

An aerial photograph of a vast, lush green vineyard in Hungary. The rows of grapevines are neatly organized and stretch across the landscape. In the background, a prominent, rounded volcanic mountain rises against a blue sky with scattered white clouds. A small village with red-roofed houses is nestled at the base of the mountain. A dirt path winds through the vineyard, leading towards the mountain.

Decanter

VOLCANIC WINES OF HUNGARY

Volcanic regions, unmissable sights and standout wines

A Decanter guide produced in partnership with Wines of Hungary

Volcanic wine rocks!

An invitation to discover the stunning landscapes and delicious wines of Hungary's many volcanic regions

'Saxa loquuntur', says the Latin proverb, meaning 'the stones speak.' Hungarian winemakers are very familiar with this idea: a key masterclass at this year's Hungarian Wine Summit was titled 'Volcanic Wine Rocks', and featured some of the most fascinating volcanic wines currently on the market. Although volcanic soils cover only around one percent of the Earth's surface, they can be found in wine regions right across Hungary, accounting for close to 40% of the country's winemaking territories.

We believe that the volcanic terroirs of Badacsony, Somló, Balaton Highlands, Eger, Tokaj, Bükk, Mátra and Zala tell the story of our land's unique character and heritage through their diverse and mineral-rich soils. These iconic landscapes have produced some of the world's most unique and internationally acclaimed wines, encapsulating the fiery spirit of the Hungarian people.

In the pages of this supplement, we showcase Hungary's volcanic wine

regions and the holistic experience they offer, combining exceptional wine, rich history and stunning natural beauty. From countless thermal spas to scenic hiking trails, these regions are essential destinations for both wine enthusiasts and nature lovers alike.

So read on; we hope you'll be inspired to sample Hungarian volcanic wines and to experience firsthand the precious legacy of our ancient volcanoes by visiting Hungary's wine regions. We're sure you'll agree that Hungarian volcanic wine truly rocks!



Pál Rókusfalvy, Hungarian Government Commissioner for National Wine Marketing

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View from Szent Tamás vineyard, Tokaj

Photograph: Wines of Hungary UK

Hungary's place in the world of volcanic wines

John Szabo MS digs into the key features of volcanic winemaking and terroir

Hungary may no longer have active volcanoes, but it does have a spectacular volcanic history, which continues to shape its wines to this day. The Pannonian Basin, nestled in the Carpathian Mountains, was an area of intense volcanic activity from shortly after the time of the dinosaurs to just a few million years ago - and you don't need to travel far in Hungary to find volcanic terroir.

What is a volcanic wine?

Volcanic wines are defined as those made from grapes grown on soils derived from volcanic materials. Since volcanic rocks and ash are extremely varied and cover dozens of countries and regions, not to mention climates and grape varieties, volcanic wines are a large and diverse family.

The topography of many volcanic regions is a challenge for vinegrowers, but has produced many unexpected benefits. The difficult terrain - and the fact that phylloxera struggles to survive in sandy volcanic soils - means rare, local grape varieties have been preserved, not to mention traditional farming practices that would be more familiar to a Renaissance painter than to most modern winemakers.

Volcanic wines thus represent a collection of highly distinctive, individual expressions from around the world - stubborn holdouts in a time of merging flavours and creeping homogeneity. What's more, Hungary has a particular abundance of native varieties with singular flavours.

Savoury vs fruity

What makes volcanic terroirs particularly special is the mouthwatering quality their wines all seem to share, whether from high acid, palpable salinity, or both. This may be due to the soils' high levels of the minerals potassium, magnesium, calcium and sodium, all of which are also present in wine. It seems that no matter the colour, volcanic wines are dominated by savoury character. Although they have fruit, of course, it's often secondary to non-fruity flavours, along with all of the nuances covered by the multi-dimensional term 'minerality'.

Minerality and volcanic wines walk hand in hand. Red grape examples

include peppery Kékfrankos and spicy, tannic Kadarka; for whites, think of Furmint's savoury botanical flavours, the summer flowers of Hárslevelű and the searing stoniness and honeyed character of the rare Kéknyelű variety.

Digging into volcanic terroirs

These characteristics have their roots at least partly in the soils. Although volcanic soils are extremely varied, there are properties shared by many that make them particularly suitable for high-quality winemaking.

Young volcanic soils (that is, those formed on recent lavas) are often actually more rock than soil. ▶



Tokaj's rolling hills conceal a complex geology

They have not yet had time to weather into water-retentive clays, as in the higher-elevation vineyards of Tokaj or the Balaton Highlands region. Since low water availability is the single most important factor for growing quality grapes, this is an obvious advantage. Also, perhaps obviously, the preferred volcanic soils for vineyards are usually on hillsides, where gravity ensures that water is limited. This is particularly true in Hungary.

