

# Ecotourism in Balaton Uplands National Park

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Ecotourism takes place in natural areas, where visitors can enjoy all the benefits that only nature can give. A true ecotourist is willing to learn, has an understanding of the vulnerability and the diversity of habitats and species, appreciates local cultures, and attempts to have a low impact on the environment. Protected areas, national parks are often chosen as scenes of ecotourism, especially when visitors are offered a colorful, many-sided supply of activities and interesting sites to visit.

## Balaton Uplands National Park

Balaton Uplands National Park, founded in 1997 on 57 000 hectares, is a diverse, mosaic-like array of habitats, consisting of 6 adjoining previous landscape protection areas. Due to the diversity of geological and geomorphological features and the local climate, wildlife and landscape are exceptionally appealing to tourists and researchers alike. The national park stretches along the north shore of Lake Balaton, which is the largest shallow-water lake in Central Europe, encompassed by hills, grasslands, lovely villages, vineyards. The once active, huge volcanic field of Balaton Uplands is a wonderland of unique geological heritage. The natural treasures of the Tihany Peninsula – part of the national park – were acknowledged by the European Diploma granted by the Council of Europe in 2003. Lake Balaton is the second most popular tourism destination in Hungary, with only the capital Budapest surpassing it. Regarding domestic tourism it is the most visited region in the country. The lake and the natural wonders of the national park enhance each other's attractiveness, thereby raising the touristic value of the region. The operational area of the Balaton Uplands National Park Directorate includes the national park and several other protected areas as well (3 landscape protection areas, 27 nature conservation areas and numerous ex lege protected objects, e.g. caves). The Bakony–Balaton Geopark – managed also by the Directorate – is member of the European and of the Global Geoparks Network, assisted by UNESCO. The key tasks of the national park directorate are to protect and interpret the natural values.

### *How to explore our national park?*

There is a change in attitude of vacationers: there is a growing demand for venturing out of the hotel or campsite to explore the surroundings, walking in nature, gaining authentic experiences in gastronomy and culture. In accordance with the fundamental goals of nature conservation, the majority of our sites and nature trails lie in areas that are open to the public. However, some strictly protected areas may also be visited by our guided tours. We offer 14 exhibition sites and visitor centers, including 4 caves, one of which is Tapolca Lake Cave Visitor Center with the unique experience of underground boating. In Csodabogyós Cave, you can stretch your limits as

you explore the dripstones and the narrow passages in a caving overall. Salföld Manor is home to traditional Hungarian domestic animals, providing lots of fun for families and animal lovers. You can walk to the top of the spectacular remains of a basalt volcano and admire the view from above. Other sites include a fantastic observatory and digital planetarium, a traditional water mill, and the reserve of the largest buffalo herd in the country. Our most popular touristic event is Lavender Festival on Tihany Peninsula. It is an open lavender harvest, during which you can enter our own plantation to pick your own bunch. Nature lovers and avid birdwatchers can request guided tours to our wonderful, strictly protected wetlands, Kis-Balaton, an important Ramsar area and bird habitat, counting more than 260 bird species. Apart from these sites, there are many walking routes and educative nature paths for the ultimate exploration of all of the sections of our national park.

<i>Registered visitors of exhibition sites and visitor centers, 2015</i>	<i>Column1</i>
<b>Exhibition site / Visitor center</b>	<b>Number of visitors</b>
Lóczy Cave	16 281
Lavender House Visitor Center	33 111
Szentgáli-kőlik Cave	312
Hegyesztű Geological Exhibition Site	42 015
Salföld Manor	24 389
Tapolca Lake Cave Visitor Center	147 156
Csodabogyós Cave	2 815
Kotsy Water Mill	2 660
Diás Island	7 459
Folk House	665
Buffalo Reserve	33 883
Disused Sand Quarry	218
House of Forests	5 198
Pannon Observatory Visitor Center	32 090
<b>Total</b>	<b>348 252</b>
<i>Registered visitors of guided tours and events, 2015</i>	<i>Column1</i>
Guided tours	17 563
Events, open days	29 125
Open-air schools	1 621
Arts and crafts	9 875
Other	7 469
<b>Total</b>	<b>65 653</b>
<b>Registered visitors altogether, 2015</b>	<b>413 905</b>

Source of data: Yearly report of Balaton Uplands National Park Directorate, 2015

The wide selection of outdoor and indoor activities, places to visit, events, festivals, open days, open-air schools and educative programs for children can only reach the public by thorough communication, and a clear and purposeful marketing strategy. Cooperation with the governmental tourism bureau and other actors and organizations within the tourism industry, with NGO's and local people proves to be necessary and fruitful to reach our common goals.



The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), 2015. *What is Ecotourism?* [online] Available at: <<http://www.ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism>> [Accessed 27 May 2016].

Balaton Uplands National Park Directorate, 2016. *Introduction* [online] Available at: <<http://bfnp.hu/en/introduction>> [Accessed 27 May 2016].

Hungarian Tourism Ltd., *Tourism in Hungary 2015 (preliminary data)*. [pdf] Available at: <[http://itthon.hu/documents/28123/8118959/MTE\\_4001\\_105x210\\_LA4\\_StatElo\\_2015\\_ENG\\_TELJES\\_web.pdf/ae097433-2c69-4893-a42c-00ee677fo865](http://itthon.hu/documents/28123/8118959/MTE_4001_105x210_LA4_StatElo_2015_ENG_TELJES_web.pdf/ae097433-2c69-4893-a42c-00ee677fo865)> [Accessed 27 May 2016].