

Great Drives Lake Balaton

Lake Balaton, Shore thing - Complete a lap of the lake in an Avis hire car

For Hungarians, unspoilt Lake Balaton is the seaside, a national park and swinging clubland all rolled into one. Drive through fairy-tale forests, volcanic mountains and some of Europe's best wine country to explore the wild and wonderful region that surrounds Hungary's gem. To top it all off, the thermal waters and sleek spas of the north shore will make sure you're chilled out before the journey home.

Test drive this two-day tour for the best of the Lake Balaton region.

Collect your rental vehicle from [Avis Budapest Airport](#) and drive southwest along the M71 through the forest to the lake. First stop is for fishing at **Kis Balaton**, then follow the lakeside road for an evening of clubbing in **Siófok**. Continue east to elegant **Martonvásár**, where Beethoven used to stay, before exploring the north shore and the **Tapolca** caves. Then it's a short drive through rolling country to the thermal lake at **Hévíz**. If you are planning to visit Budapest itself, you can always drop off the vehicle at our [Avis Budapest](#) branch.

High Points en route

Kis Balaton – Gone Fishin'

Venture into the forest to the protected wetlands of **Kis Balaton**. Steer along the winding country roads through marshes full of sea-eagles and watchtowers for bison-spotting to an angler's paradise - Kanyavári Island. Watch out for the competition though – your rod and reel are no match for the scores of cormorants and herons that line the banks.

The Palace, Siófok – Party in the Palms

The southern shores of Lake Balaton are Hungary's Riviera. There are plenty of distractions from driving round the lake with scores of windsurfing schools, lakeside cafes and wineries. But we're heading to where the locals come to party: **Siófok**'s Palace nightclub. Top European DJs come here for wild, wild nights – don't wear your best clothes if it's foam-party night. If that's too lively, chill out in the free outdoor Disco Garden, the Palace's own palm-fringed slice of Ibiza.

Martonvásár – Musical Mansion

Cruise along the shoreline again, and then out into the countryside, through Hungary's oldest village to the elegant Brunswick Mansion in **Martonvásár**. Beethoven was a frequent visitor here – it's where he composed the Moonlight Sonata. Walk through the gardens and check

out the arboretum by the lake, or just relax at one of the outdoor summer concerts.

Tapolca – Going Underground

Head along the lake's unspoilt north shore to try your hand at a different form of transport. Hire a paddle-boat and navigate your way through the spectacular volcanic caves that criss-cross beneath the **Tapolca** streets. Spend the night at a real little gem – the Káli Art Inn. This converted country house has bicycles for the nature-lover, a sauna for the lazy and even an artist's studio for the creative.

Hévíz – Spa-spotting

After all that sightseeing you deserve to spoil yourself, and there's nowhere better than Hévíz, home to the world's largest thermal lake, just a few minutes' jaunt from Balaton. Sporty types can swim to the central island in glorious water that never drops below 28 degrees centigrade, while the less energetic chill out in the indoor spa or wallow in the therapeutic local mud. Bar-hopping is easy in the town itself – drop off the car and take the mini-train instead.



High Points en route - Free time on your hands? Take your pick from the following gems:

1/ Keszthely – Galloping Gourmets

Take the winding road up through the volcanic hills for a gourmet afternoon in **Keszthely**. Work up an appetite exploring the castle and then fill up with venison and goulash at the 19th-century Bacchus restaurant. Try a candlelit tour and tasting in the wine museum – you don't need to worry about the drive home because there's an excellent hotel attached.

2/ Ajka – Heart of Glass

Time to quit the lake's shores and head north. Country roads wind through volcanic uplands, wine country and thick forest to Ajka. This is one of Hungary's most beautiful towns, and one of the oldest, but we're here for a little retail therapy. The Ajka crystal factory makes glasses and art the ancient Hungarian way, so you can watch the glass-blowers at work and pick up a unique bargain.

3/ Sümeg – Time Travelling

Swap one kind of horsepower for another. Take a trip back in time as you head north of the lake to historic **Sümeg**. Grand ruined palaces and castles line the route

to the town's castle and the historic stables. Horse riders can saddle up and explore 25 miles of trails around the area, while non-riders can follow in a traditional horse-drawn carriage.

4/ Tihany – Ride the Wind

The calm lake waters of **Tihany** are great for windsurfing. Visit Sail and Surf and let an experienced trainer teach you all the tricks. Afterwards, you deserve a break – why not go for dinner and drinks by the beach at the nearby Club Tihany?

5/ Badacsony – Under the Volcano

Some of Hungary's best wine is made on the slopes of the extinct Badacsony volcano, and our host for the day, Mr Szeremley, is something of a legend in these parts. Explore the Szeremley Estate's cellars, try some real local specialities like organic buffalo and then sit back and let the wine flow – they usually have 30 or so to choose from! Remember to appoint a driver before tasting the wine.

Avis Great Drives

Route Map: Lake Balaton



Need to know

Round circuit

250 miles – approx 5 hours, 30 minutes driving time.

Tip

Headlights must be used night and day outside built-up areas.

Soundtrack

Gogol Bordello – Gypsy Punks

Essential item

Olympus RC I Outback binoculars

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