Counterintuitively, volcanic soils, and especially the best ones for vinegrowing, are relatively infertile. Although lavas generally have generous amounts of the most important macro- and micronutrients required by plants, they are not readily accessible. These nutrients must first be weathered into an available form, and then made soluble in water to be taken up by root systems. Low water availability combined with the chemical makeup of volcanic soils therefore makes them ideal for quality winemaking.

The taste of volcanic terroir

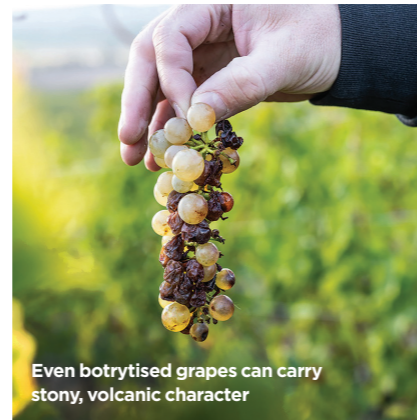
All this means that vines growing on volcanic soils get a broad and balanced diet, but in small quantities: the soils have low fertility but without particular deficiencies. This triggers the vines to focus on ripening fruit rather than growing shoots and leaves. Simply put, semi-parched, semi-starved vines produce less fruit, in smaller bunches, with thicker skins (the source of most of the grapes' aromas and flavours), resulting in more deeply coloured, concentrated, structured and age-worthy wines with a broader range of flavours.

Very old, highly weathered lavas have the contrasting property of water retention (due to high levels of clay), which, when paired with a dry growing season (such as in Tokaj) keeps vines moist and promotes even, steady ripening.

The chemistry of specific volcanic soils, too, has interesting effects as it interacts with different grape

varieties. High potassium levels in Badacsony, for example, allow varieties like Kéknyelű to take up measurably more potassium than elsewhere, resulting in wines with the unusual combination of high acid, high pH and pronounced salinity.

It's no wonder that many of Hungary's finest wines are born from these amazingly varied volcanic soils, forming a central part of the story of one of the world's great volcanic wine nations.



Even botrytised grapes can carry stony, volcanic character



Networks of cool cellars are dug into the soft volcanic rock

Photographs: Wines of Hungary



Vines growing on the slopes of Sümeg castle, north of Lake Balaton

Photograph: Wines of Hungary

Vineyards and volcanics

Exploring the soils, grape varieties and wine styles of Hungary's volcanic landscape with Dr Caroline Gilby MW

Volcanism over aeons of history has shaped much of Hungary's landscape, although this explosive period came to an end around two million years ago. Its legacy is a beautiful landscape of rolling hills, caves and natural hot springs for visitors to explore.

An overview

The ancient Pannonian Sea covered much of Hungary until 5.5 million years ago, so much of the earliest volcanic activity took place underwater. The retreating sea left behind marine

sediments, which mingled with igneous rocks (those resulting from volcanic processes) to create a complex mosaic of rock types.

The volcanic bedrock is peppered with outcrops of **limestone** and **schist**, and topped by soils of clay, sand and fine wind-blown **loess**. What does this mean for wine drinkers today? These volcanic soils leave their unmistakable signature of salinity and vibrant freshness on the regions' wines.

Hungary's volcanic soils (discussed in more detail on page 73) are all home to high-quality wines, but each region

has its own volcanic character: Lake Balaton's **basalts** are harder, while those on the Tihany peninsula are more alkaline, and Somló is home to porous mineral basalts. Mátra's soils are mainly **andesite**, contrasting with neighbouring Eger and Bükk's **rhyolite** soils. Meanwhile, the hills of Tokaj, that storied volcanic region, are a supremely complex mix.

While all these regions share a volcanic inheritance, it is the fascinating nuances of their different soils that set the stage for the rich variety of Hungarian wines. ►

Around Lake Balaton – southwest of Budapest

Some of Hungary's most picturesque and welcoming wine regions are found around the warm turquoise waters of Lake Balaton, the largest lake in Central Europe. There's a mild Mediterranean vibe to the climate, making it a popular holiday spot for swimming, sailing and walks or bike rides into the surrounding national park.

The soils

The northern shore of Lake Balaton is the site of a chain of volcanoes that erupted around three to four million years ago. The most important volcanic regions here include Balaton-felvidék (**Balaton Highlands**) and Badacsony. Balatonfüred-Csopak also boasts a small volcanic area, on the scenic Tihany peninsula on the lake's northern edge.

