



## Hungary and the Hungarians

Celtic warriors fleeing from their defeat in Greece occupied Hungary in the third century B.C., but western civilization didn't actually come to Hungary until the Roman Emperor Augustus pushed the Roman boundaries to the Danube River in the second century A.D. When the overstretched Roman Empire began to collapse, fierce tribes of Vandals, Huns, and Avars moved in, and in the eighth century, Charlemagne from France drove out these tribes.

The name 'Hungary' came from confused medieval chroniclers who thought the Hungarian settlers were descendents of the Huns, but actually any connection between the Hungarians and the unlovable Huns is only somewhat coincidental. The early Hungarians rather liked being mistaken for Huns, because it encouraged potential foes to keep their distance. The name has unfortunately stuck.

It wasn't until the ninth century that the "real Hungarians" the Magyars came and named the country and their language "Magyar." On December 25, 1000, the first Magyar king was crowned. Stephen accepted Christianity, but believed he could forcibly convert the Magyar population to Roman Catholicism. Stephen fought many civil wars with the pagans living in his country and was later named a "saint" for his efforts. In 1241 the country was overrun again, this time by Mongol hordes, and half the population was killed.

If you have ever played the board game of *Risk*, you know that Central Europe is the most difficult area of the world to hold onto. Armies, invaders, and refugees from every direction are constantly coming through this area to plunder, conquer, or settle. Foreign kings from numerous countries have ruled Hungary over the centuries. The Moslem Turks, who were defeated by the Spanish Hapsburgs, ruled for more than one hundred years. The Hungarians went to war with the Hapsburgs for their independence, but they lost their struggle in 1711.

The new Hapsburg rulers, Maria Theresa and her son Joseph did offer more freedoms to the Hungarians, advance the economy primarily through the development of Hungary's rich mines, and inadvertently united the Hungarians against them when they imposed German as the official language. Mid-nineteen century, the Hungarians fought and lost another war for their independence. Under a compromise designed to curtail home-rule agitation, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was established and Hungary was granted its own government with a dual monarchy.

As a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Hungary was obliged to aid its German allies in World War I. Two-thirds of the country was given away as punishment for Hungary's role in WWI. Hitler's promise to help the Hungarians regain their territories gradually drew the Hungarians into World War II. The Hungarians were defeated by the Red Army in 1945.

Stalin died in 1953, and three years later students and workers began to demonstrate for free elections. They proclaimed neutrality and abandoned the Warsaw Pact. On November 4, 1956 Soviet tanks entered Budapest and the uprising was suppressed. Thousands were killed and more than 200,000 Hungarians fled the country.

Ironically, the later Communist leaders in Hungary reversed most of the hard-line dictums and developed a "goulash communism" which permitted Western influence and a commerce that was the envy of the Soviet countries. Even before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Hungary snipped the barbed wire along the Austrian border, signaling the disappearance of the Iron Curtain.

Hungarians would never say they lived in Eastern Europe despite their past connection with Russia. Most often they would say that they are a part of *Central Europe*, a very hard-to-define part of the world. The Hungarian language is unique, similar only to Finland's, whose people are

descendents of the same ninth century tribe that came to Hungary. Budapest is the capitol of Hungary and the largest city—actually two cities, Buda and Pest. They are separated by the Danube River, but united in 1872 as the “Paris of the East.” The Art Nouveau design from the early twentieth century dominates the style of Budapest, just as the Danube River provides its ambiance.

Hungary is currently a political partner of the European Union. They have not joined the monetary Union, however, preferring to continue with their own currency, the Forint.

Since the Roman times, spas have been a part of Hungarian culture, providing leisure-time activity, a place for social interaction, and a medicinal function. Horse breeding and riding have been a national past time for Hungarians ever since the Magyars rode in a thousand years ago. Beautiful lakes, prairies, ranchland, hills, and forests cover this small country, as well as castles, forts, Roman ruins, and monuments from every decade and ruling authority.

The arts are very important to Hungarians. Playing a musical instrument is as natural to Hungarians as eating paprika (in its hundreds of varieties.) Visual arts are important, too, including embroidery. Dance, literature, and theater all have prominent roles in Hungarian traditions. The Gypsy population (the only real minority) continues to influence art and culture.

The first Baptists in Hungary came in 1846 when some Hungarian students were converted and baptized in Germany and returned home preaching a personal and voluntary faith in Christ and the Bible as the only “creed.” Thirty years later, missionaries from Vienna, Austria came and established the First Baptist Church in Budapest. The Hungarian government recognized Baptists in 1905, and the Baptist Theological Seminary was begun in 1906. (Many churches, as well as the seminary, were destroyed during WWII.)

Today, the Baptists of Hungary are stronger than ever. They have rebuilt churches and planted new ones. At the latest census, 18,000 people said they belonged to the 350 Baptist churches in Hungary although the churches themselves have only 12,000 officially registered. Unlike American churches, it is not unusual for European churches to have more people in attendance and claiming an affiliation with the church than they have members. The seminary has been rebuilt and is growing. Hungarian Baptist Aid operates several homes for the elderly, family camp facilities and as of 2012, almost 50 schools. Baptists of Hungary are involved with radio and television programming and Hungarian-language churches in other countries.

The food in Hungary is wonderful! Fresh fruits and vegetables are plentiful in the summer. Hungarians love “meat and potatoes” but they also like rice dishes and pasta, too. Cabbage is a favorite, as are berry dishes. Pastries are the best in Europe. Paprika, poppy seeds and goulash are Hungarian mainstays.

Hungarians are, in general, less assertive and loud than are Americans, but are deep thinkers. Centuries of foreign domination have taught them how to be good listeners. They formulate good questions and are curious about the way others live. They may call themselves Catholic, but most people on the street have never heard the story of Jesus. For so long Believers were not allowed to speak openly about their faith. Many do not know how to incorporate their beliefs about God and their feelings about their Christian experience into everyday conversation. As we learn to know and love the Hungarians, such conversations will come naturally as we share in a non-confrontational manner.

We Christians from “The West” can learn a lot from the previously persecuted Churches. Our working and living together during your evangelistic partnership will be a blessing to all. God is at work in Hungary. We join Him there.