

Travel Lightly

**50 Sustainable Tourism
Success Stories in Hungary**

7 Categories | 7 Regions | 50 Success Stories

This publication is the result of a collaborative effort by a joint team of staff from Visit Hungary and Sustainia.

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Thank you

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Disclaimer

This publication has been prepared by Visit Hungary in collaboration with Sustainia with careful attention. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, some information may change over time or contain unintentional errors. All figures and data reflect the situation at the time of publication and are provided without guarantee of completeness or timeliness.

Print

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Cover

Megyer-hegyi Tengerszem (Lake Eye of Mount Megyer) near Sárospatak in northeastern Hungary, a former millstone quarry, naturally turned into a tranquil lake and now serves as an example of how post-industrial landscapes can support sustainable tourism. © Visit Hungary

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About Visit Hungary

Visit Hungary is the national tourism organisation responsible for promoting Hungary as an attractive and sustainable travel destination.

Covering 93,000 km² with a population of 9.6 million, Hungary offers visitors a rich mix of natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and vibrant urban life, from over 1,500 protected areas, 22 wine regions, and 8 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including the capital city, Budapest. The largest cities in the countryside, such as Debrecen, Szeged, Pécs, Miskolc, and Győr and beautiful destinations like Lake Balaton, Lake Hévíz, Lake Fertő, and the Tokaj Wine Region offer unique experiences in Hungary throughout the year.

Across the country, Visit Hungary drives sustainable tourism development, fosters innovation, and creates long-term value for visitors, communities, and businesses. Through its nationwide Tourinform network, collaboration with destination management organisations (DMOs), data-driven decision-making, and international and national partnerships, Visit Hungary ensures coordinated promotion, quality services, and strategic growth of the Hungarian tourism sector.

PREFACE

Beyond Beauty: Shaping Hungary’s Sustainable Future



Hungary’s charm lies not only in its breathtaking landscapes, rich history, and vibrant culture - it lies in the promise that future generations will experience them too. As we look ahead, the question is not just how many visitors we welcome, but how we welcome them. At Visit Hungary, we believe sustainability is not a box to be ticked; it is an invitation to rethink how tourism can create value - for travellers, for local communities, and for our country as a whole.

This brochure brings together 50 inspiring examples of sustainable tourism from across Hungary. They are stories of people and places turning ideas into action: A guesthouse reducing its footprint, a village reviving old traditions, a winery championing biodiversity, a city reimagining mobility. Together, they show that sustainability is not a burden - it is a wellspring of creativity, innovation, and resilience.

Created in collaboration with our partners at Sustainia in Copenhagen, this collection is meant to be more than a showcase. It is a call to action. My hope is that these pages will spark ideas, encourage collaboration, and empower everyone working in tourism to take the next step, however small or bold, towards a more responsible future.

Sustainable tourism is not just about protecting what we have - it is about enhancing the experience for travellers and hosts alike, ensuring that the beauty, culture, and hospitality that make Hungary unique continue to thrive. With shared commitment, we build a destination that remains beautiful and welcoming, while being ready for the future.

Let’s shape that future - together.

Olivér Csendes
CEO, Visit Hungary

Travel Lightly in Hungary

About the publication

Imagine exploring Hungary in a way that leaves a positive mark on the land, the communities, and the people you meet while creating lasting memories that become the true treasures of your journey. This publication takes you on that journey, showcasing **50 pioneering and practical examples** of sustainable tourism, where innovation, culture, and nature come together to create experiences that are responsible, memorable, and truly inspiring.

Travel across the country in smarter, cleaner ways - through electric transport networks, scenic cycling routes, and low-emission tours that let you discover Hungary without leaving a heavy footprint. Stay in accommodations that combine authenticity and thoughtfulness, from boutique eco-lodges to green-certified guesthouses offering comfort with care for the environment.

Step into eco-villages where communities live as models of sustainability, managing energy, water, and resources thoughtfully, and proving that low-impact living can thrive in harmony with tradition. Savour the flavours of Hungary through chefs and restaurants embracing farm-to-table practices, zero-waste kitchens, and locally sourced ingredients that nourish both people and place.

Wander through vineyards where organic and biodynamic viticulture produces exceptional wines while protecting the land, biodiversity, and heritage of each region. Immerse yourself in festivals, parks, and outdoor adventures that bring you closer to nature and culture responsibly, offering moments of discovery that are both enriching and low-impact. Behind the scenes, organisations, certifications, and innovative tools empower tourism operators to implement sustainable practices, track progress, and build a resilient, forward-looking sector.

Together, these stories form **a mosaic of a country in transition**, proving that sustainability in Hungary is not just a concept, but a living, thriving reality. Every step, every choice, every innovation contributes to experiences that are meaningful, responsible, and unforgettable.

Methodology

This publication is the result of a close collaboration between **Visit Hungary** and **Sustainia**. Since 2009, Copenhagen-based Sustainia has specialised in identifying, mapping, and communicating sustainable solutions worldwide - vetting and verifying thousands of practices, technologies, and strategies across industries.

In 2025, with guidance from Visit Hungary, Sustainia applied this expertise to Hungarian tourism, building a robust process to ensure the 50 cases featured here are credible, diverse, and inspiring.

The process unfolded in several steps:

Broad Call and Initial Screening

A public call for candidates invited submissions from across Hungary's tourism sector. This provided a wide-ranging pool of potential best practices reflecting diverse geographies, business models, and approaches to sustainability.

Data Gathering and Quantitative Assessment

Up-to-date information and background data were collected on each candidate. This material formed the basis for an initial quantitative analysis, ensuring that only practices with a clear and demonstrable sustainability profile moved forward.

Data Protection and Information Handling

Applicants' data has been handled confidentially in line with Regulation 2016/679 of the European Parliament and the European Council (General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR). By submitting their documents, applicants consented to the processing of their data by Visit Hungary Zrt., and the Hungarian Tourism Agency Zrt., as data controllers, in accordance with the GDPR. Applicants have also consented to the publication of their data on the Visit Hungary website.

In-Depth Interviews

The most crucial phase of the process involved personal conversations with the founders, managers, and visionaries behind the practices. Conducted in Hungarian and later translated into English for clarity and readability, these interviews allowed us to move far beyond facts and figures. They revealed the deeper motivations - the philosophies, values, and missions that drive each sustainability journey. They also shed light on operations, from circular economy models to renewable energy solutions and waste reduction techniques that shape everyday practice. Importantly, the interviews explored how success is measured, not only in financial terms but through tangible benefits to the environment and local communities. Finally, they opened a window to the future, uncovering long-term visions, the challenges ahead, and the ambitions that will define the next decade of sustainable tourism in Hungary.

Evaluation Against Core Criteria

Each case was then assessed against four key criteria:

1. Relevance to established sustainability themes.
2. Diversity across tourism sectors and activities.
3. Strength of a compelling, fact-based story.
4. Geographic spread within Hungary.

Final Selection and Storytelling

In unison, Visit Hungary and Sustainia curated the final 50 best practices, ensuring a balanced and inspiring collection. Each case has been written up as a story that illustrates not just what is being done, but why it matters and how it creates lasting value.

Together, these 50 cases offer a snapshot of the vibrant ecosystem of sustainable tourism in Hungary, celebrating the people, places, and practices that are shaping the country's future as a responsible and innovative travel destination.

The collection is published in both Hungarian and English versions, and is available in print and online.

INTRODUCTION

Criteria for Selection

The 50 featured best practices have been assessed on the following four criteria:

Relevance to established themes

The extent to which the candidates align with the seven predefined categories - mobility, accommodations, eco-villages, gastronomy, wineries, activities, and resources - as well as the overarching perspective of sustainable tourism in Hungary.

Collection variety

The extent to which candidates represent a diverse range of services and solutions within the tourism sector. This criterion ensures variety within each category whenever possible and highlights the broad spectrum of Hungarian tourism initiatives and offerings.

Compelling story

The extent to which candidates present a unique approach, significant impact, or additional co-benefits, and are supported by credible and complete information.

Geographic diversity

Exemplary projects from across Hungary's seven statistical regions are presented to showcase the country as a sustainable travel destination in its entirety and to reflect the geographic diversity of what is on offer.

Travel Trends and Opportunities

Hungary’s tourism has rebounded with strength. In 2024, the sector welcomed 18,2 million guests, generating 44,9 million guest nights. Accommodation revenues rose 18% to HUF 1,065 billion (~€2.710.000.000), catering exceeded HUF 2,000 billion (~€5.088.000.000), and the industry now contributes nearly 13% of Hungary’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Early 2025 is already showing double-digit growth in international arrivals, and 2026 beckons with even more promise.

The shifts are not unique to Hungary. They mirror wider European travel patterns. Southern Europe’s share of tourism has dropped by 8% as travellers search for milder climates. Longer trips of 7-12 nights now account for 42% of travel, while 13% of travellers set budgets above €1.500 (~590,000 HUF). Event-driven travel is up 3%, fuelled by festivals and heritage gatherings. Health-focused and regenerative travel is expanding, with spas and retreats growing in demand. Artificial intelligence (AI) already shapes the planning of 18% of cultural and heritage travellers. And 37% of travellers now design multi-location journeys within a single country.

Hungary is naturally well placed to position itself accordingly. Its geography is diverse, and offers lakes, rivers, and national parks travellers now seek. Spa culture and wine regions are famous worldwide, and festival calendars align closely with the demand for wellness and event-driven travel. Hungary’s scale makes multi-location itineraries feasible, and its rail backbone, and the development of bike routes could underpin car-free journeys.

However, behind the momentum lies a sector still finding its shape. Travellers are expecting journeys that flow across regions - linking Balaton with the wine valleys, or thermal spas with cultural festivals. In practice, destinations often market themselves in isolation, so visitors stitch their own itineraries rather than step into ready-made journeys.

Mobility paints a similar picture. Hungary’s rail network is extensive, yet most arrivals still rely on cars. For many, reaching a hillside eco-village or a hidden vineyard means an improvised shuttle or car-share arranged by the host. The potential is there for rail-linked packages and greener arrivals, but the habit of private travel still dominates.

Sustainability itself is unevenly lived. In some places, it is tradition, featuring clean-up events, farm-to-table gastronomy, and heritage-based workshops. Elsewhere, it risks slipping into abstract meanings that younger audiences often brush aside. What resonates most are the tangible experiences: When visitors can taste, touch, or join in.

Resource use tells a similar story of contrasts. While some businesses compost, recycle, or repurpose leftovers into new dishes, selective collection remains patchy across regions. The skills gap also shows through: A handful of operators train their staff in water use, energy savings, or composting, but broad, systemic training is still catching up.

Community energy runs high, especially in eco-villages and rural festivals, though many of these depend on older volunteers who have carried the torch for decades. The question of how to bring younger generations into the fold is increasingly glaring.

Regulation and bureaucracy also shape the pace of change. Non-compostable thermal paper is still legally required for receipts. Small-scale producers struggle to formalise partnerships, limiting their access to restaurants and hotels. Renewable energy pilots, from solar to biofuels, face long approval times. For many micro-enterprises, the paperwork rewards the large and established rather than the innovative and local. The passion and ideas are here; the frameworks often lag.

And measurement, while improving, is still in its early stages. Only few tourism service providers track their footprints in ways that allow comparisons or joint marketing. Progress exists, but much of it is told through stories rather than numbers.

Hungary’s tourism sector is neither lagging nor finished. It is a landscape in transition, with deep traditions and modern expectations rubbing against each other. The country has the assets - thermal corridors, vineyard stewardship, hiking culture, and a resilient hospitality spirit.

The next layer in this transition is digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) which is arriving in tourism with a force that few fully grasp. The opportunity lies not in replacing the human touch that defines hospitality, but in amplifying it. AI can turn raw sustainability data into compelling stories, measure food miles across gastronomy supply chains, or optimise vineyard irrigation for resource efficiency. It can map regional journeys that connect spas, wineries, and eco-villages into seamless loops, reducing reliance on cars by promoting rail-linked mobility. For small operators, AI could mean practical tools: Menu planners that align daily dishes with seasonal availability, chatbots that explain a festival’s zero-waste plan, or dashboards that show guests how much energy and water their stay is saving.

Indeed, the real challenge is not technology but mindset. Hungary’s competitive edge lies in authenticity, and AI must serve that, not flatten it. If embraced carefully, it can give visibility to impact, make sustainability measurable, and help rural businesses stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Europe’s best.

Overall, the task ahead is less about fixing and more about connecting: Linking regions into journeys, embedding sustainability into skills and stories, and giving shape to impact so that it can be seen as clearly as it is felt.

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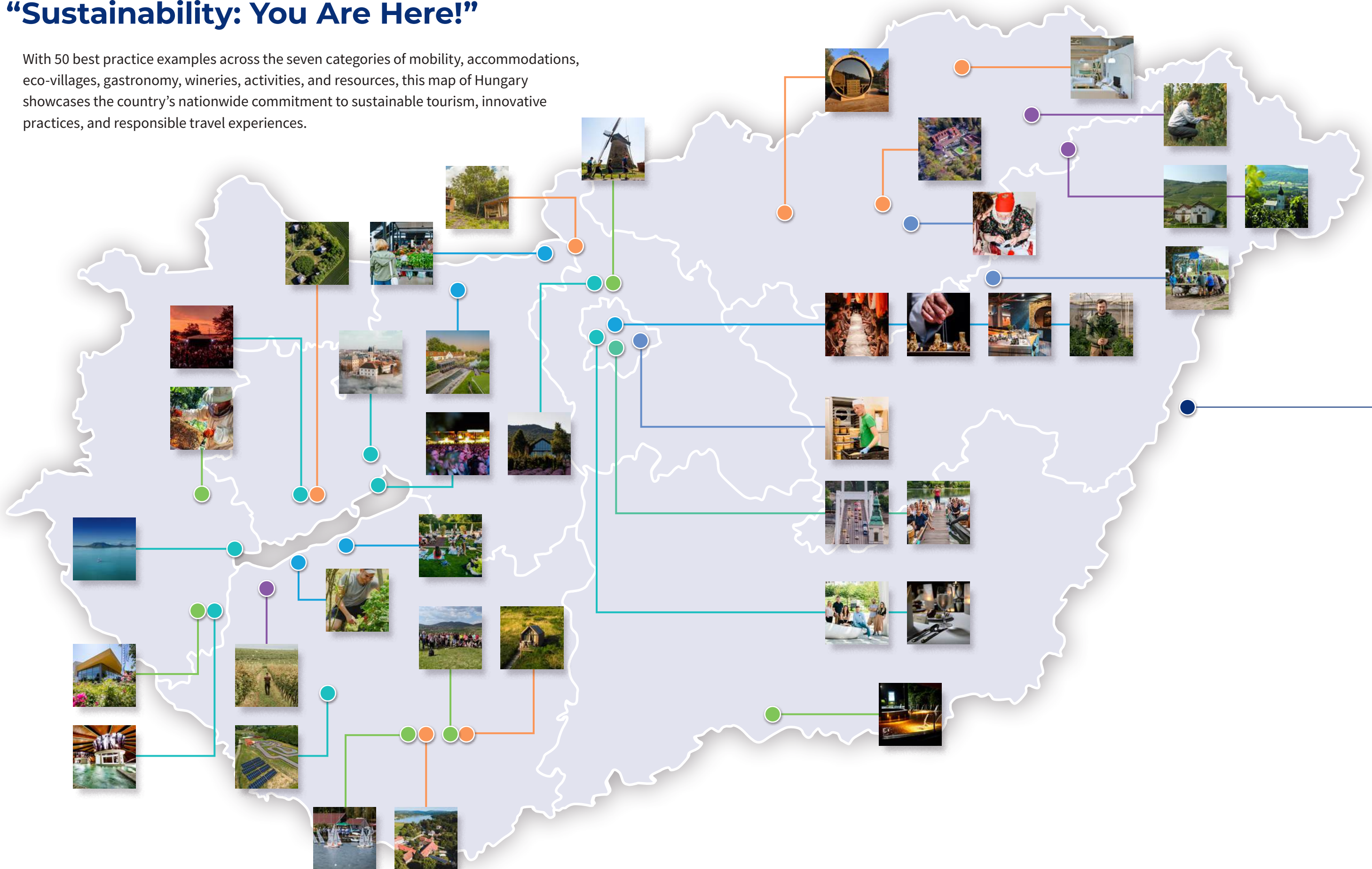
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“Sustainability: You Are Here!”

With 50 best practice examples across the seven categories of mobility, accommodations, eco-villages, gastronomy, wineries, activities, and resources, this map of Hungary showcases the country's nationwide commitment to sustainable tourism, innovative practices, and responsible travel experiences.





Green mobility is vital in Hungary, such as this tram travelling through the Liberty Bridge of Budapest.

MOBILITY

Hungary’s potential for sustainable mobility is built into its geography. An extensive national rail network connects major cities and towns, offering a low-carbon alternative to cars, while varied landscapes invite exploration on foot or by bike. Yet, behind this potential lies the persistent challenge of car dependency. For many visitors, reaching a hillside eco-lodge or a remote winery still means relying on a private vehicle, leaving the greenest travel options underutilised.

This presents a critical gap between infrastructure and habit. The „last mile“, the journey from the train station to the final destination, often remains the biggest hurdle, preventing the full integration of public transport into tourism experiences. However, a shift is underway. Driven by a new generation of conscious travellers and innovative providers, the focus is moving toward connecting the dots: Creating seamless, car-free journeys that are both convenient and enriching.

The following cases showcase this transition in action. From city-wide public transport overhauls and corporate travel reforms to a legendary hiking network built around rail access, these initiatives are tackling the mobility challenge at every scale. They prove that by linking regions, leveraging existing infrastructure, and promoting a culture of slow, mindful travel, Hungary can pave the way for a truly sustainable tourism experience.

MACRO TRENDS

Public transport is reshaping travel in Hungary. National and county passes make rail and bus journeys affordable and flexible, while seasonal destination tickets encourage spontaneous trips. Rail-first tourism packages are emerging too, with operators pairing train travel with spa weekends or vineyard tours. Even corporate travel is shifting, as firms cut back on flights under 500 kilometres in favour of rail.

Nature plays its part as well. The 2,500 km Blue Trail is seeing record momentum, with around 15,000 hike completions each year. Each section begins and ends at public transport nodes, proving that low-impact mobility can support both recreation and regional economies.

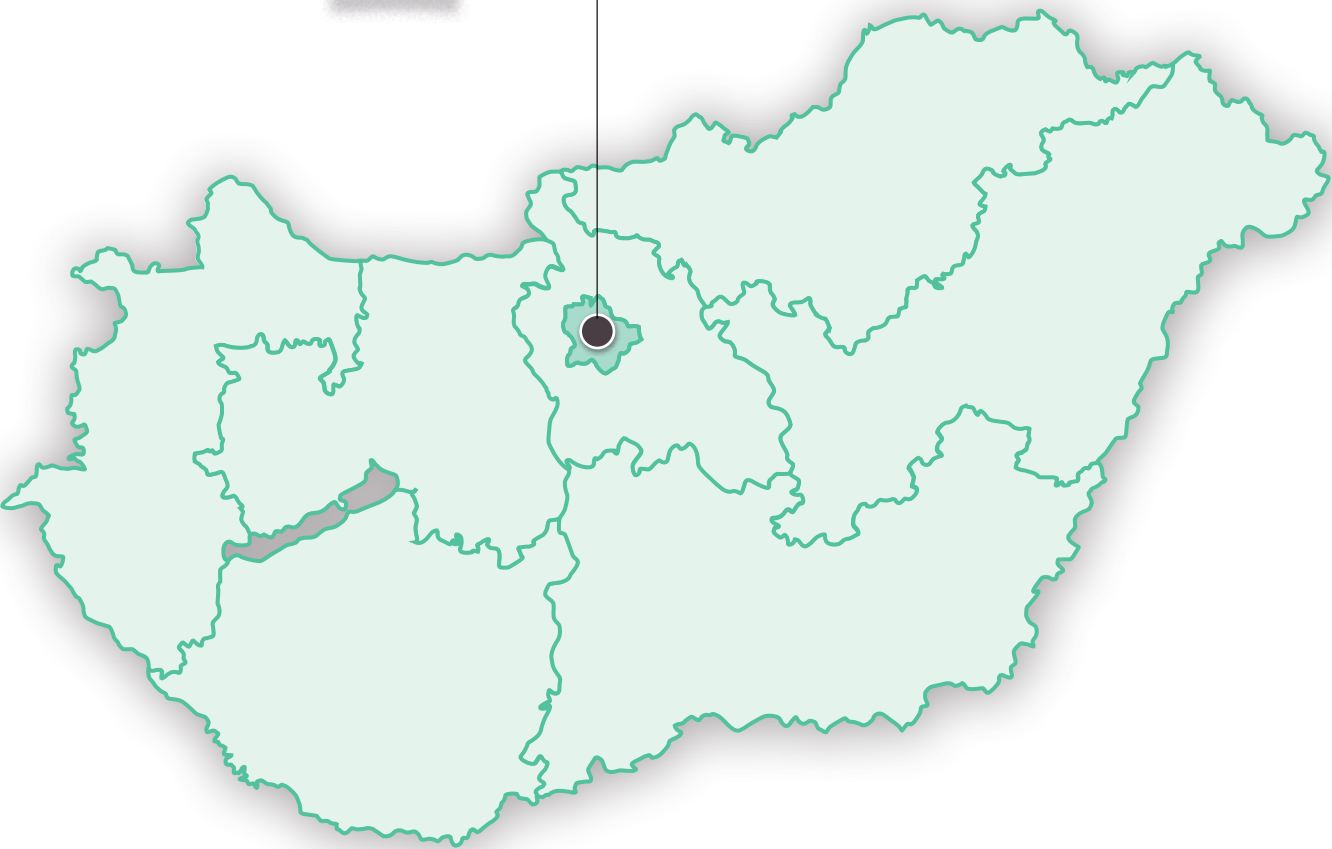
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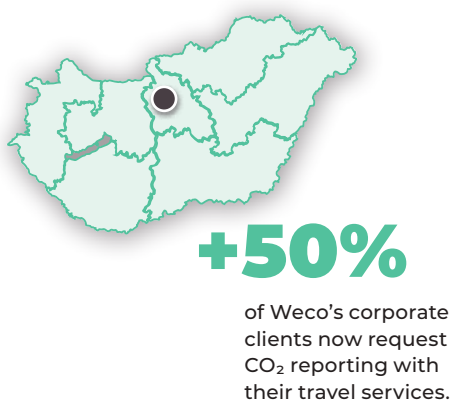


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Weco travel: Smarter trips, lighter footprints

Budapest's Weco Travel helps companies cut emissions without sacrificing business goals. Through route optimisation, pushing rail over flights, and strategic carbon offsets, they're transforming corporate mobility - without slowing down travel.



HIGHLIGHTS

Some clients ask Weco to compare the cheapest travel option with the most sustainable one, signalling a cultural shift in corporate mobility.

Weco's sustainability breakfasts and internal workshops have inspired partners such as Budapest Airport to replicate them.

The company has reached more than 100 university students through guest lectures on sustainable travel, showing its educational reach.

Corporate travel is undergoing a reckoning, and Weco Travel is proving that smarter mobility is possible. Based in Budapest, the company has embedded sustainability into its DNA, gaining fresh momentum as the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) sets higher expectations. Founded in 1990 as Chemol Travel, the company became part of the Danish-owned Weco-Travel Central Eastern Europe network in 2006. Today, Weco Travel operates across Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Romania, and as a member of RADIUS Global Travel Management it also supports multinational clients worldwide.

Weco acts as both advisor and role model, helping clients rethink mobility strategies while applying the same standards internally. The philosophy is clear: Not all travel should stop, but it must evolve. Weco helps clients calculate emissions, cut layovers, and swap flights for rail whenever possible. Beyond route design, greener hotels and fuel-efficient airline fleets are prioritised. Some clients even ask to compare the cheapest option against the most sustainable - showing how awareness is shifting. Weco also provides monthly CO₂ reports and offers vetted carbon offsetting through a Hungarian partner, ensuring credibility rather than greenwashing.

What sets Weco apart is how it blends pragmatism with ambition. "The goal isn't to cancel travel, but to rationalise it - find the golden mean," says CEO Balázs Horváth. This balance is also practiced internally: Weco has shifted quarterly board meetings online to cut flights, and created a five-member sustainability group to embed green thinking in every department. Employees attend "sustainability breakfasts" and swap events - initiatives so successful that Budapest Airport reached out to replicate them.

Beyond client services, Weco works on itself. It has set 2030 reduction targets, continuously tracks its footprint with external partners, and even challenges its biggest obstacle: Energy use from server hosting. Although server parks may resist

renewable energy, Weco is pushing the conversation forward. Internally, waste sorting, reusable lunch boxes, and regular expert talks reinforce that sustainability is not a marketing add-on, but lived daily. Authenticity, not greenwashing, is the standard.

In a world of hybrid work and carbon scrutiny, Weco Travel's model feels ahead of its time. It shows what the future of business mobility looks like: Measured, meaningful, and mission-driven. For Weco, sustainability is not a destination but a journey - one that must be built into every trip, every policy, and every employee habit. It's not just about getting there, but also about how and why.



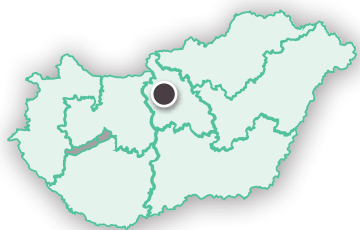
Budapest, Elisabeth Bridge (Erzsébet híd) - Ferenciek Square (Ferenciek tere).

“The goal isn't to cancel travel, but to rationalise it - find the golden mean.

- Balázs Horváth, Managing Director of Weco travel

Humtour: Hungary's gateway to eco-conscious exploration

Humtour offers immersive eco-tours from Budapest, fusing biodiversity, local gastronomy, and cultural heritage. recognised as Hungary's first Platinum Good Travel Seal organisation, their journeys promote sustainable travel and community engagement.



+2800

participants took part in Humtour organised events since 2021.

HIGHLIGHTS

Their team-building retreats bring up to 100 participants into direct collaboration with local farmers and artisans, boosting rural economies.

Tours like the Beaver Safari in Hortobágy double as biodiversity lessons, with guides teaching visitors about wetland conservation.

Every itinerary is designed with minimal waste: Humtour provides zero-waste picnic kits and promotes local, seasonal food sourcing.

Humtour is a pioneer in Hungary's sustainable tourism, offering eco-conscious journeys that connect travellers with the country's rich natural landscapes and cultural heritage. Founded in 2017 by Ágnes Szabó-Diószegehy, a trained social worker with a background in international relations, the company uses tourism as a tool for rural and community development.

The idea for Humtour - short for "Humanitarian tourism" - was first sparked in Venezuela, where Ágnes worked in a volunteer programme and later travelled widely, immersing herself in local people, culture, and history. This ethos has since shaped Humtour's mission to provide first-hand, unique experiences for travellers seeking a deeper understanding of their destinations. Their tours, easily accessible from Budapest, provide a unique blend of adventure, education, and gastronomy, all while emphasising environmental responsibility. Just in the last five years, they managed to coordinate 30 corporate teambuilding events, and 163 private events.

According to Ágnes, programmes are built around community experiences. The goal is to create a lasting experience for the travellers by allowing them to have as many connections as possible with the places and people they visit. One of their



Travellers get to try different crafts, sometimes as a form of team building exercise.



Humtour's team-building activities are part of a diverse portfolio of programmes designed to connect communities, colleagues, and the natural world.

standout offerings is the Beaver Safari in Hortobágy, where guests embark on a guided tour to observe Europe's largest rodent in its natural habitat. The experience is set against the backdrop of untouched nature, offering a serene and educational escape from the city. Participants are guided by local conservation experts who share insights into Hungary's wetland ecosystems, reinforcing Humtour's mission to join travel and environmental education.

For culinary traditions, Humtour organises farm visits and workshops. For instance, a 100-person corporate retreat for the company Zwack in the Szatmár region was organised and included hands-on cheese-making, blacksmithing, and scone-baking alongside seniors at a local social institute. This retreat received overwhelmingly positive feedback for its authentic community integration.

Humtour's approach goes beyond simple eco-tourism; it reflects a deeper philosophy of "travel with a purpose." Their Sustainability & Biodiversity Action Plan outlines initiatives that integrate biodiversity conservation into every itinerary. Examples include promoting native species awareness during nature tours, minimising waste through zero-waste picnic options, and supporting local craftspeople whose work preserves traditional skills. Moreover, all trips are designed with minimal environmental impact, utilising eco-certified transport options whenever possible.

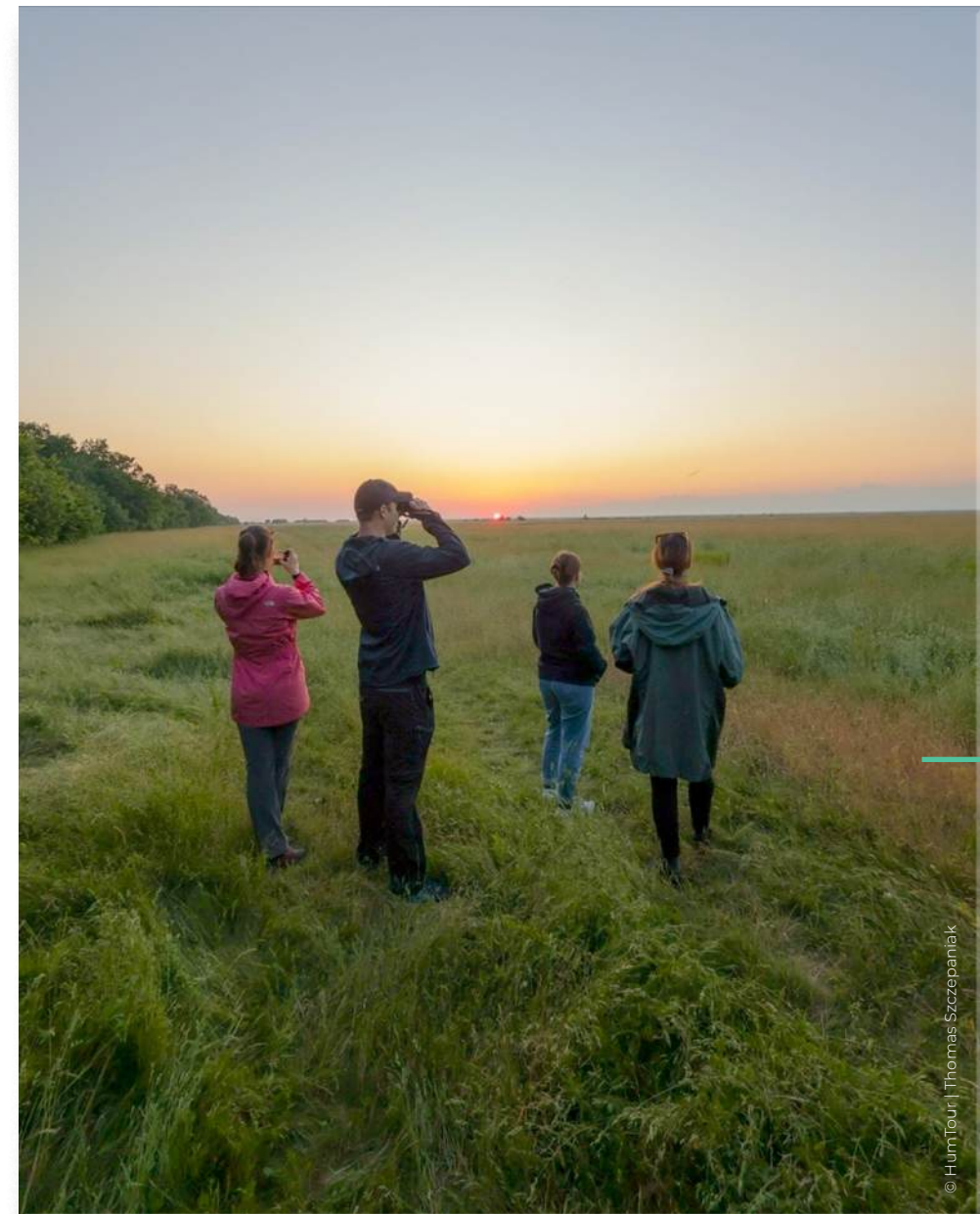
Their commitment to sustainable travel is further validated by the Good Travel Seal certification, awarded at the prestigious Platinum level. Developed by Green Destinations and aligned with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) criteria, this certification evaluates areas

such as nature conservation, community engagement, and carbon footprint management. Humtour's Platinum status signals that they not only meet but exceed international sustainability standards, placing them among Hungary's top responsible travel operators.