Badacsony takes its name from the impressive hill on the lake's shore – a distinctive type of flat-topped volcanic cone known as a 'witness mountain'. After millions of years of erosion, only the hard basalt core remains, leaving a strikingly shaped pedestal overlooking the surrounding plains.

The area also covers 10 other hills, most notably Szent György-Hegy, Csobánc and Szigliget. These inland peaks have different basalt-based soils, and a cooler climate, as they are further from the sunny reflections from the lake. This gives their wines a more linear, vibrant structure. Leading wine

producers in Badacsony include Villa Tolnay, Laposa, Sabar, Földi Bálint, Szászi, UJVARI and Borbély.

Key grape varieties

White wines dominate here, with **Olaszrizling** in the starring role. After Furmint, this is Hungary's second most important white grape, and may be the best white grape you've never heard of – because it hides under so many identities (Graševina in Croatia, Laški Rizling in Slovenia and Welschriesling in Austria). In the past, Olaszrizling was dismissed as only fit for low-quality wine, to be used in the ever-popular *fröccs* (spritzers). But with care and attention, this grape variety is capable of exciting quality, from zesty, fruity reductive styles to layered and intense age-worthy wines – and is well-suited to volcanic soils. Expect pear, lemon and pineapple with a touch of fennel and almond, sometimes honey, backed by supple acidity and a mineral firmness.

Other important grapes include the rare **Kéknyelű** variety, whose name means 'blue stem'. This white grape

has a long history in the area, but almost disappeared thanks to its low yields. Today it is having a renaissance as wineries realise its potential for flinty, stone-fruited, firm-textured wines that can repay ageing.

Pinot Gris (known in Hungary as Szürkebarát, meaning 'grey monk') also thrives on these sunny basalt soils, resulting in rich yet mineral styles.

Furmint used to be widely planted across Hungary, but has only recently been reestablished in this region, led by the visionary Canadian winemaker Robert Gilvesy on the slopes of the famous hill Szent György-hegy. Balaton Furmint has a distinctly different style to that of Tokaj: broader, with stone fruit and apple notes, and more supple acidity paired with mineral grip.

There are also a few reds – Gilvesy has planted **Kadarka** in Badacsony. **Kékfrankos**, meanwhile, is ideally suited to the volcanic caldera of the Tihany peninsula, where producers Zelna, Homola and St Donat are making impressive and delicious red wines.

“Balaton Furmint has a distinctly different style to that of Tokaj – broader, with stone fruit and apple notes, and more supple acidity paired with mineral grip”



A steep volcanic slopes in Badacsony



The Káli Basin, in the Balaton Highlands region



Csopak, on the northern shore of Lake Balaton, is famed for its Olaszrizling

Photographs: Wines of Hungary

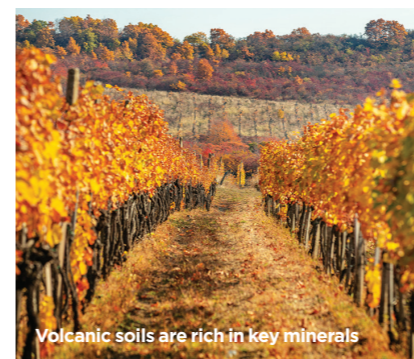
Somló – “Where God forgot his hat”

North of Lake Balaton, flat plains surround the dramatic silhouette of the lonely Somló hill – affectionately known by locals as ‘the place God left his hat’.

The soils

Soils here are typically eroded basalt and tuff, less dense and more porous than the hard basalt volcanoes close to the lake. Nearer the surface, there are layers of wind-deposited loess.

Somló wines are characterised by their distinctly fiery, mineral character.



Volcanic soils are rich in key minerals

No matter what grape is grown, Somló's terroir imparts a distinctly saline, mineral and somewhat austere character. The majority of vines here are white grapes (mostly local varieties), alongside small amounts of Syrah.

Key grape varieties

Juhfark ('sheep's tail') is the standout grape here. Producers had to fight to keep this ancient white variety, which was only reauthorised in the 1990s. Offering piercing acidity, stony leanness and restrained notes of citrus, grapefruit and herbs, wines made from Juhfark can age beautifully.

