

Introduction

Hungary's national anthem describes Hungarians as 'people torn by fate'. While history hasn't always been kind to the thousand-year-old nation, geography has. The Land of Healing Waters is a picturesque country in the heart of Europe, respected for its folk music, spicy food and goulash. Hungary's capital, the Pearl of the Danube, better known as Budapest, is one of the finest cities in Europe.



History

The state of Hungary is over a thousand years old. The Magyars (known in western languages as Hungarians) were a nomadic people who settled in the Carpathian basin in 955. Hungary was established in 1000 AD as a Christian kingdom under Stephen I of Hungary, whose sweeping reforms successfully converted Hungary into a feudal state with forced Christianisation.

By the 14th century trouble with the Ottoman Empire gradually began to weaken the Hungarian Empire and in 1526, during the Battle of Mohacs, Hungary was defeated by the Ottoman Turks. This was a major turning point in Hungarian history and set the stage for division and foreign domination. The kingdom was divided into three parts – the north-western areas were given to the Austrian Habsburgs, the central area went to the Turks, and the Transylvanian region became a vassal state under the Ottoman Empire.

In 1699 the Austrian Habsburgs under Leopold I expelled the Turks, but by the 19th century Hungarian nationalism was growing in strength, and in 1867 a Dual Monarch of Austria the Empire and Hungary the Kingdom was established, giving Hungary its own parliament and two capitals.

The Habsburg era lasted until the First World War when Hungary was forced to sign a treaty surrendering 60 per cent of its territory and population.

During World War II Hungary was occupied by Germany and in 1944, 400,000 Hungarian Jews were deported to Auschwitz and other labour camps and killed. The Soviet army occupied Hungary in 1945 and the inevitable communist takeover followed in 1949. Large estates were divided up, industry was nationalised, agriculture collectivised and a terror campaign launched. The communist takeover was met with resistance during the 1956 uprising but was savagely suppressed by Soviet troops and a pro-Moscow regime imposed.

In the 1980s, the old regime was ousted, due to the collapse of the economy, and a new government instituted, bringing with it a new constitution that paved the way for multiparty democracy. The first multiparty elections were held in 1990 and the following year Soviet troops withdrew from the country. Currently the government is made up of a centre-left majority coalition which includes the Hungarian Socialist Party and the Alliance of Free Democrats.

In 1999 Hungary joined Nato and in 2004 became a member of the European Union.

Current challenges

- ▶ The Roma community, Hungary's vulnerable minority, often live in extreme poverty and face widespread discrimination.
- ▶ Pollution and environmental damage are a major cause of concern both in Hungary and in neighbouring countries. Rapid industrialisation, which took place after World War II and inadequate sewerage facilities and treatments, are largely responsible for the air, water and soil pollution. A significant percentage of the country suffers from damage caused by acid rain.
- ▶ Corruption, money laundering and organised crime are on the increase. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Hungary's transition from a centrally planned to a market economy is happening against a backdrop of inadequate regulations.

BMS involvement in Hungary

BMS World Mission has been involved in the Theological Seminary through the work of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) for a number of years. There are seven BMS supported partner workers in Hungary – three church planting couples and one youth worker. BMS is involved in the following projects in Hungary:

Teaching English

Jenny Smith, who was a volunteer in the country for several years, was accepted by BMS as a long-term worker in 2000 and, after a year of studies at IMC, Birmingham, returned to work at the Theological Seminary in 2002. She works as a TEFL teacher at the Baptist Theological Academy, Budapest, and has been assisted by BMS volunteers.

Church planting in Hungary

BMS has provided 50 per cent of the funding for two new Roma church buildings as part of a growing involvement in Hungarian mission.

Background information

The land

Hungary is a landlocked country in the heart of Europe. Situated in the Carpathian Basin, surrounded by the Carpathian mountain range, the Alps and the southern Slav mountains, Hungary is a mostly flat land which can be divided into three main regions: The Great Plain, The Transdanube, and the Northern Hills. Over 90 per cent of the country is covered with forests and woodlands.

The two main rivers, the Danube River, that splits Hungary down the middle, and the Tisza, divide Hungary into three main parts. The largest thermal lake in the world, Lake Hévíz, and the largest lake in Central Europe, Lake Balaton, are found in Hungary.

In 2000, cyanide pollution in the Tisza river valley caused the region's worst environmental disaster since Chernobyl. All animal and plant life along a 40 km stretch of the river died. Romania was traced as the source of the pollution and legal action was taken against the mining company responsible.

Religion

During the 17th century 90 per cent of Hungary was Protestant. However, during the Counter Reformation and in the periods of discrimination that followed, many reverted to Catholicism. Today

about 57 per cent of the population is Catholic and just over 20 per cent Protestant. In 2000 Hungary celebrated 1,000 years of its conversion to Christianity.

There are 365 churches in the Baptist Union of Hungary and over 11,000 members. Hungarian Baptists have their own Theological Seminary and are also involved in the International Baptist Lay Academy (IBLA) which provides vital support to lay workers.

Prayer points

- ▶ In a country where suspicion, mistrust and division still affect attitudes of those in the Church, pray for the Holy Spirit to help the Church be reconciled, united, accepting and trusting of each other.
- ▶ Give thanks for what God is doing amongst the Roma community, who are experiencing revival. Pray for God to send mature leaders to help disciple the many new Christians into a strong faith.
- ▶ Hungary is a country still finding its feet after years of Soviet rule. Pray for the government to be wise and righteous in its decisions, policies and social action.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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