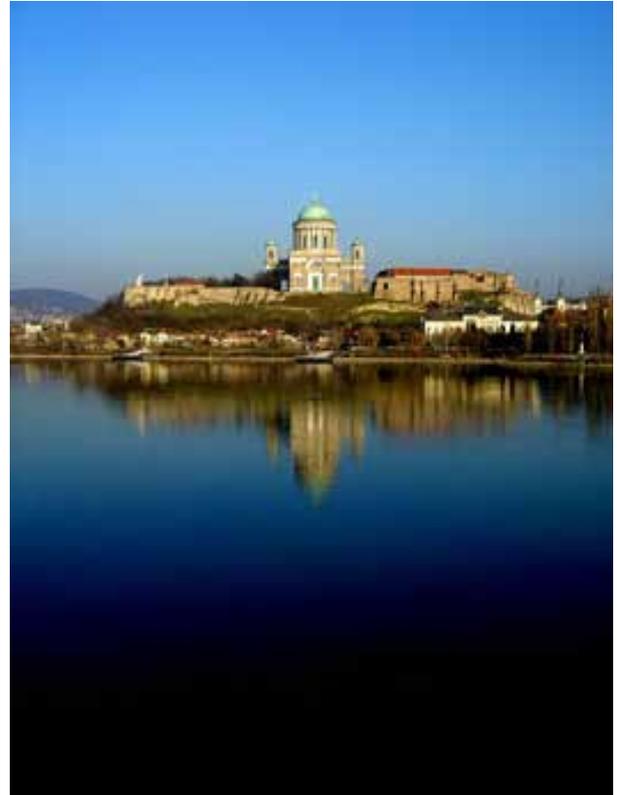


Esztergom



Beautifully situated in a crook of the Danube facing Slovakia, **ESZTERGOM** is dominated by its basilica, whose dome is visible for miles around. The sight is richly symbolic, since it was here that Prince Géza and his son Vajk (the future king and saint Stephen) brought Hungary into the fold of Roman Catholic Christendom, in the nation's first cathedral. Even after the court moved to Buda following the Mongol invasion, Esztergom remained the **centre of Catholicism** until the Turkish conquest, when the clergy dispersed to safer towns and it became an Ottoman stronghold, besieged by Christian armies. While the town recovered in the eighteenth century, it wasn't until the 1820s that it became the Primal See again, following a nationwide campaign. As part of the *ancien régime*, the Church was ruthlessly persecuted during the Rákosi era (though the basilica was well maintained, allegedly because the wife of the Soviet leader Khrushchev liked it). From the 1960s onwards, however, the Communists settled for a *modus vivendi*, hoping to enlist the Church's help with social problems and to harness the patriotic spirit of the faithful. The avowedly Christian government elected in 1990 did its best to restore Church property and influence, and, while this process slowed down after the Communists returned to power, their concordat

with the Vatican in 1997 eased fears of it going into reverse. (Information by Rough Guides http://travel.yahoo.com/p-travelguide-798981-esztergom_esztergom-i)



Esztergom lies on the right bank of the **river Danube**, which forms the border with **Slovakia** there. It was the **capital of Hungary** from the 10th till the mid-13th century when King **Béla IV of Hungary** moved the royal seat to **Buda**. The city has the **Keresztény Múzeum**, the largest **ecclesiastical** collection in Hungary. Its **cathedral, Esztergom Basilica** is the largest church in Hungary.

The Roman town was called Solva. The name Esztergom was first mentioned in documents in 1079. Some think the name comes from Isztergam ('Ister' meaning **Danube** and Gam referring to the nearby river **Garam**).

Esztergom has been inhabited since the end of

the [Ice Age](#) 20,000 years ago. The first people known by name were the [Celts](#) from [Western Europe](#), who settled in the region in about 350 BC. When the [Roman](#) legions conquered the region, it became an important border province of [Pannonia](#), known by the name of [Solva](#).

The settlement gained significance after 960 when [Géza](#), the ruling prince of the Hungarians, chose Esztergom as his residence. His son, [Vajk](#), who was later called [Saint Stephen of Hungary](#), was born in his palace built on the Roman castrum on the Várhegy (Castle Hill) around 969-975. In 973, Esztergom served as the starting point of an important historical event. At Easter of that year Géza sent a committee to the international peace conference of [Otto I](#) (Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire). He offered peace to the Emperor and asked for missionaries.



