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► EUROPE

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate. Hungary is a landlocked nation in central Europe. Covering 35,919 square miles (93,030 square kilometers), it is slightly smaller than Indiana. Most of the east is flat, but the northwest has rolling hills and low mountains. Almost 51 percent of the land is suitable for cultivation, allowing Hungary to be nearly self-sufficient in food. The capital, Budapest, is actually the union of two cities (Buda and Pest) lying on opposite sides of the Danube River. They united in 1872 as Budapest, once called the Paris of the East. The climate is continental, with cold winters and warm, pleasant summers. The average temperature in winter is 32°F (0°C) and in summer is 70°F to 75°F (21–24°C).

History. Present-day Hungary became part of the Roman Empire in 14 B.C. as the province of Pannonia, but the east remained in the hands of Germanic and other tribes. In the fifth century, nomadic Magyar tribes began migrating from the east. In A.D. 896 the Magyars, led by Árpád, invaded and conquered the resident Slavs and began permanent settlement. Christianity was introduced by Árpád's grandson, Géza, in the late 10th century. Géza's son, István (Stephen), became Hungary's first Christian king in A.D. 1000, and István converted the people to Christianity. The dynasty lasted until the 14th century, after which time non-native powers controlled the area. During the Renaissance of the 15th century, the country reached a high level of culture and political power, but large portions of the country were conquered by the Ottoman Turks. Later, Hungary was ruled over by the Austrian Hapsburgs during their rise to world prominence (16th–18th centuries). Hungarians rose in rebellion in 1848 but were defeated after two years of fighting.

In 1867, the Dual Monarchy, a sharing of power between

Austrians and Hungarians in central Europe, was established. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was later shattered by heightened national awareness and desire for self-rule among Slavic minorities. This division contributed to the beginning of World War I in 1914. In treaty settlements following the war, Hungary became an independent republic but lost two-thirds of its former territory and three-fifths of its people to new neighbor states. Hungary was a German ally through most of World War II, but Germany invaded in 1944 after Hungary began surrender negotiations with the Allies. Soviet troops liberated the country in 1945, and elections again established a republic. The Communist Party, under heavy influence from the Soviet Union, seized power within two years and by 1949 had declared Hungary a socialist state called the People's Republic of Hungary.

Communist reformer Imre Nagy tried to change the system that emerged. He even withdrew Hungary from the Warsaw Pact and declared the country neutral in 1956. In response, the Soviet Union attacked Hungary, repressed the movement, executed Nagy, and buried him in disgrace. From 1956 until 1988, when he was forced to resign under pressure for reform, János Kádár was the leader of the Communist government. By October 1989, Hungary had changed its name to the Republic of Hungary and abolished the Communist monopoly on power. Nagy was reburied as a national hero.

The country's first free elections were held in 1990. The Hungarian Democratic Forum swept the Communists from power and József Antall became prime minister. Antall died in 1993. Because people were disillusioned with the course of economic reform, Antall's party was narrowly defeated in May 1994 elections by the Socialist Party (MSZP), which

Hungary

emerged from the Communist Party. Prime Minister Gyula Horn continued the process of economic reform but also sought to meet people's basic needs. Horn won praise from the West for his economic policies and the country's economic performance. However, in May 1998 runoff elections, Horn lost to Viktor Orbán, a young center-right leader of the Federation of Young Democrats–Hungarian Civic Party (FIDESZ).

The status of ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia and Romania has challenged Hungary's leaders. Hungarians have especially close ties to their past cultural center of Transylvania (in Romania since 1920), where Hungarian kings lived in exile during Turkic rule. Treaties promoting the rights of ethnic Hungarians were signed with Slovakia (1995) and Romania (1996) after years of tough negotiations.

Hungary, together with Poland and the Czech Republic, joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in March 1999. Environmental pollution, corruption, organized crime, and discrimination against Roma peoples (also known as Gypsies) are some of the issues that Hungary is facing now. Sustained economic development in preparation for European Union (EU) membership is the state's chief goal.

THE PEOPLE

Population. Hungary's population of just over 10 million is decreasing by 0.29 percent annually. Magyars (Hungarians) form the largest ethnic group (90 percent of the population). The Roma (4 percent), Germans (2.6 percent), Serbs (2 percent), as well as Slovaks and Romanians comprise significant minorities. Budapest, the largest city, has a population of about 1.8 million. Hungarians comprise 10.6 percent of Slovakia's population and 7.1 percent of Romania's. About 40 percent of the population lives in severely polluted areas.

Language. The official language is Magyar, or Hungarian, as it is referred to in other countries. Ninety-eight percent of the population speaks it. Magyar is part of the Finno-Ugric group of the Uralic language family, which includes Estonian and Finnish. It has a complex grammar, which includes restrictions on what sort of vowels may occur together within a word. In addition, the presence or absence of diacritical markings on words may change meaning. However, pronunciation is generally easy because each letter represents only one sound. Most minority groups speak their own languages in addition to Hungarian. German and English are popular courses in school.

