

HUNGARY

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"You take a number of small steps which you believe are right, thinking maybe tomorrow somebody will treat this as a dangerous provocation. And then you wait. If there is no reaction, you take another step: courage is only an accumulation of small steps." George Konrád (b. 1933), Hungarian writer, politician. *Sunday Correspondent* (London, April 1990). On surviving as a writer in Communist Hungary.

Located in Central Europe's Carpathian Basin, with a population over ten million, Hungary is the eleventh largest country on the European continent. Currently, about 1.8 million people live in Budapest, the country's picturesque capital. This number is down from the 2.5 million in the early 1990s. Among the reasons for the decline were improvements in water, sewage, and other services in rural areas, which made Hungarians less likely to move to the capital. In addition, many of the city residents chose to leave Budapest's smog and congestion for the suburbs.

Budapest was originally two towns, Buda and Pest. They were unified in 1873 to create today's metropolis. Much of Budapest's history is preserved in its architecture and culture. The old section of Buda, on the western bank of the Danube River, contains much of the city's medieval architecture and artifacts. Pest, located on the eastern bank, is a stunning testament to Budapest's prosperity at the beginning of the Industrial Age. Numerous museums and art galleries contribute to the vibrant cultural life of the city, a distinction which has earned Budapest the nickname "The Paris of Eastern Europe." The two sides of the city are connected by a total of nine bridges over the Danube.

Having thrown off the communist regime in 1989 after almost 50 years under that system, Hungary is now fully adapted to the standards of Western societies. Therefore, all basic human rights are secured during your stay in the country, and you need to investigate the system more thoroughly only for specific purposes connected to business activities. You will have a better understanding of the country if you keep in mind that until 1989, Hungary was a satellite country of the Soviet Union, which has developed into a Western-style democracy.

Hungary is an independent, democratic constitutional state. According to the Constitution that came into effect on October 23, 1989, Hungary is a parliamentary republic. Hungary has a civil law system. The courts directly interpret the laws.

In April 1999, Hungary joined NATO and went about the final preparations for its entry into the European Union. That entry took place in 2004 after an April 2003 vote in which Hungarians approved the country's entry into the growth of the European Union.

Climate

Hungary's climate is continental, with four distinct seasons. The lowest temperature in winter is usually negative five to ten degrees Celsius (10 to 20 degrees Fahrenheit), while in summer a range of 30 to 37 degrees (80 to 100 degrees Fahrenheit) is common. Hungarians are compensated for having no sea by the fact that they can spend their holidays on the beaches of Lake Balaton, the largest lake in Central Europe.

The Culture

Due to its position in-between Eastern and Western Europe, Hungary has absorbed many influences from different cultures. Each of the 19 counties shows significant differences in geography, economy, customs, dialects and ethnicity.

Nonetheless, Hungarians have asserted a unique identity that is very different from that of any of their former overlords -- the Austrians, the Turks or the former Soviet Union. They enjoy talking about their country, whether the conversation is about something as simple as their food, or the more intricate details of their language, landscape or culture. However, most Hungarians are generally rather modest so, while they indulge in the discussion, they rarely outwardly revel in compliments.

In general, it is common for Hungarians to shake hands while being introduced and prior to parting. It is wise to wait for a woman to extend her hand before you offer your own. Close friends may embrace and kiss each other on the cheek.

Hungarians also have an unusual way of addressing each other formally. Name titles, such as Mr. or Mrs. are followed by job titles, if it is known. For example, "Mr. Architect." If a job title is unknown, the last name will suffice. You should not use first names unless invited to do so.

Hungarians are extremely diplomatic during conversation. In fact, it has been said that they have both a personal and public opinion, which may, at times, be at odds. If a conversation is headed towards controversy, it is likely that the subject will be quickly changed.

Language

Hungarian (a very special language, originating from the Finno-Ugric tribe of languages) is the primary language spoken in Hungary. Foreign nationals typically have problems grasping the fundamentals of the national language because it bears no resemblance to any other language. There is no commonality in words or pronunciations between Hungarian and either German, English, the Romance languages or the Slavic languages. Foreign nationals are encouraged, therefore, to enroll in a language course if they plan on staying any length of time. A familiarity with German will help in parts of the country where that language is widely spoken. Many Hungarians have at least a basic knowledge of English, especially younger Hungarians living in Budapest.