([Saint Stephen of Hungary](#))



[Otto I](#). Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire

The prince's residence stood on the northern side of the hill. The center of the hill was occupied by a [basilica](#) dedicated to [St. Adalbert](#), who, according to legend, baptised [St. Stephen](#). The Church of [St. Adalbert](#) was the seat of the archbishop of Esztergom, the head of the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary.

In 1000, [Stephen](#) was crowned king in Esztergom. From the time of his rule up to the beginning of the 13th century, the only mint of the country operated here. At the same period the castle of Esztergom was built, which served not only as the royal residence until 1241 (the [Mongol invasion](#)) but also as the center of the Hungarian state, religion, and Esztergom county. The archbishop of Esztergom was the leader of the ten bishoprics founded by [Stephen](#). The town council was made up of the richest citizens of the town (residents of [French](#), [Spanish](#), [Belgian](#), and [Italian](#) origin) who dealt with commerce. In the beginning of the 13th century Esztergom was the center of the country's political and economic life.

Meanwhile the citizenry had been fighting for maintaining or reclaiming the rights of towns, against the expansion of the church within the regal town. In the chaotic years after the fall of the [House of Árpád](#), Esztergom suffered another calamity: in 1304, the forces of [Wenceslaus II](#), the [Czech](#) king occupied and raided the castle.

In 1507 Archbishop [Tamás Bakócz](#) (†1521) had [Italian](#) architects build the [Bakócz chapel](#),

which is the earliest and most significant [Renaissance](#) building which has survived in Hungary. The altarpiece of the chapel was carved from white marble.



Archbishop [Tamás Bakócz](#)

The [Turkish](#) conquest of [Mohács](#) in 1526 brought a decline to Esztergom as well. In the period between 1526 and 1543, when two rival kings reigned in Hungary, Esztergom was besieged six times. Finally, in 1530, Ferdinand I occupied the castle. He put foreign mercenaries in the castle, and sent the chapter and the bishopric to [Nagyszombat](#) and [Pozsony](#). In 1543 Sultan [Suleiman I](#) attacked the castle with an enormous army and countless cannons. Following two years of heroic struggle of resistance, the foreign (Spanish, Italian and German) guards betrayed the castle. This was the period when the outskirts were finally destroyed.

Esztergom was the centre of a Turkish sanjak controlling several counties, and also a significant castle on the northwest border of the Turkish Empire – the main clashing point to prevent attacks on the mining towns of the highlands, [Vienna](#) and [Buda](#).

The most devastating siege took place in 1595 when the castle was reclaimed by the troops of Count [Karl von Mansfeld](#) and Count [Mátyás Cseszneky](#). Most of the buildings in the castle

and the town that had been built in the [Middle Ages](#) were destroyed during this period. From 1605 to 1683 the Turkish ruled in the castle, as well as the whole region again.

Though the Turkish were mainly engaged in building and fortifying the castle, they also built significant new buildings including Jamis, mosques, minarets, baths. These instalments, along with the contemporary buildings, were destroyed in the siege of 1683 resulting in the liberation of Esztergom - though some Turkish buildings prevailed up to the beginning of the 18th century. The last time the Turkish attacked Esztergom was in 1685. During the following year Buda was liberated as well.

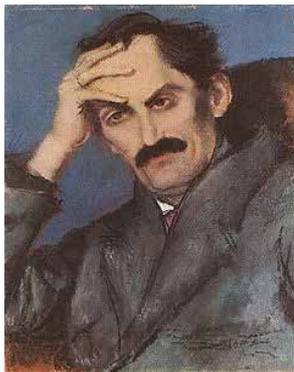
The territory was settled in by Hungarian, Slovakian and German settlers. This was when the new national landscape developed. In the area where there had previously been 65 Hungarian villages, only 22 were rebuilt. Though the reconstructed town received its free royal rights, its size and significance marked only the shadow of its old self.

Handicrafts gained strength and in around 1730, there were 17 independent crafts operating in Esztergom. Wine-culture was also of major significance. This was also the period when the [Baroque](#) view of the downtown area and the [Víziváros](#) (Watertown) were developed. The old town's main characteristic is the simplicity and moderateness of its citizen Baroque architecture. The most beautiful buildings can be found around the marketplace (Széchenyi square).

In 1761 the bishopric regained control over the castle, where they started the preliminary processes of the reconstruction of the new religious center: the middle of the Várhegy (Castle Hill), the remains of Saint Stephen and Saint Adalbert churches were carried away to provide room for the new cathedral.