In regions like the Őrség and Lake Tisza, Humtour has helped drive eco-tourism, fostering greater awareness for conservation. The company's model ensures that tourism revenue stays local: Accommodation providers, farmers, artisans, and guides all benefit economically. Backed by local partnerships, the company collaborates with national parks, biodiversity NGOs, and rural communities to co-develop experiences that deliver tangible benefits, and since 2021, Humtour has had 2802 participants.

With a focus on green mobility, Humtour encourages travellers to explore Hungary's countryside in an eco-friendly manner, advocating for low-emission transportation options and offsetting carbon emissions where unavoidable.

Humtour essentially redefines tourism as a vehicle for positive change. Their model proves that unforgettable journeys and lasting impacts can go hand in hand - turning wanderlust into a force for conservation, culture, and community empowerment.



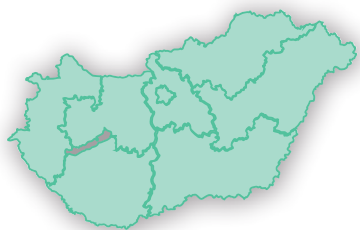
Participants observe the sunrise over Hortobágy, a setting where Humtour links immersive travel with biodiversity education

“We try to create lasting experiences for the travellers by allowing them to have as many connections as possible with the places and people they visit.

- Ágnes Szabó-Diószegehy, Founder and CEO of Humtour

Accessibility meets sustainability on the blue trail

The Országos Kékkör - Hungary’s legendary Blue Trail network - has evolved into a model for sustainable, accessible ecotourism. Spanning over 2,500 km, it connects forests, villages, and history while promoting slow travel, rural livelihoods, and foot travel over cars.



+2,500

kilometres of trail makes up The Blue Trail, making it Europe's first and longest continuous long-distance marked route.

HIGHLIGHTS

Around 15,000 new hikers - including tourists - join the Blue Trail each year, with 100,000 official stamp books sold between 2019 and 2023.

The Természetjáró app has been downloaded 500,000 times and records 6-7 million uses annually, while a new Blue Trail app now offers digital stamping.

All 27 trail sections begin and end at railway or bus nodes, embedding public transport access into the hiking experience since the 1930s.

Few tourism infrastructures combine accessibility and sustainability as completely as the Országos Kékkör. This 2,584-kilometre hiking network, linking the National Blue Trail, Rockenbauer Pál South Transdanubian Blue Trail, and Alföld Blue Trail, stretches across Hungary as a car-free green artery. Its roots go back to the 1930s, when railway worker hiking clubs first marked the route.

At its heart is the National Blue Trail (OKT), Europe’s first long-distance marked route, established in the 1950s. Crossing volcanic ridges, vineyards, plains, and remote hamlets, the Blue Trail covers nearly the entire country. It is more than a hiking path: A national backbone for rural tourism, spreading visitors beyond hotspots into hundreds of small villages where guesthouses, shops, local museums, restaurants and markets gain steady income from eco-conscious hikers.

What sets the Blue Trail apart is its built-in sustainability. The Hungarian Ramblers’ Association (MTSZ) refurbished 2,000 km in 2014-15, repainting markers, adding rest stops, and modernising signage. Thousands now join “Blue Trail Day” each October, when every section is walked at once - supported by special train



Blue trail markers highlight the route’s clear wayfinding through meadows and woodland edges.

timetables from the National Public Transport Company. A network of seven regional coordinators and hundreds of volunteers maintains the +2,500 km route, while digital tools like the Természetjáró app (500,000 downloads, 6-7m annual uses) and a new Blue Trail app with digital stamping make planning and tracking simple.

Accessibility is structural. All 27 main sections start and end at railway nodes, a design inherited from the trail's origins in railway clubs. Today, cooperation with The National Public Transport Company ensures smooth public transport access. Hikers are guided to walk linear stretches and return by train or bus, leaving minimal footprint. This “soft mobility” approach has become a flagship in Hungary’s National Active Tourism Strategy 2030.

The Blue Trail spreads tourism equitably. Instead of concentrating crowds, it disperses them across hundreds of settlements. Apps like természetjáró.hu and kéktúra.hu connect hikers directly with local lodging, ensuring rural communities benefit. Hikers earn stamps in a gamified “passport” deepening engagement. Demand has surged since COVID: 100,000 stamp books sold 2019-23, with around 15,000 new hikers starting each year, 70% on multi-day trips and 30% walking 4+ days.

This format has drawn global acclaim. In 2020, National Geographic named the Blue Trail one of the world’s 25 best travel destinations. With biodiversity-rich landscapes, strong community benefits, and a car-free model, it shows how tourism can align with conservation, climate, and culture. As MTSZ leaders put it: “The Blue Trail was sustainable before the word existed - because it was built around trains.”

The Országos Kékkör is not just a hiking trail. It is a living system - maintained by volunteers, embraced by communities, and passed between generations. By promoting slow, respectful travel on foot, it keeps Hungary’s landscapes and villages connected. It is a national achievement in sustainable recreation, marked, quite literally, in blue.

“The Blue Trail was sustainable before the word existed - because it was built around trains.

- MTSZ leaders



Slow, respectful travel on foot keeps Hungary’s landscapes and villages connected.



Stagland's minimal-impact cabins prove that small-scale accommodation can lead the way in responsible travel.

© Stagland Cabins

ACCOMMODATIONS

The role of accommodations in Hungary is evolving and changing. No longer simply a functional space for rest, today’s most forward-thinking establishments are becoming central to the travel experience itself. A new generation of hosts and hoteliers is demonstrating that a stay can be as enriching and impactful as the journey.

This movement has given rise to a rich tapestry of options, from historic manor houses given a second life to cutting-edge eco-cabins that rest lightly on the land. While their styles may differ, a common thread unites them: A profound commitment to operating in harmony with their local environment and community.

The examples in this chapter were often born from a founder’s personal mission. They are living proof that premium comfort, innovative design, and deep environmental stewardship are not mutually exclusive. These pioneers are crafting experiences that blend luxury with responsibility, offering an inspiring look at the future of Hungarian hospitality.

MACRO TRENDS

- Heritage adaptive reuse is becoming mainstream, with old farmhouses and markets increasingly transformed into guesthouses.
- A large share of EU cultural heritage hotels are small and medium-sized enterprises, with many located in Hungary.
- Smaller boutique properties are leading the way in renewable energy adoption, operating on solar, wood, or biogas.
- Rural Hungary’s growing share of renewable electricity is mirrored by the rising uptake of sustainable practices in rural tourism.



Hospitality rooted in nature: Natura Hill's eco-luxury

Sitting above the Danube Bend, Natura Hill in Zebegény redefines eco-luxury hospitality. Recognised with a Michelin Green Star, its holistic sustainability includes zero-waste gourmet dining, regenerative agriculture, renewable energy, and community-focused operations.



100%

of Natura Hill's energy is generated by renewable energy.

HIGHLIGHTS

A Michelin Green Star recognises its zero-waste gourmet kitchen and regenerative farming practices.

More than 90% of fruit and vegetables come from its own organic farms, orchards, and gardens.

Tableware is 100% handmade by Hungarian ceramicists, linking sustainability with cultural heritage.

At the Danube Bend in Zebegény, Natura Hill has spent 11 years proving that luxury and sustainability can grow together. Opened in 2014 as one of Hungary's first eco-hospitality pioneers, it blends fine gastronomy with a holistic sustainability ethos, from farming and energy to people and community. This approach earned a Michelin Green Star, alongside state and professional awards, positioning Natura Hill as a benchmark for eco-luxury.

At its heart is a zero-waste kitchen, operating on a strict pre-booking model and changing menus daily to match garden yields. At present, 90% of fruit and vegetables will come from their own certified organic production: A 0.5 ha lavender plot, an 800 m² veg garden, and 100 ha of organic orchards launched under the "natu.farm" project. A small processing plant turns produce into juices, ferments, preserves, snacks, and gluten-free items, while 100% of surplus is preserved or processed. Only local freshwater fish, cheeses, and neighbor sourced meats are used, with no waste.

Natura Hill's sustainability extends well beyond dining. Energy efficiency and independence define their operational philosophy. Over 75% of the roof surfaces host solar panels, fulfilling the property's energy needs entirely through renewable sources. The main building is heated



Future ambitions of Natura Hill include calculating carbon footprints via international standards and offsetting them through habitat restoration and afforestation, alongside a 2026 compost-heated greenhouse to advance circular economy practices.

and cooled by a ground-source heat pump system, which is significantly more efficient than traditional methods. A 100 m³ rainwater tank irrigates gardens, while low-flow taps, automated shading, and HRV ventilation systems cut waste. Even the sauna and jacuzzi run only when pre-booked, preventing idle energy use, and the wood-fired sauna burns only local Börzsöny timber.

The zero-waste ambition has been honed over five years of trial and error. Compost enriches gardens, fermenting and preserving transform scraps into new ingredients, and creative reuse is constant: Pumpkin skin toasted into cocoa substitute, or sour bread fermented into kvass. Vacuum bag use has been cut by 20%, replaced with jars and GN containers, and Natura Hill is part of international trials for biodegradable bags. Kitchen oil waste is down to just 45 litres a year.

Craft and authenticity matter too. In the past five years, 100% of tableware has been made by Hungarian ceramicists. The rotating wine list comes from small, low-intervention winemakers, many organic or biodynamic, with whom the team maintains personal ties. Each bottle is introduced with its story, ensuring guests experience not just flavour but the philosophy behind it.

Transportation initiatives further demonstrate Natura Hill's holistic sustainability strategy. The hotel promotes sustainable travel, providing complimentary transfers from local train stations and electric charging stations powered by solar energy. Their electric van transports produce from the garden, and staff commuting is optimised through carpooling and cycling.

Community and people are integral. Staff diversity includes new mothers, a retiree, and disadvantaged workers, with flexible/remote options for parents. Healthy staff meals come mostly from the garden. Each year, 1-2 employees go on to found their own sustainable cafés or bistros, a sign of Natura Hill's ripple effect. Monthly talks are held for teachers, students, and professionals, while owner Hodik Adrienn lectures at BGE and mentors theses. Suppliers, guests, and the public are educated through workshops, menus, and digital platforms.

Future ambitions include calculating their carbon footprint with international methodology, then neutralising it via habitat rehabilitation and tree-planting. Plans for a compost-heated greenhouse by 2026 will push circularity further. Having already won a Michelin Green Star, the Kőrösi Csoma Sándor State Award (2023), the Hungarian Tourism Agency Sustainability Award (2024), and the Klasszis TopDesign prize (2022), Natura Hill continues to prove that sustainability is not a trend but the future of hospitality.



Fresh vegetables from the natu.farm gardens are harvested daily, supplying the zero-waste kitchen with seasonal, organic ingredients.



Natura Hill's organic plots at the Danube Bend, show the resort's harmony with its natural setting.

Kapolcsi Sziklák: Eco-excellence redefined

Kapolcsi Sziklák, an innovative resort by Hello Wood, harmonises cutting-edge architecture with sustainability. Featuring uniquely designed “rock cabins”, it reimagines sustainable design in tourism, blending minimal ecological impact with modern comfort.



+1000

students have so far taken part in Hello Wood’s educational programmes across **20+** events, gaining hands-on experience in design, sustainability, and construction.

HIGHLIGHTS

The rock cabins are movable, designed to rest lightly on the land like hay bales, preserving the natural terrain.

Prefabrication and elevated foundations reduce construction impact, protecting local biodiversity.

Hello Wood’s programmes span 38+ countries, fostering an international network of architects, makers, and students.

Kapolcsi Sziklák redefines premium hospitality through a remarkable balance of sophisticated design and sustainability in Hungary’s scenic Balaton Uplands. Developed by Hello Wood, this groundbreaking eco-resort exemplifies how luxury can coexist harmoniously with nature.

Hello Wood is not just a design company. It began as a movement in 2010, bringing together architects, artists, and makers through summer schools and large-scale wooden installations that emphasised community, creativity, and ecological design. Over time, the movement evolved into a studio and developer, but it has kept the same spirit: Blending craft, sustainability, and bold design into places that spark connection. Their work has been recognised by multiple international prizes - including the Iconic Award for Innovative Architecture, the Architizer A+ Awards, and the Hungarian Design Award - showcasing the impact and reach of their vision.

Kapolcsi Sziklák is a natural extension of this vision.

Central to the resort’s appeal are its distinctive “Szikla” (Rock) cabins, architecturally designed to echo natural stone formations. These visually striking cabins integrate effortlessly with the surrounding environment, demonstrating how modern aesthetics and environmental



Architecturally distinctive cabins showcase how modern design can harmonise with nature while minimising environmental impact.

responsibility can beautifully intertwine. Utilising advanced prefabrication methods and elevated foundations, the cabins significantly minimise disruption to the natural terrain, preserving local biodiversity and landscapes.

Sustainability is deeply embedded into the ethos of Kapolcsi Sziklák. Built primarily from sustainably sourced timber, the structures exemplify energy efficiency, dramatically reducing heating and cooling needs despite year-round availability. Each cabin employs cutting-edge smart technologies, optimising energy use and resource conservation, effectively setting new benchmarks for sustainable tourism practices in Hungary.

Guests at Kapolcsi Sziklák experience true eco-luxury, enjoying organic local cuisine sourced from nearby farms, significantly reducing the environmental footprint associated with food transportation and production. The commitment extends beyond gastronomy, incorporating comprehensive water management solutions like efficient fixtures and smart systems that drastically lower water consumption.

Kapolcsi Sziklák's innovative model of tourism not only offers exceptional guest experiences but also fosters environmental stewardship. The resort aligns closely with global sustainability standards, positioning itself as a leader within Hungary's tourism industry. Its practices support local economies, engaging regional producers, artisans, and workers, creating a resilient local community centred around sustainability.

This forward-thinking approach has garnered significant attention, highlighting the resort's potential as a model for future hospitality developments. By embracing cutting-edge sustainability practices - ranging from renewable energy sources to resource-efficient building techniques - Kapolcsi Sziklák exemplifies how luxury accommodation can lead the way in environmental responsibility. The impact of this pioneering project extends beyond the immediate guest experience, inspiring broader industry shifts towards sustainability.

In short, Kapolcsi Sziklák does more than provide exceptional accommodations; it challenges conventional perceptions of luxury tourism, proving conclusively that environmental responsibility and premium hospitality are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary and essential elements of modern tourism.



From above, the Szikla cabins blend seamlessly into the Balaton Uplands landscape, reflecting Hello Wood's vision of eco-friendly luxury.

© Hello Wood Resort

Irota EcoLodge: Where carbon footprints vanish

In northeastern Hungary, Irota EcoLodge redefines premium tourism with net-zero carbon eco-villas. Combining passive house designs, renewable energy, and circular materials, the resort generates more energy than it consumes, setting international standards.



54%

of tap water use annually is saved, using rainwater harvesting, with 75 m³ collected in 2024

HIGHLIGHTS

The eco-villas produce more electricity than they consume, exporting surplus back to the grid.

Irota EcoLodge is Hungary's first certified Net-Zero Whole-Life Carbon resort.

A natural swimming pool and sauna provide eco-luxury experiences without environmental compromise.

Irota EcoLodge, located in a tranquil village in Northern Hungary, embodies the harmonious intersection of premium hospitality and uncompromising sustainability. Since its launch in 2016, the boutique resort has set a remarkable precedent as Hungary's first certified "Net Zero Whole-Life Carbon" resort, a milestone recognised internationally and featured in the World Green Building Council's case study library.

At the heart of Irota EcoLodge are three spacious eco-villas, meticulously crafted following passive housing principles. Each villa incorporates sustainable, circular building practices, including recycled paper cellulose insulation, which stores biogenic carbon, effectively offsetting emissions associated with traditional construction materials such as concrete. This innovative approach not only minimises environmental impact but actively contributes to carbon sequestration.

Renewable energy is a cornerstone of the EcoLodge's operation. Equipped with an expansive array of solar panels, the resort consistently produces more energy than it consumes, exporting surplus electricity back to the local grid. This excess generation demonstrates tangible proof of operational

carbon negativity, validated through detailed annual carbon footprint reports confirming the resort maintains emissions below zero tonnes of CO₂ annually.

The EcoLodge's commitment extends beyond energy management to include responsible resource utilisation. Heating needs are sustainably met using high-efficiency stoves fuelled by locally sourced firewood, dramatically reducing transport emissions and dependence on fossil fuels. Water management is equally exemplary; wastewater is treated naturally on-site, and greywater is thoughtfully reused for garden irrigation, further reducing environmental impact.

Guests at Irota EcoLodge experience eco conscious hospitality without compromise. Amenities include a natural swimming pool and sauna, integrating seamlessly with the lodge's sustainability ethos. Visitors enjoy modern

comforts in full awareness - or delightful unawareness - that their leisure contributes positively to the environment, often inspiring them to adopt similar sustainable practices in their own homes.

The successful integration of luxury and ecological consciousness has earned Irota EcoLodge numerous international accolades, positioning it as a leading example of sustainable hospitality globally. This recognition underscores the lodge's influence as an inspirational benchmark for hospitality businesses worldwide.

Irota EcoLodge challenges traditional perceptions of luxury travel. Its approach provides compelling evidence that sustainable tourism can significantly contribute to global climate goals without sacrificing guest experience, thus offering a replicable model for eco-conscious developments across Hungary and beyond.



The three eco-villas and natural swimming pool of Irota EcoLodge illustrate how modern hospitality can achieve net zero whole-life carbon.

Eco meets tradition in Noszvaj

Nomád Hotel & Glamping marries three generations of family hospitality with cutting-edge sustainability. From solar-powered lodges and electric TukTuks to farm-to-table dining, this zero-waste hideaway delivers heritage charm and a genuine green experience in Northern Hungary.



100%

of ingredients in the hotel's Trakta restaurant are local or organic.

HIGHLIGHTS

The family-run hotel has a guest retention rate of about 70%, with many returning for its eco-luxury charm.

Its “zero-waste” philosophy extends from refillable toiletries to antique furniture restoration.

Electric TukTuks replace fuel-powered vehicles for luggage and tours, making sustainable mobility part of the guest experience.

This family-run hotel, established over three decades ago, has long been a leader in eco-conscious hospitality. Built with sustainability at its core, Nomád Hotel & Glamping showcases how heritage conservation and eco-friendly practices can work hand-in-hand to create a remarkable guest experience. Guests are welcomed into a serene environment where the absence of typical hotel noise and excessive consumerism is a deliberate choice. The hotel consciously ‘sells silence’ and a deep connection to the natural environment as a core part of its offering

The hotel’s commitment to sustainability starts with its design. Every structure is built using energy-efficient materials, with high-performance insulation and triple-glazed windows ensuring minimal energy consumption. On-site solar collectors power the hotel, further reducing the property’s carbon footprint.

The hotel’s culinary offering takes sustainability a step further. At the Trakta restaurant, the menu focuses on local, seasonal produce. The hotel grows many of its ingredients in its pesticide-free garden, ensuring that guests enjoy fresh, organically sourced meals. The kitchen prides



Nomád Hotel & Glamping in Noszvaj supports eco-tourism and local traditions through its heritage-focused collaboration with the village community.

“At our place, everything is made in the same old-fashioned, time-consuming way, just like our grandparents made it.

- Barbara Balogh, Managing Director of Nomád Hotel & Glamping

itself on preparing food using the same time-consuming, old-fashioned methods as previous generations to ensure the quality and origin of every ingredient. The hotel also employs hydroponics to grow greens, allowing it to provide year-round vegetables for its farm-to-table dining experience.

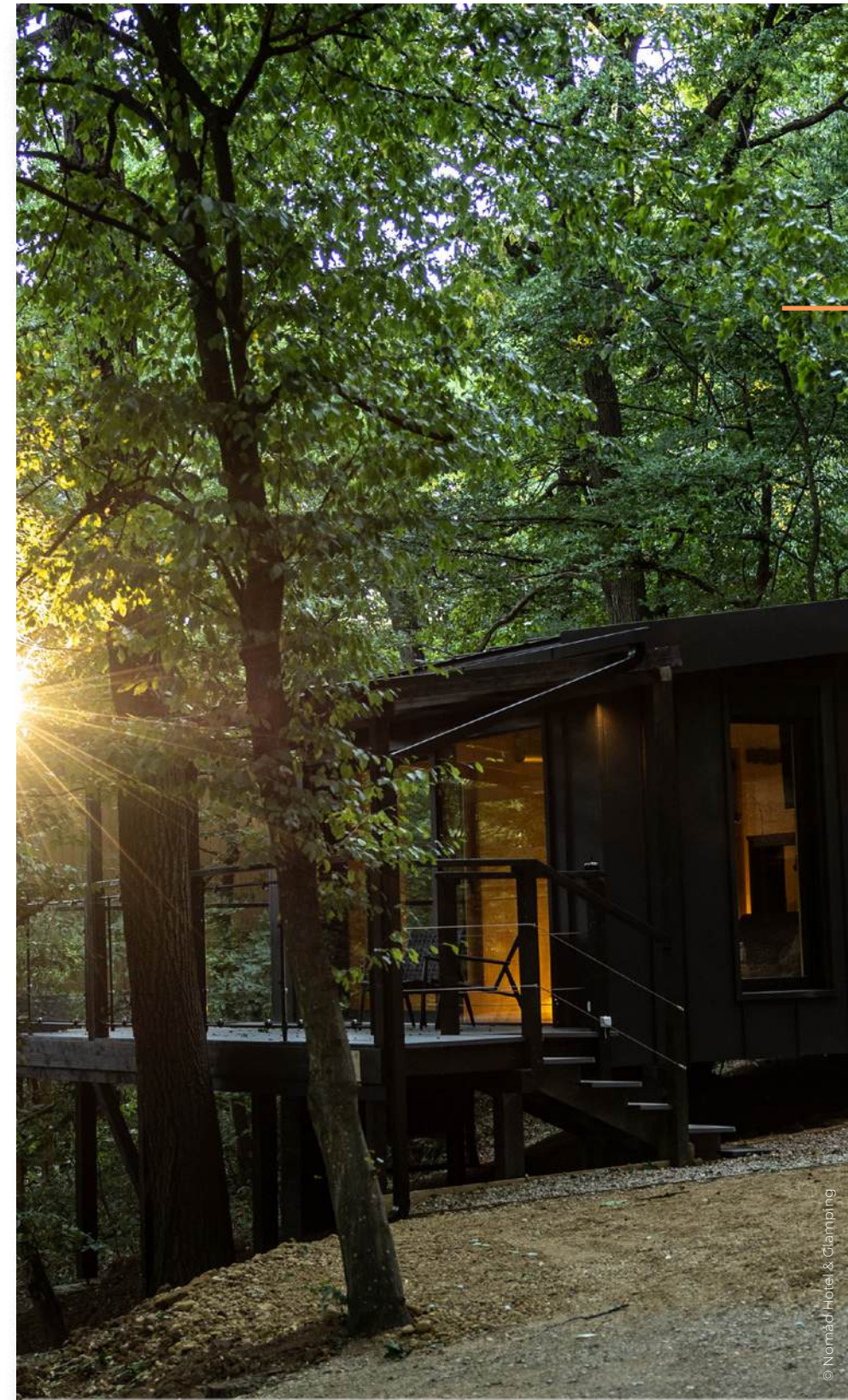
The restaurant's ingredients come from local artisans and nearby farms, with the remainder sourced from sustainable suppliers. By prioritising partnerships with local, small-scale producers, the hotel actively helps to re-establish a local economy and build a network that has been lost over time. This approach ensures high-quality ingredients while also supporting the livelihoods of local families.

This destination also runs a comprehensive recycling programme, ensuring that a significant portion of waste is diverted from landfills. It also practices organic waste composting, turning food scraps into valuable garden compost that feeds the property's vegetable beds. Refillable toiletries have replaced single-use plastics, and all cleaning products are eco-certified. Their commitment to upcycling extends to every aspect of the property, from using old shipping containers and shepherd's cottages for new buildings to restoring antique furniture and textiles for the guest rooms. This not only reduces waste but also gives new life to forgotten materials.

Electric mobility is a key feature of the guest experience. Guests can explore the estate aboard electric TukTuks, which replace traditional fuel-powered vehicles for luggage transfers and estate tours. The hotel also offers EV charging stations for guests, encouraging them to drive more sustainably during their stay.

Nomád Hotel & Glamping doesn't just focus on sustainability within its walls. It is actively involved in the preservation of Noszvaj's cultural heritage, restoring antique furniture and showcasing local craftsmanship throughout its rooms and communal spaces. The hotel's dedication to heritage conservation extends to the wider community, where it collaborates with the Noszvaj Tourism Association to support eco-tourism and local traditions.

Looking to the future, Nomád Hotel & Glamping plans to expand its sustainability efforts, introducing more green initiatives and continuing its work to conserve both the environment and local culture. Through its sustainable tourism approach, it not only offers guests a unique getaway but also sets a powerful example of how rural tourism can thrive without compromising the planet or its people.



Eco-friendly cabins nestled in the forest create a tranquil guest experience while minimising energy use and environmental impact.

© Nomád Hotel & Glamping

Where journeys blossom into forests - Natúra Panzió

Near Orfű, Natúra Panzió pioneers a unique carbon offset programme rooted in academia and community. Led by a university tourism expert, the guesthouse invites guests to fund local reforestation, generates 80% of its own electricity, and champions a destination-wide sustainability model.



80%

of Natúra Panzió's electricity is generated through solar panels.

HIGHLIGHTS

Guests can symbolically offset their travel by adopting a native tree sapling, planted in partnership with Orfű Municipality.

Over 100 tourism students visit annually for workshops, turning the guesthouse into a living classroom.

Visitors arriving by public transport receive a 10% discount, directly rewarding low-carbon travel choices.

Located amid the lush landscapes of Southern Transdanubia, Natúra Panzió is redefining sustainable accommodation. Its innovative model is driven by its owner, Dr. Tibor Gonda, a tourism lecturer at the University of Pécs. Recognising that tourism accounts for 6-8% of global greenhouse gas emissions, Dr. Gonda has transformed his guesthouse into a living laboratory for responsible hospitality and climate action.

The cornerstone of Natúra Panzió's sustainability programme is its partnership with Orfű Municipality, creating a dedicated park forest composed exclusively of native tree species. Guests at the panzió have the unique opportunity to adopt a tree sapling as a symbolic offset of their travel-related carbon emissions. While actual tree planting occurs during pre-scheduled events organised with the municipality, each guest's adoption contributes significantly to regional reforestation efforts, biodiversity restoration, and long-term carbon sequestration.

Natúra Panzió actively manages its two-hectare property using sustainable techniques. Instead of intensive mowing, the land is managed as a natural pasture, allowing nutrients to return to the soil. A dedicated 100-square-metre „bee pasture“ is left untouched to support local pollinators, showcasing a commitment to biodiversity.



Guests and students take part in a tree-planting event, supporting Natúra Panzió's reforestation and carbon offset programme with Orfű Municipality.

The guesthouse's academic connection has enhanced its environmental impact. In collaboration with the University of Pécs, they developed a user-friendly CO₂ emissions calculator for guests. This partnership extends to hands-on education, with over 100 university tourism students visiting annually for on-site workshops on sustainable hotel management.

Deeper sustainability measures are integrated throughout the operation. An expanded solar panel system now generates 80% of the property's electricity. The breakfast menu is built on local products - a passion of Dr. Gonda, who

founded Orfű's first local market 20 years ago - and a new kitchen garden supplies fresh vegetables. To encourage low-carbon travel, the guesthouse recently introduced a 10% discount for guests arriving via public transport - an offer a 9-person group immediately utilised.

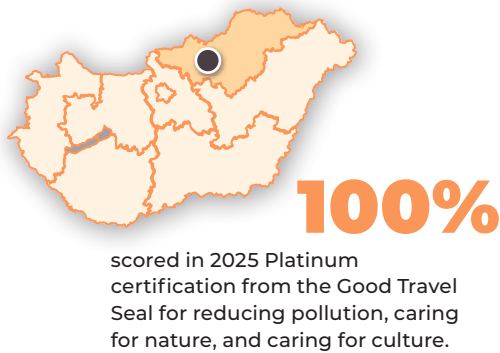
Natúra Panzió demonstrates how hospitality can effectively extend beyond guest comfort to embrace deeper environmental responsibilities. Each guest's adopted tree symbolises a tangible commitment to sustainability, ensuring that visits leave a lasting positive legacy for the environment and future generations.

“For us, the process of becoming sustainable was more important than the final certification. The real value is in the journey of learning and improving.

- Dr. Tibor Gonda, Owner of Natúra Panzió

Hiking hub with green comforts

Bagoly-kő Guesthouse in Parádsasvár combines comfort with responsibility in Hungary’s highest mountains. Guests staying at the Bagoly-kő Panzió or the Villa find not only renovated, dog-friendly rooms and a restaurant but also cyclist-friendly services, a climate-friendly garden, and clear sustainability practices that have earned Platinum certification from the Good Travel Seal.



HIGHLIGHTS

The guesthouse garden was redesigned as a climate-friendly space with perennials, mulching, and bird habitats instead of a wine cellar.

Guests receive shower hourglasses to measure water use, keeping conservation a tangible part of their stay.

Cyclists benefit from repair kits, drying rooms, and even free drinking water, making the guesthouse a recognised bike-friendly hub.

At the foot of the Mátra mountains, where trails lead to Galyatető, Kékes-tető and the Ilona Waterfall, the Bagoly-kő Guesthouse positions itself as a base camp for active tourism. The complex combines two distinct facilities: Bagoly-kő Guesthouse, a dog-friendly guesthouse with capacity for 20 people and a 40-seat restaurant, and the Villa, an independent

six-room, five-bath property that sleeps ten. Both were renovated in 2024, blending modern comfort with a strong focus on environmental responsibility.

