



My volunteering in Slovakia - 2023

A Belgian guy in Slovakia

First expressions

I arrived in Bratislava five days before my birthday. Little did I know that this adventure would be a permanent gift. The start of 11 months as a volunteer in charge of promotional activities. 11 intensive months that I invite you to discover through these pages.



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First expressions

If you're wondering what a Belgian does in Bratislava after arriving, here are some answers.

Firstly, I was able to discover the city centre with Peto, my mentor, and taste the famous Kofola. A drink I fell in love with.

Then I rushed off to visit the UFO Tower. The view from there was marvellous. I even got a guided tour of the city. A very interesting tour. And it was free.



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First expressions

Then it was my turn to show people around my country: Belgium. During a Tea Meeting, I was able to organise a presentation on the country of Jacques Brel and Jean-Claude Van Damme. Because I'm a fan of history, I focused a lot on the complicated past of this small country.

I was also able to share with the public a few anecdotes about our gastronomy and our famous beers.

To accompany this presentation, a few speculoos, some Belgian chocolate and little appetisers with Liege syrup.



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First expressions

During my first days in the office and back at my home office, I've had many presentations about Inex's different kind of activities.

I also visited Vienna for the first time. It's a superb city that I really loved. Austria is one of my favourites of this volunteering. I'll obviously be coming back later.

Then I discovered that there were also other European volunteers in Slovakia. I was able to meet them in Trenčín, at the On-arrival meeting.

It's a lovely little town. I really enjoyed the atmosphere there. At one market, other volunteers and I were even interviewed by the local television station.



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The beginning of spring

Amandine arrived in March. Like me, she was about to start the European Solidarity Corps with INEX. It was a great idea for her to take part in a night-time guided tour. We learned a lot about the dark legends of Bratislava, including Elisabeth Báthory. A sinister person...

Afterwards, I returned to Vienna. A friend of mine had just come to visit the Austrian city. It was still a bit chilly, but it was great to see him again.

I even managed to persuade him to come to Bratislava to taste the halusky and the famous Kofola. I think he enjoyed it.

Then, during April, I took the time to visit Bratislava Castle and the Slavin Memorial. Two interesting places that I'd recommend! What's more, there was a medieval march in front of the castle.

I was able to pose with a beautiful bird.



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The beginning of spring

The beginning of spring was also the opportunity to participate in the the first part of

A weekend full of encounters and fun!
Leadership Academy - Part 1

It was an opportunity for us to improve our communication skills and learn how to better plan a project.

Also, Amandine and I helped the INEX staff to organize a party for the 30th birthday of INEX.

It was great to meet all the people around INEX who are passionate about volunteering.



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The beginning of spring

As the sun slowly came back out, Robo came along to bring us more, telling us all about Portugal in a lovely Tea Meeting that was highly interactive. It made you want to be in summer already.

He presented Portuguese culture and traditions. It was very interesting and the portuguese food was very tasty.



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The beginning of spring

Also, in the middle of May, with INEX team, we took part in Mila Pre Mamu, it was to celebrate Mother's Day and allow them to have a great time with their family.

And some days later, I presented a new game at a tea meeting: the Cultionary. A game that questions everyone about their own stereotypes and prejudices in a fun way. An intercultural workshop that I really enjoyed leading.



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The beginning of spring

May was also the opportunity for me to visit some very interesting good places.

Indeed, I entered Bratislava Castle and had the opportunity to enjoy the exhibitions inside.

I want to adress special thanks to Mateusz and Adrian. Thanks to Mateusz, we visited the National Park of Pieniny, in Poland, and went to the Trzy Korony top! The view was wonderful.

And, thanks to Adrian, I was for the first time in Štrbské Pleso. I didn't yet know that I would have to return to this place for a terrifying adventure, but you will find out later.



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Summer is coming

The summer was intensive. Very intensive. It firstly started by the second part of the Leadership Academy. It was full of workshops to prepare us for for the next workcamps as leaders.

