



ACS NEWSLETTER

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Holiday Travel Checklist

Winter break is just around the corner and many of you will take advantage of this time to explore new places in the region and/or around the world. You don't want travel speed bumps spoiling your vacation plans! Make sure your travel documents are in order and you are well informed. If you answer "yes" to the following questions, then you are off to a good start. If not, then this may be a good time to make an appointment with our office.

1.) Do you have a valid US passport?
Most foreign countries require a valid passport to enter and leave. Some countries may allow you to enter with only a birth certificate, or with a birth certificate and a driver's license, **but all persons, including U.S. citizens, traveling by air, must present a valid passport to reenter the United States.**

2.) Does your US passport have minimum 6 month validity?
Some countries require that a traveler's passport be valid for at least six months beyond the dates of the trip.

Contact the [embassy of your foreign destination](#) for more information. Foreign embassy and consulate contact information can also be found in our [Country Specific Information](#) pages.

3.) Do you have enough visa pages in your passport?
Check your passport to make sure you have enough visa pages for entry/exit stamps. Keep in mind that only a maximum of 2 visa page inserts can be added to valid passports.

4.) Have you enrolled with Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)?
When you enroll in STEP, we can update you with important safety and security announcements. Enrolling will also make it easier for the embassy or consulate to contact you in the event of an emergency.



You should remember to keep all of your information in STEP up to date; it is particularly important when you enroll or update your information to include a current phone number and e-mail address

5.) Did you notify your family and friends of your travel plans?
Leave a copy of your itinerary, passport data page and visas with a trusted person in case of an emergency.

For more useful travel tips, visit the [Traveler's Checklist](#).

Have a safe and wonderful vacation!

The Flu and You

Have you gotten your flu vaccine? December 07-13 is National Influenza Vaccination Week. Seasonal flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by flu viruses. It spreads between people and can cause mild to severe illness. In some cases, the flu can lead to death. In the United States, flu season occurs in the fall and winter.

Seasonal flu activity **usually peaks in January or February**, but it can occur as **early as October** and as **late as May**. Seniors (65 and older), children (those younger than 2), and those with weakened immune systems are particularly vulnerable.

[Protect yourself from the flu!](#)

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KEEP CALM AND GET YOUR FLU SHOT

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HUNGARIAN CULTURAL TRADITIONS



St. Nicholas Day - December 6th

Saint Nicholas was a 4th century saint and bishop. He had a reputation for secret gift-giving such as putting coins in shoes and became a model for Santa Claus. St. Nicholas Day is a festival for children across Europe. In Hungary, children leave their brightly polished boots on the windowsill on the evening of December 5th. By next morning "Mikulas" leaves candy and gifts if they have been good or a birch stick if they have been bad. (Most children end up getting both as no one is all good or all bad!)

(Source: Wikipedia)

St. Lucy's Day - December 13th



In Hungarian folklore, St. Lucy's Day is rich in customs and superstitious beliefs.

The best known tradition on this day involves young boys between the ages of 7 and 16. In the early morning hours (3-4 am) they go from house to house, sitting down on their neighbors' doorsteps with handfuls of hay in their hands singing: "Lucza, Lucza, kity, koty!" Usually they are let in and offered bread, fruits, palinka or coins. If not, they promise revenge. Neighbors keep the hay that the boys sat on, believing that if they throw it away, chickens won't lay eggs. Women are not supposed to visit their neighbors on St. Lucy's Day because doing so would cause the tools in the visited house to break. Certain household chores like spinning or steaming food are also banned.

One of the most widespread traditions on St. Lucy's Day is the making of a "lucaszek" - a small stool made of 13 different types of wood collected in 13 different places. The chair should be made secretly within 13 days and then taken to the church for midnight mass on the second day of Christmas. Whoever steps on the chair in the church can see witches (evil ones) in the church. After the midnight mass the chair should be burned so that it cannot be taken by the witches.

Szilveszter-Hungarian New Year

New Year's Eve (Szilveszter) in Hungary is celebrated with house parties and street parties, including a gathering in downtown Budapest. Fireworks and firecrackers are popular. Champagne, wine and traditional Hungarian New Year dishes—frankfurter sausages

with horseradish, lentil soup, fish, and roast pig—are consumed. The national anthem is commonly sung at midnight. Hungarian Christian communities focus on celebrating Mass on both New Year's Eve and New Year's Day.

(source: Wikipedia)

HOLIDAY

If you want to take a break from the kitchen this holiday season, the following hotels and restaurants in Budapest are having Christmas and New Year's Eve dinners:

[Le Meridien](#)

[Kempinski](#)

[Hotel Intercontinental](#)

[Corinthia Hotel Budapest](#)

[Boscolo Salon Restaurant](#)

"Cheers to a new year and another chance for us to get it right."

