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# A rural escape with great expectations

WORDS ALISON GIBB

The realisation that a descendant of Charles Dickens is the owner of a boutique holiday destination and award-winning vineyard in a pretty part of rural Hungary and that she has a Scottish connection feels like a truly wonderful surprise.

Catherine Dickens's mother, Jeanne Maria, had fled Hungary in 1944 when she was only eight. By the time of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, aged 20, orphaned and seeking refuge in the UK, she was adopted by an elderly couple in Insh, Aberdeenshire.

The next stage of Jeanne Maria's adventurous life was to meet and marry a descendant of the author, Catherine's father, and to bring up their family in Yorkshire. Catherine takes up the rest of the story: "I had trained in

hospitality in the Caribbean and was keen to set up some sort of hotel business. We came across a village called Csakbereny, an hour from Budapest.

"There are uninterrupted views, stars at night, abundant greenery, all tightly nestled in a curve of the Vertes Hills and half-surrounded by extensive national park woodlands.

"We found out about Csakbereny from a Hungarian aristocrat. He arranged an annual 'weekend wine festival' on the hillside and locals would hire out their wine cottages for visitors. We realised these beautiful wooden cottages in the heart of this wine region would make a wonderful holiday destination, so we went on to buy one in 2004.

Soon after, Catherine's Vineyard Cottages was born."

There are nine cottages in total now, enjoying a lovely swimming pool and surrounded by beautiful gardens. And Catherine lives nearby. One of the cottages has an exclusive swimming pool attached. The grounds are tumbling with wisteria, fragrant lavender and shrubs bursting with colour.

"The cottages and my house are just outside the village" says Catherine. "It has become a private little hamlet of its own."

The views are stunning. Known locally as "Poor man's Provence", it is part of the Mór wine region, in Fejér county. Delicious white and rose wines are produced here

and a wine festival is held every year in Mór.

"I love our village. It is so safe, you hardly need lock your door. When British visitors finally make it out of Budapest they're surprised at this stunning countryside and all it has to offer. Its people (about 1,000) are what make it special. It has become simply my home over the past 15 years," Catherine shares.

Activities include walking, riding, cycling, wine tasting, pottery and cookery classes, made all the more enjoyable in Hungary's gorgeous climate - a sunny spring is followed by a hot summer, then beautiful autumn colours appear before an often snowy winter.

The décor in the cottages is inspired by the Caribbean, harking back to Catherine's hotel training there. Fruity,

tropical colours are mixed them with rustic Hungarian furniture and the famous, raw local linens and stunning folk embroidery. Each cottage has a very well-equipped kitchen and an outdoor grill.

They offer a popular breakfast basket, with lots of local goodies, including artisan bread, farm eggs, local salami, cheese, home-made jam and her own home-roasted granola. She has her own white wines from the small vineyard.

Hungarian cuisine is excellent and some restaurants are within 10-minutes' drive. For a bigger group, and with advance arrangement, a professional chef can prepare a meal. The cottages are a popular wedding destination, but are limited to four a year.

Catherine and partner Graham say the business is



Hungary is a fun and affordable destination, combining a stay at the amazingly pretty and tranquil Catherine's Vineyard Cottages with the vibrant, historic city of Budapest, with its world famous spas, celebrated cafes and excellent restaurants, you will find yourself experiencing a holiday that might become a hard habit to break.

going from strength to strength. "We are continually improving our level of service and trying to make our offerings more and more varied and imaginative."

You can expect a very warm welcome!

### Factfile

Prices start from £125 per night for a cottage for 1-2 people. [catherinesvineyardcottages.com](http://catherinesvineyardcottages.com) Ryanair and Wizz Air both fly direct from Edinburgh to Budapest. Flights start at £50. You will have to undergo a test for Covid-19 on arrival. You must self-isolate for 14 days unless you can provide upon arrival two negative Covid-19 tests, taken 48 hours apart and within five days prior to entry date. For the latest advice, visit [gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/hungary](http://gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/hungary)



● London Bridge at night

## Travel news

### Everyone is escaping to the country post-lockdown, but where does that leave city breaks?

Iconic spots like Venice and Paris will no doubt attract travellers keen to explore without the typical crowds, but other urban centres are likely to suffer.

In London, it's hoped the reopening of major galleries and museums will draw people. The National Gallery has relaunched with lead show Titian: Love, Desire, Death. Tate Modern and Tate Britain are now inviting visitors and the Design Museum in Kensington returns with a brand new exhibition: Electronic: From Kraftwerk To The Chemical Brothers.

Owned by the Accor group, Novotel London Bridge is one of several properties to reopen in the capital. The hotel management is realistic about the future, anticipating the first wave of guests will be friends and family visiting loved ones, but not wanting to stay under the same roof.

Over time, however, they hope people will come back simply to enjoy the city and its attractions.

### Here's what to expect on your next Accor visit...

#### A new type of meet and greet

Stickers on the floor guide guests on a one-way flow to reception, where staff in masks sit behind Plexiglass screens. Sanitised key cards are placed on the desk in an envelope - to avoid any touching - and people are advised to use lifts one bubble at a time.

#### Behind the scenes

The hotel group has introduced a series of Allsafe protocols in its properties, including increased safety measures and use of cleaning products, with standards checked by an independent auditor. Most guests won't even notice the changes, but it's comforting to know germs are being blitzed.

#### Rooms with a different view

Rooms look remarkably similar, although high touch points, such as magazines, cushions and telephones have been removed. Teabags and coffee sachets are kept in a zip-lock bag, with any unused items quarantined for 72 hours - avoiding unnecessary waste. In terms of communication, the hotel is encouraging guests to contact reception via WhatsApp.

#### Bye, bye breakfast buffets

It'll be a disappointment for many, but the days of stacking plates with bacon, eggs and pancakes are long gone. Instead, everyone will receive a takeaway bag of juices, fruit and pastries.

#### How about hospitality?

This is where Accor promise there will be very little change. Their ongoing Heartist campaign is based around delivering special moments to guests, and this will continue post-lockdown. Delivering birthday cakes might be a thing of the past, admits general manager Matt Brett, but there are clever alternatives. "We can record birthday greetings and fun messages," he says. "There are lots of ways we can still interact with our guests and make them feel welcome."

For a brochure or to book call 01283 245324

quoting Sunday Post or visit

[www.sporiviera.co.uk](http://www.sporiviera.co.uk)

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and Sat 9:00 - 13:00



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