

My experience at The Debreceni Nyári Egyetem was fantastic and opened me up to new opportunities and experiences that I would not have had otherwise. I am very grateful for my summer there, because I wouldn't be able to live and work in Budapest if it were not for this school and the help of the teachers and student helpers there.

I am a musician and decided to enroll into the language program because I was hired by an orchestra in Budapest and my boyfriend and his family are Hungarian. I also have Hungarian roots in my family. I wanted to learn more about Hungarian history and culture as part of my own heritage, but I also hoped to gain some practical skills for my job starting in the fall. I had heard about this program from my boyfriend who had colleagues and friends who spoke highly of it, but I didn't know what to expect because I had never been in a language program before. This program by far exceeded my expectations and I enjoyed it so much that I hope to return in future summers.

From the very start, I was very impressed by the professionalism and general helpfulness of all the staff, even before my arrival to Hungary. Everyone was very communicative and was attentive to my specific requests (dietary and otherwise), such as allowing me to stay with my boyfriend's parents in a nearby town instead of in the dormitories provided. I am grateful that they allowed this because although I may have missed some of the on-campus opportunities, I was able to practice the language I had learned everyday with my Hungarian family. All of the student helpers were incredibly nice and helpful and I became friends with them as well.

I appreciated that everyone was sorted into different classes based on their current Hungarian language skills, and I felt they took the time to make sure I was studying at an appropriate difficulty level that was challenging but not completely overwhelming for me. The teachers I had (Zsóka, Emese, and Erika) were so much fun to work with and all of them took the time to answer individual questions in the class and spent some one-on-one time with everyone to make sure everyone was on the same page. They also were helpful in teaching me some specific words and phrases that would come in handy at my new workplace in an orchestra, such as all the words for instruments and music and also helping me to become more proficient in counting so that I could follow along in rehearsals to come.

Coming into the course, I knew very little Hungarian. I knew quite a lot of vocabulary but hardly any grammar so I couldn't put together sentences at all. I was amazed that even in the first two days, I had filled several pages of a dictionary with even more vocabulary but I could also put basic sentences together. We learned a ton of new verbs as a class which helped me link together the nouns I already knew. The homework was challenging but we always worked through it as a class the next day, and I always felt I had a solid understanding of what we learned before moving on to the next topic. It might sound trivial, but even though my Hungarian is nowhere near fluent, I can now order at a restaurant, go to a farmer's market and speak in Hungarian, count money, and understand most of what my conductor says in my rehearsals with the orchestra. I can also introduce myself in Hungarian and write about my day. For me this is a HUGE improvement from where I started and has without a doubt made my transition into a new country a lot more doable. And this all happened in just four weeks time!

On top of the wealth of knowledge I gained in the classroom, I learned a lot outside of the classroom on the various tours we went on, and the different after school classes and activities that were planned. Some of my favorite excursions included the trip to the beautiful and historic town of Eger, where we tasted some fantastic wine and visited the large fortress there. I also really enjoyed going out into the Hortobágy National Park in the great plains of Hungary and seeing the peaceful countryside and wildlife there.

My favorite on campus event was one of the folklore nights. We ate authentic Hungarian cuisine (including my all-time favorite, pogásca), drank pálinka, and learned and sang traditional Hungarian folk-songs. We also learned some Hungarian dance moves! I had so much fun bonding with the fellow students and really soaking up the whole experience.

Thank you to all at the Debreceni Nyári Egyetem for making my summer unforgettable and preparing me for my new life in Hungary. I hope to return soon!

Sarah Tako

