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STUDY ABROAD

Hungary: A hidden gem of higher education opportunities

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When people think of completing their higher education in Europe, they often fail to consider Hungary as a valid option. However, home to several high-ranking universities, this central European gem is steadily gaining recognition among international students for its quality education, vibrant student life, and affordable tuition.

"I wanted to complete my bachelor's degree in Europe. Hungary is a tiny country with a small population offering great education, living standards, and opportunities, so it wasn't a tough choice for me. However, it's always a good idea to research your intended major and faculty before making such a big decision," says Arhita Biswas, a rising senior at the University of Pécs.

Hungary's higher education institutions offer programmes that adhere to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) standards. This ensures that degrees from Hungarian universities are recognised across Europe and beyond. Besides, the country has a fully-funded government scholarship, known as the Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship, open to international students pursuing bachelor's, master's, or PhD degrees.

According to Prattushi Mithila Das, an architecture student at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics, "I've always dreamed of pursuing higher studies abroad to explore and grow independently in my twenties. However, I needed to secure a 100 per cent scholarship to turn this into reality, as my parents couldn't afford for me to study abroad as a fee-paying student. After researching a multitude of options, I discovered the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and Stipendium Hungaricum scholarships, both of which I applied for and got nominated. I chose the latter, which offers a five-year course including a combined bachelor's and master's degree, with a scholarship amount of HUF 43,700 and an additional HUF 40,000 allowance. Since I live in a dormitory, I only receive the scholarship and not the allowance."

She continues, "This amount doesn't cover my additional expenses entirely. To manage my time, I work part-time because I don't like receiving financial support from home. Also, hourly pay is quite low here. Some

students make up by staying in dorms and not eating out at all, barely getting by on the scholarship money alone."

The application process for the scholarship is well-elaborated on the Stipendium Hungaricum website. It is essential to apply from the scholarship website as well as the Bangladesh Ministry of Education website and get accepted from both tracks. Applicants are free to choose two universities following the same or two different majors of their interest. The selection is carried out based on your SSC/HSC or O/A Levels/ equivalent transcripts, English proficiency test scores (IELTS/TOEFL), motivation letter, and extra-curricular activities. Additionally, necessary documentation such as a passport, police clearance, and medical certificates are required.

"I would suggest having a decent IELTS score that is higher than the university requirements, a well-written resume consisting of extra-curriculars relevant to your major, high grades, strong recommendation letters, and a unique, personalised Statement of Purpose (SOP) to stay ahead of others," says Md Sakib Khan, a third-year student at the University of Pécs.

Some universities obligate applicants to sit for entrance exams followed by interviews. This is the final step of the application process and is reserved for students who have passed the primary elimination stage. Applicants can expect an email from the host institution that elaborates on the specific topics that will be included, along with sample questions. The tests are mostly arranged online and the subjects depend on the major that you have selected. For instance, if someone applies for medical school, they will likely have to sit for a Biology and Chemistry test.

"I found the tests to be rather easy. The concepts were similar to the ones I studied for my O Level exams, nothing overly difficult. As for the interview, the interviewers were very friendly and considerate, they would encourage me to go on even if I had made a mistake," shares Maisha Tahsin, currently majoring in Mechatronics Engineering at the University of Debrecen.

Another challenging aspect of pursuing a degree abroad is navigating the visa application process. However, the Hungarian student visa process stands out as a notably simple and streamlined exception.

Akibul Islam, a student at the University of Pécs says, "We don't face any issues as we are already labelled as government scholars. I got an email explaining the entire process and it was fairly uncomplicated. So far, I haven't heard of visa rejections. Even if you are a self-funded student, as long as you have the finances covered and your documents are in order, you're good to go."

When moving to a different part of the world, it is important to prepare to adjust to the hustles and bustles that come with the process. As a European country, Hungary's cultural identity can be quite incompatible with South Asian traditions. While the country boasts a rich history and spirited culture, it may take some time for newcomers to acclimate. Language can be a problem initially, as Hungarian is not widely spoken outside the country and can be challenging to learn. English is mostly spoken around urban locations and tourist-heavy areas. Thus, discovering side-work opportunities or communicating with the locals often becomes a struggle.

"The issue with the language barrier is indeed troublesome as most people here prefer to speak in Hungarian over English. However, the situation has improved compared to the past. You'll get used to it over time and having Google translator on your phone is a huge help," assures Arhita

Also, Hungarian cuisine widely differs from ours and while it can be exciting for many to explore new culinary delights, others may take time to adjust their tastes to the different variants of food in Hungary. Understanding social norms is crucial too. Hungarians value punctuality, so being on time for classes and meetings is important. They also have a strong appreciation for their cultural heritage, so showing interest and respect towards their traditions and customs is always well-received. Besides, the country offers a plethora of tourist attractions for students to explore during vacations. In cities like Budapest, Szeged, and Debrecen in particular, there are extensive bus and tram networks making travel convenient.

Considering everything, Hungary stands out as a promising option for higher education in Europe. Alongside providing top-tier educational opportunities and a fulfilling experience for international students, it is a destination worth exploring.