By the beginning of the 20th century, Esztergom gained significance owing to its cultural and educational institutions as well as to being an administrative capital. The town's situation turned worse after the [Treaty of Trianon](#) of 1920, after which it became a border town and lost most of its previous territory.

This was also the place where the poet [Mihály Babits](#) spent his summers from 1924 to his death in 1941. The poet's residence was one of the centers of the country's literary life; he had a significant effect on intellectual life in Esztergom.



poet [Mihály Babits](#)

Esztergom had one of the oldest Jewish communities in Hungary. They had a place of worship here by 1050. King [Charles I](#) (Caroberto) gifted a plot to the community for a cemetery in 1326.

According to the 1910 census, 5.1% of the population were Jewish. The 1941 census found 1510 Jews here. The community maintained an elementary school until 1944. Jewish shops were ordered to be closed on April 28, 1944, the short-lived ghetto was set up on May 11. The former Jewish shops were handed over to non-Jews on June 9. The inmates of the ghetto were sent to Komárom in early June, then deported to Auschwitz on June 16, 1944. Two forced labor units, whose members were mainly Esztergom Jews, were executed en masse near Ágfalva, on the Austrian border in January, 1945.

Soviet troops captured the town on December 26, 1944, but were pushed back by the Germans on January 6, 1945, who were finally ousted on March 21, 1945.

The [Mária Valéria bridge](#), connecting Esztergom with the city of [Štúrovo](#) in Slovakia was rebuilt in 2001 with the support of the [European Union](#). Originally it was inaugurated in 1895, but the retreating German troops destroyed it in 1944. A new thermal and wellness spa opened in November, 2005.



[Mária Valéria bridge](#)

Architecture

After the WWII, reconstruction slowly managed to erase the traces of the war, with two of Esztergom's most vital characteristics gaining significance: due to its situation it was the cultural center of the area (more than 8,000 students were educated at its elementary, secondary schools and college). On the other hand, as a result of the local industrial development it has become a vital basis for the Hungarian tool and machinery industry. Those traveling to Esztergom today can admire the most monumental construction of Hungarian Classicism, the Basilica, which silently rules the landscape above the winding Danube, surrounded by mountains.

The building that might be considered the symbol of the town is the largest church in Hungary and was built from 1822 to 1869. [Ferenc Liszt](#) wrote the Mass of Esztergom for this occasion. The [classicist](#) church is enormous: the height of the [dome](#) is 71,5 meters. On one side, in the Saint Stephen chapel, the glittering relics of Hungarian and other nations' saints and valuable jewellery can be seen. On the south side, the [Bakócz Chapel](#), the only one that survived the [Middle Ages](#), can be seen. The builders of the [Basilica](#) had disassembled this structure into 1600 pieces, and incorporated it into the new church in its original form.

The treasury houses many masterpieces of medieval goldsmith's works. The western European masters' hands are praised by such items as the crown silver cross that has been

used since the 13th century, the ornate chalices, Francesco Francia's processional cross, the upper part of the well-known 'Matthias-Calvary' which is decorated in the rare [ronde-bosse enamel](#) technique. The Treasury also has a vast collection of traditional Hungarian and European textiles, including chasubles, liturgical vestments and robes.

The sound of the enormous bell hung in the southern tower can be heard from kilometers away. From the top of the large dome, visitors can see a breath-taking view.

The winding streets of the town, with its church towers create a historical atmosphere. Below the Basilica, at the edge of the mountain stand the old walls, bastions and rondellas – the remains of the castle of Esztergom. The remains of one section of the royal palace and castle that had been built during the Turkish rule had been buried in the ground up until the 1930s.

Passing through the narrow stairs, alleys, under arches and gates built in [Romanesque](#) style, a part of the past seems to come to life. This part of the palace was built in the time of King [Béla III](#). With his wife - the daughter of [Louis VII](#) - French architects arrived and constructed the late-Roman and early-Gothic building at the end of the 12th century.