Religion

Over 60 percent of Hungarians belong to the Roman Catholic Church, and over 20 percent belong to a Protestant sect. Budapest also has one of the largest Jewish communities in Central Europe, and is home to the world's second largest synagogue.

Doing Business

Business in Hungary is conducted mostly in Hungarian, but in multi-national companies the business language is language can be English, German or French. The younger generation speaks English quite well. In the countryside, less people speak foreign languages. At the same time, technical staff and office employees tend to know several other tongues.

A business decision will in general take longer to reach than most other countries. Be prepared to negotiate, and discuss the details of a particular issue.

Finding the person who makes the decision will also take time and energy. Titles on business cards do not always indicate how important a person is in their capacity. Businesses are very hierarchical, and there are many layers of people to deal with before a decision is made by the appropriate individual or persons.

Doing business requires you to dress appropriately (always take the lead from your host), be on time and shake hands repeatedly. Once seated you may encounter a more informal gathering, but do not let this fool you. Hungarians take their meeting time seriously. Always come with plenty of business cards and promotional gifts to hand out. But do not give chocolate or coffee; the days of bringing cigarettes and coffee have faded away. Give something business-related that may be useful to your colleague or associate.

If you accept a dinner or lunch invitation to the home of a business partner, take flowers. Small talk generally revolves around politics.

Working hours are strictly observed in some offices. Typically, hours are from 8:00 or 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. Lunch is an important part of the business day. Friday afternoons are also difficult to do business, as many offices close early or take the other side of a public holiday.

While Hungarians are known to have a tempestuous nature and are very emotional in business dealings, be careful not to lose your temper. If it gets tense, take a coffee break and gather your thoughts and let things calm down for a while.

Don't be afraid to speak your mind and allow yourself to be walked over by a colleague. While Hungarians may tell you things are "not possible." It is, if one perseveres.

Local Cuisine

Traditional Hungarian food tends to be rich, with meat-based offerings dominating and lavish desserts finishing a meal. Specialities include cabbage soup thickened with sour cream or freshwater fish prepared in a variety of ways. Poultry is the most common meat, although beef is used for the famous Hungarian stew known as "goulash". Goulash is beef soup thickened with potatoes and sour cream and flavoured with onions. Paprika, a red spice made from a certain kind of pepper, is the ubiquitous condiment in Hungarian cuisine.

Hungary is also known for production of the sweet dessert wine known as *Tokaj*. Although toasts at meals and parties are frequent, be aware that Hungary has very strict drunk driving laws; any amount of alcohol in the bloodstream of a driver is a punishable offense.

Breakfast in Hungary is not a lavish affair, consisting of bread and coffee or espresso. The main meal of the Hungarian day is lunch. This meal may consist of several courses; it is not unusual for business associates to gather for lunch at a restaurant. Business lunches are generally more common than business dinners. Dinner parties are generally perceived as more social or celebratory affairs. A dinner party might be thrown in honor of a deal being closed, or a transaction completed. Ordinary dinner is generally a much lighter meal than lunch in Hungary, consisting of sandwiches or salad followed by dessert.

Tipping

Waiters should be tipped ten to 15 percent of the bill if a service charge has not already been added. The tip should not be left on the table, rather, include the amount you wish to tip in your payment and ask for change accordingly. In addition, Gypsy musicians at restaurants should be tipped.

Security

While Hungary has a low crime rate, there is a risk of street crime in Budapest and near popular tourist attractions. Like in many countries, tourists are often the target of petty thefts and scams. Expatriates working in Hungary may be mistakenly assumed to be tourists, and therefore are more likely to be victims of pick pocketing, purse snatching and other thefts. Burglaries of automobiles and residences have risen in Hungary, so it is advisable to keep your doors and

windows shut and locked at all times.

This nation is very serious about punishing those who are found to be driving under the influence of alcohol. Police often conduct routine road blocks, and, if asked, you must submit to a breathalyser test. Those found driving while intoxicated are subject to fines and jail time.

Road conditions in Hungary are generally good, though the quality does decrease in rural areas. Keep alert on provincial roads, as they are travelled by pedestrians, agricultural machines, animals and automobiles alike. #####