It was great to introduce the other participants to some belgian meals during the demo-camp. I presented them the fat *mitrailette*. I think they enjoyed it.

I learned a lot during the workshops in this place and people here were very nice.

Also, it was my fist time in Banská Štiavnica. The town is very beautiful.



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Summer is coming



I also must say it : Amandine and I worked a lot. But hopefully, motivation was here. It was very intensive to prepare workcamps, blog articles, social media posts, the demo-camp and the INEX 30th birthday in the same time.

We managed with a lot of tasks but we survived.

In the midst of this arduous work, we had some moments of respite. Indeed, With Peto and Juliana we visited Malá Fatra and the beautiful village of Čičmany.



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Summer is coming

Also, I discovered I am a real lover of hiking, To prepare myself before the workcamps, I walked a lot in the forest around Bratislava. The weather was very good for this kind of activities,



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Summer is coming

I walked a lot during my volunteering. There is a lot of good places to visit close to Bratislava. This city is very well located.

There are many interesting hiking trails to do. The one that leads to Devin Castle for example.

One of my favourite places near Bratislava is also the Königswarte Lookout Tower, in the austrian side.



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The ocean of adventure



Leader, leadership, project management, financial things... Oh my god, I was leader in two workcamps and I survived.

- Lukovistia (renovation in an old school)
- Slatinka (work in an eco-village)

Lukovistia was a nice workcamp. In the south of Slovakia, it is a peaceful place. A little kingdom ruled by nature, big hills and deep forests.

But Slatinka, the fairytale village, was the best. The group dynamic was nice and the free time activities in the middle of Slovakia (Banska Stiavnica, Banska Bystrica, Zvolen Castle, walking in the forest) with motivated guys was wonderful.

It was so good to spent time with a friendly group around the fire with špecačky and good cheese. Also, it was my first experience with outside shower.



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The ocean of adventure

I want to thank Adrian, Peto and Kika for being co-leaders with me in this wonderful workcamps.

I discovered many things I discovered a lot of things, whether about other cultures, about the history of the places and also about myself.

I felt useful by taking part in projects that made sense.



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A lot of traveling



Hamburg

After these intense weeks in Lukovistia and Slatinka, I went to Hamburg for two weeks, for another international project.

Change of atmosphere. This time, it was at the Neuengamme memorial, a former concentration camp.

It was about maintaining the site but also participating in very interesting exhibitions. It was a very enriching experience, especially in terms of citizenship.

For me, the duty to remember is very important, especially in a context where anti-Semitism is increasing in Europe and in the world, I am thinking for example of the terrible attacks of October 7.



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A lot of traveling

Hamburg

I also learned a lot of anecdotes about the history of the camp. The salary of SS personnel, for example, which ranged from 180 to 240 Reichmarks per month. They even had Christmas bonuses...

I also learned about the female SS supervisors. In 1945, more than 400 female supervisors were employed. They were recruited through newspaper advertisements and professional qualifications were not required. After 1945, former female guards claimed they had been forcibly requisitioned. When lies come after cruelty...



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A lot of traveling

Hamburg

I believe that this workcamp will be an experience that I will not forget. We even had the opportunity to speak with a survivor of the holocaust and also with the second generation.

The daughter of a deportee and the son of an SS man came together to tell us about their story. It was very enriching!



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A lot of traveling



Denmark

I took the opportunity of being in Hamburg to travel to Denmark. I hoped to reach Kolding but, alas, that day, there was chaos on the rails and I had to resign myself to taking a bus. It was a long road but I finally arrived in Padborg.

I was able to walk around a bit and take a few photos. It was during a weekend of free time. It was nice to be a little alone.

An experience of a few hours but great. It was my first time in a Scandinavian country.



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A lot of traveling

Villach

After all these weeks of workcamp and the intensive work of INEX, it was time to take some time for myself. So I went to Villach, a beautiful town located in the Austrian Alps, close to Italy and Slovenia.