Other important grapes are Olaszrizling, Furmint and Hárslevelű – here always in a distinctive Somló mode: broader and more saline. Somló, a small wine region, is a land of tiny family and hobby producers, with only a few professional wineries – look out for Kolonics, Spiegelberg, Somlói Vándor and the larger Kreinbacher. ▶

“Juhfark ('sheep's tail') is Somló's standout grape. Producers had to fight to keep this ancient white variety, which was only reauthorised in the 1990s”

KEY SOILS TO KNOW

Andesite

Named after the Andes mountain range, an igneous rock midway in composition between basalt and rhyolite

Basalt

A fine-grained igneous rock formed as low-silica, low-viscosity magma cools

Limestone

A sedimentary rock, calcium carbonate, formed when calcium precipitates out of water

Loess

A porous soil of fine clay and silt particles deposited over time by the wind

Rhyolite

An igneous rock, often glassy-textured, formed as the most viscous, high-silica magma cools

Schist

A flaky metamorphic rock composed of distinct mineral layers

Tuff

A soft rock made of volcanic ash thrown out during an eruption

Heading northeast: Mátra, Eger and Bükk

A chain of volcanic hills in the northeast of Hungary is also home to important wine regions: Mátra, Eger and Bükk.

Mátra

Heading out from Budapest, the first region you come across is Mátra: cool, hilly and sadly often overlooked in favour of its better-known neighbours, despite being one of Hungary's largest regions. Mátra is home to only a handful of producers, the best being small family estates such as Centurio, Benedek and N.A.G. The wines are characterised by their freshness, elegance and restraint. Production is white-led, but with 67 varieties grown in the region, there's no real flagship. Pinot Gris/Grigio is the most planted, and the reds are led by Kékfrankos, Cabernet Sauvignon and Zweigelt.



Hungary's volcanic soils have been extensively studied

Photograph Wines of Hungary UK

Eger

Eger is one of Hungary's most important and best-known wine regions – though in the past because of a somewhat infamous wine: the cheap, rustic 'bull's blood'. This is predominantly a region of **tuff** and **rhyolite tuff** soils, with numerous cellars carved into the hills. Vines are planted on the south-facing volcanic slopes of the Bükk Mountains, which offer protection from cold north winds in the winter, but also ensure cooling breezes in summer.

Eger's climate is cool compared to the rest of the country, but its wines can combine elegant freshness and plush, fruit-forward styles. The town of Eger itself is well worth a visit for its Baroque architecture, hot springs and famous fortress.

The region's most iconic wine is still called Bikavér – but it has been reinvented as a flagship red blend, based on Kékfrankos, with strict rules governing yields and ageing. The aim is to showcase Eger terroir rather than individual grape varieties.

Eger also produces a white counterpart called Egri Csillag, together with distinctive expressions of international grapes, including Chardonnay and Syrah. Notable Eger producers are St Andrea, Kovács Nimród Winery, Toth Ferenc, Bolyki and Gál Tibor.

Bükk

The Bükk wine region is effectively a continuation of Eger's geology. Its wines were once notorious for searing, tooth-hurting acidity – but in today's climate, and with improved viticulture, this acidity is becoming a distinct advantage, creating racy, refreshing and bright wines.

Although Bükk was once a supplier of grapes to other regions, it now boasts a new generation of small estates and low-intervention producers such as Gallay and Sándor Zsolt. The Zenit grape is proving particularly appealing, along with blends based on Cseszegi Fűszeres and reds from Zweigelt and Pinot Noir.

“Eger's most iconic wine is still called Bikavér – but it has been reinvented as a flagship red blend, based on Kékfrankos, with strict rules governing yields and ageing”

HUNGARY'S VOLCANIC REGIONS

Badacsony: loess, clay and sand at lower elevations, basalt and tuff higher up

Balaton Highlands and the Tihany peninsula: predominantly dense basalt

Eger and Bükk: predominantly tuff and rhyolite tuff

Mátra: largely andesite

Somló: eroded basalt, tuff and loess

Tokaj: a complex combination of andesite, rhyolite, loess and more



Steep volcanic hillsides make for well-drained vineyards

Photograph Wines of Hungary



Wines age in intricate networks of cellars dug into Tokaj's hills

Photograph Wines of Hungary

Tokaj – Hungary's flagship volcanic region

Hungary's most famous region, Tokaj, may have some of the most complex geology anywhere in the wine world, with around 400 extinct volcanoes.

The soils

There are three main soil types: a red clay called **nyirok**, formed from degraded volcanic bedrock incorporating organic matter and iron; fine windblown **loess**, found mainly on the slopes of the volcanic Tokaj hill itself; and a soil known as '**rock flour**' (derived from pumice).

