

## HORTOBÁGY NATIONAL PARK (92 km – 1h 32')

Hortobágy is the largest protected area, and the largest natural grassland in Central Europe with cattle, sheep, oxen, horses, tended by herdsmen, and it provides habitat for various different species (342 bird species have been registered to appear in the puszta). This is an 800 km<sup>2</sup> national park in Eastern Hungary, in the puszta, rich with folklore and cultural history. The park, a part of the Alföld - puszta (Great Plain), was designated as a national park in 1973 (the first in Hungary), and elected among the World Heritage sites in 1999. According to its brief description "the Hortobágy is a vast area of plains and wetlands that have been used by humans for grazing their domestic animals for more than two millennia."

The regular flooding of the Tisza provided local farmers with fertile pastures for their herds and allowed for Hungarian Grey Cattle to be exported to Western Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. Important trade roads were established for this activity. These roads later became known as the "salt-roads" on which salt was transported from the salt mines of Transylvania. Wayside inns called "csárda" along main roads were built at the end of the 17th century in the puszta and at least forty of them were still in existence within the last century. However, only about 5 of these inns currently exist. In the years of large-scale flooding, bridges offered the only means of crossing the land. The Nine-Arch bridge was built for that purpose.

Until recently it was believed that this alkaline steppe was formed by the clear cutting of huge forests in the Middle Ages, followed by measures to control the course of the Tisza River, allegedly resulting in the soil's current structure and pH. However, Hortobágy is much older, with alkalization estimated to have started ten thousand years ago, when the Tisza first found its way through the Great Hungarian Plain, cutting off many streams from their sources in the Northern Mountains. The formation was finished by grazing animals, mastodons, and wild horses during the Ice Age, followed by domesticated animals.

Traditional T-shaped sweep wells dot the landscape, as well as the occasional mirage of trees shimmering in the reflected heat of the Puszta.

**Activities:** Eco tourism, Bicycle tour, Hiking, Hortobágy Great Fishponds, Hortobágy Herdsmen Museum, Puszta Rare Breeds Park, Bird watching, Ornithology, Nature Trail, Lake Water Trail, Horse show, horse back riding, horse drawn carriage, international and national competitions, watching of herdsmen tending their animals.



The puszta five - a traditional Hungarian horseman steers five horses in a horse show on the Great Hungarian Plains



Hungarian Grey cattle



Shepherd (juhász) attending sheeps



Puszta sweep well (gémes kút)



Nine Arch Bridge



The Hortobágy Csárda is one of the most famous inn at puszta area and hundreds of years old



Birds and bird watching tower



Horse show



Competition



The Queen visiting Hortobágy



Horses in the field