



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Hungary is a landlocked nation in central Europe. At 35,918 square miles (93,028 square kilometers), it is slightly smaller than Indiana. Most of the east is flat, but the northwest has rolling hills and low mountains. Almost 50 percent of the land is suitable for cultivation, producing a variety of grains and grapes. 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 nicknamed the Paris of the East. The climate is continental, with cold winters and warm, dry summers. The average temperature in winter is about 32°F (0°C) and in summer is 70 to 75°F (21–24°C).

History

Much of present-day Hungary became part of the Roman Empire in 14 BC as the province of Pannonia, but a section in the east remained in the hands of Germanic and other tribes. In the fifth century, nomadic Magyar tribes began migrating from the east. In AD 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 AD 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 cultural and

political influence. However, large portions of the country were soon conquered by the Ottoman Turks. Later, Hungary was ruled 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 newly created 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 drove out the Nazis 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. János Kádár then became the leader of the Communist government until 1988, when he was forced to resign under pressure for reform. 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 democratic 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 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 Hungary's improved 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 Transylvania (in Romania since 1920), their past cultural center, 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 1999 and the European Union (EU) in 2004. In the fall of 2006, violent riots in Budapest were set off by an admission that prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány's Socialist-led government had lied about the state of the economy to gain reelection just months before. Gyurcsány remained in office until resigning in March 2008. The global financial crisis of 2008 brought Hungary to near economic collapse. Other problems Hungary is currently facing include environmental pollution, corruption, organized crime, and discrimination against Roma peoples (also known as Gypsies). In 2010, Hungary passed laws allowing ethnic Hungarians living abroad to apply for Hungarian citizenship, a move that angered neighboring Slovakia, which has a substantial Hungarian population.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Hungary's population of almost 10 million inhabitants is decreasing by 0.16 percent annually. Magyars (ethnic Hungarians) form the largest ethnic group (92 percent of the population). The Roma, Germans, Serbs, Slovaks, and Romanians comprise significant minorities. Budapest, the largest city, has a population of about 1.7 million. Hungarians comprise 9.7 percent of Slovakia's population and 6.6 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-four 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 with 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 52 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. The remainder is made up of Calvinists (16 percent), Lutherans (3 percent), Greek Catholics (3 percent), atheists, and others. 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

Hungarians are proud that their country experienced a form of democracy before most other nations. Even during the Communist regime, Hungary was considered one of the most open and prosperous 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 discovered Vitamin C and invented the Rubik's cube. However, accompanying this pride is a tendency for pessimism. Many Hungarians will express doubt about their own future or condition, even if they are relatively well 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 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 their style and appearance.

Traditional costumes are seen only in rural areas and during special celebrations. Women may wear intricately embroidered blouses and skirts accented with 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 also 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 *ó estét kívánok* (Good evening). *Kívánok* is often left off in more casual circumstances or is replaced by a person's name. Children often greet older adults with the phrase *Kezét csókolom* (I kiss your hand). Adults might also use this with family or close friends to show special respect.

Popular informal greetings include *Heló*, *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 younger generation, 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 and nose-picking is considered 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 rude or vulgar gestures. 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. However, extended visits should be arranged in advance, especially in urban areas. 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 invited to dinner, it is polite to bring a small gift of flowers, boxed chocolates, or wine. Flowers are presented in odd numbers, and the hosts will usually display them on the dining table or in a room where the guests will be after dinner.

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 or two children. Urban families tend to be smaller than rural families. The cost of living is high in cities and housing is often limited. Both parents usually work. In fact, nearly 80 percent of all women work outside the home. 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.

Housing

Apartment buildings in Hungarian cities were built mostly during the Communist era. Made from concrete and not especially attractive, they make for a sharp contrast with the historic two-, three-, or four-storey buildings constructed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These include neo-Baroque buildings with ornate facades and entranceways displaying mythological and allegorical figures.

It is common for newly married couples to live in their parents' apartment while they save for a place of their own. The lowering of interest rates and federal programs to renovate old buildings have helped make homes more affordable. It is also common for city dwellers to own summer cottages in the countryside or in resort areas. Rural families tend to live in larger houses than their rural counterparts. Most have gardens of fruits and vegetables.