The wines

Today, top producers are working to better understand the individuality and potential of their soils – especially given the particular ability of the area's leading grape, Furmint, to express terroir differences. Tokaj comprises 27 villages and 418 identified separate crus – and even within a single cru there can be significant differences.

Today, the best producers are exploring the unique characteristics of single vineyards (featured on labels as *dűlő*). The darker clays of Betsek, for example, yield more structured wines;

wines from the stony soils of Úrágya are austere when young but long-lived; loess over volcanic bedrock at Kis-Garai gives more delicate ethereal aromas; while the clays of Szent Tamás produce some of the region's top wines.

In a few cases, winemakers like Szepsy, Balassa, Demetervin and Disznókő are selecting specific parcels within a cru for their unique characteristics. Tokaj has wealth of great producers that are exploring the story of their volcanic terroir, including Szepsy, Royal Tokaji, Demeter Zoltán, Gizella, Harsányi, Füleky, TR Wines, Tokaj Nobilis, Kikelet, Demetervin and Disznókő.

Vines and volcanoes come together through the lens of Hungarian wine in a glass – mineral, complex, distinctive and well worth exploring.

“The Tokaj region has 27 villages and 418 identified separate crus – and even within a single cru there can be significant terroir differences”



Sauska Cellar, Tokaj

Photograph: Wines of Hungary UK

Tasting Hungary

Beth Willard presents a selection of some of the finest sparkling, white, rosé and red volcanic wines to seek out

The mighty Danube as it divides Buda from Pest. Historic Art Nouveau architecture, grand coffee houses and decadent Turkish baths. Béla Bartók, Ferenc Puskás. All indisputably Hungarian icons – but volcanoes? Yes indeed, Hungary is dominated by a volcanic landscape whose impact is key to the character of the country's wines.

Within this selection, you will find an array of grape varieties and wine styles from these volcanic terroirs. Of course, Furmint features as the main protagonist in many of these blends, testament to the versatility of the variety and the quality of the wines it produces. There is even a fantastic sparkling Furmint, which is an outstanding example both of traditional-method winemaking and the variety's malleability.

The country's volcanic terroirs have also produced outstanding interpretations of Olaszrizling (Welschriesling), Sauvignon Blanc, Kékfrankos, Zweigelt and Pinot Noir, as well as sweet wines that hark back to when Hungary's Tokaji was prized throughout the royal courts of Europe. Of course, these wines have their distinct personalities, which represent a diversity of styles – but there are some clear commonalities.

There is a significant mineral component, which makes itself known through a stony, petrichor character, or a more intense flinty or ferrous note. And then there's the high acidity that brings not only freshness and elegance but also, in many cases, longevity.

Overall, for lovers of ancient landscapes and modern, racy wines, Hungary has a lot to offer!

SPARKLING

Gilvesy Méthode Traditionnelle, Badacsony 2019

Drink 2024-2029

Fantastically Furmint in character, this sparkling wine is balanced and poised with a seductive smokiness and toasted brioche notes. Complex and layered with serious acidity that points to its elegant evolution and potential to age further. Great personality and structure. **Alc** 11.5%

Sauska Furmint Brut 2017

Drink 2024-2027

Fruit sourced from the winery's Tokaj vineyards, vinified in Budafok. Lemon sherbet, pear and green apple on the nose. Whole-bunch pressed, unoaked and 7g/l dosage. Green apple, kiwi and lemon on the palate, whilst a buttery depth and texture nod to five years of lees ageing. Cleansing lime zest leads to a lingering, nutty finish. **Alc** 12%

Kreinbacher Birtok Classic Brut NV

Drink 2024-2028

Mesmerising white florals, ripe orchard fruit and toasted brioche notes abound! Gorgeous citrus acidity, bouncy delicate foam and a long mineral finish. Outstanding! Gold medal winner at DWWA 2024. **Alc** 12.5%



Tokaj Sparkling Wine Cellars

WHITE

Benedek Pince Epreskert Sauvignon Blanc, Mátra 2023

Drink 2024-2026

Racy acidity and punchy citrus fruit dominate this Sauvignon Blanc from one of Hungary's most important white wine regions, to the north of Budapest. With a pithy grapefruit core, this youthful and vibrant wine shows flinty freshness on the finish. **Alc** 12.5%

Gizella Hárslevelű Furmint Cuvée, Tokaj 2023

Drink 2024-2026

A lovely introduction to dry wines from the region: Hárslevelű (53%) brings a pretty floral component, while Furmint contributes typical structure and minerality. Juicy peaches, lemon and almond are immediately appealing. Just a touch of sweetness on the finish softens some of the Furmint's natural bitterness. **Alc** 12.5%