Religion. Roughly two-thirds of the population is Roman Catholic. Various other Christian groups comprise the other third, including Calvinists (20 percent) and Lutherans (5 percent). During Communist rule, religious groups were carefully regulated through a government agency. In 1990, religious freedom was granted to all, and several Western churches began seeking new members in the country. While religion does not affect their daily life much, many people consider themselves devout Christians.

General Attitudes. As a nation that experienced a form of democracy before most other European nations, the new democratic Hungary is proud of its heritage. Even during the Communist regime, Hungary was considered one of the most prosperous and open countries in Eastern Europe. It was one of the first to announce sweeping reforms and was able to accomplish them without violence or serious upheaval. The people earnestly wish to become part of an integrated Europe. Hungarians also view the achievements of famous countrymen with pride. For example, they point out that Hungarians dis-

covered Vitamin C and invented the Rubik's cube.

However, accompanying pride is a historical tendency for pessimism. Many Hungarians will express doubt about their own future or condition, even if their neighbors are worse off. Hungarian humor incorporates pessimism, which then becomes a whimsical cynicism.

Hungarians value independence, a strong and stable family, education (including good performance in school and an advanced degree), security (a job, home, or social benefits), property (a home, garden, and car), access to or ownership of summer cottages, and travel outside of Hungary. Interpersonal communication tends to be rather direct; Hungarians will freely offer opinions on a person's behavior, appearance, personality, etc. People admire professionals but generally do not admire the wealthy, who are often associated with corruption.

Personal Appearance. Clothing styles in urban areas generally follow those in western Europe. Young people tend to be brand-conscious and often wear blue jeans. Businessmen wear conservative suits, although formal dress for younger people tends to be more colorful than in the United States. Women pay particular attention to style and their appearance.

Traditional costumes are seen only in rural areas and during special celebrations. They may include intricately embroidered blouses and skirts for women, who also wear colorful hats or scarves. Each region has its specialty. The men often wear vests over loose-fitting shirts. Pants may be pleated, baggy, and less than full-length—or tight, black, and tucked inside boots. Men wear a variety of hats.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings. Adults greet each other with a firm handshake. A man usually waits for a woman to extend her hand first. Among people of the same gender, the older person will offer his or her hand first. Many Hungarians also *puszi*, or kiss each other lightly on each cheek. Polite verbal greetings include *Jó napot kívánok* (Good day), *Jó reggelt kívánok* (Good morning), and *Jó estét kívánok* (Good evening). *Kívánok* is often left off in more casual circumstances or is replaced by a person's name. Children may greet older adults with *Kezét csókolom* (I kiss your hand). Adults might also use this with family or close friends to show special respect.

Popular informal greetings include *Haló*, *Szervusz*, or *Szia*, which all mean "Hello." The latter two terms come from the Latin *servus*, which once meant "I am here to serve you." One might follow a greeting with *Hogy vagy?* (How are you?) or another question. When addressing someone, it is polite to use the person's professional title with his or her surname. People introduce themselves by surname, usually followed by the given name. Greetings on a first-name basis are limited to close friends and relatives. However, adults address the youth, and the youth address each other, by first name. Urban Hungarians do not usually greet strangers on the street, but rural people will. When parting, Hungarians say *Viszontlátásra* (See you again) or simply *Haló*, *Viszlát*, or *Szia*.

Gestures. Personal space in Hungary tends to be relatively small, and showing affection in public is accepted. Good friends, especially among the youth, will put their arms around each other's shoulders when they walk in public. Talking with one's hands in one's pockets is considered impolite. While blowing one's nose in public is acceptable, repeated sniffing is considered to be rude. Shaking one's fist at someone, giving a thumbs-down, or holding a fist with the thumb between the index and middle fingers are all considered rude or vulgar ges-

tures. To wish a person happy birthday, some Hungarians will pull the person's earlobe slightly while saying "Happy Birthday."

Visiting. Close friends, relatives, and sometimes neighbors make short unannounced visits, but extended visits, and those in urban areas are arranged in advance when possible. Relatives visit often. Guests remove shoes upon entering a home; hosts may have a pair of guest slippers for them to wear. First-time guests do not stay long, leaving just after coffee is finished. When guests arrive, hosts often help them remove their coats. An informal atmosphere prevails. Hosts accompany departing guests outside.

Hungarians enjoy socializing in the home but also frequently meet at restaurants, coffeehouses, and tearooms. Guests in the home usually are offered such refreshments as coffee, tea, fruit juice, brandy, or one of many popular regional wines. Hosts offer their best and go to great lengths to make guests feel welcome. When one is invited to dinner, it is polite to bring a small gift of flowers, boxed chocolates, or wine. Flowers are presented in odd numbers; they remain in cellophane wrapping until the hostess puts them in a vase. The hosts will usually display the flowers in a room where the guests will be after dinner, or sometimes on the table.

