Continuing towards Matraszentimre you ride through Galatyeto, a health resort situated on a mountaintop at 964m/3162 feet.

**Day 4:** Matraszentimre to Erdotarcsa. 48km/30 miles. There are steep descents on the way down from the hills to Paszto, where there is a monastery dating from the 12th century, and then on to your overnight stop at Szirak, one of the most beautiful spots in Hungary at the foot of the Cserhat Hills.

**Day 5:** Erdotarcsa to Szentendre. A longish but easy day of 64km/40 miles. We visit Vac (former Austrian name Warten) is a quieter and less 'touristy' place than the places on the west bank of the Danube. After destruction by the Turks the town was mostly rebuilt in the 18th century by the Catholic bishops, whose palace dates from 1768. There are several

beautiful churches and squares. Here you take the ferry across one of the branches of the Danube to Szentendre Island. Szentendre (St Andrew), on the right bank of the Danube, is one of the most picturesque towns in Hungary. The chief attraction of the town is its location: a small town on a big river. It was settled in the 17th century by Serbian merchants fleeing the Turks, and still retains some Balkan character in its narrow winding streets and numerous Orthodox Christian churches. It has a thriving colony of artists and sculptors and many art galleries.

**Day 6:** Szentendre to Esztergom. 34km/21miles. Upstream from Szentendre, at the western end of the 'Danube Bend', is Esztergom, one of Hungary's most historic cities, which was the nation's capital from the 10th to the 13th centuries. The 2nd century Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote his '*Meditations*' while camping here on the banks of the Danube. After the Tatar invasion of 1241 the king and court moved to Buda, but Esztergom remained the ecclesiastical capital. The city was ravaged by the Turks in 1543 and much of the present town dates from the 18th century. The river now forms the border with Slovakia and the bridge destroyed in WW2 has been repaired recently.

**Day 7:** Say good-bye to the bikes and walk 10 minutes from the hotel to the ferry pier. Riverboat to Budapest and transfer to your floating hotel on the Danube (boat tickets not included in tour price). An opportunity for some sightseeing in the capital of Hungary; or to sit back and let the great river roll by.

**Day 8.** Depart Budapest, depending on your flight time there maybe time for some more sightseeing.

## End of Tour

The tour ends in Budapest after breakfast on day 8. Return by taxi to Budapest airport (taxi not included in tour price). Or why not extend your tour by spending some extra nights in Budapest? Please enquire for details and prices.