The frescoes of the palace chapel date from the 12th-14th centuries, while on the walls of the mottes, some of the most beautiful paintings of the early Hungarian Renaissance can be admired (15th c.). From the terrace of the

palace one can admire the landscape of Esztergom. Under the terrace are the houses and churches of the Bishop-town section, or 'Víziváros' (Watertown) and the Primate's Palace. Opposite the palace is the Saint Thomas hill, and surrounded by the mountains and the [Danube](#). The walls of the castle still stand on the northern part of the Basilica. From the northern rondella one can admire the view of Párkány on the other side of the Danube as well as the [Szentgyörgymező](#), the Danube valley, and the So-called 'Víziváros' districts. It was named after being built on the banks of the Kis- and Nagy Duna (Small and Great [Danube](#)). Its fortresses, walls, bastions and [Turkish rondellas](#) can still be seen by the walk on the banks of the Danube. By the northern end of the wall, on the bank of the Nagy-Duna, an interesting memorial is put, a stone table with Turkish writings commemorates Sultan [Suleiman](#)'s victorious siege of 1543. The narrow, winding streets within the walls hide the remains of Turkish [mosques](#) and baths.

The [Keresztény Múzeum](#) (Christian museum) houses a rich collection of Hungarian panel pictures and sculpture of the [Middle Ages](#) as well as Italian and western-European paintings and handicrafts (13th-18th c.). This is where one can admire the chapel-like structure of the late [Gothic](#) 'Úrkoporsó' (Lord's coffin) from [Garamszentbenedek](#) that is decorated by painted wooden sculptures (c. 1480), the winged altar-piece by [Thomas of Coloswar](#) (1427), paintings by [Master M.S.](#) (1506), the gothic altars from Upper Historical Hungary

(Felvidék), handicrafts of Italian, German and Flemish artists from the 13th–17th centuries, tapestries and ceramics.

The parish-church in the centre of the Víziváros, which was built by the [Jesuits](#) between 1728 and 1738, and the single-towered [Franciscan](#) churches are also masterpieces of [Baroque](#) architecture.

The Cathedral Library standing in the southern part of the town, which was built in 1853 is one of the richest religious libraries of Hungary, accommodating approximately 250,000 books, among which several [codices](#) and [incunabula](#) can be found, such as the Latin explanation of the '[Song of Songs](#)' from the 12th century, the 'Lövöföldi Corvina' originating from donations of King Matthias, or the Jordánszky-codex, which includes the Hungarian translation of the Bible from 1516-1519. Along with Bakócz and Ulászló [graduals](#), they conserve also the Balassa Bible, in which Balassa's uncle wrote down the circumstances of his birth and death.

The main sight of the nearby 'Szent-Tamás hegy' (Saint Thomas Hill) is the [Baroque](#) Calvary, with the [Classicist](#) chapel on the top of the hill, which was built to commemorate the heroes who died for Esztergom. The hill was named after a church built by Bishop [Lukács Bánffy](#) in memoriam the martyr Saint [Thomas Becket](#), who had been his fellow student at the University of Paris. The church and the small castle which the Turks built there were destroyed a long time ago. On its original spot, the top of the hill, the narrow winding

streets and small houses that were built by the masters who were working on the construction of the Basilica at the beginning of the previous century.

On the southern slopes of the hill there is a Mediterranean, winding path with stairs that lead to the [Baroque](#) Saint Stephen chapel. The main square of the town is the Széchenyi square. Of the several buildings of [Baroque](#), [Rococo](#) and [Classicist](#) style, there is one that catches everyone's eyes: the Town Hall. The first floor was constructed on its top in 1729. The house burnt down in the 1750s. It was rebuilt in accordance with the plans of a local architect. Upon its façade there is a red marble carving which presents the coat of arms of Esztergom (a palace within the castle walls, protected by towers, with the [Árpáds'](#) shields below.) On the corner of the building the equestrian statue of Vajk Bottyán commemorates the original owner of the house.

The Trinity-statue in the middle of the square was created by György Kiss in 1900. The [orthodox](#) church at 60 Kossuth Lajos street was built around 1770 by [Serbian](#) settlers in Esztergom.

(Source:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esztergom>)

Esztergom, with its spectacular scenery and numerous memorials, a witness of the struggles of Hungarian history, is popular mostly with tourists interested in the beauties of the past and art.



Esztergom (Royal Castle)

After 960 Géza, the ruling prince of the Hungarians, chose Esztergom as his residence. His son, Vajk, who was later called Saint Stephen of Hungary, was born here in 970. In 1000, St Stephen (997-1038) was crowned king here.

Esztergom was the capital of Hungary from the 10th until the mid-13th century and it was the Royal Seat until the end of King Béla IV's reign. It is still the primary seat of the Catholic Church in Hungary, whose spectacular cathedral, Esztergom Basilica, is the largest church in the country.