Sustainability at Bagoly-kő Panzió is both infrastructural and cultural. Energy supply comes from solar panels, solar collectors, and a wood gasification boiler, with modern insulation and ducted air conditioning ensuring year-round efficiency. Shared spaces use LED lighting and motion sensors, while the outdoor hot tub runs on a heat pump. Minibars are only switched on when requested, and the guesthouse regularly monitors its carbon emissions while working toward energy self-sufficiency. Water-saving taps, dual-flush toilets, and on-request linen service reduce consumption. Guests sort their waste into selective bins, with clear collection points for glass, batteries and hazardous materials. Single-use plastics have been eliminated: rooms use glassware and porcelain cups, bathrooms feature refillable dispensers, and staff help guests sort waste correctly.

Food choices are equally transparent. The hiking centre maintains a public list of local producers on its website, linking guests directly with farmers and artisans from the region. Breakfasts and restaurant meals integrate these local ingredients, strengthening short supply chains. Guests can also choose from a range of

sustainability-focused packages - from the 1.5-Degree Package with plant-based menus and renewable energy, to discounts for arrivals by bicycle, bus, or electric car.

The outdoor environment is also treated as part of the hospitality offer. When plans for a wine cellar in the garden were scrapped, management instead created a climate-friendly garden. With the support of GardenMind, they planted hardy perennials, trees and shrubs mulched with local woodchips, ensuring water retention and soil health. The garden provides shelter for butterflies and birds, while feeders allow guests to participate in bird-feeding during winter months. QR-enabled apps like PlantNet invite visitors to learn about the species around them, adding an educational layer to the stay.

Cyclists are especially well served. As a bike-friendly accommodation, Bagoly-kő Panzió provides secure storage, drying spaces, free water, first-aid and repair kits, and maps of regional cycling routes. Even single-night stays are welcomed, an important service for long-distance riders. E-bikes are also available, extending access to the surrounding mountains for guests of all abilities.

Wellness and community complement the active tourism focus. The property integrates wellness services with hiking and biking programmes,

encouraging low-impact recreation that prioritises connection with nature. The in-house Beülő Café hosts cultural events and local initiatives, while partnerships with NGOs bring “Wellness for the Mind” programmes. The guesthouse also collaborates with Scale Impact, partners with the nearby GarázsSasvár venue, and even provides headquarters for a local community association. Guests are guided not just in conserving resources indoors but also in treading lightly outdoors.

Recognition of these practices came in 2025, when Bagoly-kő Guesthouse achieved Platinum certification under the Good Travel Seal. Its scorecard HIGHLIGHTS full marks in reducing pollution, caring for nature, and caring for culture. High scores were also recorded in food sourcing, employment, and climate action, while waste reduction remains an area for continuous improvement. The certification strengthens trust for eco-conscious travellers and positions the centre as a benchmark for mountain tourism in Hungary.

For hikers, cyclists and families, the appeal lies in the combination of renovated accommodation, direct access to trails, and a credible sustainability ethos. For the operators, it is a model of how rural tourism can thrive by embedding responsibility into the daily rhythm of hospitality.



Hikers are invited to pause in the Mátra foothills and perhaps enjoy a relaxing sauna break.

Stagland: A benchmark for eco-conscious travel

Born from a university thesis, Stagland Cabins in Hosszúhetény has become a national benchmark for eco-conscious hospitality. With minimal-impact cabins, an 80-90% year-round occupancy, and a string of first-in-Hungary platinum-level certifications, it proves that small-scale accommodation can lead the way in responsible travel.



1st

accommodation in Hungary to achieve the prestigious Good Travel Seal Platinum certification.

HIGHLIGHTS

Stagland was the first tourism provider in Hungary to earn Green Brands certification, achieving a 94% score for its corporate purpose.

The business is a commercial success, maintaining 80-90% year-round occupancy with 90% of bookings made directly.

The cabins are built on ground screws, a minimal-impact technique that avoids using concrete foundations to protect the forest floor.

Hundreds of trees have been planted on the property in partnership with local students and the 10 Million Trees programme.

Stagland was conceived with sustainability at its very core. The entire project grew out of the founder's Master's degree in sustainable tourism and a university dissertation focused on creating a new kind of responsible accommodation. From day one, every decision, from construction to daily operations, was consciously planned to meet the highest international sustainability standards.

The design philosophy is one of minimal intervention. To preserve the natural state of the land, the cabins were constructed on ground screws instead of concrete foundations. This technique minimises soil displacement, protecting the local flora and fauna and leaving the forest ecosystem undisturbed.

This rigorous, pre-planned approach has earned Stagland an exceptional number of prestigious awards. In January 2025, it became the first accommodation in Hungary to achieve the Good Travel Seal Platinum certification. The international audit awarded it a perfect 100% score for nature conservation, cultural preservation, and local sourcing. Shortly after, it also became the first tourism provider in the country to receive Green Brands certification, where its 94% score in the "corporate purpose"

category far exceeded the 51% benchmark. For the founders, the greatest pride comes from seeing a "tiny accommodation in Hosszúhetény" receive a level of national attention that seemed "almost impossible at the beginning."

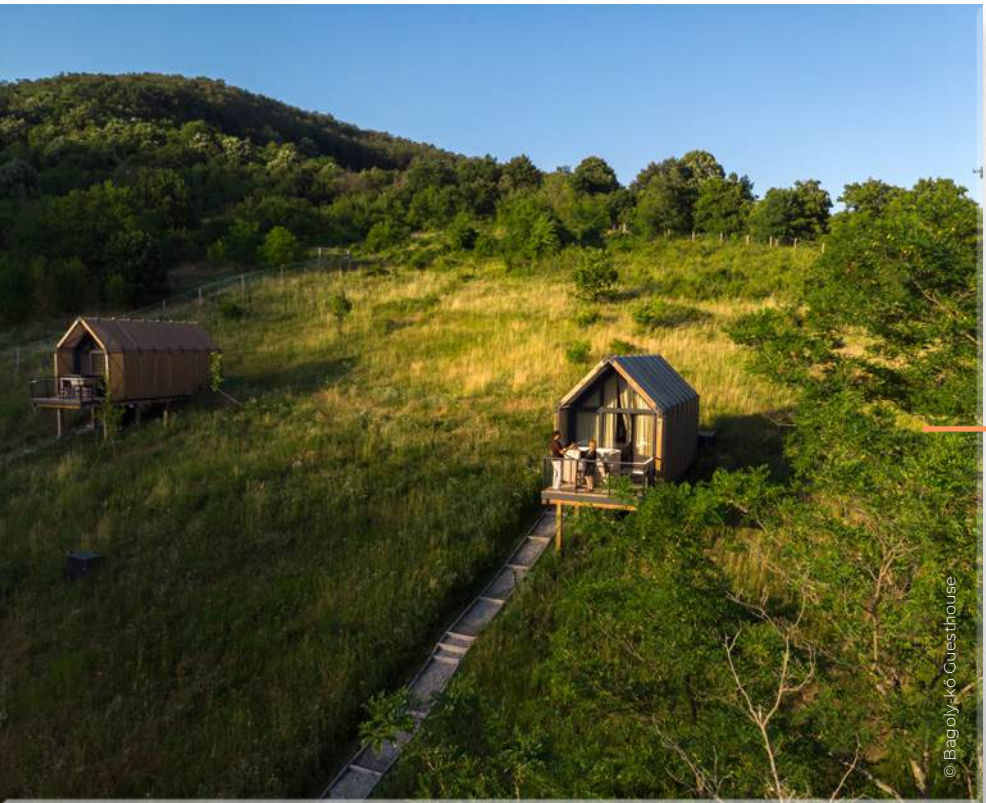
Deeply embedded in the village, Stagland operates as a true community partner. Guests are sent an educational email before arrival, and once there, they find amenities sourced exclusively from local partners: Honey from Daróczi Méhészet, biodegradable coffee capsules from Almalomb, and wine from the award-winning Schunk winery. The cabins are decorated with paintings by local artist Kaalifa, and guests are

encouraged to visit the nearby Michelin-recommended Hosszútányér restaurant. This focus on community also includes joint projects, such as planting hundreds of trees with local students.

While already a leader, Stagland continues to evolve. Future plans include further reducing energy consumption by installing a solar-panelled car park and introducing greywater recycling. To enhance its „gentle tourism“ offering, the business also plans to add electric bicycle rentals and charging points, allowing guests to explore the beautiful Mecsek hills with minimal impact.

“A tourism service is never just about us, it’s about the entire destination. Its development is unimaginable without involving the local community.

- Stagland



Stagland's cabins rest on ground screws, a construction method that avoids traditional foundations to protect the forest floor and its ecosystem.



Hosszúhetény is located in an environmentally protected area, drawing in visitors with its mountains and special microclimate.

ECO-VILLAGES

Across Hungary, sustainability is taking root at a community scale. Beyond individual businesses, entire villages, farm networks, and even forward-thinking municipalities are reimagining their futures around a shared commitment to the environment and local identity. These are Hungary's eco-villages - places where sustainability is not an initiative, but a way of life.

These communities serve as living laboratories, offering powerful blueprints for a more resilient future. Some have revived abandoned hamlets into thriving, off-grid sanctuaries, while others have implemented ambitious, city-wide climate strategies powered by renewable energy. What they share is a holistic vision that weaves together environmental stewardship, economic vitality, and cultural preservation.

The cases in this chapter tell stories of collective action. They showcase what becomes possible when people work together, whether it's a network of family farms preserving agricultural heritage or a town council redesigning its public spaces to live in harmony with nature. These are the communities pioneering a new kind of tourism, where visitors are invited not just to see a place, but to experience a living, breathing model of a better future.

MACRO TRENDS

Eco-villages attract learners by offering permaculture and off-grid workshops, drawing 2,000-5,000 mainly educational visitors per year.

Shared community infrastructures cut costs and emissions, with villages reporting far lower household energy use than local averages.

Hands-on tourism is rising as visitors join farming and food preservation courses, often staying more than three nights for learning retreats.

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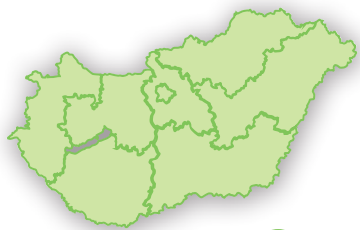


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Living villages, shared futures

The Living Villages Network connects Hungary’s eco-villages into a nationwide alliance for sustainability. Through knowledge, tools sharing, and communal practices, the network empowers rural initiatives to thrive across ecological farming, renewable energy, and community-led innovation.



10+

eco-villages are represented in the network.

HIGHLIGHTS

The Gyüttment Festival, co-organised with the network, attracts thousands annually to learn about rural sustainability and ecological living.

Villages share practical knowledge in organic farming, renewable energy, and natural building methods, creating “living laboratories” of sustainability.

Community education is central, with workshops, open days, and youth camps spreading ecological practices to wider audiences.

Across Hungary, eco-villages are showing that sustainability is not just a local experiment but a shared movement. Since its foundation in the early 2000s, the Élőfalvak Hálózata has grown into a national network that links communities committed to ecological living, renewable energy, and social cooperation. Its members range from long-established villages like Gyűrűfű and Visnyeszéplak to newer initiatives in Somogyvámos, Galgahévíz, and beyond.

At its core, the network is about exchange. Members provide mutual support in developing organic farming systems, renewable energy solutions, natural building methods, and community-based education. The emphasis is on living laboratories: Villages where everyday life integrates ecological values into farming, housing, food processing, and governance.

Agriculture plays a central role. Many eco-villages cultivate land using organic and permaculture practices, producing food for both self-sufficiency and local markets. These initiatives reduce dependence on industrial farming while reviving rural economies. Alongside farming, renewable energy adoption is spreading across member villages, with solar, biomass, and energy efficiency measures embedded in community design.

Education is another pillar. Through workshops, open days, and youth camps, eco-villages serve as training grounds for sustainable lifestyles. The annual Gyüttment Festival, organised in cooperation with the network, attracts thousands of visitors and provides a national platform for ecological innovation, rural development, and community dialogue.

The network also provides a stronger collective voice for eco-villages. By coordinating efforts, Élőfalvak Hálózata represents its members in broader sustainability dialogues and contributes to Hungary’s green transition. What makes the

model effective is its emphasis on autonomy and cooperation. Each village remains independent, but knowledge and resources are shared, strengthening resilience across the network.

In a country where rural areas often face depopulation and economic decline, the Élőfalvak Hálózata presents a lifeline - a blueprint for how rural Hungary can thrive in the face of climate and social challenges. These villages demonstrate how ecological values, community engagement, and small-scale innovation can regenerate the countryside.



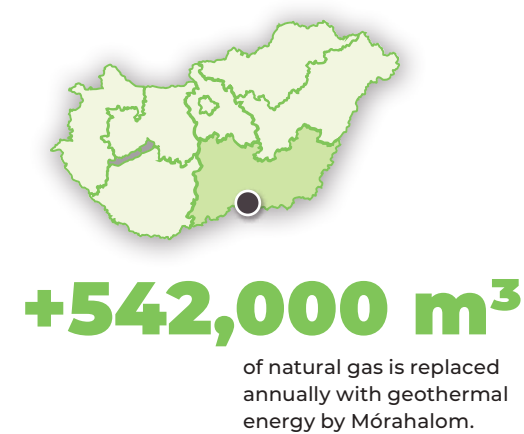
The Living Villages Network fosters community spirit through shared traditions and gatherings like the Gyüttment Festival.

“ Let us get to know nature and our own nature, so we can rejoice in a world that follows harmony and balance - for there is no good life in falsehood.

- Élőfalvak

Mórahalom is thinking green

Mórahalom proves that sustainability scales even in small towns. Through geothermal heating, expanded bike lanes, LED lighting, and environmental education, this spa town has become a model for climate-smart development - earning major European awards and setting a new rural benchmark.



HIGHLIGHTS

- The system heats 12 municipal buildings, including schools and the spa. Over 80% of public institutions’ energy comes from renewable geothermal systems.
- The town’s climate-friendly policies earned it multiple awards, including the “Bicycle-Friendly Municipality” and government’s “energy-conscious” awards.
- Street lighting has been fully upgraded to LEDs, cutting costs and emissions.

Located near Hungary’s southern border, the town of Mórahalom (population ~7,000) has emerged as a leader in sustainable urban development. Over the past decade, the municipality has demonstrated that ambitious climate action is not reserved for large cities. Strategic investments in renewable energy, sustainable mobility, and environmental education have transformed Mórahalom into a model for integrated green living.

At the heart of this transition is the town’s geothermal cascade system. Since tapping into underground thermal water reserves, Mórahalom now heats 12 municipally owned public buildings - including schools, the city hall, cultural institutions, and the Szent Erzsébet Spa - with renewable geothermal energy. This shift has reduced the use of natural gas by over 542,000 cubic metres annually and delivers approximately 18,700 gigajoules of heat each year. As a result, over 80% of municipal heating now comes from renewable sources, sharply cutting CO₂ emissions and strengthening the town’s energy independence.

The success of this system earned Mórahalom recognition through the European Climate Star Award, highlighting the town’s leadership among small European municipalities striving for climate neutrality.

Mórahalom’s sustainability efforts extend to its transport infrastructure. The town expanded its bicycle lane network, upgraded bike parking facilities, and launched cycling initiatives to encourage residents to adopt low-carbon mobility. These efforts earned Mórahalom the title of “Bicycle-Friendly Municipality,” showcasing its commitment to creating a healthier, more accessible urban environment.

Public lighting was another focus area. Through a phased upgrade to LED technology across the town’s streetlights, Mórahalom has significantly reduced energy consumption in public spaces - enhancing safety while lowering operational costs.

Water and waste management have also received attention. The municipality invested in drinking water quality improvements and modernised biological treatment at its sewage plant, preserving local soil and waterways. In parallel, selective waste collection campaigns were expanded to embed recycling habits into community life.

Education underpins many of Mórahalom’s initiatives. Environmental awareness programmes are integrated into school curricula, helping younger generations understand the importance of nature conservation, waste reduction, and climate-friendly living from an early age.

This holistic approach to sustainability has not gone unnoticed. Mórahalom was awarded the Hild Prize for Urban Development, one of Hungary’s most prestigious recognitions for towns leading in progressive urban planning and community engagement.

Today, Mórahalom stands as a compelling example of how smaller municipalities can drive impactful climate action. By investing steadily in renewable energy, clean transport, and environmental stewardship, the town has improved both its quality of life and its long-term resilience - showing that sustainable development is not just achievable, but essential at every scale.



The Szent Erzsébet spa in Mórahalom is heated by the town’s geothermal system, cutting gas use and CO₂ emissions.

Zala Valley’s open farms: Agritourism rooted in heritage

The Zala Valley Open Farms network connects local producers and visitors through authentic agritourism. By opening gates to farm kitchens, vineyards, and herbal gardens, the initiative sustains traditions, reduces food miles, and fosters eco-friendly exploration across rural Hungary.



HIGHLIGHTS

- The network includes 35 farms across 30 villages.
- On a single 2025 “Open Day,” nearly 1,700 visitors toured 29 farms.
- A social return study showed every €1 (~393 HUF) invested generated €4 (~1,572 HUF) in community value.

Along the Western Transdanubia hills, a different kind of rural revival is underway. More than just a tourism project, it’s a strategic rural development programme designed to revitalise a disadvantaged region. Here, 35 family farms across 30 villages have joined forces under the Zala-völgyi Nyitott Porták (Zala Valley Open Farms) network - an initiative that transforms local agriculture into a living, breathing sustainability experience.

Launched by the Zala Thermal Valley Association, the Open Farms project invites visitors to step beyond the farm stand. Each participating farm welcomes guests for behind-the-scenes tours, tastings, and hands-on workshops that reconnect people with food, land, and tradition.

Activities range from falusi vendégasztal (rustic communal meals) to beekeeping demonstrations, herbal foraging walks, and traditional strudel-making workshops. The network also organises three annual „Portanyitogató“ (Open Days), where farms are free to visit without registration. Guests don’t just sample - they participate, gaining firsthand knowledge of organic gardening, free-range animal husbandry, and food preservation techniques that have anchored rural life for generations.

Sustainability is tied into every aspect of the initiative. For example, by promoting the consumption of local products, the network cuts down on food transport emissions and strengthens circular economic ties among producers. A formal study quantified this impact, showing every €1 (~393 HUF) of investment has generated €4 (~1,572 HUF) in social value. Farms coordinate offerings to prevent overproduction, support each other’s successes, and keep biodiversity alive across the valley’s cultivated landscapes.

Transparency is central. Guests see how cheese is crafted, how herbs are gathered, and how sustainable, low-input farming systems work in practice. This spirit of mutual support is even written into their charter, which, based on shared learning experiences, requires members to offer guest facilities and promote, rather than criticise, one another.

Beyond farm gates, Nyitott Porták has mapped and marked 200 kilometres of renewed hiking trails connecting participating farms, encouraging visitors to farm-hop on foot through marked eco-trails. This was a massive community effort, involving workshops where 24 farms learned to paint the official trail markers themselves.

Educational impact is another priority. The network’s model has proven so successful that it now serves as the official professional advisor for a nationwide „Open Farm Days“ pilot programme launched in 2025. Through this and local school visits, the initiative teaches how rural life rooted in harmony with nature can remain viable and vibrant in the 21st century.

Offering immersive rural experiences that celebrate tradition while embracing sustainability, the Zala Valley Open Farms network sustains small family producers, strengthens community resilience, and opens new pathways for low-impact rural tourism.



Beekeeping demonstrations give visitors an up-close look at traditional practices that sustain biodiversity in the Zala Valley.

Zalakaros: Designing a climate-resilient spa town

Zalakaros has redefined what it means to be a spa town. By integrating the geothermal revolution of its famous spa with Hungary’s first city-centre rainwater filtering system and a deep commitment to biodiversity, this award-winning municipality is creating a powerful blueprint for a green future.



4,700 m²

area is used to naturally filter rainwater, using a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS).

HIGHLIGHTS

The town’s thermal spa saves up to 250,000 m³ of natural gas annually by using geothermal energy for heating.

The Karos Korzó project introduced over 3,000 new climate-adaptive trees, shrubs, and perennial plants to the town centre.

Future plans include creating an Energy Community to share surplus geothermal heat with other buildings in the town.

Zalakaros is a winner of the European Green City Award and the Entente Florale gold medal for its commitment to green spaces.

Known as one of Hungary’s top thermal spa destinations, the city of Zalakaros has become a national frontrunner in climate-adaptive urban development. This holistic approach, which earned the city the European Green City Award, is visible across the town, from its largest tourist attraction to its public spaces.

At the heart of its green transformation is Karos Korzó, the revitalised town centre. Faced with the challenge of managing stormwater from increasingly extreme weather, the town opted for a nature-based solution instead of costly concrete channels. The result is Hungary’s first city-centre Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS). This innovative system uses permeable surfaces and two large biofiltration hubs to collect, clean, and absorb runoff from over 4,700 square metres of the town centre. The project solved a critical infrastructure problem while creating a beautiful, biodiverse park filled with over 3,000 new native trees, shrubs, and perennials.

This ethos of smart resource management is mirrored at the town’s economic heart, the Zalakarosi Thermal Spa. Driven by the 2022 energy crisis, the spa invested in a major geothermal upgrade. It now uses the same 96°C thermal water to first heat the entire complex via heat exchangers, replacing up to 250,000 cubic

metres of natural gas annually, before the water, now cooled to a perfect temperature, fills the medicinal pools.

These flagship projects are part of a wider, integrated vision. Building on its legacy as a winner of the Entente Florale gold medal, Zalakaros manages its green spaces to promote biodiversity, uses solar panels to power public buildings, and operates a circular composting system for the town’s green waste.

Looking ahead, the municipality is planning to create an „Energy Community,“ where surplus geothermal heat from the spa will be used to warm neighbouring hotels and public institutions. It is this combination of forward-thinking governance and a deep-rooted commitment to a high quality of life, in a town that famously has no traffic lights, that makes Zalakaros a truly replicable model for a sustainable future.



The revitalised Karos Korzó town centre combines biodiversity, stormwater management, and community life in a climate-adaptive design.

“ Our guiding principle is that all our developments must be environmentally conscious. We have to manage large numbers of visitors, but we strive to do it in a way that is sustainable for the long term and does not wear out the town.

Livable settlements: A new urban pact

The National Association of Livable Settlements is building Hungary’s first large-scale platform for sustainable cities and towns. Through a combination of expert advice, financing know-how, and innovation brokerage with community-building and education, it helps municipalities of every size accelerate their sustainability transition.



27

municipalities already engaged as members, representing Hungary’s settlements from small villages to metropolitan districts.

HIGHLIGHTS

It is Hungary’s first nationwide platform supporting sustainability at settlement level.

The Livable Settlements Academy delivers Hungary’s only professional training dedicated to urban sustainability.

The Association acts as an innovation broker, connecting municipalities with market-ready solutions and EU funding opportunities.

Urban areas are at the front line of Hungary’s sustainability challenges. Congested transport, rising energy costs, and the need for resilient infrastructure make cities and towns critical actors in the transition. Yet municipalities often lack the expertise, financing access, or institutional support to implement systemic changes. This is where the National Association of Livable Settlements (ÉTOSZ) steps in.

Founded by Dr. Judit Lilla Bartuszek, ÉTOSZ was created as a cross-sectoral platform that brings together local governments, businesses, and professional organisations to find common ground. It is both a hub of expertise and a network for action, designed to ensure that settlements across Hungary can adopt sustainable solutions at scale. Today, 27 municipalities are already members, ranging from Budapest districts to county-level cities and small rural settlements.

Its activities span six key functions: Professional advice, mediation of innovative market solutions, tender monitoring and financing support, education and awareness-raising, advocacy, and network-building. Together, these form a comprehensive service infrastructure that allows local leaders to move from abstract goals to practical implementation.

Education is a particular strength. Through the Livable Settlements Academy, ÉTOSZ and its partner, the Sustainable Communities Foundation, run Hungary’s first dedicated training programme on settlement-level sustainability. Launching its fifth semester in autumn 2025, the Academy fills a major gap: Municipalities often cannot commit to multi-year professional courses, yet need marketable, flexible, and directly applicable expertise. The Academy responds with compact, high-quality training days, connecting participants not only with knowledge but with Hungary’s leading sustainability professionals and innovators.

The Association also acts as a broker of innovation. It scouts and introduces cutting-edge market solutions - from renewable energy systems to green infrastructure and sustainable mobility models - and adapts them to municipal realities. For small towns, this may mean access to affordable waste management solutions or advice on securing EU funds. For metropolitan districts, it may involve strategies for integrated transport or shared green space development. For county-level cities, the focus is often on regional leadership: Shaping local economies, tourism, and service delivery in ways that create cohesion with surrounding towns.

What makes ÉTOSZ distinctive is its integrative approach. Cities, towns, and villages are not treated as isolated units but as part of a larger urban-rural ecosystem. Through alliances, municipalities can coordinate investments, share knowledge, and strengthen their collective negotiating power with national and international institutions. This collaborative model mirrors successful European networks, but is adapted to Hungary’s local conditions.

The emphasis on community runs deep. ÉTOSZ does not simply advise mayors or municipal staff; it fosters horizontal networks where settlements exchange best practices and learn from one another. By doing so, it transforms sustainability from a technocratic task into a shared civic movement.

In Dr. Bartuszek’s words, the goal is to “create the foundations for future professional connection points.” In practice, this means building the institutional bridges that Hungary’s sustainability transition depends on. Whether through education, innovation brokerage, or shared advocacy, the National Association of Livable Settlements is making sustainability actionable for municipalities of every size - and reshaping the governance of Hungary’s cities and towns in the process.



Founder of the National Association of Livable Settlements, Dr. Judit Lilla Bartuszek, LL.M.

Hosszúhetény: Where a village saved a flower and found its future

The identity of Hosszúhetény was forged in the successful fight to protect its natural symbol, the rare Banat peony. Today, this same spirit of collective action drives its modern sustainability efforts, from a formal climate strategy and solar-powered infrastructure to a thriving culture of “gentle tourism.”



+800

tonnes of waste collected annually, with growing shares recycled.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Solar panels power Hosszúhetény’s municipal buildings and street lighting.
- The municipality’s selective collection and composting programmes have drastically reduced per capita waste.
- Community eco-clubs and joint tree-planting projects between businesses and schools are part of everyday life here.

In the southern foothills of the Mecsek Mountains, the story of Hosszúhetény is one of a community deeply connected to its natural and cultural roots.

The village’s ethos is symbolised by the Bánáti bazsarózsa (Banat peony), a protected flower of which 90% of the world’s population is found here. A grassroots protest to save the flower’s habitat from development, known as the „Battle of Zengő,” became a defining moment, cementing a shared commitment to conservation that now shapes the village’s future.

This long-standing respect for nature has been formalised into a modern framework. As a member of the Climate-Friendly Municipalities Alliance, Hosszúhetény adopted a comprehensive climate strategy (2018-2030). Rather than waiting for national mandates, the village took its own initiative, installing solar panels on the town hall and other public buildings and upgrading street lighting to solar-powered systems.

The model extends to waste management. The village introduced selective recycling and passed regulations to restrict the open burning of yard waste, encouraging community-wide composting instead.



Villagers gather for a community event, highlighting the role of collective engagement in driving climate action.

As a result, its annual waste collection is significantly below the national per capita average. This is not just a top-down transformation; the municipality invests in community-driven sustainability through regular climate workshops and school eco-clubs. This environment has cultivated a thriving ecosystem of high-quality, sustainable businesses and over 100 annual cultural events.

The village has achieved what many rural communities strive for: It is the only municipality in Baranya County with a consistently growing population. This success earned international recognition, with Hosszúhetény’s story being presented at the 2025 Green Destinations conference in Montpellier.

Eco-tourism means heritage in Skanzen

Hungary’s largest outdoor ethnographic museum, Skanzen in Szentendre, safeguards rural traditions through eco-friendly tourism and interactive cultural programmes. With 60 hectares of sustainable exhibits and immersive festivals, it’s a living demonstration of heritage conservation and ecological education.



+1000

children participate in the museum’s “school garden programme” annually.

HIGHLIGHTS

Thousands of visitors join eco-festivals and workshops each year.

Renewable energy and waste reduction are integrated into museum operations.

Exhibits highlight sustainable crafts like natural dyeing, weaving, and herb farming.

Located just outside Budapest, the Szentendre Open-Air Museum - commonly known as Skanzen - does more than showcase Hungary’s rural past; it actively preserves it through sustainable cultural tourism. The Museum - opened in 1967 - covers over 60 hectares. Skanzen is a vibrant tribute to traditional Hungarian life, encompassing authentic buildings, crafts, and landscapes gathered from all corners of the nation.

At Skanzen, heritage is not a static display - it’s lived and practiced. Visitors step into meticulously restored houses, barns, and workshops that breathe life into centuries-old practices, from traditional pottery and weaving to organic farming. The immersive experience encourages active participation, making sustainability and heritage preservation tangible realities rather than abstract concepts.

Eco-tourism is integral to Skanzen’s identity. Ecological management practices permeate the site, from careful landscape maintenance designed to promote biodiversity, to energy efficiency measures integrated into operational facilities. Renewable energy systems and conservation techniques ensure that preservation efforts themselves minimise environmental impact.

One standout feature is the museum’s robust schedule of educational programmes and interactive festivals, notably their popular seasonal events. These festivals offer hands-on experiences in traditional, sustainable skills, such as natural dyeing, herb cultivation, and traditional construction methods. For example, the annual Easter festival attracts thousands who participate in eco-friendly workshops and cultural demonstrations, creating not just memories but a deeper awareness of sustainable lifestyles. The museum’s “Iskolakert” (School Garden) programme involves around 43 classes, meaning about 1,000 children participate annually.

Recognising the increasing challenges posed by climate change, Skanzen has embedded sustainability into its educational framework. Workshops and guided tours specifically address ecological issues, integrating traditional knowledge with contemporary sustainability practices. The museum has thus become an

informal yet influential eco-educational centre, fostering awareness in visitors of all ages and backgrounds.

Operationally, Skanzen is proactive. The museum’s management constantly seeks improvements in resource efficiency - installing renewable energy systems, optimising waste management, and adopting circular practices across operations. By doing so, Skanzen demonstrates that cultural institutions can lead by example, inspiring visitors and other organisations alike.

Skanzen is more than a museum; it’s a dynamic, living platform for ecological and cultural education, uniting Hungary’s heritage with forward-thinking sustainability. Its approach offers a replicable model for similar institutions globally, proving heritage conservation and environmental stewardship can powerfully coexist.



Skanzen encourages visitors of all ages to try simple living.

Choosing quality over quantity in Orfű

To protect its natural charm, the lakeside village of Orfű made a radical choice to cap its own growth. By strategically limiting tourism to 120,000 overnight stays per year, this community-led initiative prevents overtourism, preserves biodiversity, and pioneers a new model for responsible destination management in Hungary.



+60%

of Orfű's area is forested, with parks managed as bee pastures.

HIGHLIGHTS

120,000 annual overnight stays is the set cap to prevent overtourism.

A 1 km stretch of public lighting runs entirely on solar energy.

About 260 households participate in composting programmes.

Sitting around three shimmering lakes on the slopes of the Mecsek mountains, the village of Orfű is one of Southern Transdanubia's most beloved resort destinations. With over 60% of its area covered by forest, its identity is inextricably linked to nature. But as its popularity grew, the community faced a choice between pursuing unlimited growth and preserving the very tranquility that made it special.

