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Living as a student in a foreign country

Thursday, August 04, 2016

DH and I like to travel, but this trip is a very different experience. Our usual plan is to research countries and travel on our own or with children and grandchildren. We also enjoy river cruises where our floating hotel takes us to major cities and interesting towns without any effort on our part.

This, however, is very different. For 3 weeks we are students at Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia.

Slovakia is the eastern half of the old Czechoslovakia which peacefully divided in 1993 after the breakup of the Soviet Union. The western half is the Czech Republic.

This is the main building where the opening and closing ceremonies are held.



This is the building where our classes are held



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The sign translates as "Teachers want a better future for your children"

Maybe you can see one of my classmates in the window. Frank is from Canada. His parents escaped to Canada when the Soviets crushed the 1968 revolution ("Prague Spring").

The students in our program (Slovak Language and Culture) are divided into 13 levels according to their language proficiency based on a placement test.

I am in level 6. DH is in level 1. My class is taught completely in Slovak which is a real stretch for me. The teacher is excellent. If we have a question, he explains with different Slovak words. Only as a last resort will he explain in English.

I am 2 generations older than the rest of my class. Yes, I have grandchildren almost as old as they are. We have 3 Italians, 2 Russians, 1 German, 1 Austrian, 4 Romanians, 1 Bulgarian and the Canadian guy. Everyone speaks more than 1 language.

Class sessions include grammar instruction. Slovak is the 3rd most difficult language in the world because of its complicated grammar - too convoluted to explain quickly. Conversational Slovak is stressed through assorted activities. One time we each had to make up a multiple choice quiz about our own country and present it orally to the class. Very enlightening! Think, how much do YOU know about Bulgaria?

As I explained in my last blog, we rented an apartment in "Old Town" to save time traveling from the dorm on the outskirts of the city. Also we wanted air conditioning just in case there is a heat wave.

I begin each day with a 5K (3.1 mile) run along the Danube - a 5 minute walk from our apartment. Breakfast in our own kitchen also saves time and money.

It is a 10 minute walk to the University which is also located next to the Danube.

There are 2 morning classes (1 1/2 hours each)

1 hour for lunch which we eat in the school cafeteria. There is always a choice of main course along with soup and salad and a huge roll. Water and lemonade are the drink options. Fine with me. I only drink water all day anyway.

Then one more 1 1/2 hour afternoon class session

This is followed by optional lectures on a variety of topics. These are offered in Slovak and English. There are concerts and films in the evening. These are optional also. Alternatively there are the cultural events of "Summer in Bratislava"

Weekends bring excursions in and around the city as well as one 3 day trip around the country. These include visits to castles, caves, mountain lakes and traditional village crafts.

I must not forget that I have homework every night. I hope this explains my reduced presence on SP. I am logging in every day and eating healthy. It's fairly easy to eat healthy here. Mostly everyone does. There doesn't seem to be a problem with obesity although carbs are a staple of the diet. The supermarket's largest sections are fresh baked goods, fruits and vegetables.

Tap water is fine to drink, but everyone seems to prefer bottled sparkling water or "with gas" as I was told. They buy it in huge bottles.

If you have read this far, thank you. I'm happy to at least be able to keep in touch with my spark friends.

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CD15003511

Sounds like an incredible experience!





1766 days ago



DIANNEMT

Wow! What a great experience!
1768 days ago



SLENDERELLA61

How marvelous! What an experience!! Sounds like your brain and body are getting quite a workout. Thanks so much for sharing.
1768 days ago



ECOAGE



1768 days ago



HOLLYM48

Wow, what an awesome experience you are having. That is wonderful that you are in level 6 and really pushing yourself in another language. Keep on having fun and sharing this wonderful time with us!
1769 days ago



MARYJEANSL

Sounds like a fantastic experience - you must be very proud to be at level 6. :) I am a bit envious - I love to travel.
1769 days ago



PEGGYO



1769 days ago



WOOFERCOALBOY

What a great trip!
1769 days ago



TUTUNAN

I enjoyed reading your blog. Thanks for posting.
1769 days ago



PHEBESS

Sounds like a wonderful way to spend the month of August!

I took a month-long college course in Sienna, Italy - though it was through the university here in Bellingham, where I received my teacher certification. I was older than the language instructor!!!! (And probably older than the art history professor as well!!!!)

But it was an absolutely wonderful summer, I loved it!
1769 days ago



HELEN_BRU

Always look forward to your Slovak travels. Nostalgia for me. I was there in 1971 visiting my parents. I had no idea how difficult the language was to learn. So I won't blame myself for not being that proficient. You are remarkable!
1770 days ago



WATERMELLEN

That sounds like a most demanding AND rewarding program!! Good for you: keeping the brain AND the body in top shape!
1770 days ago



CD4114015

You lean such and interesting life! You and dH are blessed indeed....thanks for sharing so we

can "tag along"!



1770 days ago



DR1939

I spent 2 weeks in Hyderabad on a course for faculty from the US. We spent the mornings learning about India from speakers from all disciplines and governmental areas. Afternoons were



culture, e.g., museums, temples, mosques, factories, research facilities. On the weekend we drove further south to get a better sense of the country lifestyle. We spent another week on our own doing tourist things. It was a mind blowing experience. Even better, my university paid for everything but the week of touring.
1770 days ago



CD15641307
That sounds awesome!
1770 days ago



SMILINGEYES2
It is amazing you are fluent enough to keep up in the class.



Enjoyed dinner with a friend in graduate school. Her grandmother immigrated as a young adult but the only English she spoke was Eat More.
1770 days ago



CD15665102
Lovely! Thanks for the update.
1770 days ago



SPEDED2
How very exciting for you. We were stationed overseas in the late 70s and early 80s. What an experience! The people we met were so similar to us, just spoke another language.



Looking forward to future posts.
1770 days ago



GINIEMIE
Sounds so cool. I hope you and DH enjoy every minute. I'd love to participate in something like



that. Maybe in German or Dutch.



1770 days ago



JEANKNEE
How incredibly wonderful! What an amazing experience this must be. Thanks for checking in



and letting us know what you're doing.
1770 days ago



DOVESEYES
Thanks so much for the blog how wonderful to be able to do it. I'll "watch this space" for more :)
1770 days ago



NUMD97
B_B, no one would expect you to check in, when you have homework to do, young lady!



These are well-planned, months-in-advance planning events (yes, I follow your preparatory blogs) and we can wait till you return to give us the "Reader's Digest" version of your trip.

Having said that, it sounds amazing to have a class as diverse as you do, wanting to learn more about Slovakia. I'd gamble and say each one has a story.

Enjoy your workman's holiday. You deserve it to be as successful as you can make it. SP will keep and we'll save a seat for ya when you come home.

Best,

Nu
1770 days ago



POINDEXTRA
I wonder if there's similar course in Italy. I'd love to do that one day.
1770 days ago



LIVEDAILY
This is amazing!! It must be so interesting!!
1770 days ago





PHOENIX1949



1770 days ago



ONEKIDSMOM



Brought back memories of working in Italy and living in an apartment in the outskirts of Rome, Mostacianno (sp?)... we had customer engineers in from all over Europe and the variety of

languages spoken in "Education" sessions was amazing.

THANK YOU!

for sharing your trip with us, as time allows!

1770 days ago

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