Eating. Breakfast may be a light meal with only rolls and a drink, or it may be heartier and include eggs, salami, cheese, yogurt, and even hot peppers. Lunch is often the main meal, including soup, often salad, a main dish of meat and potatoes, and dessert with coffee. Most people eat a light dinner of cold cuts, fruit, bread or rolls, and a drink.

Before eating or when entering a room where someone is eating, Hungarians say *Jó étvágyat* (literally, "good appetite"). They keep hands above the table but do not rest the elbows on it. Napkins are kept on the table throughout the meal. It is not usually necessary to ask that food be passed across the table. Reaching for what one wants is considered a sign that the guest is comfortable with the host. Leaving food on the plate is impolite; people are expected to take only what they will eat. Although tap water is safe to drink, many people prefer mineral water or some other beverage. As throughout Europe, the continental style of eating is used, with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right. At restaurants, guests usually seat themselves, and tips of 10–15 percent are customary.

LIFESTYLE

Family. The average Hungarian family consists of parents and one child. Urban families tend to be smaller than rural families. The cost of living is high in cities and housing is often limited. The father maintains a dominant role in the family. Both parents usually work. In fact, nearly 80 percent of all women work. Men share some household responsibilities but traditionally take the "outside" chores (yard work, gardening, etc.). Aging parents generally are cared for by their children, who may live in the same house or nearby. Urban families live in either small apartments or small single-family homes, while rural families have single-family homes.

Dating and Marriage. Young people like to go to movies, concerts, and theaters. They enjoy dancing, watching television, and just talking together on park benches or in cafés. Many ski and hike together. Most Hungarians expect to marry and raise a family (in that order). Urban couples tend to marry later than rural couples. Most people wait to marry until after they have finished schooling or are working. Traditional weddings were elaborate three-day affairs but are rare today. Still, the cere-

mony at city hall is often followed by a lavish dinner. Religious couples have a church wedding in addition to the civil ceremony. With housing in short supply, young couples often must live with parents for their first few years of marriage.

Diet. Hungary's location in central Europe makes it a prime gathering point for many ethnic culinary specialties. One of the most famous Hungarian specialties is *gulyás* (goulash), a soup of meat, potatoes, onions, and paprika. Paprika is a familiar spice in many dishes. Pork is the most common meat in the Hungarian diet, but chicken is also popular. Typical side dishes include noodles, potatoes, and dumplings. With main meals, a cabbage-and-vinegar salad is popular. Except for certain seasonal varieties, vegetables and fruits are in ample supply year-round. Bread and pastries are available in a wide variety. Fish soup (*halászlé*), stuffed paprika peppers (*töltött paprika*), stuffed chicken, and various kinds of strudel and pancakes are all part of the country's culinary tradition. Hungary is also proud of its many wines.

Recreation. Hungary's most popular sport is soccer. Other important sports include swimming, tennis, fencing, and sailing. Hunting and fishing are popular activities as well. In their leisure time, many Hungarians like to take walks, visit parks or local museums, attend concerts, watch television, or work outside in the garden. They meet in town for afternoon tea or an ice-cream treat or relax at the local thermal bath. For vacations, many like to go to resort spas. Longer vacations are often spent at Lake Balaton in the western part of the country. Many also travel to neighboring countries.

Hungary was once known as a nation of horsemen, especially for the time when the Hussars (15th-century light cavalry) were famous for their horsemanship. Today, horses are used mostly in the tourist industry, but some Hungarians enjoy riding them for recreation.

The Arts. Hungarians consider their music and performing arts companies, art galleries, and other cultural institutions to be national treasures, and people of all ages attend whenever possible. Prominent Hungarian composers include Ferenc Erkel, Franz Liszt, Béla Bartók, and Zoltan Kodály. Bartók and Kodály both incorporated features of traditional Hungarian folk music into their works. Hungarian folk music and dancing are still popular. Young people also enjoy contemporary music. The national dance is the *csárdás*, a courting dance in two parts (slow, then fast), which is performed at weddings, festivals, and other special occasions.

Hungary has a strong folk tradition, including embroidery, ceramics, ceiling and wall painting, and wood and bone carving. However, commercialization threatens the existence of some of these art forms. Free-market policies introduced in the 1990s significantly reduced government support of the arts.