Balassa Furmint, Tokaj 2022

Drink 2024-2028

Serious and layered but immediately enjoyable, this is a Furmint full of tropical fruit – orange blossom, guava and peach – balanced perfectly by intense salinity. Stony metallic notes intertwine harmoniously with the typical punchy acidity of Tokaj. Mouthwateringly mineral on the finish. **Alc** 13%

Patricius Furmint, Tokaj 2022

Drink 2024-2026

A crystal-clear wine with engaging aromas of apple blossom and fresh pear. It shows fresh, zesty fruit with notes of crunchy, ripe apple backed by vibrant acidity. This is a benchmark dry Furmint. **Alc** 13%

Sabar Kéknyelű, Badacsony 2022

Drink 2024-2026

Modern and fresh, this is a delicious interpretation of one of Hungary's rarer white grape varieties. Spicy and lively with green chilli, grapefruit pith and white pepper. Stony and grippy, the wine has real drive and an attractive touch of fennel bitterness that lifts the finish. **Alc** 13.5%

Sabar Olaszrizling, Badacsony 2022

Drink 2024-2026

A delightful example of a lighter style of white, this is both elegantly simple and simply enticing. Springtime aromas of flowers and cut grass keep the wine fresh and light on its feet. Apple compote and lemon myrtle make for a long, minty finish. **Alc** 11.5%

St Andrea Mária Egri Cuvée Grand Superior, Eger 2022

Drink 2024-2028

From the most volcanic site in the region, this blend of mainly Furmint and Chardonnay offers a chalky, textural palate with a mineral backbone. Layered with lemon and lime, there's a touch of white pepper and mouth-watering grapefruit on the finish. Tension and energy point to ageing potential. **Alc** 13.5%

Szeremley Riesling, Badacsony 2022

Drink 2024-2026

A classic white from Hungary, this blend of Olaszrizling and Riesling offers seductive smokey aromas and lime. The palate is weighty and appealingly syrupy with tinned pineapple sweetness surrounding a stony core. The finish has impressive lift from stone fruit and aniseed bitterness. **Alc** 12%

Bodrog Borműhely Lapis Furmint, Tokaj 2021

Drink 2025-2029

Wood spice notes combine with creamy coffee and vanilla in this oaked Furmint. The palate is quite rich, with ripe peach and pear, whilst a bitter almond note lends some freshness to the finish. This wine will continue to benefit from time in bottle. **Alc** 12.5%

Royal Tokaji Szt Tamás Furmint, Tokaj 2021

Drink 2024-2030

A stunning expression of the celebrated Szt Tamás vineyard. Complex and heady on the nose with mango, orange and grapefruit, the wine is broad and satisfying, balanced with sensational acidity. Pithy, puckering and powerful with a slatey, flinty backbone. **Alc** 12.5%

Gilvesy St George Furmint, Badacsony 2020

Drink 2024-2026

Hallmark Furmint aromas of fresh mango and macadamia nut. Combined with a touch of reduction, this makes for a heady and inviting wine with an impressively stony core and serious intensity on the palate. As a wine that offers both immediacy and substance, this should have broad appeal. **Alc** 12.5%

Fülek Mestervölgy Furmint, Tokaj 2019

Drink 2024-2028

Lusciously inviting, this Furmint is dry but offers up ripe peach and apricot, held together by racy acidity, typical of the region. The wine seems to have gained weight and richness after a few years in bottle, and while it will probably develop further, it is delicious to drink now. **Alc** 13.5% ▶



Volcanic rocks in Tokaj

Photograph: Wines of Hungary

Kolonics Furmint, Somlò 2019**Drink** 2024-2026

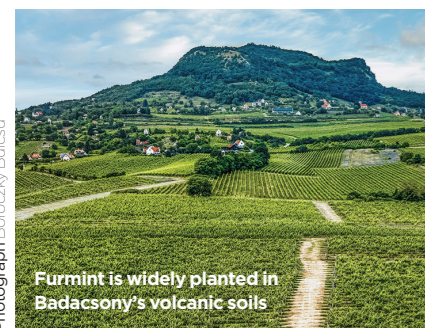
Stony energy marks this light and more delicate interpretation of Furmint. More textural than overtly fruity, the wine displays a little reduction, which adds interest, together with inviting smoky notes. A good example of the ageing potential of the variety and region.

