Hungary

Location

The Republic of Hungary is an Eastern European country located between 45° and 50° degrees North Latitude and 15° to 20° East Longitude. Hungary is a landlocked country, surrounded by seven countries. These countries include Austria, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia. Today Hungary covers an area of about 93,000 square kilometers or 36,000 square miles, which is about the size of Indiana. It sits in the middle of the Carpathian Basin.

Geography

Hungary sits in the middle of the Carpathian Basin, which is a mountain range in eastern Europe. Hungary has a number of rivers flowing through it. Probably the most notable is the Danube River. Other rivers include the Tisza, Drava, and Szava. Hungary is mostly flat country with rolling hills. The highest point is Mt. Kekes with an elevation of about 1,000 m or 3,300 ft. One of the largest freshwater lakes in Europe, is the Balaton which is located in the Western half of Hungary.

History and Culture

Hungarians call themselves Magyars. This was the name of their nomadic ancestors who, in the year of 896 BC, crossed over the Carpathian Mountains and settled the Carpathian basin. The language spoken by these nomadic peoples is classified as Ugric. These people supposedly came from the area of the Ural Mountains. The earliest date that Hungary was recognized as a country by Western Europe/the Catholic Church, was in the year of 1000 CE. At this time with Papal approval, the first king of Hungary, St. Steven was crowned. He urged his people to adopt the European sedentarianism and let go of their nomadic tendencies. In 1222 Andras II adopted a charter comparable to the English Magna Carta, called the Arany Bula. Soon afterwards the Tartars, a branch of the Mongol Hordes invaded Hungary. They were pushing west but due to the death of Ogodei Khan the local Khan rushed back east to grab power. After a brief respite, Hungary was again invaded, this time by the Ottoman empire. The Ottoman empire controlled the middle of Hungary. Austria laid claim to Western Hungary and Transylvania remained the single pure Hungarian outpost. After about 200 years with the expulsion of the Turks, The Austrian empire moved in to occupy Hungary, up until the end of the First World War. At this time the Allies split up Hungary and parceled out two thirds of the land to both their allies and enemies. To this day Hungary is one third of its original size.
After the First World War Hungary had a short respite until Germany took it into the Second World War. Towards the end of the Second World War Hungarian armies joined the Soviet Union to push the Germans out of occupation. After the war the Russians stayed and instituted communism. In 1990 Hungary held its first democratic elections and the last Russian soldier left in 1991. In 1999 Hungary joined NATO and has now also been accepted into the European Union.

**Important Dates**

Most important dates other than those related to religious holidays, deal with celebrating revolutions, and uprisings even if at the time did not succeed. Oct. 23, the uprising of 1956 against the communists, is celebrated. March 15, the revolt of 1848 against the Hapsburg Empire. Aug. 20 in celebration of our first king St. Steven. May 1st-changing of seasons; December 24- Christmas Eve; April-Good Friday and Easter. Other than these there are a number of smaller festivals hosted by towns and smaller religious groups.

**Religion**

The two major religious groups are comprised of Catholics and Protestants. There is a percentage of other religions including Christian denominations not mentioned, Judaism, Muslim, etc.

**Climate**

The climate of Hungary is influenced by a number of factors. One of these factors is the mountains that surround Hungary to the North and the East. From the south-west Hungary receives the effects of the gulf stream. Therefore Hungary has similar weather to Mid-western United States. Hungary’s summer finally really heats up in June, yet their season is long and warm enough to plant corn. Hungary also receives moderate rainfall.
Agriculture

Hungary is an agriculturally unique country. Hungary’s animals are also unique. Two Hungarian breeds of horses include the Sagya and the Nonius. The Rack are a special longhaired breed of sheep. To manage and guard these sheep, they have several ancient breeds of dogs as well. The Kuvasz and the Komondor are both guard dogs. The Puli and the Pumi are both work dogs. In addition to these, they have a hunting dog called a Vizsla. They have their own breed of long-horned cattle as well.

Hungary has retained a great deal of farming land. Their major crops used to be composed of at least three types of grains and corn. Hungary is also known for its vineyards. In the hilly regions near the Balaton one can find the vineyards from which come famous Hungarian wines such as Tokai and Egri Bika-ver. Hungary is also known for Paprika. Paprika literally means pepper. However, when talking about spices, one usually means the ground blood red peppers which Hungarians liberally use to flavor food.

Food

Paprika was already mentioned as a commonly used spice in Hungarian cooking. Two well known Hungarian dishes in the west that utilize paprika are Gulyas soup, and Csirke Paprikas (Chicken and Dumplings). In Hungary traditional foods included the use of lots of garlic, onions, and sour cream. A Hungarian type of cheese is the Trapista cheese. This cheese might be comparable to baby-swiss. There are a number of Hungarian sausages and pastries that one should try if given the chance. One famous cake is the layered chocolate cake called Dobos Torta. This is most likely a later invention of Hungarians. Now in order to wash all this wonderful food down one could drink a wine such as Tokai or Egri Bika-ver.

Language

The official language of Hungary is Hungarian, or Magyar. If one did not know Hungarian, they could try German for that would most likely be the second most popular language in the country. This is a relic of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, and the close relationship these countries have had for the past few hundred years.
**Currency**

Even though Hungary has been accepted into the European Union, they have not yet switched over to the Euro currency. This is scheduled to happen in 2004. Currently the major currency is the Forint. Approximately two hundred forints cost a one-dollar. The Filler is the lower denomination of a forint, but it is not worth enough to be used.

**Trade**

After the communists were pushed out of Hungary, the industrial sector was handed into the hands of private owners. Hungary has its own stock exchange. Though not an industrial giant, Hungary still seems to perform better than other Eastern ex-communist block countries.

**Population**

Hungary’s population is in the vicinity of 11 million people. This does not include the millions that were forcibly left outside of Hungary when it was split up into parts. Nor does this include those that escaped from then till after the 1956 student revolt against communism. Lately there seems to be a trend showing a decline in population. Some link this to current emigration patterns. Others seem to link this to the lifestyle of modern Hungarians. It seems that many Hungarians are living a very career oriented life. This leaves little time, or desire for children.

**Education**

The education system in Hungary as in other parts of Europe, is distinctly different from the west. Hungary has an educational system that takes kids through what we consider high school. From that point, students have the choice to go to Graduate/professional School. There is no intermediate college type of school. It seems that Hungary’s high school or gimnazium finishes them at a level fit for these professional schools.
Landmarks

The most famous landmark in Hungary might be considered the city of Budapest. It is the home to nearly two million people. It spans a river with seven bridges and is the home to many beautiful and old buildings. The Lake Balaton might be the second most famous landmark of Hungary. Its cool shallow waters are the playgrounds for many vacationers. If one is interested in agriculture, the Puszta is the place to go. There the horsemen or Csikos still show off their traditional skills and give horseback riding tours. If one is interested in ruins then there are a few that might interest them. The most romanticized one would be the Castle of Eger. It was involved in several battles for power against the Ottoman Empire. There are even some authentic villages shown as living museums, for the public. Hungary is a land filled with culture, and given the chance one would be hard-pressed not to stumble across anything interesting.

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