

Charlotte
Hungary

2020 – ongoing

Moving in the midst of a global pandemic was interesting and going back into a lockdown (Y10 up to start with) only a couple of months into starting a new job was a challenge! But, 2 years on, schools are open and life has returned to 'normal'.

Everyday life is what you make it, I'm living in Budapest and there is always something going on – concerts, festivals, film screenings, exhibitions, sports etc as well as the numerous touristy things to do. Public transport is fantastic, there is an extended network of buses, trams and a metro in Budapest and a strong network of buses and trains to take you further afield. On a day-to-day basis, life is fairly straightforward and you will face no big problems. It is easy, and fairly quick, to get around. Shops are open until around 8pm. There is a fair bit of variety in supermarkets.

Life is convenient until you need documentation / medical help. There are different government offices for different things and the documentation has to be exactly right. There are not always English-speaking people who work in the offices. If possible, take a Hungarian speaker with you. There is national health insurance so not all schools offer private healthcare. I have not had much reason to use it but I have heard some good, some bad stories. Again, it can be quite difficult to obtain appointments/find English speaking doctors. But, on the other hand, I can email my GP and ask for meds if I need them and he will upload the prescription electronically to the system so all I have to do is go to the pharmacy and pick them up.

Deciding where to live will be a big factor for your lifestyle. Most of the schools are a little out of town on the Buda side. Some people, especially those with families, choose to live on that side for ease of commute, more access to green space and quieter living. Those who want to party or be closer to attractions/amenities choose to live on the Pest side. I decided to live in District 8 which is a quieter district on the Pest side but served by the 4-6 tram which runs 24 hours, so it is convenient. This means my commute is about 45-50 minutes (walk & bus), I am used to this as it was the same at my previous school in Prague. I chose my flat because it is on a quiet side street within walking distance of 3 supermarkets, the bus to work and central Pest.

Language

Hungarian is a hard language to learn, locals do appreciate it when you try to use a few words, but many will immediately respond in English! If you want to learn perseverance is key. There are many Hungarian English speakers in the city, particularly younger people, and ordering in restaurants/bars won't be a problem. Once you leave the city it can be a little harder but translate will be your friend!

There is a large expat population so there are a lot of English/ non-Hungarian speakers in the city and many events cater to that. There are lots of groups offering a variety of activities that you can join e.g. sports like rugby, football, book clubs, language exchanges, hiking.

Budapest schools

The schools vary in terms of expectations, teaching load, salary, students etc. so it definitely helps to do your due diligence and consider if it'd be the right fit for you. There is a fair bit of movement between schools so once you are here you could move on after a year or two. Jobs come up pretty regularly. Most of the British international schools teach the IB programme, there is one school that offers A-Levels. The other schools offer a mix of American, IB and other countries national curricula.

As with all locations, students vary! In general, I'd say most of the international schools have mixed populations with lots of nationalities. In my school I'd say the top 5 nationalities are Hungarian, Chinese, Indian, Japanese & Russian but we have students from over 50 countries. They are keen to learn about the world and other cultures.

The government is currently at odds with state schools and appears to be bringing in more laws to impact what can and can't be taught. For example, a recent decree has made it illegal to "promote lgbtq+ ideology" (homosexuality is being equated with paedophilia), this means schools are now not allowed to talk about LGBTQ+ issues. At the moment it seems international schools may not be impacted to the same extent, we still teach LGBTQ+ content, but this could change and is worth keeping an eye on.

Needed salary

How much you need to live will vary depending on your lifestyle. Life here is not as cheap as it once was but you can certainly still live comfortably. Expat teacher salaries are much more than local salaries. As a single person, living alone in a 1-bedroom flat around a third of my monthly salary goes on rent & bills. The rest goes on food (inflation currently 40%), events such as concerts, trips & travel in the holidays. It is not possible for me to go away every holiday, especially not to countries with a strong currency (like the UK), and I do need to budget every month.

Advantages & Disadvantages

- + quality of life / life-work balance
- + lots of cultural and sporting events, museums, castles, hiking etc
- + opportunities to explore Hungary and the surrounding countries.
- cost of living
- current government
- bureaucracy