

ST. STEPHEN'S DAY 2015

# Food, folk dancing and fireworks

**One of Hungary's most popular public holidays, St. Stephen's Day, is coming up, during August 19-20, and this is your best bet to get a taste of true Hungarian traditions – be they religious, cultural or nationalistic. There will be plenty of activities all weekend, topped by a highly-anticipated fireworks display over the Danube that would give any US city on the Fourth of July a run for its money. Here's what you need to know about Hungary's national holiday.**

## Just who was St. Stephen?

Well, he's the patron saint of Hungary. St. Stephen I was the very first King of Hungary and the driving force behind the nation's adoption of the Christian religion. Crowned in 1000 by the pope, he is remembered for establishing the lands of historical Hungary and for imposing the religion of Christianity – often by brutal methods – on its peoples within.

His life is remembered primarily through three famous legends, which has led the former king to mythical status within the country. His religious work was recognised early on by the church, and he was canonised on August 20, 1083 – just 45 years after his death.

For centuries afterwards, this day was recognised as Day of St. Stephen's Feast; however from 1687 that day has been moved around the calendar. Most of the world now celebrates the Day of St. Stephen's Feast on December 26 but in honour of a different St. Stephen – the martyr of Jerusalem.

However, the original date of the celebration remains in Hungary – disrupted only when communist authorities outlawed the celebrations due to their religious nature. The post-communist Hungarian Parliament re-established the day in 1990 and it remains the most popular holiday on the Hungarian calendar.

## August 19 – let the party begin

Traditionally, events begin the day before St. Stephen's Day, on August 19. In Budapest, you'll want to head to the Danube embankment on the Buda side for the Street of Hungarian Flavours. Here you'll be able to find high-end culinary delights from across the country, as well as to sample the pride of the harvest – pálinka.

Look for the Hungarian Cake 2015 – a new tradition that sees confectioners from across the land vie for the title of this year's Hungarian Cake. August 19 will be your first chance to sample this year's winning entry. The fair operates from noon until midnight.

In the evening, head to Clark Adam tér to see just how Hungarians prepare to celebrate their national day. A street party featuring traditional Hungarian music in a wonderful open-air environment greets locals and visitors alike and is sure to put you in just the right mood for the next day's activities.

## August 20 – Morning programming for families

The real festivities begin on August 20 with the raising of the Hungarian flag outside the Parliament Building on Kossuth tér at 8.30am. From there head to the Street of Hungarian Flavours

(open 10am to 10pm) or to the banks of the Danube to take in the air and water show that begins at 10am. Children will love the different kinds of air and watercrafts on display (note: show is yet to be confirmed).

An afternoon of family programming (11am to 6pm) is on offer on the Danube banks between Clark Adam tér and Bem tér, with music, dancing, entertainment and puppet shows.

The Parliament Building – and Hungary's Holy Crown – can be visited for free from 1pm to 8pm. For those looking for the best seats for the evening's fireworks, the hilly terrain on the Buda side provides many of the best spots, between the Liberty and Chain bridges.

## Hungarian culture at its finest

For those looking for an even richer experience of Hungarian culture, be at the Basilica by 3pm for the Blessing of the Bread and the Harvest Procession. The ceremonial parade combines the colour of Hungarian folk traditions with the pageantry of its religious customs.

The Basilica also hosts the Festive Holy Mass at 5pm followed by the Procession of St. Stephen's Holy Right Hand. Water cruises are a very popular option for viewing the fireworks and should be booked early.

► *Lee Reaney*



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