In 2010, they chose preservation. Through a newly established local Tourism Destination Management, the community began a collaborative process to redefine its future. This culminated in a landmark 2017 strategy with a bold centrepiece: A strategic cap of 120,000 overnight stays per year. This self-imposed limit was designed to prevent the environmental strain and overcrowding of overtourism, ensuring the village remains a livable, green haven for residents and a high-quality destination for visitors.

This philosophy of „quality over quantity“ is visible everywhere. The village's green spaces are managed as bee pastures, with parks mowed only three times a year to support pollinators. A 1-kilometre stretch of public lighting is powered entirely by solar energy, a unique initiative in Hungary. Community-wide efforts include a programme that provided 260 households with

compost bins and biannual „Environmental Days“ where residents undertake collective clean-up and beautification projects.

The result is a destination that feels both vibrant and serene. Visitors can explore the historic Orfű Mills, enjoy the famous Bear's Garlic Festival, or cycle on paths connected to the EuroVelo route, all within a framework of conscious tourism. The village's success in balancing nature and tourism

has earned it multiple awards, including the „Excellent European Destination“ title and a gold medal in the „Flowery Hungary“ competition in 2022.

Since placing a value on its natural and social capital, Orfű has become a powerful example of how a destination can thrive not by growing endlessly, but by choosing to flourish sustainably.



Residents and visitors enjoy model sailboat races, one of many community activities that connect leisure with the village's lakeside identity.

“Recolour Your Life (Színezd újra az életed)

- The official motto of Orfű



A seasonal dish presented on biodegradable mycelium tableware demonstrates Salt's circular design philosophy.

GASTRONOMY

A quiet revolution is taking place in kitchens across Hungary. More than just a revival of classic recipes, the country’s culinary scene is experiencing a profound reconnection with the land. The focus has shifted from the plate back to the soil, with a new generation of chefs, restaurateurs, and artisans championing a philosophy of radical locality and deep respect for nature’s rhythms.

This movement is built on capturing a true sense of place on the plate, the idea that food should be an authentic expression of the environment it comes from. It has inspired chefs to become foragers, gardeners, and preservers, crafting menus that tell the story of a specific forest, lake, or micro-region.

The closed-loop kitchen is fast becoming the standard, where a zero-waste ethos guides every decision. Here, vegetable trimmings are transformed into stocks, surplus produce is fermented for the winter, and composting returns vital nutrients to the farms that supply the ingredients.

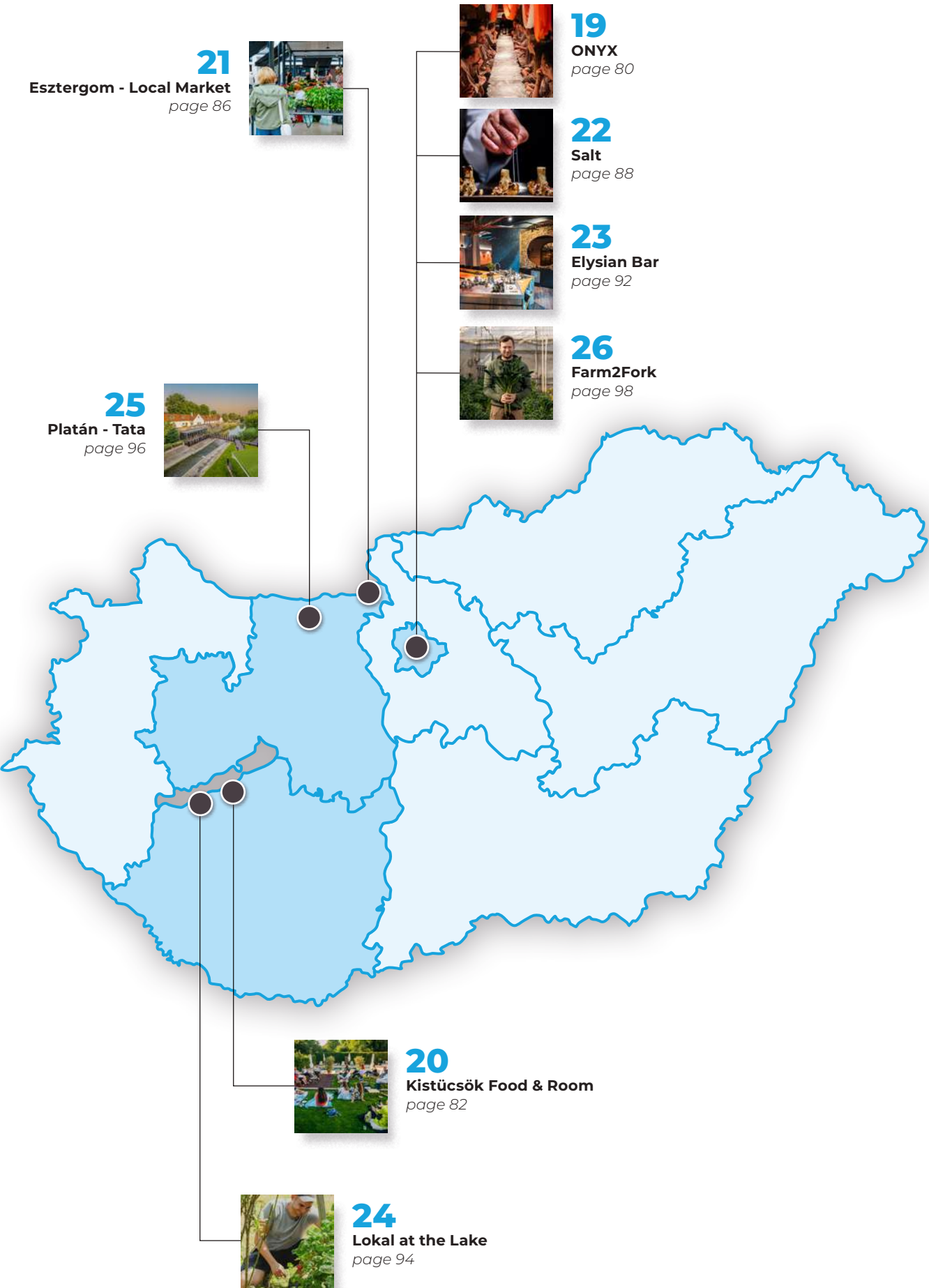
The cases in this chapter are the leaders of this charge. From two-Michelin-star restaurants in historic castles to pioneering zero-waste cocktail bars in the heart of Budapest, they are all united by a shared commitment to seasonality, traceability, and circularity. They prove that the most memorable flavours are not imported, but grown, foraged, and crafted with care, right here at home.

MACRO TRENDS

Hyper-local sourcing is on the rise, with produce increasingly sourced within a 50-kilometre radius. Farm-to-table restaurants in rural areas now report significantly lower food miles compared to their urban peers, reducing transport emissions while strengthening local supply chains.

Closed-loop kitchens are helping to cut waste by integrating composting and reuse into daily operations. Many sustainable kitchens now reduce more than 50 percent of their organic waste through local composting schemes, turning food scraps into a resource rather than a burden.

Food and craft bundles are emerging as a popular way to combine dining with cultural experiences. Restaurants that pair meals with traditional crafts report higher spending per guest, as visitors value the added authenticity and connection to local heritage.



The rebirth of a Michelin-starred giant

In an unprecedented move, the team behind Hungary’s first two-Michelin-star restaurant symbolically demolished it to build a new future. Reborn from this metamorphosis, ONYX now operates as two entities: A Michelin green-starred sustainability workshop (Műhely) and a breathtakingly immersive new restaurant (ÆTHER).



100%

regional sourcing achieved leading to zero-waste, for which the restaurant was awarded a Michelin green star.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The new restaurant interior is built with reclaimed materials, including custom furniture from recycled wool felt and screens cast from scrap aluminium.
- The team operates as a democratic “Creative Community,” with chefs and artists working collectively, replacing the traditional kitchen hierarchy.
- Onyx was the first restaurant in Hungary to calculate a full carbon footprint, covering everything from supply chains to guest menus.

In 2020, after 14 years of success, the team at ONYX did the unthinkable: they closed their world-renowned, two-Michelin-star restaurant. Believing the traditional fine-dining model had become too rigid, they handed guests hammers at a “last supper” to symbolically tear down the old walls and begin a process of complete reinvention.

This restructuring led to the creation of the ONYX Creative Community, a democratic collective of chefs, artists, and scientists who now run two distinct but connected concepts. The first to open was ONYX Műhely (“Workshop”), a 16-seat experimental kitchen and sustainability lab. It was here that the team developed their new ethos, earning a Michelin Green Star for its radical commitment to zero-waste practices, 100% local sourcing from the Carpathian Basin, and pioneering the use of materials like mycelium (mushroom root) to grow compostable plates and design elements.

In 2025, the main restaurant was reborn as ONYX ÆTHER. This is not just a meal; it is an immersive, multi-sensory journey. Guests are seated at a 16-person communal table and taken through an 11-course menu that travels through time, from the 1700s to a speculative culinary future in the year 3016. The interior itself is a testament to the

Műhely’s sustainable philosophy, built using raw, reclaimed materials like scrap aluminium, recycled felt, and reprocessable concrete.

ONYX Műhely itself has become a milestone of this transformation - functioning as ONYX’s research, development, and innovation hub. Here, sustainability is broken into practice: Menus are designed with at least 60% organic ingredients, seasonal sourcing is prioritised, and advanced preservation techniques like liquid freezing cut food waste. All furniture and uniforms are Hungarian-made from recycled or circular materials, while energy-efficient design reduces consumption by up to 70%. Waste separation is comprehensive, plastics are phased out, and even detergents are locally sourced and eco-friendly. Most strikingly, ONYX Műhely was the first

restaurant in Hungary to calculate its full carbon footprint, covering everything from staff commutes to guest menus. Education, attitude-shaping, and guest engagement - including a carbon offsetting programme through local tree planting - are integral parts of the dining experience, making the workshop both a restaurant and a living sustainability laboratory.

The traditional kitchen hierarchy is gone. In its place is a collaborative team of “creators” who personally serve and explain the story behind each dish. By deconstructing the past, ONYX has created a groundbreaking and deeply sustainable model for the future of gastronomy.



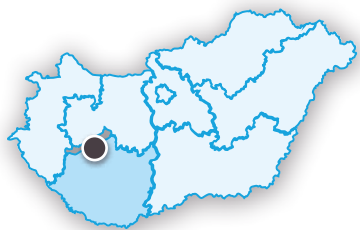
The 11-course ÆTHER menu takes guests on an immersive journey through the past, present, and speculative future of food.

“In order to create something new, we first had to demolish the old. We are building the future of Onyx and, at the same time, our own future.

- ONYX

Seasonal local flavours by Lake Balaton

Michelin recommended Kistücsök Food & Room has defined Lake Balaton cuisine for 30 years with two rotating four-course menus featuring 100 percent local ingredients. Zero-plastic operations, innovative glass upcycling, a live-kitchen Chef’s Room, and the Taste Balaton festival also prove that seasonality and local sourcing can sustain year-round tourism.



100%

of Kistücsök’s ingredients are sourced from within 50 km of Lake Balaton.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Broken glass from the restaurant is upcycled into plates and décor by local artist Görömbei Luca.
- The restaurant provides stable, year-round jobs for 30 staff, doubling to 60 in summer.
- Kistücsök financed a 5-hectare reforestation project near Balatonszemes, supporting local biodiversity.

For more than three decades Kistücsök Food & Room in Balatonszemes has championed genuine local and seasonal gastronomy. Under chef-owner Balázs Csapody, the restaurant sources every ingredient from within the Balaton micro-region. This philosophy wasn’t born from a trend, but from the owner’s family travels over 20 years ago to regions like Friuli, Italy, where they were inspired by the deep-rooted connections between restaurants and neighboring farms. Today, Kistücsök collaborates closely with a network of 30-40 farmers, fishers, cheesemakers, and vintners - all within a 50 km radius - to secure its provisions.

To honour the year’s natural rhythm Kistücsök offers two four-course menus that rotate every six weeks. Operations embody a zero-waste ethos. Single-use plastics were fully phased out, and kitchen trimmings are composted. In a unique display of circular artistry, all broken glass from the restaurant is sent to local glass artist Görömbei Luca, who transforms it into custom plates, vases, and decorative items used on-site. Staff training ensures every team member practices waste reduction, and guests receive menu cards detailing each dish’s provenance.



Kistücsök’s team outdoors, reflecting their focus on community and shared experiences.

Beyond the kitchen, the restaurant has taken direct environmental action by financing the planting of a nearly 5-hectare forest near Balatonszemes. This project, in partnership with Climate Action, contributes to long-term carbon sequestration and improves the local microclimate.

In the fall of 2021 Kistücsök opened their accommodation, with 19 rooms and 2 suites, 4* hotel, beside the Chef's Room, a live-kitchen event space designed to provide guests with a complex gastronomic and tourist experience. The Chef's Room hosts thematic dinners where diners can watch chefs work live, creating collaborative menus that share their passion, values, and creativity.

Kistücsök extends its farm-to-table philosophy to the bar. Leftover herbs and fruit peels become house-made syrups and tinctures, powering signature cocktails. The wine list now boasts more than 700 items dominated by Balaton wineries but also includes selections from other Hungarian regions.

To extend Balaton's culinary calendar beyond summer Kistücsök joined the Taste Balaton festival in spring 2024. The ten-day event featured over 100 workshops across 26 partner venues - from foraging hikes to winemaker dinners - drawing more than 300 participants. This commitment to year-round operation is a cornerstone of their social sustainability, providing stable, full-time employment for a core team of 30 people, a number that doubles to 60 in summer.

With its three decades of terroir-driven cooking and forward-thinking operations, Kistücsök Food & Room remains a model of sustainable gastronomy at Lake Balaton. The Michelin-recommended restaurant's commitment to local sourcing, precise seasonality, zero-plastic operations, and immersive experiences demonstrates how a region's culinary heritage can flourish all year while strengthening both economy and environment.

“We talk about Lake Balaton through our food and wines - honouring traditions with familiar flavours in new packaging and building trust with local producers.

- Balázs Csapody, Owner of Kistücsök Food & Room



Kistücsök's own brand, peach marmalade.

© Kistücsök

Farm-to-table meets community in Esztergom

In May 2023, Esztergom opened a purpose-built market hall to showcase the region’s farm-to-table heritage. Powered in part by 83 rooftop solar panels, the market - which also doubles as a civic hub designed for residents as much as for trade - champions a circular economy, with vendors supporting one another, and a bottle-return programme that has already collected over 16,000 units.



+80

rooftop solar panels provide around 25% of the market hall’s electricity needs.

After decades of open-air stalls on a street still known locally as „Market Street,” Esztergom in May 2023 debuted a permanent, 3,000-square-metre market hall to revitalise its farm-to-table heritage. Located in the city’s historic core, the hall was built around a restored 19th-century classicist building, joining modern architecture with protected heritage. Local farmers, butchers, and artisans now offer seasonal specialties across 23 retail spaces and 58 vendor tables.

HIGHLIGHTS

Since March 2024, the bottle-return station has collected more than 16,000 bottles.

Over 100 regional producers, artisans, and vendors sell at the market.

Free electric shuttles help elderly residents access the market, making sustainability inclusive.

The market was conceived as a civic space. The design deliberately prioritises residents over transient tourism, creating a gathering point where neighbours shop, dine, and interact daily. Shaded courtyards, community seating, and cultural programmes turn the hall into more than a trading floor. It anchors Esztergom’s ambition to build a liveable small town on the Danube, where sustainability is measured not just in infrastructure but in social cohesion.

At the heart sits “Piac42,” the market’s bistro led by Michelin-star chef Barna Ádám. Open from morning through dinner, Piac42 serves classic and creative dishes. In a prime example of the market’s circular philosophy, the bistro sources its ingredients directly from the hall’s vendors. This

internal economy is a core principle. During the annual Böllér (Butcher’s) Festival, the market’s butchers provide the meat, the greengrocers supply the onions, and the restaurateurs cook and sell the final product, ensuring all value remains within the community.

The market hall hosts a rich programme of culinary events, workshops, and themed markets. These include “Kipakolóvásár” (flea markets) for secondhand goods, regular antique fairs, and collaborations with local civic groups like the “Kertbarátok köre” (Garden Friends Circle) for demonstrations on traditional food preservation.

The market also comes alive after dark through its “Gasztroest a Piacon” (Gastro Evenings), now a recurring success. On these nights, the hall shifts from trading floor to festival, with live music and the city’s food artisans stepping into the spotlight. Piac42 serves cocktails and seasonal plates, while guest chefs add flavour with street-food favourites like pulled pork. Other vendors expand their repertoires with sausages, olives, fresh juices, or sweet classics like chimney cake and ice cream. Entry is free, as the value lies in the atmosphere: A ritual where Esztergom’s residents gather not just to shop, but to celebrate their shared table.

Inclusion underpins the project. To help elderly and mobility-challenged residents, Esztergom introduced free electric “dottó” shuttles that run between neighborhoods and the market. Sustainability is also built-in: 83 solar panels on the roof provide roughly 25% of the building’s energy needs, and a “MOHU Repont bottle-return station” was installed in March 2024. In just a few months, it collected over 16,000 bottles, with the value of the returned deposits redeemable at any of the market’s shops.

To educate the public on the benefits of shopping locally, the market runs a column in the local newspaper called “Piaci Tudatosító és Tudósító” (Market Aware-ner & Reporter).

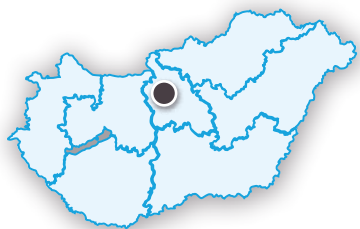
Esztergom’s market hall earned a place on the Green Destinations Top 100 sustainable tourism list in 2024. By uniting local producers, chefs and the community under one roof offering hands-on events and providing inclusive transport, the city has strengthened its economy, reduced food miles and crafted an authentic farm-to-table destination that serves both residents and visitors year-round.



Shoppers and vendors meet at the market hall, strengthening community ties and supporting local producers.

Salt’s bold sustainable gastronomy vision

Salt fuses tradition, innovation, and sustainability. With wild-foraged herbs and mycelium-hemp tableware, this boutique Michelin Green Star restaurant redefines circular fine dining. It is a bold, authentic ode to Hungarian heritage and sustainable gastronomy at the highest level, proving that local ingredients and bold choices can shape a new culinary future.



100%

of menus feature wild-foraged herbs, mushrooms, and flowers.

HIGHLIGHTS

Salt collaborated with MOME to design biodegradable plates from hemp and mycelium.

All food scraps are composted and returned to the restaurant’s own garden in Gödöllő.

Guests can choose local or natural Hungarian wine pairings alongside seasonal juices.

Opened in Budapest in 2019, Salt has quickly become a reference point for sustainable fine dining in Central Europe. Located in the heart of the city, this Michelin Green Star-awarded restaurant reimagines Hungarian culinary heritage through the lens of circularity and local sourcing. Behind it is chef-owner Szilárd Tóth, who brings his passion for foraging, fermentation, and heritage recipes to the fore, creating a delightful dining experience that is deeply rooted in place and season. The idea first emerged from a prior collaboration, where a specific ‘four-hands dinner’ with a fellow chef sparked the concept. This event highlighted how a particular New Nordic Cuisine’s approach to foraging and preservation mirrored the historical traditions of Old Hungarian Cuisine, where rural communities relied on similar techniques out of necessity.

Salt’s philosophy is simple, yet ambitious; every dish should reflect Hungary’s landscape, history, and ecological potential. To achieve this, Tóth and his team personally forage wild herbs, berries, mushrooms, and flowers from regions such as Szatmár, while also cultivating specific plants in Salt’s own garden in Gödöllő. Operated in partnership with a nonprofit that employs people with reduced work capacities, the garden grows native species like juniper, hawthorn, crabapples,



Chef Szilárd Tóth and his team craft dishes with precision, combining innovation with traditional Hungarian techniques.

“Running a restaurant is not the most sustainable thing in the world, but you can strive to operate as sustainably as possible. This is a fundamental principle in every decision we make.

- Máté Boldizsár, Co-founder of Salt.

barberries, woodruff, chervil, and salsify - now staples in Salt's seasonal menus.

This deep respect for sourcing extends to protein as well. Organic ham and pig's jowl bacon come from Tóth's own family-run butchery in the village of Nyírmeggyes, ensuring full traceability and ethical provenance. Beyond the familiar, Salt's kitchen is known for surprising inclusions - like Burgundy snails or even ants - used not for novelty, but as an extension of its philosophy to reintroduce lost or overlooked ingredients from Hungarian culinary history.

The result is a rotating seasonal menu that reflects the cycles of the land. The restaurant's "Journey of Ingredients" philosophy guides every decision from sourcing to waste. Salt's composting initiative transforms kitchen scraps into garden nutrients, while homemade juices and non-alcoholic pairings complement the food experience without compromise. The zero-waste philosophy is supported by a strict reservation policy that requires guests to pre-book and pay for their course within 48 hours of cancellation, effectively eliminating food waste.

The wine and drink menu at Salt is equally aligned with its values. Alongside classic pairings, Salt offers curated selections of natural and organic Hungarian wines and house-made seasonal juices. Diners can opt for a local pairing, an European natural wine set, or the more premium Prestige range. Most Hungarian labels hail from small vineyards practicing organic or biodynamic methods, particularly from Tokaj, Balaton, and Somló.

Design is just as innovative. A standout collaboration with Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design (MOME) led to the development of mycelium-and-hemp plates - fully biodegradable and Hungarian-made. It is a tangible symbol of Salt's commitment to circularity, where even tableware honours sustainability. This specific collaboration involved a designer who created the plates' shape and a cultivator who grew the mycelium fibers on natural materials. The project serves not only as a tangible symbol of their commitment but also as an educational tool to raise awareness about sustainable materials with their guests.

These choices have earned Salt multiple accolades, including a Michelin Star (2021) and Michelin Green Star (2022), recognising not just culinary brilliance but also a deep commitment to sustainability. They have also been recognised by Dining Guide, receiving the "Sustainable Restaurant of the Year" award.

Looking forward, Salt plans to continue its journey of experimentation by moving to a larger location to accommodate a dedicated fermentation lab. The expectation is that this new space will allow the team to delve even deeper into the art and science of preservation, creating novel ingredients and textures while further enhancing the guest experience. It represents a tangible step in their ongoing mission to explore every facet of sustainable gastronomy.

Salt is not just a restaurant - it is a movement. By honouring ancestral wisdom and rethinking modern hospitality, the establishment shows that sustainability can be luxurious, local, and deeply personal.



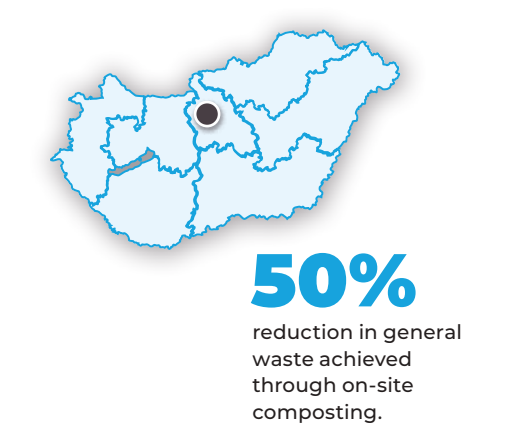
The kitchen staff work as a collaborative team, drawing on foraged ingredients and traditional preservation techniques to create innovative dishes rooted in sustainability.



Handpicking herbs and berries, integrating wild ingredients into the restaurant's seasonal menus.

Zero-waste cocktails at Elysian

Elysian Bar redefines bar culture with a zero-waste ethos, crafting cocktails from seasonal, locally sourced ingredients, eliminating single-use plastics and repurposing organic waste. This innovative cocktail bar sets a new standard for sustainable hospitality in Hungary's capital.



HIGHLIGHTS

Single-use plastics have been eliminated across the bar's operations.

All cocktails are made with seasonal Hungarian produce, including a hyper-local spirits section.

The rotating menu features sections like "Preserved," showcasing fermentation and pickling.

Standing on Budapest's lively Akácfa Street, Elysian Bar is raising the bar - literally and figuratively - for sustainable hospitality. This cocktail bar is a sanctuary for conscious consumption, where zero-waste meets world-class mixology, and each drink tells a seasonal, local, and regenerative story, offering patrons an experience that delights the senses while honouring the planet.

Elysian's philosophy is simple, but powerfully aligned with nature. Their rotating cocktail menus change with the seasons, using only the freshest ingredients sourced from regional producers and local artisans. Seasonality isn't a branding gimmick - it's a fundamental operating principle. "It's about being in tune with nature's cycles," says the team. Each cocktail is a celebration of what is ripe, local, and can be used fully without waste. Leftover components, often discarded elsewhere, find new life here. Citrus peels become infusions, and herb stems transform into aromatic garnishes. Composted waste is given to the farmers to ,give back to the Earth.

The cocktail menu is a testament to this philosophy. Divided into sections like „Fresh,“ „Preserved,“ and „Classic,“ each drink tells a story of thoughtful sourcing and creative reuse. For instance, the „Preserved“ selection showcases the art of fermentation and pickling, capturing flavours at their peak and extending their lifespan

without relying on artificial preservatives. In a dedicated ,hyper-local' section of the menu, Elysian offers cocktails made exclusively with Hungarian spirits in addition to the seasonal, Hungarian produce they already use. This ensures that not only the fresh ingredients but also the base spirits are sourced from within the country, creating a fully Hungarian drink experience.

Food complements the drinks, too. Elysian's small plates (think beer-friendly bites like crispy chickpeas or fermented root chips) are curated with the same attention to zero-waste preparation, regional sourcing, and low-impact packaging.

Beyond the drinks, Elysian's commitment to sustainability permeates its entire operation. The bar has eliminated single-use plastics, opting instead for reusable or compostable alternatives. Energy-efficient appliances and lighting reduce electricity consumption, while organic waste is composted, returning nutrients to the earth and closing the sustainability loop.

The ambiance complements the ethos. Elysian's interior design embraces minimalism and natural elements, creating a serene environment that encourages patrons to savor their drinks mindfully. The space fosters a sense of community, inviting guests to engage in conversations about sustainability and conscious living.

On the global stage, the bar is on track to visit around 20 countries by the end of the year to share their sustainability philosophy and shine a spotlight on the Hungarian bar scene. According to co-owner, Márton Szabó, a cocktail is a luxury item, which makes weaving sustainability into the nightlife industry a serious challenge. However, they believe there is a need for this, and their goal is for as many establishments as possible to switch to this form of operation.

Elysian's approach serves as a model for the hospitality industry, demonstrating that environmental responsibility and exceptional service can coexist harmoniously. Elysian Bar isn't just crafting drinks - it's building a culture of conscious nightlife. One where flavour, responsibility, and creativity can cohabit.



The bar's centrepiece, framed with natural elements, reflects Elysian's philosophy of pairing design with sustainability.

Lokal plates with purpose at Lake Balaton

Lokal at the Lake in Fonyód is more than a small-plate restaurant. It's a manifesto where seasonal produce, zero-waste cooking, and biodynamic wines come together just 100 metres from the Balaton shore. What began as a farmers' market during COVID has grown into one of Hungary's most authentic sustainability stories.



95%

of Lokal's ingredients are sourced from within 80 km, supporting small farmers and minimising food miles.

HIGHLIGHTS

Twisted carrots, surplus milk, and day-old bread are all repurposed into new dishes, keeping Lokal's waste close to zero.

Kristinus Wine Estate operates a biodynamic garden specifically for Lokal, supplying ultra-local vegetables alongside wine.

The restaurant began as a COVID-era farmers' market in Nagykanizsa, which continues every Friday and still anchors their supply chain.

At Fonyódliget, just a short stroll from the beach, Lokal at the Lake welcomes guests with a philosophy stitched into every plate: Food should honour both people and place. The restaurant, founded by Janka Gelencsér and Richárd Csillag,

evolved naturally out of their farmers' market "Piac a Kertben" in Nagykanizsa, where they began connecting directly with small producers during the pandemic. What started as a lifeline for farmers became the blueprint for their restaurant: Local ingredients, community-driven supply chains, and a radical commitment to sustainability.

Today, about 95 percent of Lokal's ingredients come from within 80 kilometres. From buffalo meat and freshwater fish to artisanal cheese, mushrooms, and sourdough bread, each product is sourced from farmers they know personally. These aren't just suppliers; they're friends and partners. When Kristinus Wine Estate established a biodynamic garden to grow vegetables exclusively for Lokal, it further closed the loop between vineyard and kitchen. Even the drinks list is hyperlocal, featuring natural wines, homemade kombucha, and a specially brewed Lokalista Lager from Balatonszentgyörgy Sörművek.

The restaurant's kitchen operates on a near-zero waste principle. A twisted carrot rejected by supermarkets becomes the base for broth. Pork nails, often discarded, are turned into a rich stew. Leftover milk transforms into milk pie, while day-old bread reappears as bread pudding. Every ingredient has a second life. Cleaning, too, is

sustainable: Lokal partners with Hungarian brand "Cleaneco," using biodegradable, refillable products that match their ethos.

The menu brings this philosophy to life with a blend of tradition and reinvention. Diners can start with comforting staples like plum soup with cottage cheese dumplings or a fresh zucchini soup with fruit vinegar and bruschetta. Small plates invite sharing: Watermelon tacos with aioli, salted lemon, and chili, potato gratin with mangalica pork ham, or catfish croquettes with elderberry vinaigrette. Hearty dishes showcase the region: Wild boar with garden salad and green mayonnaise, paprika stuffed with veal in tomato sauce, or the beloved Zala classic dödölle with mangalica bacon and sour cream. The chef's four-course menu rotates weekly, pairing such dishes with biodynamic Hungarian wines, from crisp Olaszrizling to playful Kékfrankos rosé.

Desserts extend the zero-waste ethos with indulgent simplicity. Plum "derelye" (sweet ravioli with plum sorbet), Pavlova with summer fruits, and mágyarakás, a layered bread pudding with mascarpone and apple cream, close the meal with seasonal flavour. Even the children's menu follows the same standards, with scaled-down portions of beef ragù tortellini or wild boar croquettes, ensuring sustainability doesn't skip the youngest guests.

But Lokal is more than a restaurant. It is part of a wider ecosystem of community building and education. Their Friday farmers' market remains active, offering vegetables, fruit, preserves, and cheese directly from local producers. Guests can often find Janka there with their dog Dödölle, while once a month, Richard cooks meals at the market itself. Their own garden, just 200 metres

away, supplies tomatoes, eggplants, peppers, and apples that feature in seasonal dishes. Visitors may taste blackcurrant syrup or apple juice made from their own orchard.

For Janka and Richard, sustainability wasn't an abstract choice but the result of lived experiences, learning to farm during the pandemic, recognising the problem of food waste first-hand, and wanting to keep their farmers supported after market demand declined. Lokal at the Lake is their solution: A restaurant that doesn't just cook food but tells the story of a community and a landscape.



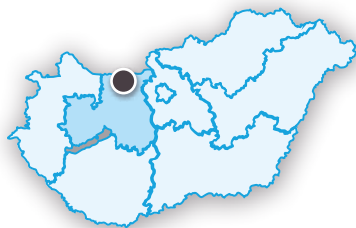
Richárd Csillag, co-founder of Lokal at the Lake, forages in the restaurant's garden, gathering fresh produce grown just steps from the kitchen.