Holidays. Public holidays include New Year's Day, War of Freedom Day (15 March, a day marking the 1848 rebellion and war), Easter (Sunday and Monday), Labor Day (1 May), Pentecost, St. Stephen's Day (20 Aug.), National Holiday (23 October, in honor of the 1956 uprising), and Christmas (25–26 Dec.). In addition, local festivals commemorate various folk or religious events throughout the year. At Easter, it is customary in some places for boys to "sprinkle" girls with water or cologne as a sign that the girl is a flower that should not wilt. Also popular at this time are elaborately painted Easter eggs. St. Stephen's Day celebrates the harvest and honors the first king of Hungary. People also observe personal holidays called name days. A name day, often more significant than a birthday, commemorates the saint after whom a person is named. It is

Hungary

celebrated with gifts, flowers, and cards.

Commerce. Businesses open around 8 a.m. and remain open until 6 p.m. Some close for an hour at lunch. Many businesses are open on Saturday until 2 p.m. Most close on Sunday. Produce stands often operate on sidewalks, and open-air markets are found in most towns. Produce, fresh bread, and other items are available at these markets. People shop often for fresh produce and dairy products, which are easily obtained at neighborhood stores. Supermarkets are located in large cities.

Formalities are important in business dealings. People tend to use formal names, discuss business politely, and treat others with respect. Refreshments are usually served at business meetings. Business discussions may be followed by an invitation to dinner, regardless of the progress made in the meeting.

SOCIETY

Government. A parliamentary democracy, Hungary is composed of 19 counties. An elected president (Ferenc Madl) is chief of state, and a prime minister (currently Peter Medgyessy) is head of government. Parliament has one 386-seat house, called the *Országgyűlés* (National Assembly). The voting age is 18.

Economy. Overall, Hungary is performing better than many former communist countries and has the potential for a bright future. Strong foreign investment, stable government institutions, a booming small-business sector, and a hardworking labor force are key strengths. Industries account for 35 percent of the gross national product. Important natural resources include bauxite, coal, and natural gas.

The country still faces a large budget deficit despite recent austerity measures. Further budget reforms may require unpopular cuts in social benefits (some of the most generous in the region). The transition to a free-market economy has been difficult for many of Hungary's citizens who have endured higher prices, higher taxes, and a lower standard of living. Many are able to afford the consumer items now available on the market; however, others, especially in the east, are at or below the poverty line. The government is selling all state-owned small businesses and pledges to accelerate privatization of larger industries. Hungary welcomes foreign investment and trade in order to build its economy and increase its hard currency reserves. The currency is the *forint* (HUF).

Transportation and Communications. Public transportation in Hungary is well developed. Budapest has a subway. Taxis are also available. More and more people own private cars, but public transport is still the principal mode of travel. Bicycles are used for short distances. An extensive train network serves most of the country.

The communications system has improved since privatization, although many homes still lack telephones. Most families have a television and radio. There are several local broadcast channels, and cable television is available but expensive. Four daily national newspapers and several regional papers service the country. Magazines and other publications abound. The free press is active and striving to be competitive with foreign media companies investing in Hungary.

Education. Schooling is free and compulsory for all children ages six to fourteen. Most then go on to secondary schools for

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	38 of 175 countries
Adjusted for women	36 of 144 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$12,340
Adult literacy rate	99 percent (male); 99 (female)
Infant mortality rate	9 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	67 (male); 76 (female)

technical training or preparation for higher education. Teachers are well trained and students receive a solid education. Beginning in elementary school, foreign language classes are offered. Those who successfully complete secondary school may go on to any of the five academic, four medical, and nine technical universities in Hungary, provided they pass tough entrance exams. Several other institutions of higher learning are also available. University education was free before 1994, but students must now pay tuition.

Health. Hungary's health care system is well organized and modern. Standards in hospitals and clinics are generally high. However, the lack of adequate funding for the health system seriously threatens the quality of care. Health care professionals are well trained but not necessarily well paid. All citizens receive free care in public institutions and most medicine is paid for. But patients are often expected to give "gratitude money" or small gifts to health care professionals in addition to standard medical costs. Patients must pay to see private doctors. Major health hazards include pollution, a traditionally high-fat diet, high alcohol intake, and widespread smoking. Hungary also has one of the highest suicide rates in the world. These factors combine to give Hungary one of Europe's lowest life expectancy rates.

AT A GLANCE

Events and Trends.

- With one of Eastern Europe's most stable emerging economies, Hungary was one of the top countries listed for EU membership in 2004. However, in late 2003 the EU cited several agriculture-related issues the country needed to improve before joining.
- A new government led by Peter Medgyessy came to power in April 2002. The ruling center-left coalition pledged to prepare Hungary for EU membership and to increase funding for health care and education.
- A controversial "preference law" went into effect in February 2002, giving 3.5 million ethnic Hungarians living in other countries the right to receive health, education, and travel benefits in Hungary. Neighboring countries complained the law encouraged ethnic Hungarians to remain unassimilated, and the EU said the law breached equal opportunities regulations. Hungary voted to amend the law in 2003 to conform to EU standards.

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