

Zala Springs is our new Hungarian No.1

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Springs is our new Hungarian number one

We try to keep an eye out for golf developments that appear to be a cut above the rest in Central Europe. For instance, our ranking review for the Visegrad countries (<http://www.top100golfcourses.com/news-item/v4-central-european-countries-re-ranked-2016>) in January of 2016 mentioned the wonderful new 36-hole golf resort at Penati in Slovakia, featuring a Nicklaus Design layout called the Legend and a Jonathan Davison course named the Heritage, both of which now occupy places in our Top 100 for Continental Europe (<http://www.top100golfcourses.com/golf-courses/continental-europe>).

Looking to the future, we're excited about a new enterprise currently under way in the Czech Republic which architect Kyle Phillips told us about a couple of months ago when we caught up with him at the European Institute of Golf Course Architects annual conference in Spain. The Oaks PGA National course near Prague is an integral part of an ambitious residential development that will raise the profile of golf in the region when it opens next year.

Another similar high-end master planned resort, Zala Springs (<http://www.top100golfcourses.com/golf-course/zala-springs>), was recently unveiled in Hungary and it too boasts an 18-hole championship layout designed by a world renowned American architect, Robert Trent Jones Jr. When we heard that the European Golf and Travel Media Association (<http://www.egtma.com>) was planning a visit to this new facility, we just had to make sure we were among the delegates invited to have a proper inspection of this outstanding project.



The resort is conveniently situated within a three-hour drive of Budapest, Bratislava, Vienna, Zagreb and Ljubljana so it's no exaggeration to describe its location as at the heart of central Europe. The spa town of Hévis and Lake Balaton lie less than half an hour's drive away, offering lots of alternative recreational opportunities and there's dozens of vineyards dotted around the surrounding landscape producing local wines of the highest quality that really must be sampled.

The beautifully appointed clubhouse is the focal point of an exceptional amenity at the centre of the estate and the course is set around this impressive building, with fairways laid out in two returning 9-hole circuits and holes routed around the edge of the property, leaving more than adequate space for the real estate that's now

under construction. There's also a splendid driving range and practice area with twelve covered and seventy open air bays available for warm up and tuition.

Of course, it'll take a while longer before the boutique hotel, spa, apartments and villas are all in place but already the course looks and feels as though if it's been there for a long time, such is the ease with which the holes already blend into the natural terrain. It's not often you come across a new 18-hole layout that seems to have matured so quickly, which merely endorses the quality of both the build and the in-house maintenance standards.

Zala Springs had literally just opened its doors to the golfing public when we published our introductory Top 5 for Hungary last year however we make no apology for installing it now as the country's number one course. Having suspected in advance that it could be something special, we engaged in a little quality control by visiting the other credible contenders around the country to see how they compared and we now have absolutely no doubt that it stands head and shoulders above all the others.

The course at Pannonia Golf & Country Club (<http://www.top100golfcourses.com/golf-course/pannonia>) was formerly lodged at the top of the tree and it now drops two places to number three in our national chart. Set out within an old country estate which once belonged to the House of Hapsburgs, the fairways weave their way around a pleasantly undulating wooded landscape that's interspersed with small ponds but the fairway maintenance could certainly be improved at the moment.



The Old Lake Golf & Hotel (<http://www.top100golfcourses.com/golf-course/old-lake>) course resides a little further east of the capital, along the M1 motorway heading towards Bratislava and Vienna, and this delightful course is packed with interesting features. It may lack sophistication and some might think it's a little too unpolished, nonetheless there's a lovely feel to the place that shines through on almost every hole and it well deserves to rise one place to number four in our new Hungarian listings.



It takes almost two hours to drive the 125 kilometres south from Old Lake at Tata to Balaton Golf (<http://www.top100golfcourses.com/golf-course/balaton>) on the northern slopes of Lake Balaton, next to the Balaton Uplands National Park. The course was chosen by the Hungarian Olympic Committee as the golfing venue for the Budapest bid to host the 2024 Summer Olympics (before the tender was withdrawn a couple of months ago) and the enchanting rustic layout at Balaton Golf (recently renamed from Royal Balaton & Yacht Club) rightly remains at number two in our revised national standings.

It requires another two-hour road trip, starting with a ferry trip across Lake Balaton from the Tihany peninsula, to get to Hencse National (<http://www.top100golfcourses.com/golf-course/hencse-national>) (where it's only 40 kilometres to continue on to Croatia across the Drava River at the Hungarian border town of Barcs) and this

golf operation is owned and run by one of the most remarkable octogenarians we have ever come across, Paul Banhidý.

He told us he was imprisoned for political reasons under the old communist regime before being released by a new man in power, allowing him to emigrate to northern Australia, where he ran a hotel for almost two decades. Returning to his native Hungary, he decided against all advice to build a course in the south east of the country, which he managed for almost ten years before selling the business to foreign investors. In 2014, after the renamed European Lakes venture failed under the new owners, he bought the property back and set about almost single-handedly to restore the course to its former glory.

The reincarnated version of Hencse National isn't quite ready to open for general public play, though it's not too far off, so for now it drops down the latest edition of our latest chart two places to number 5 but we'd expect the course to occupy a higher position when we next reappraise the Hungarian rankings.



Rank/Course	Move
1 Zala Springs	New entry
2 Royal Balaton	No change
3 Pannonia	Down 2
4 Old Lake	Up 1
5 Hencse National	Down 2

To view further details of our newly updated Hungary Top 5 (<http://www.top100golfcourses.com/golf-courses/continental-europe/hungary>) rankings click the link.

Jim McCann
Editor
Top 100 Golf Courses

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10 Latest Course Reviews

Notts (/golf-course/notts)

This course is the tale of two nines. The front nine is relatively benign with only a c...



(/golf-course/notts)

Hankley Common (/golf-course/hankley-common)

The drive out to Hankley is certainly worth it without question. I believe the club has...



(/golf-course/hankley-common)

West Sussex (/golf-course/west-sussex)

This course blew me away! It's one world-beater hole after hole. My playing companion h...



(/golf-course/west-sussex)

Woking (/golf-course/woking)

This course has a reputation for wonderful greens. I confirm that this theory is 100% c...



(/golf-course/woking)

Royal Cinque Ports (/golf-course/royal-cinque-ports)

The golf at Deal is a wonderful experience. History oozes in abundance as you inhale th...



(/golf-course/royal-cinque-ports)

St Enodoc (Church) (/golf-course/st-enodoc-church)

This is the most dramatic course in GB&I and I fell in love with it on the first fairwa...



(/golf-course/st-enodoc-church)

Saunton (East) (/golf-course/saunton-east)

With 13 par 4s and not much variety, this flat piece of land is a lackluster experience...



(/golf-course/saunton-east)

Hencse National (/golf-course/hencse-national)

Hencse National has endured some turbulent times since it first opened in 1994. Owner P...



(/golf-course/hencse-national)

Balaton (/golf-course/balaton)

There’s a certain rustic charm attached to the course at Balaton Golf which really ende...



(/golf-course/balaton)

Old Lake (/golf-course/old-lake)

The Old Lake course surprised me. Located just off the main highway between Budapest an...



(/golf-course/old-lake)

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