

Luxe List: 15 Indulgent-Yet-Affordable Trips

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New & Noteworthy

WINE & TRAVEL

A Taste of Tokaj

A Hungarian wine region cultivates a new class of hotels. By Mike DeSimone and Jeff Jensen

A 2- to 3-hour drive from Budapest, Hungary's Tokaj region gives wine lovers many reasons to rejoice: Picture-perfect terraced vines run alongside rambling roads from the villages of Tokaj to Sarospatak; the area is peaceful and uncrowded; and the euro is not yet the official currency, so prices have remained reasonable for U.S.

travelers. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the region is best known for its white wines, the majority of them sweet, including the most famous: Tokaj Aszu, which Louis XIV of France once dubbed "the king of wine and the wine of kings."

Recently, a trio of new or recently restored hotels has brought the caliber of

accommodation in Tokaj out of the Soviet era and into the 21st century.

The Andrassy Kuria Hotel & Spa (from \$146/night; andrassy.hu) occupies a restored 17th-century mansion in the town of Tacal. Its spa is the first in Hungary to offer vinotherapy, a treatment regimen popular in Spain and France that relies

on vine and grape seed extracts and said to have antiaging effects. Opened in May 2008, the extensive marble and mosaic-tiled spa also includes a pool, a swim-through Jacuzzi grotto, and several saunas. Within the hotel, a vaulted restaurant, *Passione*, pairs Andrassy wines with traditional Hungarian cuisine, such as

pork filet stuffed with goose liver and dried apricots, and local catfish with paprika-tomato goulash.

Just up the road is the **Grof Degenfeld Castle Hotel & Winery** (from \$148/night; degenfeld.hu), a renovated former palace amid a 250-acre vineyard. Evoking the splendor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Venetian



chandeliers drip from the ceilings and family hunting portraits grace the walls of the lounge and restaurant, hinting at the menu's delights. Rich in local game, it includes roasted duck breast served over peach compote and venison steak topped with forest mushrooms. During warmer months, guests can dip into the outdoor pool or take over the tennis court.

Reminiscent of a French country inn, **Mádi Kúria Hotel** (from \$75/night; madikuria.hu) has 24 modern, comfortable rooms in a restored bank building in the village of Mád (a 20-minute drive from the village of Tokaj). It also offers sumptuous dining, a deep wine cellar, and proximity to some of the area's finest wineries.

All three hotels can organize wine tastings and arrange a car and driver for winery visits. Although visitors may find the scenic roads easy to navigate in a rental car, Hungary's zero-tolerance alcohol law means that hiring a driver is the way to go.

The characteristic sweetness of Tokaj wines is achieved by allowing the grapes to fully ripen on the vine and become inoculated by the

fungus *Botrytis cinerea*, also known as "noble rot." This process, also used for crafting sweet Sauternes in France's Bordeaux region, allows sugar to concentrate in the grapes, and after two fermentations, results in a finished wine with a high level of residual sweetness.

Two must-visit wineries are **Janos Arvay's** eponymous winery (arvaybor.hu) and Izabella Zwack's **Dobogó** (dobogo.hu). While both produce ambrosial Tokaj aszu wines, they also make a name for themselves with dry and semisweet wines. Standouts include the deliciously dry Arvay Tokaji Hétfürtös Sárgamuskotály, the ethereally balanced and somewhat sweeter Dobogó Mylitta (named for Izabella's great aunt), and the excellent oak-aged dry Dobogó Furmint.

Spring, summer, and fall are all fine times to visit. May brings the Tokaj Wine Festival; August has its Zemplen Cultural Festival; and October unleashes the Tokaj Harvest Festival, with tasting booths in the town square, dancing in the streets, and a colorful folk parade. ■



FROM TOP: Tokaj, Hungary, bears a large network of wine cellars carved into the rocky hillsides during the 15th through the 17th centuries; Dobogó Winery occupies a house built in 1869; the 20-room Grof Degenfeld Castle Hotel & Winery is ensconced in a former palace estate and vineyard.



AMENITY WATCH

In the competitive world of luxury accommodations, hotels will try anything to woo customers. Here is a roundup of recent offerings.

DJ LESSONS

In NYC, AKA hotels, an extended-stay brand, is partnering with the DJ Scratch Academy to offer guests one-on-one DJ lessons and VIP passes to see their skilled instructors spin at local nightclubs (hotelaka.com).

BALSAMIC WRAP

The Hilton Los Cabos Beach & Golf Resort has unveiled a spa body wrap that combines the fragrance of grapes and blueberries with pure balsamic vinegar. Crouton-aided exfoliation is not included (hiltonloscabos.com).

SPIRITUAL MENU

In lieu of the standard in-room Bible, the Preston Hotel in Nashville lets guests take their pick from a "menu" of sacred texts, including the Torah, the Koran, and Buddhist scripture (hotelpreston.com).

SUGGESTIVE SIPS»

Meant to inspire, er, spontaneity, BOKA Kitchen + Bar in Seattle extends the Spontaneitini for \$250: two vodka cocktails and one key for a room at the adjoining Hotel 1000 (hotel1000seattle.com).