Alc 14%**Kolonics Juhfark, Somlò 2018****Drink** 2024-2025

It is interesting to taste this example of Juhfark with some age. Rich and weighty after time in bottle, there are pretty musk rose and wild fennel notes. Ripe peach and stone fruit bitterness dominate the palate, which has developed an oily, viscous texture.

Alc 13%**Szeremley Kéknyelű, Badacsony 2006****Drink** 2024-2026

There are only 50ha of Kéknyelű, a rare Hungarian grape, nearly all in Badacsony. It is a grape with ageing potential, evident in the surprising freshness of this 18-year-old white. With both umami and ripe fruity notes (shitake mushrooms and quince), this is a complex wine with a wet stone minerality. **Alc** 13%



Photograph Boróczy Balázs

Furmint is widely planted in Badacsony's volcanic soils

ROSÉ**Zelna Rosé, Tihany 2022****Drink** 2024-2026

An elegant rosé blend of Kékfrankos and Zweigelt, with strawberry fruit and a wonderful pomegranate and cranberry crunch. Following time on lees and a year in bottle, the palate offers weight and intensity resulting in a substantial yet lively rosé from Lake Balaton's volcanic peninsula, Hungary's smallest PDO. **Alc** 12.5%



Photograph Wines of Hungary

Caves within volcanic rock provide ideal conditions for ageing wine

RED**Benedek Pince Pinot Noir, Mátra 2022****Drink** 2024-2026

Light in colour with delicate aromas of sour cherry and pomegranate, this Pinot Noir is destined for immediate drinking. Just on the right side of green, it is fresh and lively with an underlying stoniness that speaks of its volcanic origins. Would benefit from being chilled for summer drinking. **Alc** 11.5%

St Andrea Merengő Egri Bikavér, Eger 2021**Drink** 2024-2029

Made from a selection of the best fruit from St Andrea's nine vineyards. The base is Kékfrankos, bringing pretty floral notes and elegance, while international varieties offer blackberries and spice. After 16 months in barrel, it is already soft and succulent, but kept in check by impressive acid drive. **Alc** 15%

St Donat Magma Kékfrankos, Balaton 2021**Drink** 2024-2026

From the Tihany peninsula, this is a delightfully light and lively red with pretty floral and sour cherry aromas. The palate is lifted with serious graphite drive and is very fruit-forward despite nearly a year in barrel, with a juicy, raspberry finish. **Alc** 12.5%

Gallay Zweigelt, Bükk 2020**Drink** 2024-2026

Medium bodied with lots of wild berry fruit, this Zweigelt was part whole-bunch fermented, which accounts for a certain freshness. Aromas of sundried tomato, brambly fruit and peppery spice are immediately appealing in this wine, which should be enjoyed young and possibly a little chilled.

Alc 12%**St Andrea Nagy-Eged Egri Bikavér Grand Superior, Eger 2019****Drink** 2024-2029

Wonderfully intense and powerful, this single-vineyard wine combines Kékfrankos with Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Syrah. Blackberries and black pepper aromas lead to a plummy, ferrous palate with great structure, with present but well managed tannins. This is young but will develop beautifully in bottle. **Alc** 15%

Gallay Kékfrankos, Bükk 2017**Drink** 2024-2025

This red spends 24 months in oak, developing some vanilla and toast character, and showcasing the variety's ageing potential. Jammy strawberry fruit combines with cigar box and leather in this seven-year-old wine, which is ready to drink now. **Alc** 12%

SWEET
Gizella Aszú 6 Puttonyos, Tokaj 2019

Drink 2024-2028

Winner of a Best in Show award at DWVA 2024. Winemaker László Szilágyi believes the 2019 might be one of his best vintages. A delightfully light style of Aszú wine, layered with lemon curd, fresh mango and honeycomb. It has a vibrant, stony core and is light on its feet, making it very approachable to drink young. **Alc** 9.5%



The Széchenyi Baths in Budapest's City Park

A travel guide to volcanic Hungary

Hungary boasts myriad thermal spas and striking landscapes – Sue Tolson heads out to discover the country's volcanic treasures

Hungary's capital, Budapest, is famed as the spa capital of the world. But in fact, thanks to its volcanic past, the entire country is blessed with numerous hot springs.

The practice of bathing in Hungary's mineral-rich, healing waters goes back to Roman times, when the province of Pannonia was part of the Roman Empire.

The Ottoman Empire, which covered large areas of modern-day Hungary, continued this tradition, and baths dating from this period are still in use today. ▶



The Széchenyi Baths is one of the largest in Europe

The spa capital of the world

Budapest is home to nine thermal baths and over 120 natural hot springs, so no visit is complete without a soak in the calming waters.