"Sustainability is not our concept. It is our life, and we share that joy with our guests."

- Lokal at the Lake team

Two stars, one ecosystem

The Platán complex in Tata is a holistic model of sustainability where culinary excellence is the result of a deeply rooted system. From heating all units with self-grown energy reed to a zero-waste food chain and mentoring local youth, this two-Michelin-star destination proves that true luxury is circular.



100%

of Platán's heating and hot water comes from Miscanthus biomass, being produced on 30 hectares, while an off-site solar park covers its high-demand production.

HIGHLIGHTS

Platán is Hungary's only restaurant to hold two Michelin Stars and a Michelin Green Star, making it both a culinary and sustainability benchmark.

The restaurant is built into the former cellar and moat of the historic Esterházy Castle in Tata.

Platán's focus on social sustainability includes mentoring local students and maintaining one of the lowest staff turnover rates in the sector.

Its zero-waste food system eliminates food waste across five hospitality units.

Beside the historic Esterházy Castle in Tata, the Platán complex is a 16-year journey in sustainable hospitality. Rooted in their hometown, the founders have slowly and thoughtfully grown a single restaurant into a multi-faceted ecosystem that includes a bistro, a fine-dining restaurant, a boutique hotel, a bakery, and a street food unit. Their approach was sustainable before it was a trend, driven by a simple respect for their historical and natural environment.

Platán's most innovative solution is its energy independence. All of the complex's heating and hot water needs, from the hotel spa to the restaurant kitchens and even the off-site greenhouses are met using Miscanthus, a high-energy reed. They grow this biomass themselves on their own land, harvest it, and feed it into modern, digitally controlled boilers. This is complemented by a solar park at their off-site production facility, which powers energy-intensive activities like the bakery and confectionery.

Their food system is a masterclass in zero-waste circularity. A single product is cascaded through the different outlets to ensure full utilisation. For example, a baby corn starts its journey in the two-Michelin-star Platán Gourmet. Slightly larger pieces are used in the Platán Bistro, while mature cobs are grilled at the Korzó street food unit. Any remaining surplus is made into soup for the staff

canteen or preserved and pickled for the winter. This „full circle“ philosophy applies to everything, including the 18 Angus cattle they raise on their own farm, ensuring every part of the animal is used with respect.

This model is supported by an 11-year-old horticulture programme that grows hard-to-source or highly-travelled produce, and a bakery that even produces the hamburger buns for the street food unit. The goal is to achieve the highest quality with full traceability and minimal environmental impact.

Platán also invests heavily in human sustainability. They have strong partnerships with local vocational schools, mentoring students in every unit, from the kitchen to the pastry shop. This commitment to education and providing stable, long-term employment has resulted in very low staff fluctuation. By nurturing the next generation of hospitality professionals, they are ensuring the sustainability of their craft and their community.



Even the bread tells a story at Platán. By baking everything in their own bakery, they guarantee every ingredient is traceable and part of a truly circular system.

“We don't write the menu, the environment around us writes it for us. Our most important job is to listen to it.

- István Pesti, Chef of Tata Platán

Linking farmers and tables

Farm2Fork bridges the gap between Hungarian farmers, chefs, and consumers. Through sourcing of local, seasonal, and organic produce, the platform shortens supply chains, reduces environmental impacts, and supports fair trade partnerships that strengthen Hungarian agriculture and gastronomy.



+60

Hungarian producers showcased on the Farm2Fork platform, offering vegetables, fruits, herbs, mushrooms, and processed products directly to restaurants and households.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Farm2Fork allows customers to filter produce by type, producer, and whether it is organically or conventionally grown.
- The platform curates seasonal boxes, ensuring consumers eat in tune with Hungary’s natural cycles.
- Reduced packaging and shorter supply chains cut food miles, lowering environmental impacts across the board.

Farm2Fork is reshaping the way food reaches kitchens in Hungary. Founded by Boldizsár Horváth, the initiative grew out of a simple but ambitious goal to connect Hungarian farmers directly with chefs, restaurants, and consumers who value high-quality, local produce. The name itself - “Farm2Fork” - reflects the farm-to-table principle guiding its work.

What sets Farm2Fork apart is its ability to act as a bridge between producers and gastronomy. Farmers gain reliable buyers, while chefs and households gain access to carefully selected ingredients that would otherwise remain hidden in local markets or limited to small-scale distribution. This exchange strengthens rural livelihoods and enriches Hungarian cuisine with authentic, traceable products.

The platform emphasises seasonality and organic practices. Vegetables, fruits, herbs, mushrooms, and processed goods are curated with care, ensuring that what reaches the plate is fresher, more nutritious, and lower in environmental impact than imported alternatives. Customers can filter their purchases by type, producer, or growing method, choosing between organic and conventional, but always with the guarantee of Hungarian origin.

Sustainability also runs through the business model. Farm2Fork essentially cuts transport emissions and food miles by minimising the distance ingredients travel, Packaging is consciously reduced, and where possible, environmentally friendly solutions are prioritised. Beyond logistics, the company cultivates close personal relationships with farmers and chefs alike. This human element is part of the founder’s philosophy, ensuring that trade is not only about efficiency but also about fairness and trust.

Farm2Fork offers more than just products. Its platform showcases producers, giving visibility to the people behind the food. This transparency helps consumers and restaurants make informed choices and strengthens appreciation for the craft and labour that underpin Hungarian agriculture. For chefs, it means working with ingredients whose origins they know intimately - a cornerstone of modern sustainable gastronomy.

With categories ranging from seasonal boxes to fresh vegetables, fruits, mushrooms, herbs, and processed products, Farm2Fork’s reach continues to grow. Each order placed represents a direct investment in Hungarian agriculture, reinforcing the country’s position as a hub of local, sustainable food culture.

As Boldizsár Horváth reflects, Farm2Fork is more than logistics: „Every day I work to connect Hungarian farmers with top restaurants and consumers who are open to high-quality, local ingredients.“

This philosophy captures the initiative’s impact. By making farm-to-table more accessible, Farm2Fork nurtures stronger rural economies, empowers chefs with better ingredients, and offers consumers a tangible way to support sustainability through their everyday choices.



Boldizsár Horváth, founder of Farm2Fork, builds close ties with farmers and chefs based on a philosophy that trade must rest on fairness, trust, and human connection.

“ Every day I work to connect Hungarian farmers with top restaurants and consumers who are open to high-quality, local ingredients.

- Boldizsár Horváth, Founder of Farm2Fork



Over 80 historic wine cellars carved into rhyolite tuff line the hillside at Herceghút - Kőporosi Pincesor, a UNESCO-listed site in the Tokaj wine region still used today for producing and storing Tokaji wines.

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WINERIES

In Hungary, wine is a story told by the land itself. It is a narrative of ancient geology - of volcanic basalt, rich loess, and limestone soils - shaped by the hands of vintners who see their role as one of patient interpretation. More than just a craft, winemaking here is a long-term commitment to a specific piece of the earth, a practice of listening to the soil and translating its voice into the bottle.

Today, a new chapter of this story is being written. A growing number of winemakers are moving beyond conventional methods, embracing practices that seek to enhance the life of the soil rather than simply take from it. This is a philosophy of generational stewardship, where the vineyard is treated as a complex, living ecosystem, nurtured through biodynamic preparations and a deep understanding of natural cycles. In the cellar, this translates to minimal intervention, allowing the unique character of the vintage and the vineyard to express itself with honesty and clarity.

The result is a collection of wines that are not just made, but grown - each bottle a vibrant expression of its unique origins. The estates featured here represent the forefront of this movement. They are proving that the most profound and authentic wines come from the healthiest, most resilient land, demonstrating a deep commitment to the future of both their craft and their environment.

MACRO TRENDS

Regenerative viticulture is on the rise. Organic and biodynamic practices are expanding across Hungary, with several leading wineries paving the way. Tokaj Hétszőlő, for example, now manages 55 hectares of organic-certified vines, setting a benchmark for sustainable winemaking in one of the country’s most prestigious wine regions.

Biodiversity is being restored in vineyards. Instead of relying on synthetic pesticides, many growers are planting cover crops and encouraging natural allies such as bats and bees. These biodiversity plots support healthier ecosystems, protect the vines, and reduce the need for chemical interventions, creating a more balanced environment for winegrowing.

Terroir is celebrated through unique soils. In Hungary’s Balaton Highlands, vineyards thrive on volcanic basalt soils that impart a distinctive minerality to the wines. This geological foundation not only shapes flavour but also connects each bottle to the natural heritage of the region, making terroir a key part of sustainable wine identity.

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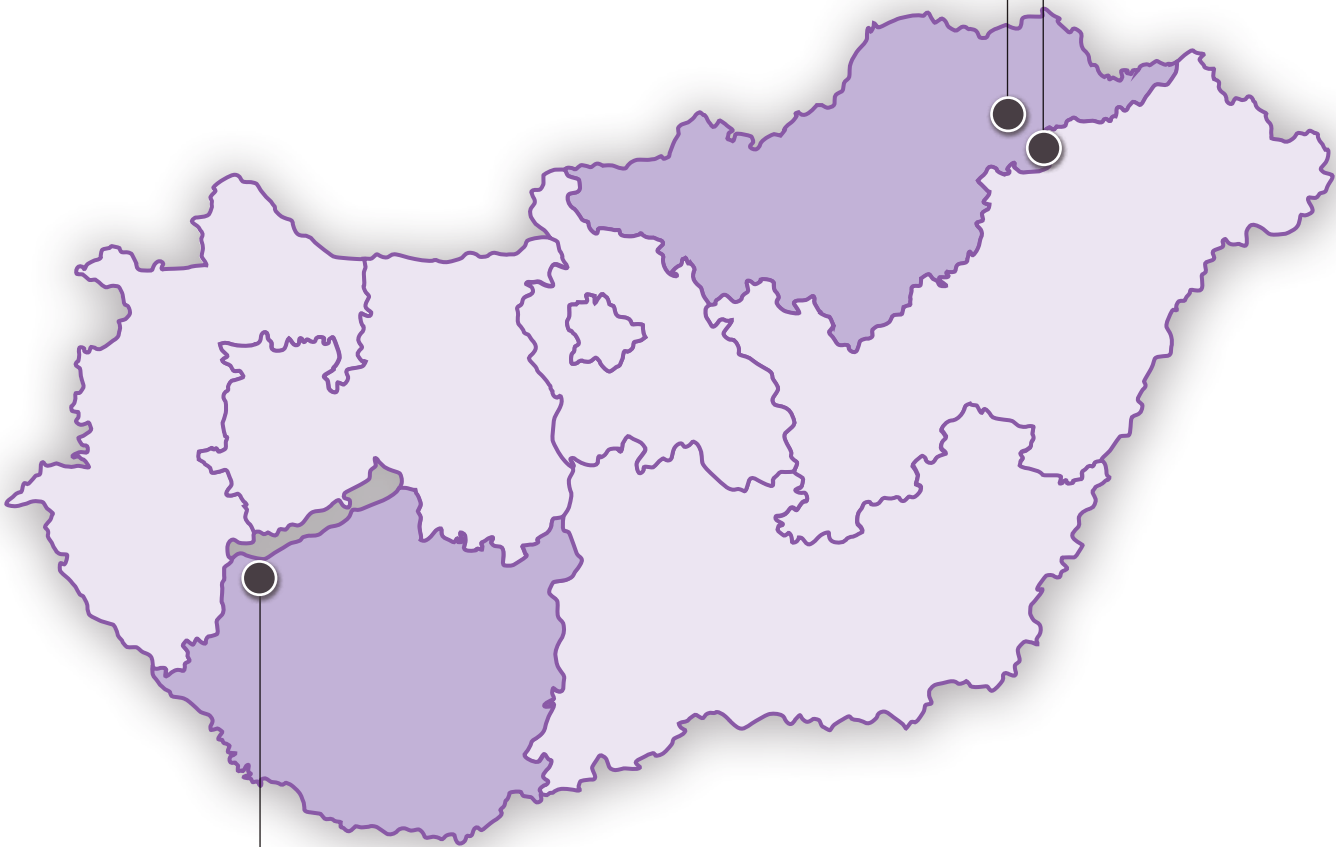
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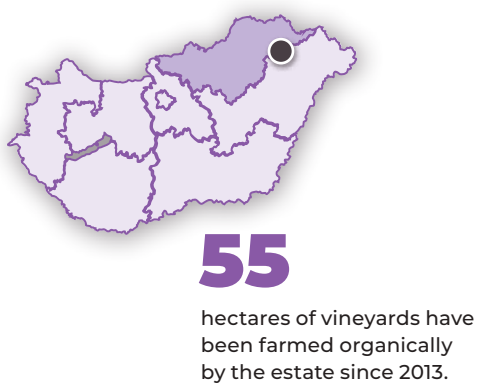


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Tokaj heritage in every bottle

Tokaj Hétszőlő blends five centuries of winemaking tradition with modern sustainability. As one of Hungary’s first fully organic vineyards in Tokaj, it protects biodiversity, harvests rainwater, and uses low-emission tools, crafting exceptional wines that honour nature and heritage alike.



In Hungary’s historic Tokaj region - where wine has been elevated to legend - Tokaj Hétszőlő Bio Szőlőbirtok is rewriting the script through organic innovation. Founded in 1502, the estate has cultivated some of the most fertile volcanic-loess parcels on the south slope of Tokaj Hill for over five centuries. But Hétszőlő is not resting on history. Today, it is a model for regenerative viticulture that protects terroir while crafting complex, expressive wines.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Rainwater harvesting reduces reliance on freshwater for cleaning and irrigation at the winery.
- Ecological “islands” here provide habitats for birds and insects, supporting natural pest control.
- The estate follows a 4R strategy (reduce, reuse, recycle, reject) across all operations.

The winery’s name, meaning “seven parcels of vineyard,” is a nod to the original land selection by the Garai family in the 16th century. These plots benefit from ideal Tokaj conditions, i.e., loess-rich soils, misty mornings, and afternoon breezes. Unlike many historic estates, Hétszőlő has fully embraced ecological responsibility. In 2009, the winery began its transition to certified organic farming, earning full certification for all 55 hectares by 2013 - one of the first in Tokaj to farm entirely without synthetic pesticides, herbicides, or fertilisers. Today, copper use averages just 2-2.5 kg/ha - nearly half the EU organic limit.

Instead, the estate cultivates biodiversity through cover crops, compost-based soil enrichment, and ecological buffer zones planted between rows and

parcels. A joint project with ÖMKi (the Hungarian Research Institute of Organic Agriculture) further tests cover crop mixes to improve soil health and control erosion. These “ecological islands” provide habitats for insects and birds, supporting natural pest control and vineyard health. Copper and sulfur use - while permitted in organic farming - is being phased out gradually, replaced by natural substances like baking soda and orange oil. Vineyard machinery is shifting to low-emission alternatives, shrinking the estate’s carbon footprint even further.

Hétszőlő’s commitment to conservation extends to its cellar. The estate produces all wines using traditional Tokaj techniques and native fermentation, including Dry Furmint, Szamorodni, and Tokaji Aszú - without artificial inputs or systemic interventions. Packaging is designed with circularity in mind. Corks are FSC-certified, bottles are lightweight, and suppliers must meet environmental standards. Local families are engaged in vineyard work, combining social inclusion with ecological farming.

Equally impressive is their water and waste management. Rainwater is harvested from rooftops and reused for cleaning and irrigation, sharply reducing freshwater consumption. A “4R” strategy - reduce, reuse, recycle, reject - guides all resource use, from winery operations to visitor events. The result is a closed-loop system that minimises environmental impact while maximising transparency.

The estate also opens its doors to the public with regular tastings, cellar tours, and educational programmes - teaching visitors how organic viticulture supports the long-term health of both wine and landscape. With a wine shop on-site and events throughout the year, guests can experience the harmony between old-world craft and new-age responsibility.

At Hétszőlő, sustainability is a generational commitment. As technical director Gergely Makai puts it, “We do believe that with an organic approach we can protect the vitality of the vines and so have better quality now and in the future.”



The historic cellars of Tokaj Hétszőlő, where centuries-old heritage can coexist with modern organic winemaking.

“We do believe that with an organic approach we can protect the vitality of the vines and so have better quality now and in the future.

- Gergely Makai, Technical Director of Tokaj Hétszőlő

Szóló Borászat: Organic viticulture at its finest

In the village of Tállya, Szóló Borászat is cultivating more than just vines. It is nurturing a philosophy. This boutique Tokaj winery channels biodynamic farming, ancestral knowledge, and minimal-intervention winemaking into terroir-driven natural wines that speak of land, life, and legacy.



HIGHLIGHTS

- Historic parcels like Tökösmály and Sípos are home to 60-year-old vines.
- Here, ultra-lightweight bottles reduce carbon impact in packaging and shipping.
- Horse ploughing, hand harvests, and cover crops are preferred to fossil-fuel machinery on the vineyard.

In Hungary’s Tokaj region, where history runs deep and soils even deeper, Szóló Borászat is quietly redefining what it means to make wine. Situated in the UNESCO World Heritage village of Tállya, this small, family-run winery is led by Tímea and Tamás Éless, whose deep respect for nature and winemaking runs through every bottle they produce.

“We made a promise to take care of the land,” they say. That promise shows up everywhere, from the use of horse plowing and manual harvests to their rejection of chemicals in both vineyard and cellar. The farm is certified biodynamic - all 12 hectares of it, a step beyond organic that treats soil, plant, and celestial cycles as one living system. All their grapes - Furmint, Hárslevelű, Kabar, Kövérszőlő - are grown without synthetic inputs. Between the rows, cover crops thrive, many of them developed with university partners to enhance biodiversity. In the winery, wild fermentation rules. Wines are bottled unfinned, unfiltered, and unsulphured, if possible. The result? Vibrant, expressive, deeply personal wines that represent Tállya - alive, like nature itself.

Their vines span iconic vineyard names like Tökösmály, Bártfai, Sípos, Hetény, and Dukát each worked by hand and celebrated for its unique character. The Tökösmály vineyard for instance



Among the rows of Tokaj vines, capturing the winery's philosophy of hands-on care for every plant.

features 60-year-old Hárslevelű vines growing on steep, south-facing slopes of rhyolitic tuffa - producing some of Szóló’s most compelling wines. Bártfai, once lost to the family, was reclaimed and replanted with a mix of Furmint and Hárslevelű. Sípos, their scenic 0.8-hectare parcel with 60-year-old vines, looks over Tállya’s rooftops. Hetény, affectionately referred to as “over the water,” is cherished for its historic charm and quiet tasting spot. Meanwhile, Dukát is a southwest-facing vineyard planted in 1985 with Furmint, including rows of red grapes for their rare rosé.

But Szóló is more than a vineyard and bottles. It is a place of learning. The estate has become a magnet for students, interns, and researchers - from Waldorf classes to international enology trainees. Children come to experience harvest, university students write theses on natural winemaking, and young winemakers learn the craft of biodynamic viticulture in practice. This unplanned role as an educational hub reflects the estate’s philosophy of sharing knowledge and keeping small-scale viticulture alive for the next generation.

Every step of Szóló’s operation is designed to lower its environmental footprint. Rainwater is collected for spraying, while tractors are used sparingly and only where animals or hand tools cannot. The cellar relies on gravity rather than

pumps, cutting energy use. Glass bottles are deliberately lightweight - down to 400 grams - and labels are printed on recycled apple pulp. Fossil fuel use is minimised through traditional vineyard methods: no deep ploughing, minimal mechanisation, and reliance on manual labour and scything between vine rows. Biodiversity is encouraged through cover crops, natural vegetation, and local manure use, while grape marc is recycled as mulch. Spraying is limited to sulfur, small amounts of copper, orange oil, and biodynamic preparations, guided by data from on-site meteorological devices.

As demand for biodynamic and natural wines rises in Hungary and abroad, Szóló has found its bottles on the lists of Budapest’s top restaurants and in markets as far away as Japan, New York, and Seoul. Yet the family dreams of selling more locally, even experimenting with refillable solutions and a new tasting room to reduce the footprint of exports.

As one of Hungary’s most progressive natural wineries, Szóló Borászat proves that tradition and innovation do not and should not conflict. Rather, they ferment beautifully together. Through care, courage, education, and craftsmanship, this Tokaj gem is bottling a future that respects the past and sustains the land for generations to come.

Beyond the vine: A biodynamic vision at Lake Balaton

Kristinus Wine Estate has transformed into Eastern Europe’s largest biodynamic winery, earning Demeter certification for its holistic approach. From zero-chemical farming and biodiversity islands to upskilling a new generation of agriculturalists, Kristinus proves that a deep commitment to nature can recultivate the land and reshape international markets.



HIGHLIGHTS

- Over 100 birdhouses and 7 insect hotels support natural vineyard biodiversity on the property.
- Exports from the winery doubled from 40% to 80% after certification, reaching Scandinavia, North America, and Western Europe.
- Glass bottle weight has been reduced by ~40%, saving energy and lowering transport emissions.

On the southwestern shores of Lake Balaton, Kristinus Wine Estate is pioneering a new chapter in Hungarian agriculture. In 2018, the estate’s leadership made a bold decision to convert the entire operation to biodynamic farming, a philosophy that treats the farm as a single, self-sustaining organism. This wasn’t just a change in the vineyard; it was a complete transformation of the winery, restaurant, hotel, and even the office.

By 2022, Kristinus had earned its full Demeter certification, officially becoming the largest biodynamic winery in Eastern Europe. The 70-hectare estate is now a vibrant ecosystem where 40 hectares of vines grow without any synthetic chemicals, protected by natural, house-made preparations like nettle and yarrow teas. The remaining land is dedicated to pasture for the estate’s biodynamically raised cattle, sheep, and chickens.

The commitment to biodiversity is visible everywhere. The vineyard rows are interspersed with bee pastures and cover crops, while over 100 birdhouses and 7 large, custom-built insect hotels support a healthy population of natural predators. This holistic approach extends to the winery’s supply chain, where they have reduced the weight of their glass bottles by nearly 40% and eliminated

1,788 kg of plastic waste through certified packaging. In a testament to the quality achieved through these methods, their 2020 Sauvignon Blanc received a 96-point score from Wine Enthusiast, a rating that places it among the world’s elite wines.

This deep commitment has yielded remarkable business results. Before certification, Kristinus exported 40% of its wine, primarily to neighboring countries. After achieving Demeter status, exports skyrocketed to 80%, opening new, premium markets in Scandinavia, Western Europe, Canada, and the United States. The certification provided a trusted, international language for quality and sustainability that resonated with conscious consumers worldwide.

Kristinus extends its mission through education, serving as a practical training ground for students from local Waldorf schools - an institution also founded by Rudolf Steiner, the father of biodynamics. By sharing their knowledge through workshops and internships, they are inspiring a new generation to pursue careers in sustainable agriculture.

Looking ahead, the estate is diversifying its biodynamic production. They are now growing medicinal herbs like cornflower and calendula for a Demeter-certified cosmetics company and developing non-alcoholic grape products like verjus and vinegar, responding proactively to changing global consumer trends.

“Our goal is to produce food with the least human intervention, that is the healthiest and has the highest intrinsic value, and to sell it through the shortest possible supply chain.

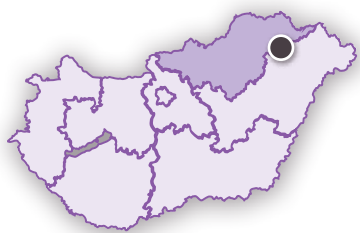
- Kristinus Borbirtok team



Kristinus vineyard, where biodiversity and soil vitality are central to cultivation.

Wine, culture, and conservation in Tokaj wine region

The Tokaj Wine Region Development Council harmonises ecological stewardship with socio-economic growth, creating sustainable tourism through visitor centres and cultural hubs. recognised globally, Tokaj sets a benchmark in responsible wine tourism.



5,000

hectares of vineyards across 27 municipalities are coordinated by the Tokaj Wine Region Development Council, which oversees sustainability and development.

HIGHLIGHTS

In Bodrogkeresztúr, 30+ stork nests were safeguarded by burying power lines.

The region won UNWTO Best Tourism Villages (2023) and a Green Destinations Europe award.

6-7 km of vineyard roads were built to double as erosion-control and water management systems.

Established in 2014, the Tokaj Wine Region Development Council leads sustainability in Hungary’s UNESCO wine World Heritage site. - covering 27 municipalities - has developed a long-term comprehensive regional strategy approved by the Hungarian government. Tokaj, famous for its unique white wines, now extends its global reputation by aiming to become Europe’s first climate-conscious wine region by 2030, integrating climate adaptation, tourism, and cultural preservation. The sustainable future of the region is set out in the Tokaj Wine Region Climate Strategy, which prioritises awareness-raising, and the protection of both nature and the built environment.

The council’s vision balances tourism with heritage protection. Visitor centres like the one in Mád are built to high energy standards, using solar power, heat pumps, and renewable charging for electric bike rentals. Gastronomic hubs connect visitors to local traditions and flavours while protecting the cultural landscape. Parallel investments in vineyard roads double as rainwater-control systems, tackling soil erosion and safeguarding the environment.

Tokaj’s comprehensive approach to sustainability has earned significant international recognition. Its efforts placed the region on the prestigious Green Destinations Top 100 list, underscoring its commitment to sustainable tourism practices. Moreover, the region’s outstanding performance in sustainability led to its inclusion as one of the UNWTO’s Best Tourism Villages in 2023, further elevating Tokaj’s status on the global stage. A standout project in Bodrogkeresztúr won 3rd prize in Europe: 34-35 stork nests were protected by burying power lines, reducing bird accidents while also improving stormwater drainage. These achievements underscore Tokaj’s model of linking ecological stewardship with cultural vitality.

Ecological practices are central to Tokaj’s vineyards and infrastructure. Climate change already forces adaptation, as harvests now start in August in some years, requiring new cooling techniques like dry ice to prevent premature fermentation. Shifts in slope value, drought stress, and intense rainfall patterns highlight why erosion-control roads and climate-resilient grape

varieties are priorities. Sustainability here is not theory - it is an urgent response to visible climate pressures.

The council supports local wine producers, artisans, and service providers, emphasising local sales to create jobs and keep villages vibrant. Community participation is essential: Projects like cable burial in Bodrogkeresztúr required written consent from hundreds of households, and public forums were held to build trust. By embedding projects in local life, the council ensures benefits are shared widely and resilience is strengthened.

Through its progressive and integrative strategy, the Tokaj Wine Region Development Council exemplifies how sustainable tourism can effectively drive regional development, protect environmental resources, and sustain cultural heritage. As a global benchmark, Tokaj serves as a potent example of how regions worldwide can harmonise ecological stewardship with meaningful economic growth.



The green vineyards of the Tokaj hills are famed for producing the region’s distinctive wines, shaped by volcanic soil and centuries of craftsmanship.



The warm thermal waters of Hévíz Lake, a natural spa that promotes sustainable tourism by combining health, wellness, and environmental care.

© Visit Hungary

ACTIVITIES

More than anything else, it is the experiences we have and the things we do that shape our travels. A memorable holiday is built on a collection of moments, such as the energy of a festival, the quiet of a nature trail, the fun of a family adventure. In Hungary, a growing movement is dedicated to ensuring these activities are not only enjoyable but also meaningful and responsible.

This isn't about limiting fun; it's about enriching it. It's about connecting our leisure time to the local culture, community, and environment in a positive way. Across the country, event organisers, visitor centres, and entire regions are proving that tourism can be a powerful force for good. Major festivals are cutting their environmental footprint, adventure parks are teaching children about renewable energy through play, and regional strategies are being designed to protect natural landscapes for generations of visitors to come.

The cases in this chapter showcase the diverse ways Hungary is making tourism more sustainable from the ground up. From large-scale events to intimate nature-based excursions, these initiatives are all built on a common principle that the best travel experiences are those that give back to the places and people that make them possible.

MACRO TRENDS

Culture and festivals embrace sustainability: Events are cutting waste, sourcing locally, and engaging visitors in climate awareness.

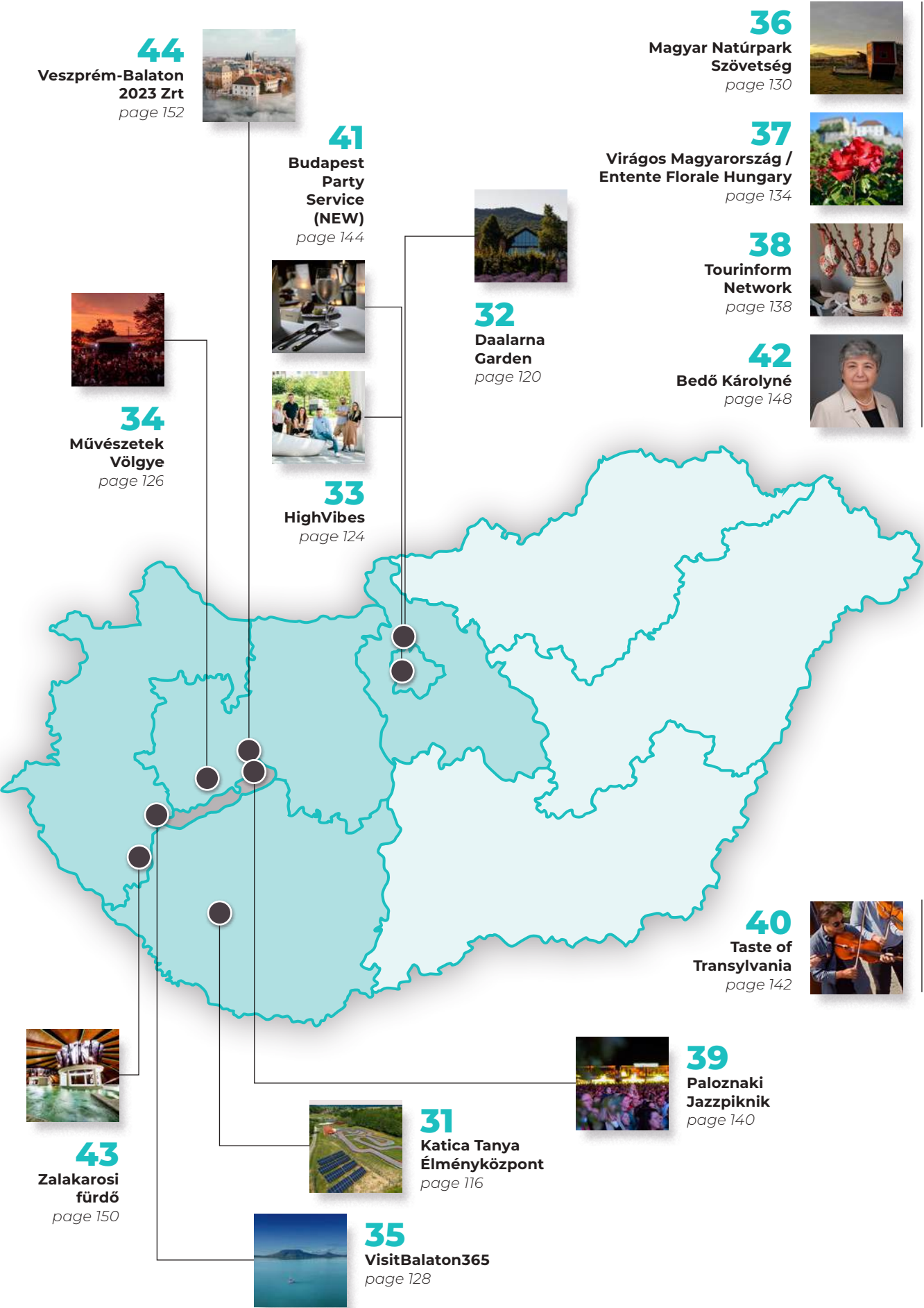
Hungary's largest cultural festivals now attract over 200,000 visitors while phasing out single-use plastics.

