

# Debrecen Nyári Egyetem

## Eric Aubery

My interest in the Hungarian Language stems from my family background. My mother was born in Budapest during the First World War. It wasn't until I travelled with her to visit our remaining relatives in Hungary that I became aware that she spoke fluent Hungarian. Since then I have wanted to reconnect with my Hungarian heritage.

I have been studying the Hungarian language for a year. I spent a month in Budapest earlier this year to study at a small private language school. I greatly enjoyed my time there and continued studying on my own and with a Skype tutor.

I found the Debrecen Summer Language program through my independent Hungarian language study online through the Duolingo application. One of the commentators in the Duolingo message board wrote a lengthy review of her experience with the program.

This led me to research the program online, where I found information on the curriculum, dates, and prices. I also found that several scholarships were offered through affiliated organizations. I applied on the first day scholarship applications were opened. A few weeks later I received an email from Debrecen informing me that I qualified for the scholarship offered by the *Cleveland Hungarian Development Panel*.

I was quite excited to hear about this opportunity. I am delighted to have discovered an organization promoting educational ties between Hungarians and Americans. I am deeply touched by the generosity of this gift of a two week scholarship to attend the Debrecen Summer Language and Culture program.

My initial impression of Debrecen was that of a small city. It's remarkable that as Hungary's second largest city it is only one tenth the size of Budapest. When I look at the map of Hungary I see a multitude of small dots. It made me curious about what life was like in all those small towns, villages and hamlets. I didn't have a chance to explore them on this trip, but hope to in future visits.

I observed that the city has benefited greatly from recent investments, including a new stadium, a second tram line and many other infrastructure improvements.

The Debrecen University is a nice blend of older and newer. Classes were held in the main university building, an older building with a lot of charm. The classrooms were equipped with audiovisual equipment.

The dorms compare favorably with the university dorms I've seen here in the US. I was very satisfied with my upgraded single room. My room had a private bathroom with a shower, and a small refrigerator. There was a kitchen down the hall with a microwave. There's plenty of storage space. The wifi worked well.

I have nothing but praise for all the administrative staff, teachers, student interns, and service people working at the university and on the Summer Language Program. Everyone was great!

The classes use the Hungaro Lingua textbook series. The current edition dates from 2017, but much of the content is older. The plot line and characters are dated, but are nonetheless amusing. I got the impression that the teachers have considerable leeway in teaching the material, as long as the curriculum is followed. I found the listening comprehension exercises that my teacher had us complete to be particularly useful.

The participants in the program were clustered into two main categories: students learning Hungarian as part of their university studies, and older adults like myself. The older adults were mostly either language professionals, near native speakers, or complete beginners. I was an oddity as an older adult with an intermediate level of Hungarian. All my classmates were university students.

I found the course quite challenging, as my classmates were more accustomed to university style classes, not to mention more mentally agile. Incidentally, most of the older adults I spoke with who were in more advanced classes also felt their courses were challenging as well. I view this as a positive. This is a serious program, not just a fun way to spend a few Summer weeks!

I enjoyed the cultural programs, especially the city and bicycle tours. It gave me a chance to get off campus and see visit the area. I also managed to meet some local people not affiliated with the university, which helped me understand what it's like living in Debrecen. The evening programs offered a couple times a week in the evening were well attended. I was surprised how useful the folk singing was at improving speaking cadence. The quiz program was entertaining, especially the Hungarian tongue twister contest.

I met several participants who were returning, some many times to the Summer Program. I can see myself doing the same to further improve my Hungarian language skills.