The biggest and most popular is Neo-Baroque **Széchenyi Baths** in the City Park, which boasts numerous indoor and outdoor thermal pools, as well as a swimming pool. Visitors can while away a winter afternoon among clouds of billowing steam watching the chess players. Alternatively, the Art Nouveau **Gellért Thermal Bath** offers turn-of-the-century elegance with its beautiful tiled thermal pools and indoor swimming pool, surrounded by intricately carved columns. The historic **Rudas Baths** allow you to travel back to Ottoman times and relax in the octagonal pool under its 16th-century dome, or enjoy the rooftop hot tub with panoramic views over the Danube and Budapest.



Beyond the capital

The whole country is, however, dotted with hot springs, with many villages boasting their own thermal bath. If you want to combine relaxing in the soothing waters with wine tasting, Hungary's volcanic wine regions offer plenty of opportunities.

The northeast: salt hills, cave baths and atmospheric cellars

Head toward **Eger** to taste some spicy Egri Bikavér, a Kékfrankos-based red blend, making sure to stop off in **Egerszalók** and bathe alongside striking white travertine limestone terraces in the **Valley of Medicinal Waters**. You can admire the ever-changing, lacy white ledges and dazzling limestone curtains from the comfort of the **Salaris Resort Medicinal and Wellness Spa** or the outdoor pools of the **Nostalgia Baths**.



Just south of Hungary's second city, **Miskolc**, nestled in the forests of the Bükk Mountains, the **Miskolctapolca cave bath** is formed of a series of water-filled caves above natural hot springs. It's an unforgettable experience: swim from cave to cave in the warm, mineral-rich water flowing through ancient natural passages,

luxuriate in the current's massaging effects and listen to the echo as you bathe 'under the stars' in the dome-shaped 'Star Hall'.

Tokaj, home to one of the world's most iconic sweet wines, Tokaji Aszú, is not to be missed. Visitors can cycle around the rolling, vineyard-covered volcanic hills of this UNESCO World Heritage site and discover rows of atmospheric cellars carved into the hillsides. Alternatively, hike up to the volcanic Megyer-hegy tarn and enjoy the views from one of Hungary's most beautiful natural sites, before relaxing in the **Végarzó Baths** in Sárospatak.

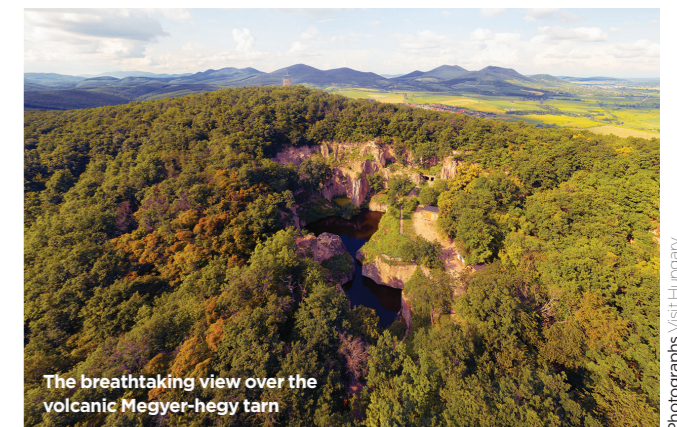
The southwest: otherworldly landscapes, fields of lavender and thermal lakes

Explore the northern shore of the 'Hungarian Sea' en route to the Badacsony wine region. Stretching out into **Lake Balaton**, dividing it into two basins, the **Tihany Peninsula** boasts

geyser cones and vast purple lavender fields that rival Provence with their gorgeous scent. Visit the **Benedictine Abbey of Tihany** and savour a glass of local red Kékfrankos.

Heading west, picturesque, untouched villages and an increasingly dynamic food and wine scene can be found in the **Balaton Highlands** and **Badacsony**. The hills offer plenty to explore: from the 'rock sea' in **Szentbékáll** to the striking basalt 'organ pipes' of **Szent György-hegy** and the view from the castle ruins atop **Szigliget**. Located at the western tip of Lake Balaton, surrounded by the lush green forest of a nature reserve, **Hévíz** is the world's largest swimmable thermal lake - centuries of bathers have relaxed in its healing waters.

With all this and more to offer, Hungary's volcanic regions provide a refreshingly holistic experience, combining breathtaking landscapes and the expressive, terroir-driven wines they produce.





Vineyards among the mountains of Tokaj



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Rows of cellars in Herceghút, northeastern Hungary

Photographs: Wines of Hungary