Experiences double as education: Attractions and visitor centres integrate hands-on lessons in conservation, farming, and circular living.

Family- and nature-based centres across Hungary engage more than 100,000 visitors annually in sustainability practices.

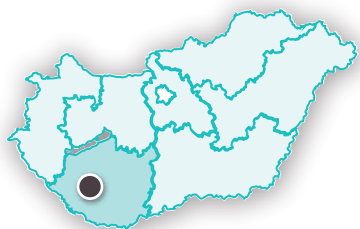
Communities lead the transition: Regional councils, digital platforms, and grassroots competitions mobilise towns and producers to embed sustainability in daily life.

Programmes like Virágos Magyarország involve over 300 towns each year in biodiversity and climate-friendly projects.



Adventure reimagined through sustainability

Katica Tanya is more than an adventure park; it's a mission. Guided by a deep commitment to a sustainable future, this family-run hub has implemented radical solutions in energy, water, and waste, proving that a profitable business can prioritise the planet by consciously sacrificing short-term gains for long-term survival.



+80%

of the park's landfill-bound waste was cut, through radical waste reduction and on-site sorting.

HIGHLIGHTS

The park saves roughly 7,000 km of waste-hauling journeys each year thanks to on-site reed-bed wastewater treatment.

All go-karts have been converted from petrol to electric, cutting local emissions and noise.

Single-use plastics are banned across the entire site, from cups to cutlery.

For 25 years, Katica Tanya Élmenyközpont has been a beloved rural activity centre in the village of Patca. But for the last 15 years, it has also been a living experiment in radical sustainability. The transformation began when owner János Handó read a UN climate report that painted a dark picture of the future. He made a decision: “We will do everything in our sphere of influence so that my child, his child, and his child’s child will have a livable future. This is our motivation, our strategic goal.”

This philosophy challenges the conventional wisdom that sustainability must always increase profitability. Handó argues that real change requires a willingness to invest in solutions that may never offer a traditional financial return, sacrificing a small percentage of profit today to ensure the business - and the planet - can survive tomorrow. This long-term, holistic thinking is visible in every aspect of the park’s operations.

The park’s approach to waste management is exceptionally thorough. Believing that recycling is an imperfect solution, Katica Tanya has banned the sale of PET plastic bottles since 2022, offering juices in paper cups or refillable flasks instead. After discovering that guests used 20,000 plastic



Visitors can race on Katica Tanya's electric go-karts, turning fun activities into a lesson in green mobility.

“We believe in the concept of borrowing our Earth from our successors rather than inheriting it from our predecessors.

- Katica Tanya team

trash bags in a year, the team re-engineered their collection process. Now, waste is emptied into a central container, allowing bags to be reused multiple times and reducing plastic bag consumption by 90%. Furthermore, because staff found that guest-sorted recycling was only 30-40% accurate, they now manually re-sort all waste on-site. Using a compressor, they have reduced their landfill-bound waste volume from three large containers per week to just one every three weeks.

Energy independence is another cornerstone. The park has no gas connection; kitchens run on highly efficient induction cooktops. A 169 kW solar panel array generates 100% of the park's annual electricity needs (around 200 MWh), and solar collectors heat the water. When building new facilities, Handó considers the „total cost of ownership,” investing in extra insulation and energy-efficient systems that, while more expensive upfront, dramatically reduce long-term energy consumption.

Water is treated as a precious resource. All wastewater is handled by an on-site, chemical-free reed-bed filtration system, saving an estimated 7,000 km of waste-hauling journeys annually. Rainwater is collected and used to flush all toilets, a system designed not for its short-term financial payback, but because using treated drinking water for this purpose is, in Handó's view, „a luxury the world cannot afford.”

This deep commitment transforms the guest experience. Families enjoy slides, ziplines, and electric go-karts, all powered by the sun. They are gently nudged toward more conscious habits - no disposable straws, no single-use plastics - in an environment where sustainability is simply the normal way of doing things. It is environmental education disguised as a day of fun.

What makes Katica Tanya stand out is how seamlessly it fuses environmental consciousness with guest satisfaction. Everything runs quietly and efficiently in the background, allowing visitors to focus on fun while knowing their visit contributes to a regenerative future.

More than just a theme park, Katica Tanya is a living proof that green design doesn't subtract from excitement, but rather adds to it. It's not a compromise; it's an upgrade.



Solar panels, rainwater systems, and on-site sewage treatment turn family fun into a hands-on sustainability experience.

Daalarna: Sustainability is elegance

Daalarna Garden is a 5-hectare event venue near Budapest that redefines luxury through sustainability. From solar-powered operations to wildlife-friendly gardens and upcycled architecture, it proves that elegance and sustainability can coexist without compromise.



+95%

of the venue's building materials are upcycled, including beams, columns, and paving stones from historic structures.

HIGHLIGHTS

The five-hectare estate is managed for biodiversity, with lavender fields, wildflower meadows, and native woodlands supporting pollinators and wildlife.

A solar panel park powers 100% of the estate's electricity needs in summer months.

The lavender and wildflower meadows host so many insects that guests sometimes need to raise their voices during conversations outdoors.

In the hills of Szentendre, just outside Budapest, Daalarna Garden offers more than a picturesque setting for weddings and events. It offers a blueprint for sustainable luxury. Founded by fashion designer Anita Benes, the venue was conceived with a singular vision: To create a space where elegance and environmental responsibility are inseparable.

The estate spans five hectares of thoughtfully curated landscapes, including a one-hectare lavender field, English gardens, wildflower meadows, and native woodlands. This biodiversity isn't ornamental; it's intentional. The grounds are designed to support local ecosystems, providing habitats for insects, birds, amphibians, and small mammals. A stream near the entrance nurtures aquatic life, while the absence of chemical treatments ensures a safe haven for all creatures.

According to the Daalarna team, there's so much noise from the insects in the lavender field and the wildflower meadow that you have to speak a little louder when having conversations nearby.



Rows of lavender leading toward the event hall, forming a scenic landscape and a thriving habitat for insects and birds.

“We’ve filled the space with incredible stories, and we make a point to share them with our guests.

- Daalarna Garden team

Architecturally, Daalarna Garden is a testament to sustainable design. Approximately 95% of its structures are built from recycled materials. Wooden beams from a 19th-century tobacco drying building, cast iron columns from centuries ago, and paving stones from the Hungarian National Museum's reconstruction all find new life here.

Energy efficiency is central to the venue's operations. A solar panel park powers the estate, providing 100% of its electricity needs during the summer months. Heating and cooling are provided through electricity generated from the panel park, ensuring a comfortable environment year-round without reliance on fossil fuels. The buildings are also equipped with a 'smart house' system that monitors energy use and automatically adjusts features like the smart shading system to reduce energy consumption for cooling.

Water conservation is equally prioritised. Rainwater harvesting systems supply water for irrigation and non-potable uses, while low-consumption fixtures minimise waste. The estate's saltwater pool eliminates the need for chlorine, aligning with its chemical-free maintenance philosophy. In addition to rainwater harvesting, the venue uses drip irrigation systems in garden beds covered with mulch to significantly reduce water usage.

Daalarna Garden's commitment to sustainability is evident in every detail, from its event practices to its core philosophy. The venue promotes a paperless experience by offering digital materials and encourages the use of local, seasonal ingredients. It supports sustainable transportation with bicycle parking and electric vehicle charging stations. A strict 'house policy' with catering partners ensures a zero-waste approach, where all food and material waste is sorted and removed from the site. This dedication to conscious consumption even extends to the Daalarna wedding dress brand, which incorporates recycled materials into some of its designs.

This exquisite venue demonstrates that luxury and sustainability are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they enhance each other, creating an experience that is both indulgent and conscientious - a model for the future of event venues.



The venue's main building, designed with reclaimed wood, glass, and stone, blending modern elegance with sustainable architecture.

© Daalarna Garden.

Zero-waste events, maximum impact

Budapest's HighVibes sets a new benchmark in sustainable event management. Guided by a powerful 6R model (Rethink, Refuse, Reduce, Repurpose, Recycle, Rot), they prove that memorable, human-centred events can leave a positive legacy without environmental costs.



HIGHLIGHTS

- At a single 2,500-person corporate event, HighVibes reduced the carbon footprint by 33%, saving 20 tonnes of CO₂.
- Over 500 professionals downloaded their “Sustainable Event Guide,” with a second edition now co-created with the Hungarian Event organisers’ Association.
- For unavoidable emissions, HighVibes partners with WWF Hungary to restore habitats instead of relying on traditional offsets.

For the founders of HighVibes, the turning point was personal. After years of running a traditional event agency, they faced a growing dissonance between their personal efforts toward sustainability and the immense waste generated by their profession.

The final straw came after a three-day rhythmic gymnastics event, where they had to throw away thousands of square metres of single-use red carpet. This moment catalysed a complete transformation, and in 2020, they relaunched HighVibes as the region’s first agency dedicated to creating human-centred experiences, sustainably.

HighVibes’ meticulous approach is built on a holistic, 6R framework that goes far beyond simple recycling. They Rethink event concepts from the ground up, Refuse unnecessary elements, Reduce consumption, Repurpose materials, Recycle what’s left, and ensure all organic matter can Rot (compost). This is applied across seven key areas, from venue selection to catering and decor. To manage waste, they partner with the Zöldövezet Tárulás, a specialist organisation that makes their selective collection 70% more efficient.

Transportation planning reflects their commitment to sustainability. HighVibes intentionally selects venues accessible via public transportation and emphasises carbon footprint reduction. To ensure transparency, they use the leading international platform Trace by Isla to measure an event’s carbon footprint. For one 2,500-person corporate event, their methods

reduced the carbon footprint from a baseline of 60 tonnes of CO₂ to just 40 tons.

Education plays a pivotal role. In 2021, HighVibes released its „Sustainable Event Guide,” a comprehensive 50-page document that was downloaded by over 500 marketing and HR professionals across Hungary. The guide’s success has led to a partnership with the Hungarian Event Organisers’ Association for an updated edition, cementing their role as industry thought leaders.

For the unavoidable emissions that remain, HighVibes rejected simple carbon offsetting. Believing a local impact requires a local solution, they partnered with WWF Hungary on a long-term habitat reconstruction project, a more complex and holistic answer than tree planting. This initiative helps restore a complete ecosystem within a national park, turning the final carbon

footprint of their events into a force for local biodiversity.

Through dozens of meticulously executed events, HighVibes directly prevents waste and cuts emissions while promoting sustainable practices. Beyond environmental impact, they actively integrate social sustainability, ensuring community involvement and tangible local benefits from their events. Their Net Promoter Score of 9.7 out of 10 proves that their clients - and their guests - are highly satisfied with events that are both memorable and responsible.

HighVibes continues to raise the sustainability bar, transforming the event industry in Hungary and beyond by showing that memorable, joyful experiences can coexist harmoniously with responsible ecological stewardship.



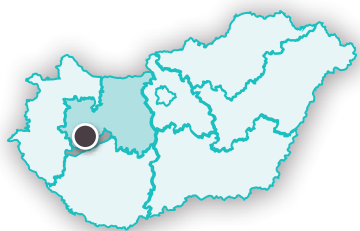
The team behind Hungary's first sustainable event agency, HighVibes.

“Organising a sustainable event begins with a collaborative thinking process involving stakeholders, where we assess all environmental impact factors, from the largest to the smallest.

- Szabolcs Pécsi (Head of Events)

Greenfest culture in full swing

Művészetek Völgye, Hungary’s largest arts festival, combines cultural preservation with environmental sustainability. From reusable cups and compostable cutlery to local crafts and climate education, it sets a benchmark for eco-conscious festivals rooted in community, creativity, and care for the planet.



+200,000

visitors are drawn to the festival annually and in 2025 earned the Good Travel Seal Silver with about 94% compliance.

HIGHLIGHTS

Reusable cups cut festival waste nearly in half compared to disposables.

More than 100 local artisans and food producers participate each year, keeping the festival deeply rooted in the community.

Environmental NGOs like WWF Hungary run on-site eco-education programmes, turning cultural events into climate awareness platforms.

Művészetek Völgye is not just Hungary’s largest multi-arts festival. It’s a living celebration of sustainability and creativity, woven into the fabric of Kapolcs and surrounding villages. Founded in 1989, the festival began as a grassroots initiative that used art as a means of revitalising rural life.

Over the decades, it’s grown into a 10-day celebration of music, theater, design, dance, and literature, now drawing over 200,000 visitors annually. Despite its scale, its soul remains deeply local. Residents host events in their gardens, and more than 100 local artisans are active participants, integrating cultural heritage with economic resilience. In 2025 the festival’s sustainability credentials were formally recognised with the Good Travel Seal Silver certification, scoring 94% compliance.

In 2019, Művészetek Völgye launched its “Tovább zöldül a Völgy!” (“The Valley is getting greener!”) campaign, reimagining how a rural mega-festival could respond to the climate crisis. Reusable cups replaced disposables, compostable dishware became standard, and visitors were encouraged to bring their own bottles and utensils. Waste management has since been professionalised: 15 volunteers now work daily shifts to sort festival waste, food waste goals are set annually, and unused meals are donated. Replacing disposable cups alone cut waste nearly in half.

And the green push didn’t stop there. On-site composting was rolled out for all biodegradable dishware, supported by a network of waste-sorting stations and clear guidance for attendees. Environmental partnerships with national parks and NGOs like WWF Hungary helped embed climate awareness into the festival experience, not just its operations. Visitors can participate in eco-education games, attend workshops on climate change, or visit pop-up exhibitions focused on sustainability themes.

Vendor policy reinforces the green mission. The “Kék Abrosz” (Blue Tablecloth) accreditation HIGHLIGHTS food stands using local, seasonal, and sustainable products. Vegetarian and vegan options are prioritised, and labeling ensures transparency for visitors. Beyond the festival, artisans and food vendors benefit year-round from visibility, while organisers also support the villages through EU grant applications and even subsidised housing programmes to keep local families in place despite rising real estate prices.

Organisers continue to refine sustainability practices each year. Festival marketing has shifted toward digital channels to reduce print waste. Volunteer programmes emphasise green awareness, and zero-waste campaigns are promoted online and onsite. Further developments have expanded the use of reusable materials and continued engagements through climate-focused programming.

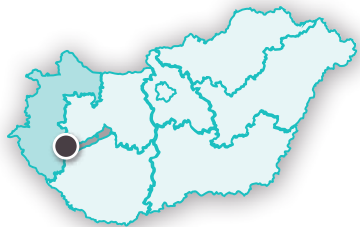
By uniting culture with environmental care, Művészetek Völgye shows that even mass gatherings can tread lightly. With its Silver Good Travel Seal, year-round community support, and climate-aware programming, the Valley proves that sustainability can be festive. The festival has become not only a cultural landmark but also a model for how rural communities and visitors can celebrate responsibly - leaving behind no waste, only stories, music, and memories.



Festival grounds in Kapolcs, capturing the Valley’s energy and atmosphere.

Lake Balaton, all year long

VisitBalaton365 reimagines Hungary’s iconic lake as a year-round destination, promoting off-season adventures, cultural events, and local collaborations. By extending tourism beyond peak seasons, it fosters sustainable development and supports the regional economy.



+1,500

local businesses are promoted on the VisitBalaton365 platform.

HIGHLIGHTS

In 2024, Lake Balaton welcomed 3.2 million guests and 9 million guest nights, its best results ever.

Around 200 billion HUF (~€509.000.000) in revenue was generated for local accommodation providers in 2024.

The summer share of guest nights has fallen from 65-66% to around 60-61%, showing growing off-season demand.

Once seen only as a summer retreat, Lake Balaton - dubbed the “Hungarian sea” - is evolving into a dynamic year-round destination thanks to VisitBalaton365. This regional initiative, launched to counterbalance seasonal tourism pressures, HIGHLIGHTS the lake’s diverse attractions across all four seasons from hiking trails and wine festivals to cultural heritage sites and wellness experiences.

The platform acts as a curated portal connecting travellers to seasonal programmes, rural experiences, and lesser known gems such as the Szent György-hegy wine region, the Káli Basin villages, and eco-friendly sites like the Kis-Balaton nature reserve. With many featured attractions listed online, ranging from thermal spas to artisanal markets and hiking routes, the site encourages low-impact tourism that distributes footfall beyond the crowded summer months.

VisitBalaton365 also collaborates with hundreds of local businesses to spotlight sustainable providers, rural accommodations, and authentic gastronomy events. By linking visitors directly with local service providers, it strengthens the rural economy while preserving cultural heritage. Examples include winter wine tastings, eco-bike tours, and off-season family farm visits that are integrated into the platform’s event calendar.

The impact of VisitBalaton365’s efforts is becoming increasingly visible. In 2024, Lake Balaton welcomed 3.2 million guests, a 7.5 percent increase from the previous year. Guest nights have surged, totaling approximately 9.1 million, a 3.9 percent increase compared to 2023. Domestic guest nights increased by 3.6 percent to 6.5 million, while foreign guest nights saw a 4.7 percent rise to 2.6 million. These figures represent the best results ever for Lake Balaton. The total gross revenue for accommodation providers reached nearly 200 billion forints (~€509.000.000), a 14 percent increase despite similar room capacity. The distribution of guest nights is also shifting, with the summer months now accounting for around 60-61 percent of the total, down from 62-64 percent previously. February, March, May, and October saw stronger than usual numbers in 2024, indicating growing interest in autumn and

spring visits. The increase in domestic day visitors by 10 percent in 2024 also points to the success of promoting shorter trips outside the main holiday period.

Events like the Taste Balaton festival, a 10-day gastro-cultural programme featuring exclusive tasting menus, gastronomic tours, concerts, wine tastings, and workshops at numerous local restaurants and venues, exemplify the kind of high-quality, off-season offerings being promoted.

More than a marketing initiative, VisitBalaton365 is reshaping how Hungarians and international visitors relate to Lake Balaton - not as a summer-only destination, but as a living, breathing region with natural, cultural, and economic vibrancy year-round.



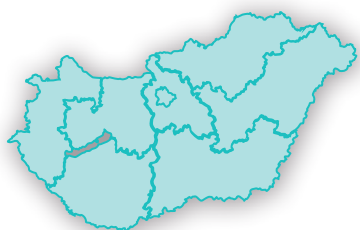
Balaton, the “Hungarian sea” is a popular choice for activities such as sailing, biking and hiking.

“The question is not when Lake Balaton will have four seasons. It is what we need to do to ensure that as many people as possible know about it and get to know the offerings of Lake Balaton in autumn, winter, and spring.

- Péter Princzinger, CEO of VisitBalaton365

Nature parks: Conservation in action

Nature parks in Hungary prove that conservation and development can work hand in hand. With 18 recognised parks covering around 10% of the country, they protect landscapes through cooperation with local people, mixing ecological preservation with rural identity, education, and sustainable tourism.



18

recognised nature parks across Hungary, covering approximately 10% of the country and involving over 10% of municipalities.

HIGHLIGHTS

Nature parks integrate conservation with rural development, strengthening cultural identity and sustainable tourism.

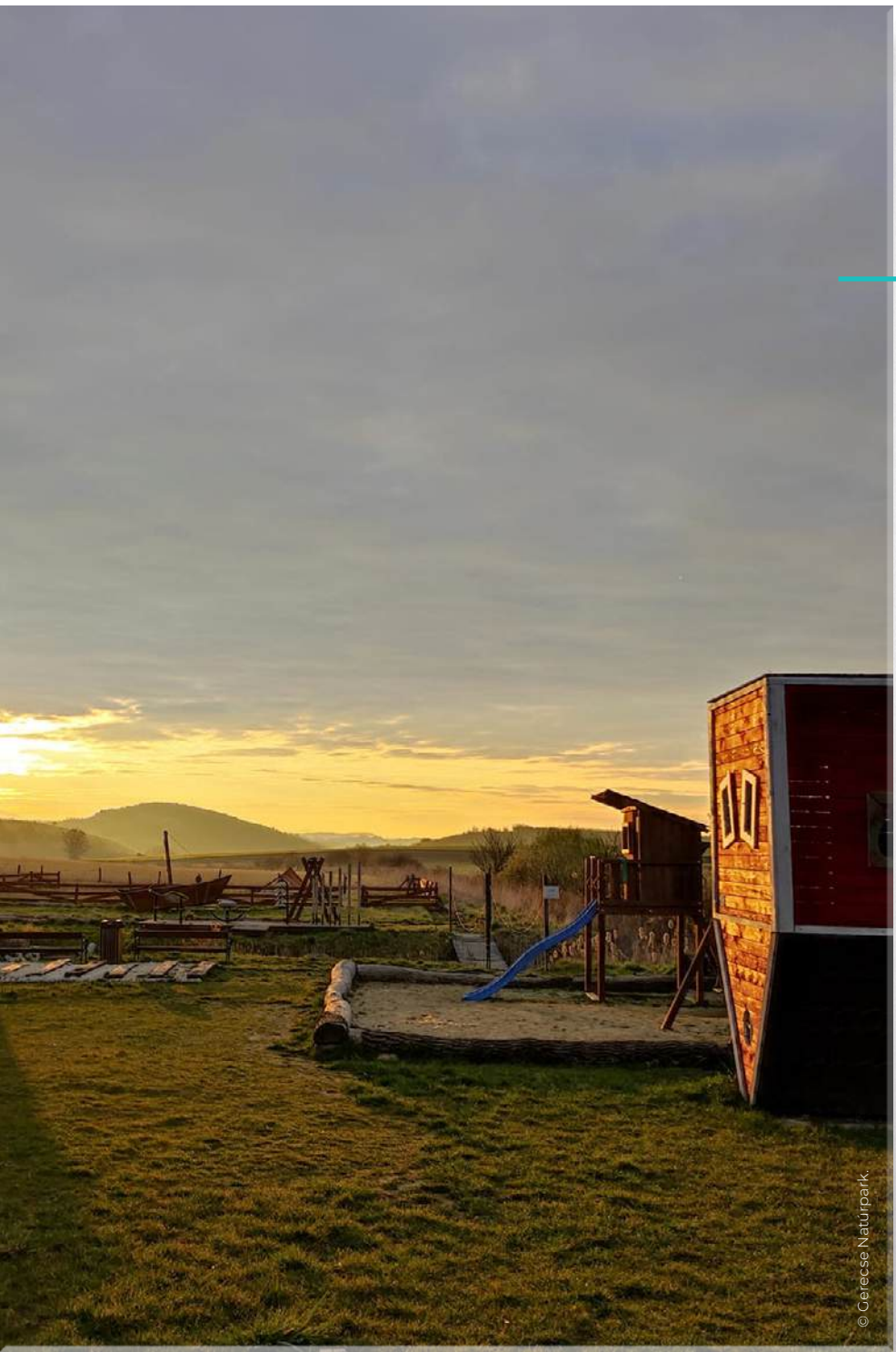
Nearly HUF 300 million in funding has supported projects since 2020.

The first cross-border park, Csallóköz (Slovakia, 2020), shows how the Hungarian model is spreading across the Carpathian Basin.

For 25 years, nature parks have been one of Hungary’s quiet success stories in sustainability. Unlike national parks, which are state-run, nature parks are born from the ground up. They emerge when municipalities, civil organisations, and local volunteers come together to protect the unique cultural and natural heritage of their landscapes.

This is not about fencing off nature from people. The model is built on integrated protection, safeguarding the land and its values not from communities, but with them. In practice, this means supporting local economies, reviving traditions, and using landscapes as both a source of livelihood and cultural pride.

The movement began in 1997 in Kőszeg through an Austrian-Hungarian cross-border project. In 2004, the Nature Conservation Act formally defined nature parks, and by 2012 the Hungarian Nature Park Association (Magyar Natúrpark Szövetség) was established to coordinate and represent them. Today, 18 recognised nature parks span Hungary, representing around 330 municipalities - nearly 10% of all settlements - and covering 10.3% of the country’s territory.



A visitor centre promoting eco-education in Gerecse Nature Park - one of the 18 recognised nature parks in Hungary.

The Hungarian Nature Park Association acts as the umbrella organisation, providing advocacy, knowledge exchange, and representation. It strengthens cooperation with state institutions, while remaining firmly rooted in civil society. Since 2020, the legal framework has been reinforced by a ministerial decree requiring annual professional reports. In return, the state has channelled almost HUF 300 million (~€770.000) into supporting nature park activities - a major step forward compared to the ad hoc civil grants of earlier years. Its ambition extends to the Carpathian Basin, where the first cross-border nature park, Csallóköz in Slovakia, was created in 2020, with more expected to follow.

Education is a pillar. Through projects like “Together for the Youth!,” the Association has developed programmes to keep young people in

rural areas by building environmental awareness and local opportunities. From youth camps and guided tours to environmental classes and volunteering schemes, the goal is to foster responsibility for nature and ensure the next generation sees the countryside as a place to thrive, not leave behind. The programme, supported with nearly HUF 44 million (~€113.000) in funding, strengthened youth engagement, expanded environmental knowledge, and improved cooperation among professionals and communities.

Beyond this, nature parks also run national student competitions, environmental awareness days such as World Water Day and International Forest Day, and annual “Landscape Day” excursions each October. These events now reach schools across the country.

The impact of the nature park movement reaches across sectors. Farmers adopting sustainable practices find support and recognition. Tourism gains new attractions rooted in authenticity, such as local food, guided hikes, and cultural storytelling. Local governments benefit from a shared platform that connects them to national policy discussions.

Above all, residents see tangible results: Stronger identity, better cooperation, and an economy that aligns with ecological values. In some regions, like the Beregi Nature Park in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, this even helps slow rural depopulation by strengthening attachment to place. In others, like Szigetköz in Győr-Moson-Sopron, it aids integration of newcomers into local identity and traditions. Since COVID, 25 “active tourism days” have been held in nature parks, promoting hiking, cycling, and canoeing in ways that connect visitors to locals while minimising environmental impact.

The parks have also become symbols of how Hungary can balance tradition and modernity. By drawing on international models, especially from Austria and wider Europe, they adapt best practices while preserving local distinctiveness. They prove that they are not just landscapes of protection but landscapes of opportunity, demonstrating that rural regeneration, cultural preservation, and environmental care can reinforce each other.

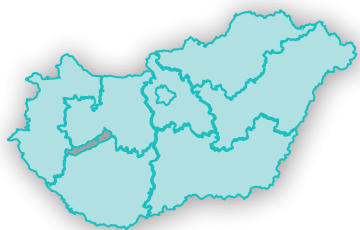
As Hungary’s green transition advances, nature parks stand as a community-led counterpart to state conservation, embodying the principle that sustainability works best when people are active stewards of their land.

“**At the Hungarian Nature Park Association, sustainability always means using local resources with the least external input, involving local people, and caring for nature in ways that can be renewed.**

- Dr. Pető Péter, President of the Hungarian Nature Park Association

Hungary's bloom; flowers, environment and community

Since 1994, Virágos Magyarország has grown from a flower contest into Hungary's largest grassroots sustainability movement. Over 300 towns compete annually, turning local pride into environmental action through native planting, waste reduction, and education that touches millions of residents.



+1.5

million residents take part in greening projects annually across 300 - 400 Hungarian municipalities.

HIGHLIGHTS

The initiative began in 1994 and has grown into one of Central Europe's largest community sustainability movements.

Even small villages now create rain gardens and selective mowing systems, innovations that were almost unknown a decade ago.

Winners represent Hungary in the international Entente Florale Europe competition; Over the years, Hungary has earned multiple gold medals in Entente Florale Europe, raising the country's profile as a green destination.

Virágos Magyarország began more than thirty years ago as a beautification contest. The early focus was simple: Floral displays on public squares. Today, the movement has evolved into Hungary's largest community sustainability programme, embedding environmental responsibility into the everyday life of towns and villages across the country.

Each year, 300 to 400 municipalities participate, from tiny rural hamlets to major cities. Their efforts engage millions of residents in collective projects that go far beyond flowers. Communities now prioritise biodiversity, plant native and climate-resilient species, compost organic waste, and create rainwater management systems. Many also integrate local products and services, reduce chemical use, and introduce sustainable soil practices.

The initiative has become a platform for knowledge transfer. Towns that repeatedly participate benefit from expert juries who provide free, practical advice. Over time, these visits trigger visible improvements in green space management, energy use, and public engagement. As organisers put it: "It may look like a competition, but in reality it is an educational movement."



© Virágos Magyarország

Communities are rethinking their landscapes, using plantings like roses to show a commitment to beautification and environment stewardship.

“Entente Florale Hungary is not about competition. It is about people taking responsibility for their environment and finding joy in it.

- Virágos Magyarország team

Climate adaptation is increasingly central. Villages and cities face challenges such as drought, pests, and heat stress. Virágos Magyarország encourages diversity in planting to reduce risks of collapse from single-species reliance. This includes promoting Hungarian-bred flower varieties developed for resilience and cultural heritage.

Social impact is equally strong. Schools, families, local businesses, and municipal leaders collaborate on greening efforts, building community pride and cohesion. Many smaller towns lack specialist knowledge or long-term strategies, but the programme offers access to experts and sponsors who help them adopt smarter, climate-aware solutions. In places like Kecskemét and Szeged, these efforts have scaled into exemplary models of integrated sustainability.

The competition also drives innovation. In recent years, organisers introduced thematic prizes such as “Green Innovation of the Year.” Submissions now increasingly focus on climate adaptation, stormwater systems, and biodiversity corridors. A decade ago, a single rain garden was a rarity. Today, even small villages are experimenting with rainwater-harvesting green areas, selective mowing, and energy-efficient public buildings.

The real strength lies in persistence and repetition. Municipalities that return year after year gradually embed sustainability into their DNA. A steady 15% of towns are deeply committed, using the contest to benchmark progress and inspire regional partnerships. These leaders demonstrate how grassroots action can transform both landscapes and mindsets, positioning Hungary as a case study in how beauty, climate resilience, and community engagement reinforce one another.

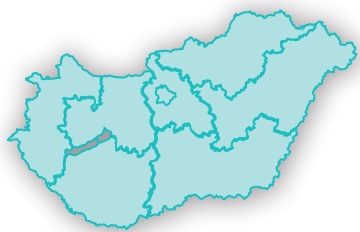
For tourism, the effect is clear. Travellers are drawn not only to cleaner, greener public spaces but to the authenticity of seeing entire communities mobilised. Entente Florale Hungary has become a symbol of pride, resilience, and sustainability - an initiative that began with flowers but now encompasses the future of Hungarian landscapes.



Flower-lined walkways, hosting community events for Virágos Magyarország's greening initiatives.