Dating and Marriage

Young people like to go to movies, concerts, and theaters. They enjoy dancing, watching television, and talking together on park benches or in cafés. Some ski and hike together. Many use the internet to meet each other. Most Hungarians expect to marry and raise a family. 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 these are rare today. Still, the ceremony at city hall is often followed by a lavish dinner. Religious couples have a church wedding in addition to the civil ceremony.

Life Cycle

Hungarian babies have traditionally been named after their parents or after saints. Recently, there has been a trend toward naming them after characters on popular TV shows. In all cases, the names must be officially recognized by the government, and exceptions must be petitioned. Each day of the year is associated with a particular name. So-called “name days,” along with birthdays, are celebrated.

Traditionally, Hungarians wore black and mourned for a year after a person died. Today, only old women in the countryside keep up this tradition. On the anniversary of a death, family members of the deceased often attend a memorial mass and pay their respects at the grave site.

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, a popular spice in many dishes. Pork is the most common meat in the Hungarian diet, but chicken and turkey are gaining in popularity. 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 chicken, stuffed paprika peppers (*töltött paprika*), 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 favorite activities include swimming, tennis, fencing, sailing, hunting, and fishing. 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 may also meet in town to drink afternoon tea, eat 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 region. Many also travel to neighboring countries. Hungary was once known as a nation of horsemen, especially because of the Hussars (15th-century light cavalry), who 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 attend whenever possible. Prominent Hungarian composers include Ferenc Erkel, Franz Liszt, Béla Bartók, and Zoltán 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

Holidays include New Year's Day (1 Jan.), War of Freedom Day (15 March, marking the 1848 rebellion and war), Easter (Sunday and Monday), Labor Day (1 May), Pentecost (50 days after Easter Sunday), St. Stephen's Day (20 Aug.), National Holiday (23 October, in honor of the 1956 uprising), and Christmas (25–26 Dec.). 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 and the founding of the Hungarian State. 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 celebrated with gifts, flowers, and cards.

SOCIETY

Government

Hungary is a parliamentary democracy and is composed of 19 counties. An elected president (currently Pál Schmitt) is chief of state, and a prime minister (currently Victor Orbán) is head of government. The unicameral parliament has 386 members and is called the *Országgyűlés* (National Assembly). The voting age is 18.

Economy

Due in part to Hungary's large budget deficit, the economy nearly collapsed in the face of the 2008 global financial crisis. Loans worth US\$25 billion from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were issued to keep the country's economy afloat. Future 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. Hungary welcomes foreign investment and trade to build its economy and increase its hard currency reserves.

Strong foreign investment, stable government institutions, a booming small-business sector, and a hardworking labor force are key strengths, giving Hungary the potential for a bright future. Industries account for 37 percent of the gross national product. Important natural resources include bauxite, coal, and natural gas. The currency is the *forint* (HUF).

Transportation and Communications

Public transportation in Hungary is well developed. Budapest and other large cities have subways, trams, buses, and taxis. 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. Most families have a television and radio. There are several local broadcast channels, and cable television is available but expensive. Cell phones and internet usage have increased greatly over the past few years, although computers remain an expensive item. Several national and 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 eighteen. Students normally attend primary schools for eight years, although some attend from four to six years. Afterwards, students choose from a variety of secondary, technical, or vocational schools, depending on their interests and abilities. 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 one of numerous colleges, universities, or technical schools, provided they pass tough entrance exams. To graduate from college, students must pass a foreign language exam. University education was free before 1994, but now most students must pay tuition.

Health

Hungary's healthcare 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. Healthcare professionals are well trained but not necessarily well paid. Citizens receive free care in public institutions and the cost of some medicine is subsidized. But patients are often expected to give "gratitude money" or small gifts to healthcare 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

Contact Information

Embassy of Hungary, 3910 Shoemaker Street NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 362-6730; web site www.huembwas.org. Hungarian National Tourist Office, 350 Fifth Avenue, Suite 7107, New York, NY 10118; phone (212) 695-1221; web site www.gotohungary.com.

POPULATION & AREA

Population	9,992,339 (rank=83)
Area, sq. mi.	35,918 (rank=109)
Area, sq. km.	93,028

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	36 of 182 countries
Gender inequality rank	34 of 155 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$18,600
Adult literacy rate	100% (male); 99% (female)
Infant mortality rate	5 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	71 (male); 79 (female)

*UN Development Programme, Human Development Report 2010 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).