

Can you introduce yourself please?

My name is Ute, and I am 24 years old. I am studying psychology with a focus on clinical psychology and educational psychology and am now in my third master's semester. I spent the winter semester 2020/21 and the summer semester 2021 in Hungary in the city of Pécs.

Why did you decide to spend a semester abroad?

After graduating from Gymnasium, I went to France for a short time. And after my bachelor's degree, I volunteered at an Animal Rehabilitation Center in South Africa. This center took care of the admission and care of injured wild animals. It was a very interesting experience for me. In my opinion, living abroad is a great enrichment; I have gained many new experiences and got to know different cultures and their people. As a result, I have become more open (open-minded) and more independent.

Why did you choose Hungary?

I really wanted to study in English, and I had no other option than Hungary. In France or Spain, the language of instruction would have been the national language.

At the beginning, I put great importance to the choice of the city in which I would spend my semester abroad. I thought I really wanted to visit one of my favorite cities and study there. I was a little disappointed that it did not work. Over time, I realized that the city is not that important. The most important are the people you get to know, what kind of activities you do and what the courses are like. As a group of international students, you just have a great time together, even if the city is small. Therefore, everyone should take advantage of any opportunity to go abroad. I am very satisfied, and I think Hungary is great.

How were your first days in Hungary?

In the beginning, I was in quarantine for two weeks, which was also strictly checked. The police even came by and rang my doorbell to see if I was at home. Therefore, the first few days were stressful for me.

However, I already knew that because I had applied a year before and had researched extensively in advance. The pandemic had just started. At the time, I still thought that the situation would not last this long and that things would return to normal by the time I started my semester abroad. When I realized that the pandemic situation would last longer, I was a little worried that I might not be able to start the semester abroad. Fortunately, it was still possible, and I am just happy that it worked out and that I went to Hungary.

Did you learn Hungarian before your semester abroad?

I did not learn any Hungarian before but the university offered us a language course that takes place twice a week. The language is very difficult to learn and I am making slow progress. I think the other international students in my course feel the same way. Hungarian has the same origin as Finnish and thus it differs from the Romance languages. English, German, French or Spanish all have certain similarities or even use similar words. This does not apply to Hungarian. You have to start from scratch. The sentence structure is also completely different. However, I still try to learn the language and often try to read and understand a little in magazines or in supermarkets.

I do not know anyone here with whom I can speak Hungarian on a regular basis, but I often have to speak Hungarian with locals because some of the people do not speak English at all. For example, at the beginning of my semester abroad I had to do many organisational things in Hungarian on my own, such as registering with the city or the immigration authorities. When my Hungarian is not enough to communicate, I use body language. For example, I once wanted to buy stamps for postcards. However, they did not speak any English there, so I had to show that I would like to buy postage stamps for Germany. It worked. 😊

Did you improve your English skills?

Yes, definitely. So far, I have learned many new words in my semester abroad and I am learning more almost on a daily basis. I used my English skills much more actively in my semester abroad than I had previously used it at home. In Germany, people use the English language, for example, when reading English literature and therefore rarely have to speak it themselves. Since the other course participants at the university are also international, you have to discuss in English in the seminars.

I also used English more often in my free time, as I have much more contact with international students. We have a large and active WhatsApp group consisting of approximately 300 Erasmus students. This way, spontaneous activities can quickly be planned or trips and picnics can be organized. Of course, there are some restrictions due to the current Corona situation, but we do pretty much everything we are currently allowed to do.

We often go for walks, hikes, drink coffee or eat ice cream. The weather is nicer here than in Germany; much sunnier and we therefore spend a lot of time outside. There is also an art

student in our group. She teaches us a little drawing. It is not really professional, but a fun way to pass the time.

How is your everyday university life in Hungary compared to Germany and how do you find the university support there?

I find it much more relaxed here in Hungary. It's probably because I didn't choose that many courses. I am almost finished with my master's courses and didn't have to choose as many courses here as in the previous semesters at the University of Hildesheim. I would also recommend not taking too many courses abroad so that you have time to get to know other cultures and people.

I am also very happy with the university support. My subject coordinator is very nice. At the beginning I asked her a lot of questions, even some that have nothing to do with the university, for example, entry restrictions, bus schedules, mask requirements, etc. She was always able to give me an answer to all of my questions. What I also really liked are the ESN events. For example, they organized a quiz night. I really enjoyed the events. Unfortunately, they only took place online, which has the disadvantage that it is not so easy to get to know each other. It was fun anyway. The events were always in the evening when you had to be home from 8 p.m. due to the curfew. As a result, you still had some contact, which was very nice.

How do you live in Pécs?

I live here in a three-person flat share, not in the student dormitory. I already met my roommates on Facebook, where I also found the flat share. There are many Facebook groups where you can search for an apartment. I decided to share a flat because you don't get a single room in the student dormitories. You have to share it with someone. I was not sure if I wanted to share a room with a stranger, especially during online studies when you have to be at home all the time. That is why I preferred to look for a flat share. My roommates happen to be German too, which was very practical and helpful, as they could often help me.

How do you like the online studies?

It would be nicer to study at the university. Although I am currently also taking two courses that do not have very many students. There we always have to turn on our camera during the lecture. There are so many questions, and there is a lot of discussion. I think it is resolved quite well, and makes it feel a bit like we are really in the seminar together.

Did you experience culture shock?

I do not think I have experienced a culture shock, but of course, some things are different from what we know from Germany. There is a market hall here, which also has butcher display where you can see whole pig heads and legs. Paying the utility bill is also a little different here. You always have to pay for this in cash. You get an invoice, which you then take to the post office and pay the invoice there every month.

I was also surprised that many German things are available here. There are DM, Rossmann and Aldi here. Everything on the products is in German, just like you buy them in Germany. I also noticed that some older people here learned German as a foreign language, not English.

What is your favorite Hungarian food?

I have not eaten many Hungarian dishes. However, there are some things that I would like to try, for example, there is a fruit soup - I'm curious.

Where is your favorite place in Pécs?

Zsolnay district. This is the artist quarter. There used to be a porcelain factory here. There is no traffic in this area and a lot is decorated with colorful tiles. It looks very nice.

What is the cost of living in Hungary?

The price of food is comparable to Germany. The costs for using public transport and rent are definitely lower here than in Germany. For my shared room I pay half of what I pay in Hildesheim. Above all, it is nice here; I live in a large apartment in an old building right in the center.

Can you see Germany with different eyes after your semester abroad?

I am very grateful to live in Germany, especially because there are a lot of other international students here with whom you can exchange ideas about countries and cultures. I am always grateful for the opportunities you have in Germany. In Hildesheim, we also have contact with international full-time students who are not studying through Erasmus funding, but are on site for a longer period. They came to Germany because they had no opportunity to study in their home country. I really appreciate the fact that I am not in such a situation and that I have the opportunity to receive a good education in Germany in order to have the best possible chances for my future path. We sometimes complain about a few things in Germany, but I think that these are sometimes high-level complaints.