Hungary's hidden gems, responsibly shared

With nearly over 90 regional offices, Tourinform promotes sustainable, community-driven tourism in Hungary. From free heritage walks to cycling tours, their local activities disperse visitors beyond hotspots while supporting small businesses and eco-friendly travel.



+2

million visitors served each year from over 90 local offices.

HIGHLIGHTS

Tourinform's database contains up-to-date details on 65,000 tourism providers and 6,500 attractions.

The network employs around 250 staff who guide visitors toward sustainable, community-based travel.

Tourinform is Hungary's nationwide network of local tourism offices dedicated to empowering communities and advancing sustainable tourism practices. With over 100 offices spread across the country, Tourinform serves as a vital bridge between visitors and the unique cultural, natural, and historical offerings of each region - while working to keep tourism environmentally responsible and socially-inclusive.

The network's core strength lies in decentralisation. Rather than promoting only high-traffic destinations, Tourinform helps distribute tourism more evenly by offering personalised recommendations and multilingual support that guide visitors toward lesser-known gems. This approach not only reduces pressure on overcrowded hotspots but also fosters deeper, more authentic travel experiences.

Each office plays a hands-on role in shaping responsible tourism at the local level. Tourinform regularly organises low-impact, community-focused activities such as heritage walks, cycling tours, and cultural programs that invite visitors to engage directly with local traditions and landscapes. These events often run free of charge, lowering barriers to access while supporting local businesses and artisans.

Sustainability is woven into the organisation's everyday work. Tourinform actively promotes eco-friendly transportation options, such as biking and public transit, and emphasises accessibility through barrier-free travel information. These efforts contribute to lower carbon emissions while making travel more inclusive and environmentally conscious.

Further, Tourinform helps ensure that tourism revenue benefits the communities that host visitors. Restaurants, craft shops, and small-scale

service providers are highlighted through guided experiences, redirecting economic value to places that need it most.

Whether assisting a traveler in a major city or a remote village, Tourinform's presence ensures that tourism in Hungary grows in a way that respects people, places, and the planet. It is a quiet but powerful driver of grassroots sustainability, proving that real change in tourism begins at the community level.



Tourinform offices highlight regional crafts and cultural heritage, ensuring tourism revenue benefits local artisans and producers.



“Tourinform offices have every tool and every insight to make your journeys easier and more inspiring.

- Tourinform team

Jazz, wine and wasteless festivals

Since 2012, Paloznaki Jazzpiknik has grown into a three-day celebration of music, wine and community - one that balances vibrancy with environmental responsibility. With over 20,000 attendees, local food, and a waste-sorting rate of 68%, it shows how festivals can celebrate their surroundings without costing the earth.



+68%

of waste sorted at the 2023 Jazzpiknik festival - one of the highest rates in the Hungarian festival scene.

HIGHLIGHTS

The festival grew from a courtyard jamboree to a major event with 40 concerts across four stages.

Around 20,000 people attended the event over three days in 2023.

Vendors include a strong mix of local, plant-based, vegan, and regionally distinct food options (for example, Gourmet GreenGo, and other artisan, dietary-inclusive food trucks).

In the village of Paloznak, perched above Lake Balaton’s northern shore, the Jazzpiknik has become more than a music festival. Starting out as a small backyard gathering between good wine and good music, it has blossomed into a three-day, four-stage event drawing tens of thousands of guests each year. Founders Szabolcs Homola and Orsolya Valde envisioned something different from the mass festivals booming around Balaton - an event rooted in place, taste, sustainability, and human connection.

Gastronomy, local produce, and conscious design play central roles. Festival food trucks and vendors serve regional flavours - from pulled pork BBQ over wood smokers to vegan and dairy-free handcrafted ice creams, retro Balaton street food, and plant-based offerings from Gourmet GreenGo. Producers from around the region are spotlighted, giving them exposure and sustainable business; visitors enjoy not only the music but the opportunity to taste authenticity.

One of the festival’s most significant achievements is its attention to environmental impact. In collaboration with the Green Belt Association, Jazzpiknik achieved a 68% rate of waste sorting in its 2023 edition - widely considered a large success in the Hungarian

festival sector. That means nearly seven out of ten waste items were separated for recycling or proper disposal, mitigating landfill pressure.

Another deliberate move has been audience engage-through programming. In its 10th edition, the festival sought out younger attendees by booking acts like Emeli Sandé, whose appeal spans generations. Alongside major concerts, smaller stage performances, a bicycle tour across Paloznak, and adventure-style children’s programs expanded the festival’s footprint in the village. These are not just entertainment - they are ways to build sustainable connections between generations, place, and practice.

While many festivals focus only on summer, Jazzpiknik has nudged its seasonality by

promoting “Picnic atmosphere” events under grapevines, embracing outdoors, and relying less on heavy infrastructure. The event remains deeply anchored to local ecology: The site is set in vineyard hills; the décor, staging, and logistics aim to keep things light, respecting both landscape and community.

The result is an event that feels grounded - both culturally and environmentally. It’s a festival where jazz under the stars becomes a way to celebrate community values, local food, and conscious choices. For Paloznaki Jazzpiknik, sustainability isn’t a label: It’s baked into the food, the waste bins, the children’s play areas, the way chefs source, and the way attendees arrive.



Concerts are the heart of Paloznaki Jazzpiknik, drawing people together under the open sky to share music and moments.

Flavours of the past, recipes for the future

Taste of Transylvania links the culinary heritage of the region with contemporary responsibility. Through local sourcing, waste reduction, fair employment and cultural storytelling, the festival and its GastroAcademy show how gastronomy can nurture both people and place while keeping traditions alive for the future.



HIGHLIGHTS

The Taste of Transylvania GastroAcademy trains chefs, waiters, and tourism professionals with EU-recognised diplomas.

The event links sustainability with cultural heritage by promoting local ingredients, traditional recipes, and zero-waste practices

The Taste of Transylvania Underground in the Praid Salt Mine brought Michelin-starred chefs together with local producers in a low-waste festival setting.

The Taste of Transylvania is more than a festival. It is a movement that combines gastronomy, sustainability, and cultural preservation in one of Europe’s most storied regions. Its mission is summed up in a single idea: “We cook for the

community with the flavors of the past for the future.” What began as a culinary gathering has expanded into a network of events, training initiatives, and cultural platforms that bring heritage into dialogue with today’s environmental and social challenges.

Environmental responsibility runs through every detail. Sourcing is primarily local and seasonal, built on long-term relationships with farmers and artisan producers. Nose-to-tail cooking, fermentation, and preservation ensure that waste is reduced, and leftover food is redirected where possible. Packaging and tableware are chosen for reusability or compostability, with disposable plastics kept to a minimum. Energy-saving equipment and shared logistics reduce the event’s footprint further, while guests are encouraged to travel by public transport. In one edition, even a dedicated train from Budapest was arranged to carry festivalgoers.

The social dimension is just as central. Taste of Transylvania is committed to fair employment and to training the next generation of professionals. Its GastroAcademy offers accredited adult training courses for chefs, waiters, and other catering roles, with EU-recognised diplomas. Beyond formal training, the Academy hosts workshops, producer days, and open kitchen programmes that connect guests, producers, and young

professionals in an ongoing exchange of knowledge. Cultural heritage is cultivated through storytelling, from historic recipes drawn from sources like Pál Kövi’s “Transylvanian Feast” to local sourdough traditions and monastic brewing techniques. Local chroniclers and storytellers provide a narrative backbone that makes every event both educational and deeply rooted in place.

Economically, the impact is tangible. Since its inception, the initiative has introduced more than 350 brands and connected them into regional value chains, giving small producers visibility and stable partnerships. The festival strengthens local economies by encouraging longer tourist stays and return visits, balancing the heavy seasonality typical of the region. Transparent pricing ensures fair returns for both producers and guests, building trust alongside growth.

Responsible culinary innovation is another defining feature. Fermentation, sous-vide, dehydration and other modern techniques are deployed not for novelty but for reducing waste, improving yield, and extending shelf life. Plant-

based dishes sit alongside traditional animal-based ones in balanced menus, highlighting biodiversity and nutritional awareness. Guests are introduced to these practices with transparency, learning the origin stories and production processes behind what they eat.

The Taste of Transylvania Underground, held in the Praid Salt Mine in 2025, embodies this ethos. Michelin-starred Hungarian chefs cooked alongside local producers, while jazz performances and crafts filled the cavernous halls. The use of digital Festipay systems reduced paper waste, while the closing event - Romania’s largest brunch - brought the community together in a collective feast. Families, children, and visitors from abroad shared not only food, but also a vision of how festivals can be immersive, joyful, and responsible at once.

In every respect, Taste of Transylvania demonstrates that sustainability in gastronomy is not a separate project. It is the quality of everyday decisions, from how vegetables are sourced to how guests arrive, from the design of a menu to the telling of a story.



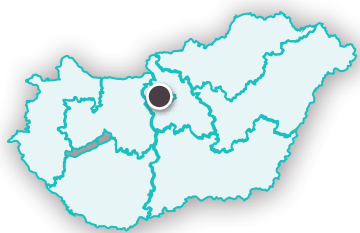
Taste of Transylvania is a vibrant cultural, culinary and traditional hub.

“We cook for the community - with the flavors of the past for the future.

- Taste of Transylvania

Catering elegance with a green touch

For more than 20 years, Budapest Party Service has defined event catering in Hungary. From intimate weddings to business conferences, its reputation rests on creativity, precision, and hospitality. Today, the company is reshaping its industry by embedding sustainability into menus, logistics, and design without sacrificing elegance.



130,000

single-use plastic items eliminated annually by Budapest Party Service after switching to biodegradable cutlery.

HIGHLIGHTS

By sourcing local ingredients, the company reduces its food transport footprint by nearly 100,000 km every year.

Budapest Party Service saves 800 kg of food annually, redistributing it to charities instead of going to waste.

Menus are labelled with “planet pictograms,” ranking their sustainability so clients can choose greener options.

In vibrant Budapest, where food and celebration intertwine with tradition, Budapest Party Service has carved out a reputation as the country’s premier professional catering company. Established more than two decades ago, the team has catered thousands of events - from corporate galas to international conferences and private celebrations - always anchored by one principle: catering is not just food service but a message. Every menu, every setting, every detail is a conversation with guests.

The scale of their operation is unmatched. Their in-house professional kitchen, equipped with cutting-edge technology, can serve up to 1,500 guests at once. They partner with over 150 venues across the city, from historic halls to riverside gardens, tailoring the atmosphere through creative décor and bespoke tableware. Since 2010, they have been consistently recognised by the Hungarian Gastronomic National Association, with awards that include “Event Organiser of the Year” in 2011. But behind the polish lies a deeper story: A conscious shift towards sustainability.



Menus built on seasonal sourcing prove how thoughtful choices can shrink food miles while lifting up local producers.

“Our goal is simple: Create unforgettable events that respect our guests and our planet.”

- Budapest Party Service

The company brands this approach “Our Greenery” - a framework that threads environmental responsibility into every stage of an event. Their industrial dishwashers save 5,000 litres of chemical-based cleaners annually by using biodegradable alternatives, reducing both energy and water use. Textile waste is cut by eliminating buffet linens, saving 24 tonnes of fabric from unnecessary washing each year. At the dining tables, 55,000 plastic forks, 40,000 knives, and 35,000 spoons have been replaced by biodegradable cutlery, while straws are phased out or substituted with paper.

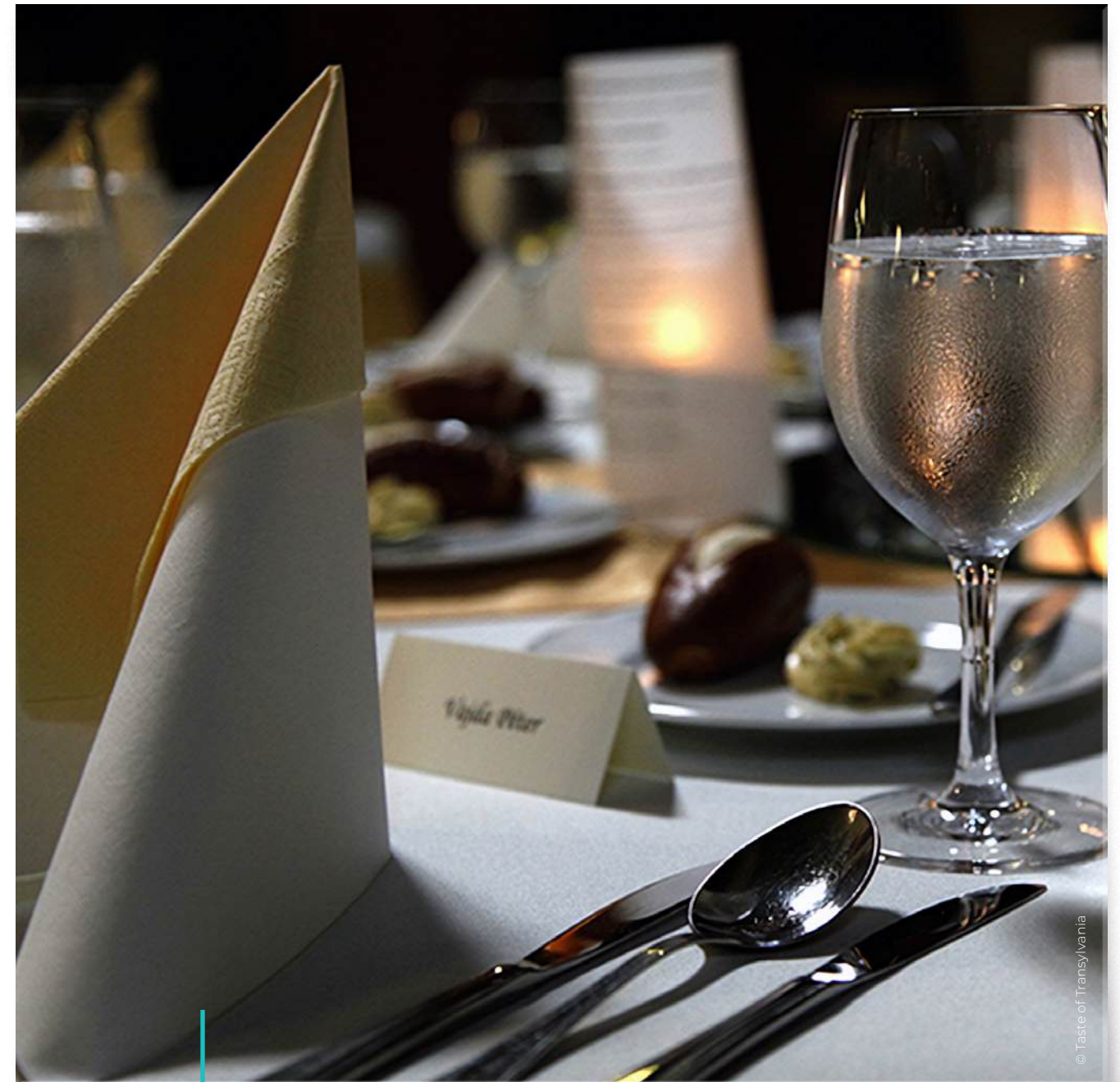
Menus themselves are coded with “planet pictograms,” a visual signal of sustainability performance. To qualify for at least three planets, more than half of the raw materials must come from domestic farms, with a minimum of six meat-free dishes. Many menus score higher, reflecting seasonal, farm-to-table sourcing that cuts transport emissions and supports Hungarian producers. One change alone - favouring local fish like trout and small-farm produce - reduces their environmental footprint by nearly 100,000 km in food miles annually.

Food waste, a major issue in large-scale catering, is handled with both foresight and compassion. Portions are optimised with experience from two decades of events, but surplus food still arises. Around 800 kg of prepared dishes are diverted each year to charities like the Budapest Bike Mafia, the Hungarian Food Bank Association, and the Order of Malta, ensuring hot meals reach those who need them most.

Even drinks carry a sustainability lens. Homemade syrups and lemonades are prioritised over bottled options, and partnerships with local farms extend into beverages. For staff and guests alike, this creates a closed-loop ethos where sustainability enhances rather than diminishes the experience.

Seating and table design, often overlooked in the sustainability conversation, also reflect this ethos. Elegant round tables with linens are paired with efficient laundry systems that use eco-friendly detergents. Lounge furniture at garden events reduces the need for disposable décor, while minimalist designs cut back on resource-heavy accessories. The company has shown that style and sustainability can co-exist seamlessly - one enhancing the other.

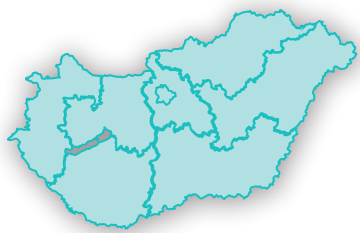
Budapest Party Service proves that in hospitality, sustainability does not mean compromise. Their evolution reflects both global demands and Hungarian traditions: A respect for land, food, and community. For clients, the impact is clear. They enjoy flawless execution and culinary excellence, while knowing their events leave a lighter footprint. For the company, the vision is equally clear: To host the next thousand events with the same creativity, but with an ever-sharper focus on sustainability.



Conscious choices in tableware and textiles turn everyday details into quiet acts of sustainability, where design carries both style and responsibility.

Environmental lessons across borders

From classrooms to corporate boardrooms, Bedő Károlyné champions environmental education and sustainable business practices. Through international collaborations, she empowers both students and companies to take responsibility for the future.



+1000

students and **+100** educators influenced through curriculum development and outdoor programs.

HIGHLIGHTS

Bedő Károlyné has helped integrate environmental themes into Hungary's national core curriculum.

She has led international projects like "5 Countries - 1 River", linking schools across five nations.

She extends sustainability education beyond schools, influencing businesses and municipalities.

Bedő Károlyné is one of Hungary's most respected environmental educators, with a career that bridges classrooms, boardrooms, and international riverbanks. She has spent decades weaving sustainability into everyday life - showing that protecting nature is not theory, but a lived practice. Her leadership has shaped curricula, trained teachers, and inspired thousands of students, while also engaging businesses and municipalities in sustainable action

Education remains her foundation. Bedő Károlyné helped integrate environmental themes into Hungary's national core curriculum, ensuring every student encounters sustainability. She has developed teaching materials and run trainings that have given hundreds of teachers the confidence to integrate ecology with other subjects - from biology to civic studies. Her methods emphasise outdoor learning: Forest walks, river monitoring, and hands-on recycling projects that turn abstract lessons into memorable experiences. For her, sustainability is not a subject but a mindset to be practiced daily.

She is also a bridge-builder across borders. As a leader in projects like "5 Countries - 1 River", she has shown that pollution knows no boundaries and solutions cannot stop at them either. Her work links schools across Hungary, Ukraine, Romania, Slovakia, and Serbia, allowing students

to meet, share knowledge, and recognise the Tisza River as a shared lifeline. These programs have strengthened regional cooperation while teaching young people that caring for ecosystems is a common responsibility.

Beyond schools, Bedő Károlyné has extended her impact to companies and local governments, promoting sustainability practices and even encouraging early forms of environmental

reporting. She insists that education must reach boardrooms as well as classrooms, as the same mindset shift is needed everywhere. Widely invited to conferences and EU-linked projects, she has mentored a generation of younger educators and advocates. Her work demonstrates how personal passion can scale into systemic change, aligning Hungary's education and international cooperation with the needs of the planet.



Bedő Károlyné, one of Hungary's foremost sustainability educators.

“Education does not stop at the classroom door. Environmental awareness must reach our homes, our workplaces, and even our rivers.

- Bedő Károlyné

Turning a crisis into a green revolution

Faced with an existential energy crisis in 2022, the Zalakaros Spa made a bold decision: To become fully independent from natural gas. By investing in an innovative system to harness its 96°C thermal water, the spa has not only secured its future but has also become a national benchmark for sustainable wellness.



250,000

cubic metres of natural gas are saved annually after the spa switched its entire heating system to its own thermal water.

HIGHLIGHTS

The 200 million HUF (~€500,000) investment had a rapid return, paying for itself in under two years through energy cost savings.

The spa uses an innovative dual-purpose system: The same 96°C water first heats the buildings via heat exchangers, then fills the pools.

A new solar park is being built over the car parks, which will provide 16% of the spa's electricity.

The spa is now planning to supply geothermal heat to neighbouring hotels, creating a green district heating network for the town.

The Zalakaros Spa, one of Hungary's most beloved wellness destinations, was founded in 1965 after the discovery of exceptionally hot, 96°C thermal water. For decades, this natural treasure filled the pools, while the sprawling complex was heated with natural gas. This changed dramatically with the 2022 energy crisis. Faced with soaring gas prices that threatened its very survival, the spa's management made a decisive move to harness the immense energy potential flowing right beneath their feet.

The challenge was technical: The water's extremely high mineral content (13,000 mg/litre) caused severe limescale build-up in pipes at high temperatures. The breakthrough came with the implementation of a food-grade inhibitor that prevents this build-up, allowing the spa to use the 96°C water directly. They engineered an elegant, dual-purpose system: The hot thermal water first runs through heat exchangers to provide all the heating for the spa's buildings, a process which simultaneously cools the water to the perfect temperature for the pools. No new wells were needed; they simply stopped wasting the energy they already had.

The results were immediate and transformative. The 200 million HUF (~€500,000) investment completely replaced an annual consumption of 200,000 to 250,000 cubic metres of natural gas,

paying for itself in under two years. This shift earned the spa a national award for energy efficiency and the 2024 „Value & Quality Grand Prize“ for environmental innovation.

The spa's commitment to a sustainable future is ongoing. A large-scale solar park is currently being installed on car park canopies, which will generate 16% of the spa's annual electricity needs while providing shade for guests' vehicles. Furthermore,

with the success of their own system proven, the spa is now in negotiations to supply geothermal heat to neighbouring hotels, creating a green district heating network for the town.

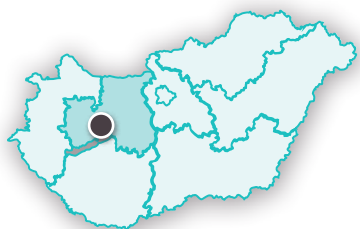
What began as a decision driven by financial necessity has become a powerful story of innovation and resilience, inspiring other spas across the country to follow their lead.



The Zalakarosi Fürdő's geothermal heating system is a cornerstone of the town's sustainability strategy.

Reimagining the European capital of culture

Veszprém-Balaton 2023 showed how culture can drive regional development. With 116 municipalities involved, new cultural venues opened, and thousands of events staged, the programme created a lasting legacy for communities and visitors across the Bakony-Balaton region.



2,800

cultural events organised across the Veszprém-Balaton region in 2023, involving 116 municipalities.

HIGHLIGHTS

Domestic overnight stays in Veszprém rose by more than 50% during the programme year.

Cultural infrastructure investments included the CODE - Centre of Digital Experience and the restored Castle Prison.

The Garden of Communities Pavilion symbolised regional cooperation, with 116 planter boxes representing each municipality.

When Veszprém and the Balaton region were awarded the title of European Capital of Culture 2023, the aim was to strengthen regional identity and bring culture to the centre of development. The initiative became the first in Hungary to be organised as a genuine regional programme: 116 municipalities joined forces to deliver events and projects across both the Bakony and Balaton areas.

The scale of activity was unprecedented. By the end of the summer, nearly 2,800 cultural events had taken place across the region, including around 1,192 events in Veszprém alone during the first eight months. Concerts, exhibitions, festivals and local projects brought together residents and visitors, while also drawing significant tourism interest. Domestic overnight stays in Veszprém rose by more than 50% compared to the previous year, and international visitor numbers also grew.

Cultural infrastructure was a core focus. The CODE - Centre of Digital Experience opened in the renovated Veszprém County Cultural Centre, offering interactive and immersive exhibitions through spaces like the Hexagon theatre and Studio room. At the same time, the historic Castle Prison (Várbörtön) was restored and reopened to visitors, adding a new dimension to the city's cultural life.

One of the most symbolic projects was the Garden of Communities Pavilion, designed by Hello Wood. Built from stacked timber structures, the installation featured 116 planter boxes - one for each participating municipality - and became a living monument to cooperation across the region.

By connecting municipalities, revitalising heritage spaces, and investing in new creative venues, Veszprém-Balaton 2023 has left behind a legacy that extends well beyond its title year. It demonstrates how cultural investment can strengthen communities, attract visitors, and create a shared regional identity that continues to grow.



Renovated heritage spaces like Veszprém's Castle District anchored the European Capital of Culture programme, blending history with new cultural life.

“A truly exemplary and unique project in Europe, not confined to the boundaries of a single city, but unfolding across an entire region.

- Alíz Markovits, CEO of Veszprém-Balaton 2023 Zrt.



Yellow bags of collected plastic sit piled on a raft, ready to be hauled from the Tisza.

© PET KUPA

RESOURCES

A sustainable tourism sector is built on more than just individual hotels and restaurants. It needs a support system: A dynamic ecosystem of tools, organisations, and movements that connect, guide, and inspire change on a larger scale. This is the connective tissue of the movement, empowering both businesses and travellers to make more responsible choices.

These resources take many forms. They are the certification labels that build trust and help visitors identify authentic, eco-friendly products. They are the innovative apps that use technology to solve problems like food waste. They are the foundations that educate the public and set new standards for an entire industry. And they are the passionate, grassroots initiatives that turn environmental protection into a shared community adventure.

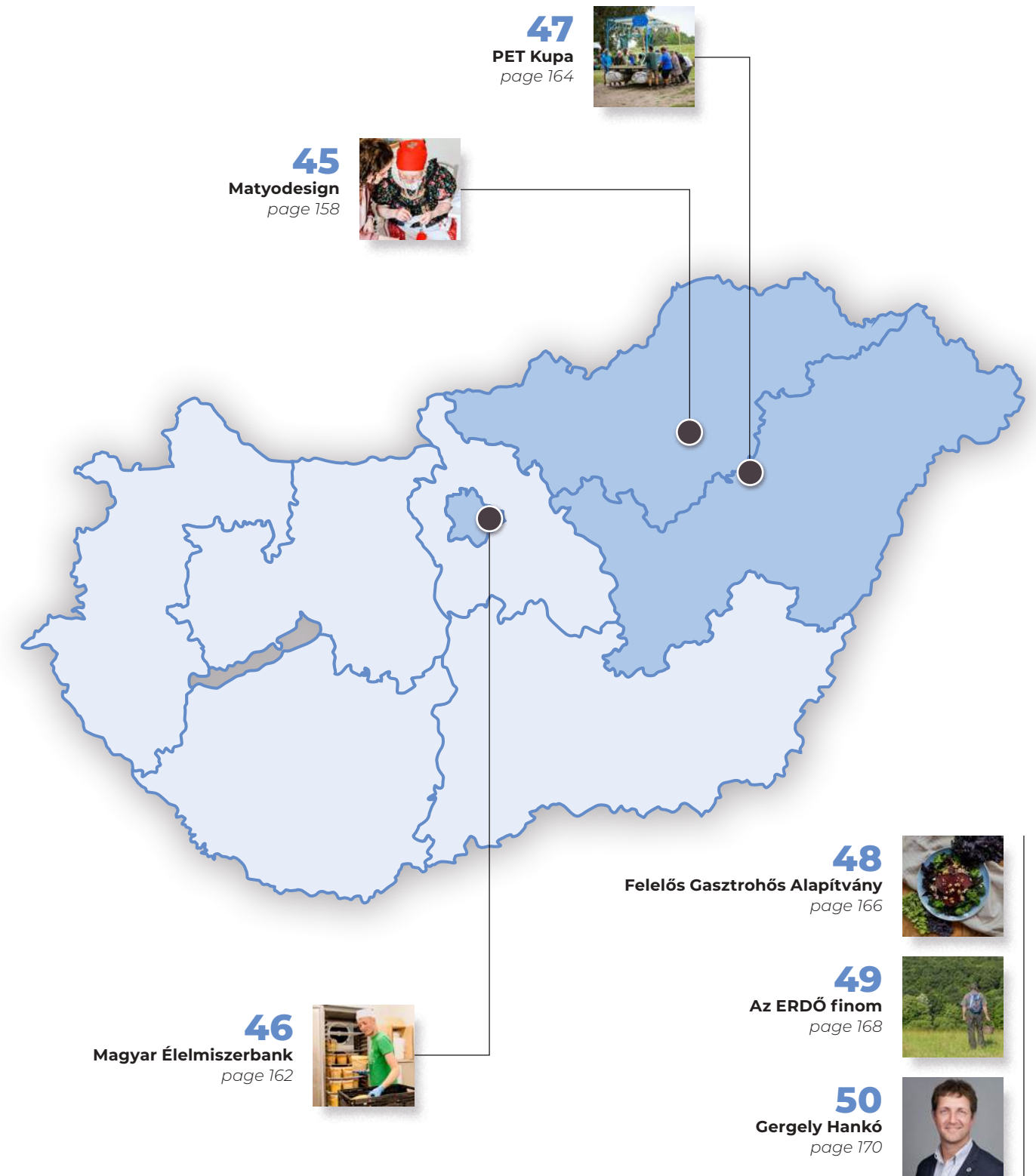
The cases in this chapter offer a look at this vital support network. They are the enablers and the innovators working behind the scenes to build a stronger, more resilient, and more connected sustainable tourism landscape in Hungary. From slow fashion social enterprises to river-cleaning „pirates,“ these are the stories of the ideas and organisations that make wider change possible.

MACRO TRENDS

Events go reusable. Reuse cup systems have been adopted nationwide, helping events drastically cut down on single-use plastics. Organisers now report a significant reduction in waste volumes, showing how large gatherings can shift towards more sustainable practices without compromising the festival experience.

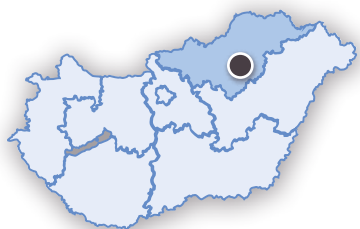
Grassroots clean-up tourism gains traction. Along the Tisza River, community-driven clean-up events collect around 7.5 tonnes of waste annually. Increasing numbers of tourists are joining these efforts, turning environmental stewardship into a shared activity that blends travel with positive local impact.

Local product certification strengthens short supply chains. The “National Park Product” label highlights goods that meet sustainability standards and are produced within protected areas. Today, hundreds of certified items carry this mark, giving visitors trusted options while supporting local producers and reducing supply chain distances.



Matyodesign: Handcrafted heritage meets empowerment

Matyodesign revives Hungarian Matyó embroidery through ethical slow fashion. Employing local women artisans in a UNESCO village, this social enterprise combines heritage with contemporary design, championing sustainability, community empowerment, and a conscious “slow life” ethos for a better future.



+25

local women artisans in the UNESCO-listed village of Tard are provided with a sustainable income by Matyodesign.

HIGHLIGHTS

The brand holds a Carbon Footprint Certificate from DoYourCarbon, verifying its emission-reduction practices.

Most products are made from natural, ethically sourced materials and often produced in zero-waste collections.

Hand-embroidered designs connect heritage to global markets, with items now sold in over 30 retail stores.

In the quaint village of Tard in northeastern Hungary, a vibrant cultural heritage, recognised by UNESCO, is being meticulously stitched back to life by Matyodesign. Founded in 2010 by Rozi Váczi, this pioneering social enterprise is dedicated to preserving the exquisite Matyó embroidery craft while simultaneously fostering sustainable development and empowering the local community through the principles of slow fashion and slow life.

