

Personal report on ERASMUS+ student exchange in Hungary, Budapest.

Receiving institution: Budapest University of Technology and Economics (Budapesti Műszaki és Gazdaságtudományi Egyetem) in the 2017 Summer Semester.

Preparation

The summer semester in Hungary and the BME in particular starts in the first week of February. With the coming of January, 2017, I started making preparations to leave and to settle in Budapest. The process was a bit problematic since at the time being I hadn't been in Cottbus for a couple of months and was presently back in my home country. Despite having slow communication with the BTU, things were still being done in a timely fashion. One by one, all the necessary documents were being finalized so I focused on the relocation process. I managed to find a cheap flight to Budapest a couple of days prior to the start of the orientation week and my mobility period. I contacted the Erasmus Student Network of the BME which provided plenty of useful information and advice about life in Budapest and the BME structure. One thing that I personally disliked was the fact that the partner university did not provide accommodation at their dorms for international students, which at first seemed like a major inconvenience. I started looking for a flat in Budapest which proved to be less complicated than I thought it would be. There were plenty of websites and platforms for flat- and roommate searching with a substantial amount of options. I was in the process of acquiring a place to stay when a major issue occurred with the BME. For reasons unknown I was not present in their system as an incoming exchange student. Even though that seemed like the end of my adventure, it was not. The BME administration proved to be incredibly understanding and welcoming as they agreed to let me enroll for that summer semester nonetheless. I found a flat that seemed suitable and in my price range and several days after that, I departed for Budapest.

Accommodation

I reached my flat in the evening of Saturday, the 28th of January – two days before the start of orientation. The flat I had picked was on the Buda side of the city (west of the Danube River). Reaching it was not complicated since Budapest has a really good public transportation system. My landlord welcomed me and provided me with some first-hand basis knowledge about Budapest such as major ways of reaching the flat, supermarkets with low prices, etc. He took me to the flat and showed me around. The flat was nothing fancy, but it was the cheapest option I could find in Budapest. In hindsight, I should have done more research and found a better option because soon after that I discovered significantly better alternatives. The amount of available accommodation throughout the city at the start of the semester was unbelievably high. To my surprise, this trend continued several weeks after the semester started, and, while the number of flats and rooms decreased notably with the progression of the semester, various opportunities were still available. Still, the flat had one redeeming quality – it was 15-20 minutes away from the BME and had a tram station with relevant connections right in front of the building entrance.

Studying at the BME

Due to the fact that the university was not expecting me as an incoming student for that semester, my exchange had a bit of a rough start. I hadn't received the "welcome package" of information from ESN BME that all other Erasmus students had. A lot of useful information had been provided in that package, ranging from public transportation systems, recommended gyms, restaurants, cultural locations, information about the university and the campus, but most importantly – the schedule of all events during the orientation week, including registration in the university and for classes as well as all the required documents. It was pure luck that while exploring the campus on the first day of the semester I stumbled across the Central Admissions Office and the Erasmus Office where they instructed me where to go to catch up with the orientation that was being organized for the exchange students at that very same moment. My luck struck again and I managed to reach the introduction and information session just in time to hear everything important. The people working at the ESN once again proved extremely helpful and resourceful. They provided me with a complete and detailed timetable for all the social and cultural events, they helped me speed things up with my registration process and catch up with the other newcomers, and even extended a couple of deadlines of cultural events that week just for me. But after that setback I got to enjoy everything the university and Budapest had prepared for that first week of February. There were events practically every day that made me and everyone else feel welcome. Not only that but I managed to complete all relevant paperwork and register for courses (the BME administration staff helped me immensely with that task again). I had to make some adjustments to my learning agreement and courses, since there were some courses not present in the catalogue for the summer semester that I wished to take while there were 1-2 courses that I had chosen that were from the winter and not the summer semester and were therefore not available at the time. Nonetheless, I was and still am satisfied with my final choice of courses at the BME. They were all relevant to my study major but I also found them interesting. The professors offering them were good at their job and had a very high level of English. The material was interesting for me and was presented well, all the course requirements are readily available and properly laid-out for anyone wishing to read them. Additionally, the professors were very understanding about the mindset of Erasmus students and constantly communicated with us about exam, trip, and presentation dates. Multiple options were offered and some professors even offered alternatives for students that were unavailable or lacking behind. All in all, the university provided a very friendly studying and even living environment.

Daily life and free time

Budapest is the first big capital city that I've lived in for such a long period of time. And I can truthfully say that I enjoyed every single thing about it. Food was not as expensive as I initially believed and living costs were the same if not lower than in Cottbus. Supermarkets offered a variety of cheap products of various types and street food, a student's best friends, was affordable and available 24/7 in most of the cases. Restaurants were a bit more pricy but as long as one doesn't go to them on a daily basis, they are still something people on a budget can experience. As mentioned already, public transportation is adequate and frequent throughout the day and connects the entire city. At night, it's scarce but that holds true for pretty much everywhere.

From my observations most Hungarians did not speak English well or at all, but I did encounter a lot of people that were at least trying to communicate. The Hungarian language is a unique one so every foreigner in Budapest had troubles with non-English speakers in the city. That wasn't a real problem but actually a source of fun interactions and stories. Due to the fact that a lot of international students, not to mention tourists were constantly present in the city, almost everyone had signs, information, and menus available in English, but also in German to my surprise. I even met Hungarians that could not speak English but communicated in German.

Outside of all the ESN organized event, the cultural and nightlife of the city is booming. There are more ruin bars, pubs, and clubs that I can list or remember. There are a number of independent organizations that constantly organized events and parties specifically for students and internationals. The city has a large number of thermal baths as well that everyone feels naturally drawn to. A monument, a statue, or a historic site, can be found around every corner. Something is always happening somewhere in the city and since I managed to group all of my classes on Monday and Wednesday, I had all the free time in the world to enjoy the city. Much more can be said and listed about the life in Budapest but to summarize I'll say that the city has something to offer for everyone. I absolutely recommend giving Budapest and the BME a chance – you will not regret it.