The atmosphere there is really nice. Maybe it was because of the sun but I had the impression that this city exuded something Mediterranean. Surprising for an Austrian place.



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A lot of traveling



Italy

Villach is a small town very close to Tarvisio, a beautiful little town on the Italian side. It is nestled in the mountains. I went straight there to walk and discover this place.

I was literally dazzled by the beauty of the place and the tranquility that reigned there. I felt like I had this place all to myself. I think the best deal is to go to this kind of place in September, it allows you not to have to deal with tourists and screaming children everywhere.



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A lot of traveling



Slovenia

From Villach it is very easy to reach Arnoldstein. The city is dominated by numerous peaks. On one of them Germanic, Slavic and Latin culture come together. It is the triple border between Austria, Slovenia and Italy.

I went there. A very pleasant and intense walk. Discover here some photos from the Slovenian side.



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A lot of traveling



VIENNA

I also returned to Vienna to visit Empress Sissi's apartments. I'm really not a fan of the character. She exuded coquetry, superficiality and, above all, with her dietary demands and whims it must have been a nightmare to share a meal with her. At least she had convictions and did not hesitate to defend it.

I much prefer Franz Joseph. I think he did a lot for his country. He managed his empire like a good father. Too bad he was on the wrong side during the war.

Despite this, I think he was an honest and respected ruler. Not a cruel tyrant like those of World War II.



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A lot of traveling



VIENNA

Honestly, Austria has become my favorite. For me, it is the best country in Europe. They have magnificent landscapes, a very rich history and, above all, an excellent rail network.

I often say that they have one station per mountain. They are aware of their tourist potential and know how to highlight it.



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The leaves fall

Potáborka

After this intensive summer, we organized with INEX the delivery of certificates. It was a great time to chat with others about workcamps and leadership responsibilities.

Afterwards, we concluded with a game of bowling. I won, haha.



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The leaves fall



Slatinka

Shortly after, I returned to Slatinka. A weekend of volunteering on site. It was great to see this beautiful place again with the wonderful colors of autumn.

A magical weekend working in the woods and meadows in an atmosphere that only autumn can bring



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The leaves fall



In the Tatras

After this weekend in Slatinka, I immediately left for the Tatras. My goal was to reach the summit of Rysy, the highest peak in Poland, at 2501 meters above sea level.

I managed to climb to 1937 meters but, unfortunately, I was surprised by the snow. Temperatures were in the negative. The wind was blowing hard. Reluctantly I had to give up.

I think this is my biggest disappointment with this volunteering :(Having to move back two kilometers from the goal.



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Tea and pumpkin



Back in Bratislava

After this adventure in the most frozen place of Slovakia, I took part in some Tea Meetings (Iceland and Halloween), organized by Amandine. It was very very interesting ! I learned a lot about pagan traditions and her workcamp,

With INEX team, we also went to INTEGRA centre. The clients were very enthusiastic and friendly. A nice moment.



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Christmas times



My last weeks in Slovakia

Christmas was already approaching. I had the chance to participate in a tea meeting where I prepared gifts for single seniors.

It made me happy to participate in such solidarity actions. These are things that are close to my heart.

Afterwards, I also had a great time at the Zážitkovica. It was great to see Banska Stiavnica again and... under the snow. Unfortunately, the week-end was too fast.



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Christmas times



My last weeks in Slovakia

We also had a final party with a lot of people for Christmas. Amandine and I were able to present our adventures during a presentation. It was great to talk to people about it.

The most funny was to disguise my self in INTEGRA as a Mikuláš for the 6th of December.

People were so proud of their christams decorations.



Thank you

Thank you for your interest in my adventures and big thanks to INEX team.

Big thanks to Peto, my mentor and co-leader in Slatinka

Big thanks to Amandine, nice flatmate and co-volunteer in this adventure

Big thanks to Adrian, great co-leader at Lukovistia