Matyodesign operates on an ethical business model that stands in deliberate contrast to the fast-paced, often unsustainable practices of the mainstream fashion industry. Embracing the slow fashion ethos, the brand focuses on creating high-quality, timeless pieces - clothing, accessories, and home goods - that celebrate enduring value over fleeting trends. Each item is hand-embroidered by skilled local women artisans in Tard, ensuring that traditional techniques and patterns are passed down and kept alive. This not only preserves precious folk art but also provides sustainable income opportunities and meaningful work for these women, empowering them and contributing to the economic vitality of the rural community. Currently, the family business provides work to 27 local women in Tard, creating a bridge between generations and urban and country life.



Matyó artisans preserve UNESCO heritage through Matyodesign’s slow fashion.

“It is our mission to keep the Matyo culture alive with ethical business practices and by creating sustainable income opportunities for the Matyodesign artisans.

- Rozi Váczi, Founder of Matyodesign

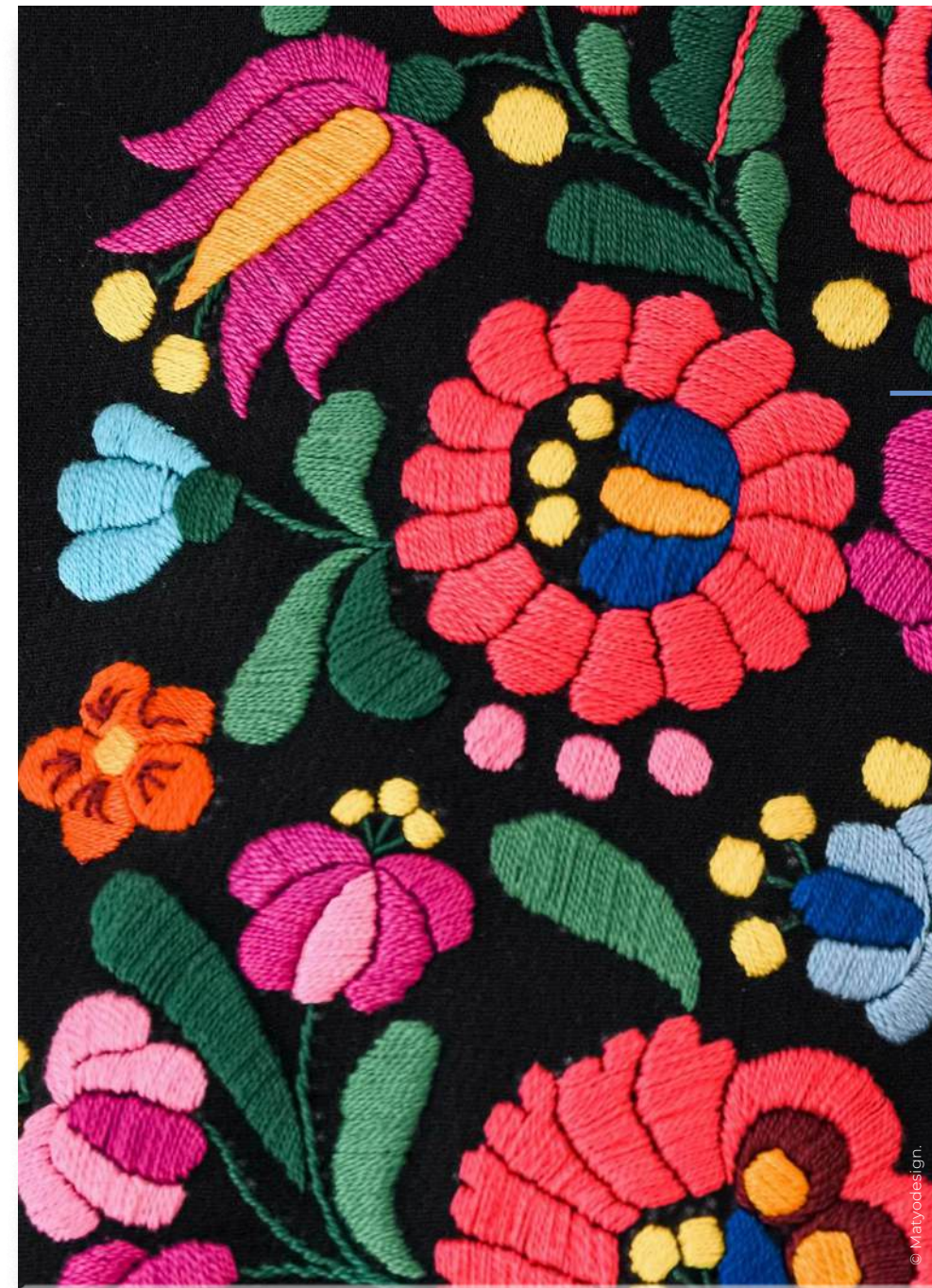
The commitment to sustainability at Matyodesign extends beyond the social sphere into environmental consciousness. The brand prioritises the use of natural materials in its products and often produces items in small batches or even zero-waste collections, minimising environmental impact. Local production in Tard significantly reduces emissions associated with transportation.

Matyodesign's dedication to environmental responsibility was officially recognised with a Carbon Footprint Certificate from the independent organisation DoYourCarbon. This certification involved a comprehensive examination of their operations, from manufacturing to transportation and daily activities, helping them identify areas for further emission reduction. For customers, this certificate serves as a guarantee that their purchase supports a more sustainable future, encouraging conscious shopping decisions.

Matyodesign successfully blends traditional Matyó folk art with contemporary design, creating products that are both culturally rich and relevant to modern aesthetics. These handcrafted items are available through the brand's webshop and in over 30 retail stores, including hotel boutiques, connecting a wider audience, including tourists, with authentic Hungarian craftsmanship. This market presence demonstrates the viability of traditional crafts within a modern, eco-conscious business framework.

The „slow life“ philosophy inherent in Matyodesign's approach - focusing on quality, community, and conscious creation - offers a compelling alternative to the fast-paced consumption culture, reducing the fashion industry's environmental footprint while celebrating a more deliberate and community-centric way of living.

Matyodesign stands as a powerful example of how cultural heritage, social empowerment, and environmental sustainability can be interwoven to embroider a brighter, more conscious future.



Matyó embroidery with floral patterns, supporting Matyodesign's sustainable craftsmanship.

From food waste to sustenance

The Hungarian Food Bank is a social and environmental powerhouse. By pioneering innovative shock-cooling technology to rescue prepared meals from hotels, concerts, and major events, it provides millions of meals to vulnerable people while preventing massive CO₂ emissions.



+10,000

tonnes of food was rescued in 2024 by the Food Bank, reaching **+245,000** vulnerable people nationwide.

HIGHLIGHTS

Since its funding, they have saved more than 110,000 tonnes of food, which prevented nearly 24,000,000 kg of CO₂ emissions, equivalent to the annual emissions of 10,000+ cars.

Using innovative shock-cooling technology, the Food Bank safely rescues prepared meals from major concerts, hotels, and events.

Just 1,000 HUF (~€2,5) in operating cost enables redistribution of food worth 30,000 HUF (~€50).

The Hungarian Food Bank Association operates on a powerful motto: “Good for the needy and good for the planet too.” Since its launch in 2005, it has become a vital link between food surpluses and those in need across Hungary. While its primary work involves rescuing near-expiry goods from supermarkets, the organisation has recently pioneered a groundbreaking programme to tackle the complex challenge of food waste in the tourism and hospitality sector.

Rescuing prepared meals from hotels, events, and canteens has long been a logistical and legal challenge. Strict food safety rules meant hot food had to be distributed within a three-hour window, an impossible timeframe for leftovers from a late-night gala dinner. Furthermore, businesses were hesitant to donate due to liability concerns.

The Food Bank’s innovative solution is shock-cooling technology. By using special equipment to rapidly chill prepared meals to between 0 and 5°C, they can safely extend the food’s lifespan from three hours to 24-48 hours. The Food Bank also takes on full legal liability upon collection, removing the risk for its partners. This has opened the door to large-scale rescues from the HORECA sector.

Today, the programme is a major success. The Food Bank partners with leading caterers and venues to rescue leftovers from major events, including concerts, Formula 1 races, and EU summits. They have also placed shock-coolers in 25 schools to save unsold lunches and are now expanding into hotels and event riverboats.

This targeted programme is part of a much larger operation. In 2024 alone, the Food Bank rescued

over 10,358 tonnes of food in total, reaching 245,000 vulnerable people through a network of 650 charities. This work prevented nearly 24 million kilograms of CO₂ emissions. By transforming surplus into sustenance with innovative, safe, and scalable solutions, the Food Bank proves that tackling deprivation and protecting the environment can, and should, go hand in hand.



Warm food is being saved daily from schools, hotels and restaurants.

“In Hungary, 1.8 million tonnes of food goes to waste every year, while hundreds of thousands go hungry. Our goal is to create a connection between the food surpluses accumulating in our country and those in need.

- The Hungarian Food Bank Association team

PET Pirates clean Hungary's rivers

PET Kupa transforms river cleanup into adventure, as volunteers build trash boats and race down the Tisza, collecting plastic waste and raising awareness. With over 100 tonnes removed since 2013, the event is a fun, high-impact fight against river pollution.



+120
tonnes of plastic waste has been removed from Hungarian rivers since 2013, by PET Kupa volunteers.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The 2024 Lake Tisza race alone collected 7.5 tonnes of waste in three days.
- Four annual races now attract 500-800 participants, with teams building boats from plastic bottles.
- International partnerships support waste management in three Ukrainian towns, stopping trash before it drifts downstream.

PET Kupa is Hungary's most inventive grassroots river cleanup. It began in 2013 when a team of nature filmmakers, documenting sand martins along the Upper Tisza, were shocked by plastic pollution. Co-founder Molnár Attila Dávid soon met Palkó István, who had built a PET-bottle boat, sparking the idea to use waste itself to fight waste. The first race was filmed with just four quirky boats crewed by friends and family, but the story caught fire. Today, hundreds join in the multi-day adventure, building PET boats and racing while cleaning the river.

The Tisza, one of Hungary's great rivers, is heavily polluted by PET bottles drifting downstream. PET Kupa was designed as both cure and campaign: A vivid adventure that removes trash while raising awareness. Participants describe the experience as both "shock and joy" - shock at floodplains buried in waste, joy at seeing them cleaned just hours later.

The results are measurable. Since 2013, volunteers have removed over 119 tonnes of plastic waste. The 2024 Lake Tisza race alone saw 19 teams haul out 7.5 tonnes in three days. To keep its family-like spirit, the main Tisza race is capped at ~15-16 teams, but PET Kupa has expanded outward: New events on Lake Tisza, the Bodrog, the Maros, and a Youth Kupa. Altogether,

four competitions now draw 500-800 people each year, plus additional one-day corporate cleanups.

What sets PET Kupa apart is its mix of action and play. Volunteers camp by the riverside, row their floating PET rafts, and join evening programmes like the playful "PETA-Sztár" talent show. Awards go for the most inventive boats as much as for trash collected. Photos show smiling faces despite nettles, mosquitoes, and heavy lifting - proof that serious action can still feel like fun. Many teams return year after year, keeping the spirit strong.

Beyond races, PET Kupa runs year-round programmes. Plastic Pirates map illegal dumpsites, while schools "adopt" river sections to clean twice a year. International projects stretch

into five Tisza-basin countries, supporting Ukrainian partners with balers, forklifts, and depots so less waste reaches Hungary in the first place. Three partner waste operators already run in Kőrösmező, Ungvár, and Beregszász. The goal is to turn today's river rescue into tomorrow's waste-management system.

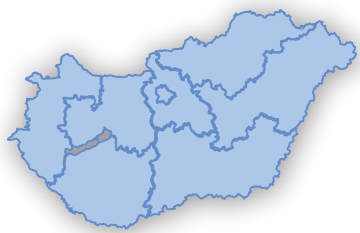
Essentially, PET Kupa builds more than clean rivers; it builds community, tourism, and reputation. Local pubs and shops stock up when the "PET Pirates" arrive, and new centres like the River Rescue Hub in Olaszliszka provide jobs and even tourist lodging. It is proof that with creativity and collective effort, Hungary's most polluted river can also be its greatest stage for environmental action.



Volunteers launch a PET-bottle boat, using waste for PET Kupa's cleanup.

Greener meals, one restaurant at a time

The Felelős Gasztrohós Alapítvány leads Hungary’s push for sustainable dining, certifying green restaurants and launching initiatives like reusable food containers to reduce waste and inspire responsible food choices across the hospitality sector.



+40

restaurants are currently certified as sustainable; more than 150 have participated since 2012.

HIGHLIGHTS

Their “Reusable Box Community” offers returnable containers to cut packaging waste.

Interactive sustainability games are used at schools, festivals, and company team-buildings.

Campaigns have inspired chefs to rediscover Hungarian crops like millet and buckwheat.

Founded in 2012, the Felelős Gasztrohós Alapítvány is Hungary’s leading voice for sustainable dining. What began as an effort to “green” restaurants quickly grew into a dual mission, certifying eateries and raising consumer awareness. Today the foundation works with ~40 certified restaurants nationwide and runs playful, interactive education programmes that reach thousands, from kindergarteners to corporate teams.

At the heart of their work is the “Fenntartható Vendéglátóhely” (Sustainable Restaurant) certification, co-created with experts and inspired by international models. Updated into a three-tier system - Conscious, Inspiring, and Master - it recognises efforts across seven criteria, namely: Waste management, green cleaning, certified organic or Fairtrade inputs, share of local ingredients, and more vegetarian or vegan options. Around 40 restaurants now carry the label, with 150+ having participated since 2012.

Beyond certification, the foundation addresses consumer habits directly. Their “Rakun Dobozközösség” (Reusable Box Community) offers returnable takeout containers, cutting single-use packaging waste. Other campaigns highlight forgotten Hungarian crops like millet, buckwheat, or sea buckthorn, inspiring chefs and consumers to replace imports with local

alternatives. These programmes make sustainable choices visible and practical in daily life.

Education is delivered in playful, engaging ways. The foundation developed a library of large interactive games on seasonality, composting, meat consumption, packaging, and pollination. A joint game with food safety authority NÉBIH teaches how foods can be safely eaten past “best before” dates, tackling food waste. These tools appear at schools, company team-buildings, and major festivals like Sziget, Bartók Feszt, Autómentes Nap, Bánkító, and Művészetek Völgye.

Collaboration is central to their approach. Felelős Gasztrohós works closely with chefs, restaurant owners, producers, and sustainability experts to create practical, scalable solutions for the food industry. This cooperative spirit has allowed them to build a supportive community committed to real change within Hungarian hospitality.

Through its combined efforts in certification, innovation, and education, the Felelős Gasztrohós Alapítvány has positioned itself as a cornerstone of Hungary’s sustainable dining movement. The initiative proves that responsible gastronomy is not only possible, but increasingly popular and impactful.



Felelős Gasztrohós inspires responsible food choices across the hospitality sector.

From forest to tabletop

Az ERDŐ finom is a nationwide initiative that combines forestry and gastronomy to promote sustainable foraging. By turning wild ingredients into fine cuisine, it reconnects people with Hungary’s forests and encourages conservation through culinary exploration.



100%

of wild ingredients used are sourced from certified sustainable areas.

HIGHLIGHTS

Around 1,300 people joined workshops and events in 2024, with 3,000 expected in 2025.

Forest-to-table dinners and tours attract several thousand participants annually.

Online videos and lectures have reached over 40,000 views, popularising forest-foraged food.

Az ERDŐ finom began with a book of fine-dining forest recipes and has since grown into a nationwide movement blending forestry, gastronomy, and education. The initiative turns foresters’ generational knowledge into workshops, forest-to-table events, and tours to reconnect Hungarians with the forest as a living pantry of health, heritage, and biodiversity.

Instead of just mushrooms or wild garlic, participants discover a hidden world of flavours: Forest mustards from hogweed seeds, acorn flour, bird-berry jellies, pine powder, and even “forest cocoa.” Every ingredient is sourced sustainably - whether foraged, harvested as part of ecosystem care, or drawn from invasive species. The result is not only broader culinary horizons, but also a revival of ancestral zero-waste practices, where nothing in the household went unused.

Forest-to-table collaborations are thriving: Chefs, hunters, and foresters now co-host wild food dinners, and special “Erdő Gasztro Express” tours combine heritage train rides with forest walks and tastings. High-end hotels like Lillafüred’s Palotaszálló have embraced the programme, with events running at full capacity. Forestry associations also integrate edible plant education into guided tours, showing guests how to taste the forest in season.

The project strengthens rural communities by creating demand for sustainable forest ingredients. Local foragers, hunters, and small producers gain new markets, while chefs are encouraged to use zero-kilometre sourcing instead of imported seafood or spices. Since forests are within reach across Hungary, the model shows that fine dining can be authentic and low-impact at the same time.

Education is at the heart of the initiative. Books like Az Erdő finom and Ehető Erdő are now in their 4th-5th editions, while workshops, tours, and lectures reach thousands each year. Events range from 400-person lectures to intimate family foraging walks, together drawing several

thousand participants annually. Online, videos have reached ~40,000 views, turning forest foraging into a cultural talking point. More than recipes, the project gives people usable knowledge - what plants heal, what mushrooms nourish, and how forests sustain self-care and resilience (“öngondoskodás”).

Essentially, Az ERDŐ finom reframes how food, sustainability, and biodiversity connect. It shows that the forest is not only tasty, but also trustworthy, clean, chemical-free, and abundant. With inspiration, ethics, and knowledge at its core, the initiative proves that when gastronomy and ecology meet, the forest is both teacher and table.



Educational walks and foraging tours reconnect Hungarians with the forest as a source of food, health, and cultural heritage.

“Our goal is not to sell products, but to inspire. What we give people is knowledge - usable knowledge.

- Bózsó Gyula, Forester and co-author of Az ERDŐ finom

A bridge over rivers and policy

From eco-villages to river cleanups, Gergely Hankó is one of Hungary’s most influential green experts. As head of KSZGY SZ and a driving force behind PET Kupa, he bridges policy, innovation, and community action to cut waste and protect nature.



+70,000

kg of river litter collected by PET Kupa annually under Gergely’s guidance, with 60% successfully recycled.

HIGHLIGHTS

The Tisza Roundtables, founded by Hankó, have become the largest platform for river dialogue in Hungary.

In 2022, cross-border river-pollution prevention kept 700,000 kg of waste out of Transcarpathian waterways.

As director of KSZGY SZ, Hankó represents over 280 green enterprises and connects them to EU and global markets.

Gergely Hankó has become one of Hungary’s most recognisable environmental leaders, a figure whose work spans policy, community action, and international advocacy. An environmental engineer by training, he is known as the “all-around guy” of Hungarian environmentalism - active as organiser, policy commentator, NGO

supporter, volunteer coordinator, and conference moderator. His reputation rests on one simple principle: Sustainability requires action at every level, from grassroots cleanups to global diplomacy.

Since 2018, Hankó has served as the managing director of the Hungarian Association of Environmental Enterprises (KSZGY SZ), the country’s most significant independent green advocacy organisation, representing more than 280 member organisations. He is also the acting managing director of KEXPORT, Hungary’s environmental export cluster, where he promotes Hungarian eco-innovations and green technologies abroad. Through these platforms, he connects domestic expertise with international markets, positioning Hungary as a contributor to global sustainability transitions.

Waterways and waste management have become central arenas for Hankó’s leadership. Since 2016, he has been closely tied to the Plastic Cup (PET Kupa) initiative, first as a waste expert and later as vice-president. The project mobilises volunteers in competitive river cleanups across the Tisza and Danube rivers, while also advancing scientific monitoring of riverine litter. Under Hankó’s guidance, PET Kupa has scaled its impact: Of the 70,000 kilograms of litter collected annually, roughly 60 percent is recycled. In 2022 alone, river-pollution prevention efforts linked to the

initiative kept some 700,000 kilograms of waste from entering waterways in the wider Transcarpathian region.

Hankó also founded the Tisza Roundtables, now the largest forum for river experts and stakeholders in Hungary. These gatherings have created a rare space for dialogue between local communities, scientists, NGOs, and policymakers, all focused on strengthening waste management systems and protecting shared waters. His role has been particularly significant in Transcarpathia, where his work has elevated river protection to a regional development priority.

Recognition has followed. In 2015, he received the Herman Ottó Innovator Award from the Ministry of Rural Development. In 2024, the Ministry of Energy awarded him the Commemorative Plaque for Our Environment. Internationally, he serves as Vice President of the National Member of ISWA (International Solid Waste Association), bringing Hungarian expertise into global waste and recycling debates. He is also a multiple-time TEDx speaker and was named among Hungary’s 25 most influential green experts.

Yet his work is not only about systems and institutions. Earlier in his career, Hankó helped pioneer the “paraszt-wellness” (peasant wellness) concept in the village of Gömör szőlő s, a model that reconnected urban visitors to traditional practices of gardening, animal husbandry, and organic farming. This experiment in rural sustainability combined heritage with ecological learning, planting the seeds of a philosophy he has

carried forward: Progress and tradition are not opposites but allies in building a resilient future.

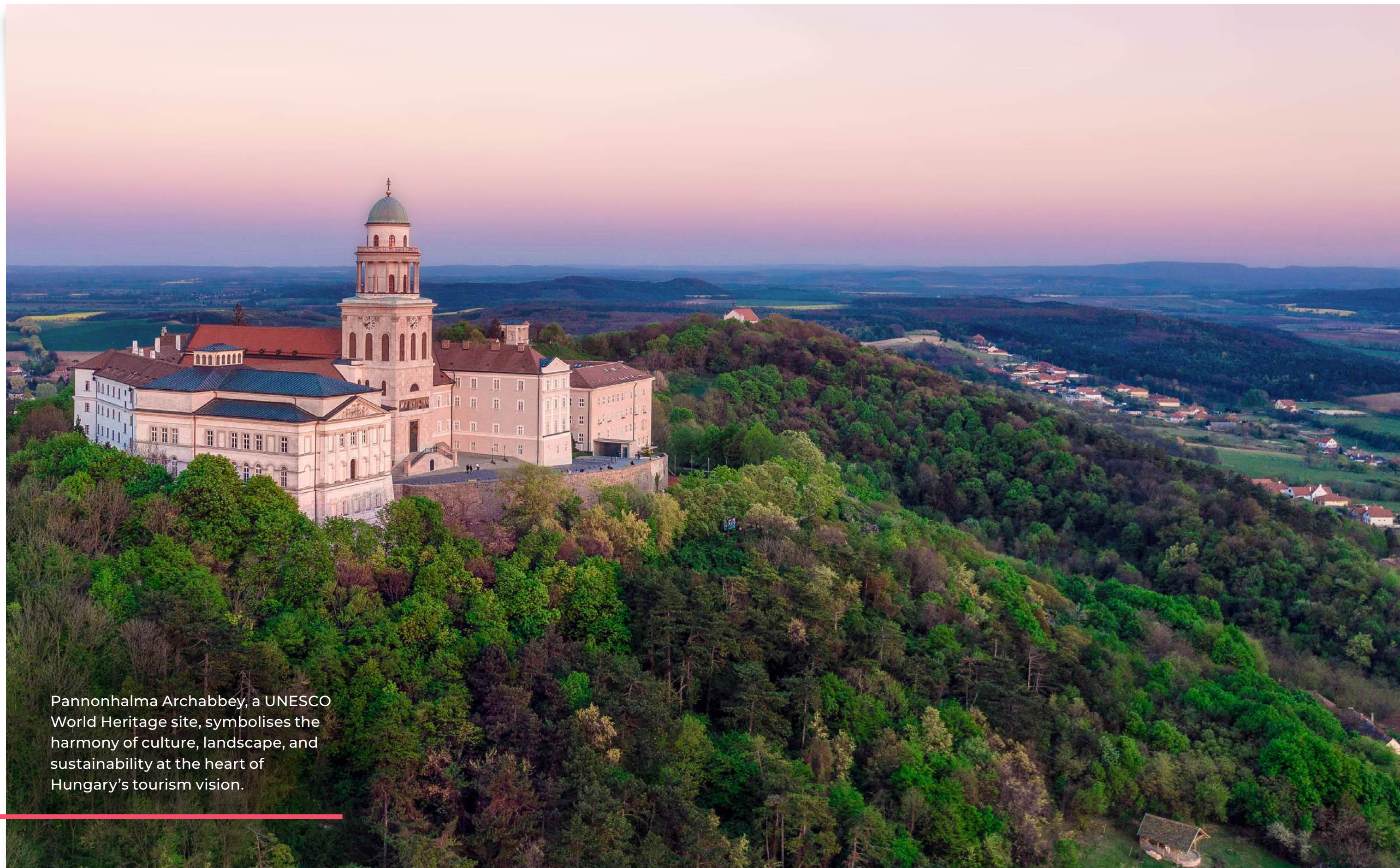
Hankó’s leadership is defined by breadth and persistence. He has shaped waste management policies, built international platforms, revitalised rural communities, and inspired countless volunteers. His vision is clear: Hungary’s path to sustainability depends on linking grassroots action with national ambition and global cooperation.



Gergely Hankó’s work on river cleanups embodies a wider fight for cleaner waters and stronger community action against waste.

“A change in perspective is needed: waste should no longer be seen as rubbish, but as a secondary raw material, and even as a product.

- Gergely Hankó



Pannonhalma Archabbey, a UNESCO World Heritage site, symbolises the harmony of culture, landscape, and sustainability at the heart of Hungary's tourism vision.

Key Terms in Sustainability

Biodiversity

The variety of living organisms in an ecosystem, essential for ecological balance and resilience.

Carbon Neutrality

A state where net greenhouse gas emissions are zero, achieved by reducing emissions and offsetting what remains.

Circular Economy

An economic system that minimises waste and keeps resources in use through reuse, repair, and recycling.

Community Engagement

The active involvement of local people and stakeholders in planning and decision-making to ensure shared benefits.

Eco-Certification

A label granted to tourism businesses or products that meet recognised environmental and social sustainability standards.

Eco-Tourism

Tourism that focuses on conserving nature and supporting local communities while minimising negative impacts.

Ecolabel

A voluntary mark used to identify services or products with verified lower environmental impact.

Green Mobility

Transport solutions with reduced environmental footprint, including cycling, public transport, and electric vehicles.

Impact Measurement

The process of collecting data on environmental, social, and economic outcomes of tourism activities, used for transparency, credibility, and improvement.

Permaculture

A design system for agriculture and communities that imitates natural ecosystems to ensure long-term sustainability.

Renewable Energy

Energy derived from naturally replenishing sources such as solar, wind, and biomass.

Resilience

The ability of systems, communities, or businesses to withstand and recover from shocks while maintaining function.

Slow Tourism

An approach to travel that values longer stays, local connections, and reduced environmental impact.

Sustainable Tourism

Tourism that balances environmental, social, and economic considerations to meet present and future needs.

VSME (Voluntary Sustainability Reporting Standard for Non-listed Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises)

An EU-backed framework that allows small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to measure their sustainability impact in a practical, user-friendly way.

Waste Reduction

The prevention and minimisation of waste generation through better design, reuse, recycling, and responsible consumption.

List of Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
BKK	Budapesti Közlekedési Központ (Budapest Transport Centre)
CNG	Compressed Natural Gas
CO ₂	Carbon Dioxide
CSRD	Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (EU)
CSDDD	Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (EU)
EPR	Extended Producer Responsibility
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance
EU	European Union
EUDR	European Union Deforestation Regulation
EV	Electric Vehicle
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GSTC	Global Sustainable Tourism Council
LED	Light-Emitting Diode
LCA	Life Cycle Assessment
MVK Zrt.	Miskolc Városi Közlekedési Zrt. (Miskolc Public Transport Company)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PEFC	Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal (United Nations)
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organisation
VSME	Voluntary Sustainability Reporting Standard for Non-listed Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises

Sources and Credits

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10 Things You Can Do Next

Tourism is changing fast. Travellers want more than sights and services. They want meaning, care for nature, and proof that their choices support real impact. At the same time, Europe keeps introducing new rules on sustainability. The EU’s Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and Hungary’s ESG Act set the framework. But those apply mainly to the largest players.

Other EU rules are also reshaping the playing field. The Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) demands responsibility across supply chains. The EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) bans products linked to deforestation. The EU Forced Labour Regulation addresses human rights in sourcing, and the Empowering Consumers Directive is cracking down on misleading sustainability marketing.

Though most micro- and small enterprises in Hungarian tourism are not directly bound by these regulations, their role is just as important. They shape visitor experience and regional identity. They carry much of the weight of authentic, sustainable tourism. Their impact matters: Whether it’s reducing waste, creating jobs, supporting farmers, protecting landscapes, or keeping traditions alive.

The good news is that sustainability is not only about rules. It’s about competitiveness. It’s about being recognised and trusted by travellers. It’s about showing impact in a way that is seen, comparable, and measurable.

The EU’s Voluntary Sustainability Standards for Micro-Enterprises (VSME) were created with exactly this in mind. Unlike heavy reporting rules, the VSME is light, practical, and friendly. It helps businesses tell their story in numbers and actions, showing visitors and partners that their impact is real. Think of it as a tool for visibility, not paperwork.

So, what can smaller businesses do now to keep pace with changing tourism and future-proof themselves? Here are ten clear, practical steps:

1. Know where you stand

Take stock of what you already do - whether it’s buying local, saving energy, or hosting cultural events. Every step counts.

2. Focus on what matters most

Not all impacts are equal. A winery may focus on water use and soil health, while a spa may prioritise energy savings. Start where your footprint is biggest.

3. Measure simply, measure often

Track basic numbers: Waste collected, litres of water saved, local suppliers used, visitors engaged. Small metrics build credibility.

4. Cut waste, add value

Minimise single-use plastics, repurpose leftovers, or create new products from surplus. Guests notice and appreciate visible actions.

5. Invest in people

Train staff on sustainability practices, from towel reuse to local storytelling. Empowered workers make a stronger experience for visitors.

6. Strengthen local roots

Buy from nearby farmers, feature regional crafts, or partner with local festivals. Local value is part of what visitors pay for.

7. Make it easy for guests to participate

Provide clear signs, simple options, or fun ideas: Recycling stations, bike rentals, community clean-ups. Sustainability is more powerful when shared.

8. Think in journeys, not stops

Connect your offer with others in the region - wine plus hiking, spa plus gastronomy. Collaboration extends stays and spreads benefits.

9. Tell your story with proof

Don’t just say you’re sustainable - show it. Post your numbers, highlight small wins, share before-and-after stories. Transparency builds trust.

10. Use tools that fit your size

Consider adopting frameworks like the VSME. They help structure your impact without heavy reporting, making your efforts visible to travellers and partners.

Hungary’s tourism has always been about its landscapes, its culture, and its people. From the rolling hills of Tokaj and the Bükk, to the windswept shores of Lake Balaton, and the vibrant streets of Budapest, every region carries its own story. The task now is to ensure that these stories evolve in a world where travellers are asking for more - more meaning, more responsibility, and more impact.

Every choice matters. When providers cut waste, source locally, or train staff differently, they shape not only their own reputation but the identity of Hungarian tourism as a whole. The sector’s resilience depends on thousands of small, measurable actions adding up to something bigger. The future will belong to those who act now - with clarity, honesty, and impact.