~Oprah Winfrey



Christmas Markets

Christmas markets in Budapest have become a holiday tradition rivaling those in Vienna. The most popular Budapest markets are located in Vörösmarty Square and in front of St. Stephen's Basilica. In both locations you will find vendors selling Christmas-themed arts and crafts, Hungarian mulled wine, pálinka, fried sausages and other tasty dishes.

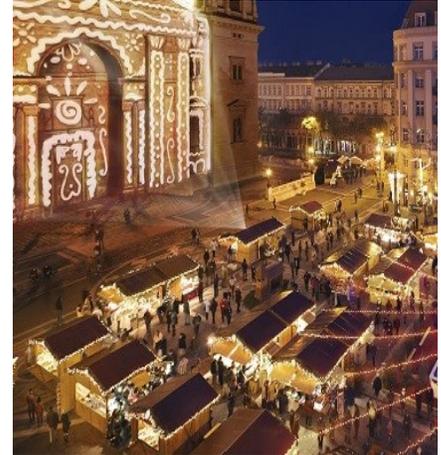
There are daily programs taking place at Vörösmarty square during the festival, including choir concerts, folklore performances, book reading, Santa Claus programs for children, workshops and other activities.

The market in St. Stephen's Basilica boasts

a small ice skating rink. For opening dates and times visit the [Christmas market link](#).

If you have explored the Budapest markets and want to experience more, venture out to the world-famous [Viennese markets](#). Here you will also find quality handcrafts, choir groups, and children's activities.

Whatever your choice may be, get out and explore the beauty and tradition of the Christmas markets and soak in the yummy smells and delightful ambiance.



Tax Season

"In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes."

[Benjamin Franklin](#)

The Internal Revenue Service would like to remind U.S. taxpayers that they may need to file Form 8938

(Statement of Specified Foreign Financial Assets). It is important for taxpayers to determine whether they are

subject to this requirement because the law imposes significant penalties for failing to comply.

More information is available on the IRS tax site, specifically under [Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act](#).

The President's Executive Action on Immigration

On November 20, 2014, the President announced a series of executive actions to crack down on illegal immigration at the border, prioritize deporting felons not families, and require certain undocumented immigrants to pass a criminal background check and pay taxes in order to temporarily stay in the U.S. without fear of deportation.

These initiatives have not yet been implemented, and USCIS is not accepting any

requests or applications at this time. USCIS is warning those that could qualify from the executive action against anyone who offers to help them submit an application or a request for any of these actions before they are available. They could become a victim of an [immigration scam](#).

For up to date information on this matter visit [USCIS](#).





Contact Us!

Telephone:
During office hours:
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After-hours emergency calls for American citizens only: (36-1) 475-4400

Facsimile:
(36-1) 475-4764

E-mail Addresses:
If you have specific questions or comments, you may wish to contact the appropriate section listed below:

American Citizen Services: acs.budapest@state.gov

Embassy Address:
Embassy of the United States of America
Szabadság tér 12
H-1054 Budapest, Hungary

Upcoming Embassy Holidays

Date	Holiday Name	Country Origin
Dec. 24	Christmas Eve	U.S./Hungary
Dec. 25	Christmas Day	U.S./Hungary
Dec. 26	Christmas Day	Hungary
Jan. 1	New Year's Day	U.S./Hungary
Jan. 20	Martin Luther King Day	U.S.

Please note: All offices are closed during American and Hungarian holidays, as well as Saturdays and Sundays



Drinking and Driving Do Not Mix

Hungary has a zero tolerance policy on drinking and driving, which means that no amount of alcohol may be consumed before sitting behind the wheel. Since 20th January 2008, the driving license is withdrawn on the spot from the driver, and is given back only after the expiration of the driving ban period decided by the authorities.

Up to 0.5‰ alcohol in the blood is a minor offence, while 0.8‰ and over qualifies as a traffic crime. Drivers detected with more than 0.5‰ alcohol will receive 5 penalty points, a fine up to 100,000 HUF and a driving ban from 1-12 months. Drivers detected with more than 0.8‰ will receive 9 penalty points, a fine decided upon by the court, a driving ban of 1-10 years and an imprisonment of up to 1 year.

Think twice before getting behind the wheel after drinking! It could cost you your driving privileges, or worse, a life!

Important Reminders



The Embassy would like to remind all U.S. citizens that by law, U.S. passports must be carried at all times. The police can stop you anytime, anywhere and can ask for your passport. If you do not have your passport on you, the police can detain you until they are able to verify your citizenship.

For visa information, please visit our webpage (<http://hungary.usembassy.gov/visas.html>).

Please note that in all visa matters including, but not limited to non-immigrant, immigrant visas and green card issues, you must visit the webpage. U.S. Citizen Services is unable to assist you with visa matters.