

My name is Anna, and I'm an American with Hungarian roots living in California. I decided to spend 2 weeks of my summer this year in Debrecen, Hungary to improve my Hungarian. The University of Debrecen's summer program was the perfect mix of language and cultural learning. I left with not only better language skills, but also many unforgettable memories and friendships made.

My father is from Hungary, and moved to the United States solo at age 25 to start a new life. All of his family is still living in Hungary and every time we would visit my family, my conversations with them were limited. My father was the translator, and I never fully got a handle on the language. This year, I decided I wanted to apply for Hungarian citizenship. Although it is not required for me to speak Hungarian to become a citizen through descent, I still thought it would only be right to properly learn the language if I was going to be calling myself Hungarian. As I did research on where I could learn, I came across a few options. but the one that stood out most was the University of Debrecen. I had also heard about the university in the past from a family friend who claimed it was the best option for learning and that people come from all over the world to study there, especially for their popular summer program.

I decided to apply for a scholarship to attend the university through the Cleveland Hungarian Development Panel. "The Cleveland Hungarian Development Panel (CHDP) is a non-profit organization of dedicated volunteers who recognize the need to promote and support educational and cultural ties between Americans and Hungarians. The Mission of the CHDP is to provide assistance and promote the exchange of ideas for Hungarian projects in the areas of commerce, education, health and human services." I'm really grateful to have received the scholarship from this generous organization, who had sponsored several other students as well. The program was 1 month long spanning from mid July to mid August, and I was given the option to attend the first 2 weeks or the last 2 weeks . I chose to go for the first 2 weeks. It seemed like it was going to be a long time, but total immersion with the language is proven to be the quickest way to learn, so I knew I had to go for it. After the 2 weeks were up, I actually wanted to stay for the whole month because it was so effective.

My experience at the University exceeded my expectations. I had never until that point lived on a college campus, so that was an experience in itself. There were people from all walks of life, from all over the world, who were there to reach the same goal- to learn Hungarian and experience the culture. There were people of all speaking levels and many had attended the program previously and were back again for more fun and learning. Most students were of Hungarian descent, like myself, trying to get closer to family and get a deeper connection to their roots. There were quite a few others who had no Hungarian heritage, but still found connections to the country and wanted to learn. There were people learning for love, whether it be a significant other or love for Hungarian culture. Others were from neighboring countries and had connections through their work and Hungarian minorities in their countries. Some were students majoring in the Hungarian language in college. A group of Chinese students shared their stories how they took an exam at their university and got placed with the language that best suited their skills. In their case, they scored high and were given Hungarian, one of the most difficult languages. They didn't choose Hungarian, Hungarian chose them! There were also a handful of people there just because they were enamored with the sound of the language. A woman from Austria shared her love for Hungarian poetry and embroidery in traditional clothing, and a man from the Czech Republic was a fan of several Hungarian metal bands and said Hungarian was the most beautiful language in the world.

Everything was impeccably taught, and there was a special emphasis on speaking. This was the most useful for me for memorization and communication, and I felt that I could actually confidently communicate the things I had learned in a short period of time. My teacher, Lieli Pal, lively and intelligent, is a long time professor at the University. He is an expert in teaching languages and is very knowledgeable in linguistics. He always tried to give examples relevant to languages we already knew for comparison such as German, Croatian, and French. He was very good at correcting me on pronunciation and inflection which is essential in the Hungarian language. The school even offered an extra program on Phonetics to help with this. There was a lot of time with breaks and lunch to make phone calls, go for a walk, relax and grab a snack at one of the cafes on campus. The classes went at a comfortable pace. They were not

overwhelmingly long with information overload, and it was a great system where everyone in class was included and were progressing positively together.

Another one of the highlights of this experience for me was, of course, the food. The university is located very close to downtown Debrecen and it's easily accessed by tram or walking. I had the chance to enjoy the city and eat at some great local restaurants. There was also great authentic Hungarian cuisine offered by the school every day. I had to get a gym membership while I was there to offset all of my eating. Luckily, there's a gym conveniently in the building right next to where I was staying. Some of my favorite meals were at the weekly folklore nights. All of the students were invited for dinner followed by singing and dancing. Some students took that even further and had parties every night!

Before leaving Hungary, I visited my cousins and grandparents, who live about an hour away from Debrecen. I was able to communicate more than I ever could since taking the classes and they were very impressed by my pronunciation. That was very satisfying and made me even more motivated to continue studying Hungarian. I'm currently continuing my lessons online via Skype with a teacher, and am in the process of planning a winter trip to Hungary and Poland. I am very happy to have had this experience with the University of Debrecen and can't wait to return again in the future.