

RETURNEE OF THE MONTH

DECEMBER 2018 / JANUARY 2019



ABOUT RILEY WALSH

Program: CIEE: Hungary: Budapest:
Central European Studies

Duration: Spring 2018

Major: Foreign Affairs & Russian and
Eastern European Studies Minor

MOST INTERESTING CLASS & WHY?

Through Corvinus University Budapest, I took a class called Nations in the Crossroads: Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe. It was similar to classes I had taken before – about the political history of the region since around 1890. Having a Hungarian professor gave the class a whole new perspective. Instead of learning about European history from book written by people who lived it, the class was based on discussions with someone who lived through the events first-hand and on analysis of sources which the locals felt best described their experiences. That kind of ground-level perspective is very hard to find outside of going to the place where the history actually happened. I took mainly politics and history classes towards my Foreign Affairs major or Minor (Russian and Eastern European Studies). I did take an elective class in the indigenous language, Hungarian, while I was there. Taking a class in the language there is something I would highly recommend, even if the language seems impossible to learn in one semester. Not only did it help with little things like ordering food and the obvious day-to-day conversations, it really gives some insight into the local culture. Being able to just say some basic phrases in the local language can disarm awkward situations before they start as well.

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HOW WAS EDUCATION ABROAD DIFFERENT THAN ANTICIPATED?

What struck me the most was the different style of college in Central Europe. Going to university classes is like going to work. Students at the university where I took classes go to class during the day then leave at night, just like going to a normal job in the city. The classes were longer (an hour and a half), and were for the most part lectures rather than discussions. The amount of free time I had was immense, since I didn't have any club events or meetings. I was able to explore a lot more and find new hobbies with the time which I still have today. UVA is a very stressful environment that's always pushing for more involvement, so being able to spend a semester outside without that stress was enlightening. Having time to spend relaxing at a café somewhere off the beaten track, or explore the non-touristy parts of the city was very nice, but also made me appreciate the quality of the UVA experience even more.



NUMBER ONE WAY THE EXPERIENCE CONTRIBUTED TO YOUR GROWTH

I feel much more confident in myself after living in the city in Budapest. It's empowering to know you can do something as hard as be a functional adult living in a city where all the signs are in a completely foreign language. After that, coming back to live and study in Charlottesville seems much more comfortable and easy. One microcosm of that is a major interest in photography I gained while there. I had both the time and ability to try a new hobby because I was already trying so many new things, where I might not have otherwise.

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FAVORITE LOCAL HANGOUT & WHY?

Central Café near Erzsebet Hid. It's one of the old-style European cafés from the 1890s, but less touristy than the cafes in Vienna or Paris. Especially on Sundays, students were able to find seats in the café, have some extremely good coffee, and study for an hour or two. Another favorite spot: Spar, the grocery store. It's like a cross between a wawa and a mini food lion. There's one on every block, and they have fresh pastries and coffee for the commute to the university and groceries for dinner you can pick up on the way home. I went to Spar almost every other day, and got really familiar with what all the stores in a 3-block radius around my apartment had stocked.

MOST INTERESTING/DELICIOUS CUISINE TRIED

On a program excursion to rural Transylvania, we had the chance to try a homemade dish called Töltött Káposzta. It is essentially cabbage stuffed with pork, onions and seasoning. I didn't think it looked super enticing, but I tried one in an effort not to be rude and immediately ate as many as possible. A dish famous in Budapest is coffee – the Hungarian claim to have better coffee than Austria, a contentious claim to say the least. No matter what coffee shop in Budapest you visit though, you'll never be disappointed with the coffee.



UNIVERSITY
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EDUCATION
ABROAD

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MOST MEANINGFUL INTERACTION WITH A LOCAL

At 0300 in the Liszt-Ferenc airport lobby waiting for the gates to open for my flight back to the US, an older Hungarian man came up to me and said something very quickly. As anyone with only one semester of study in a language can say, lack of sleep essentially eliminates any understanding of grammar or vocabulary. After stumbling around for a minute, I realized that he was asking me for the time — and even more shocking, I actually understood his Hungarian! That was a moment when it hit me that I had passed a major test in learning a language: interacting with a native speaker in their language.

BUDAPEST IN 3 WORDS

Historical

Contemporary

Charged

ANYTHING ELSE TO ADD?

Budapest is a city that has experienced firsthand the major developments of the past 3 centuries, and yet continues to be on the frontline of political development and social experiments. In the same places, there have been wars, revolutions, and historical figures from every major period in European history all the way back to the Romans. Existing at the same time as this history is a recognition of the present and future, especially politically, of Hungary in the European Union and social change. Activism for and against present government takes place on the same streets as hundreds of years ago.

