

## Transcript

**Episode Title: “Black Girl in Budapest” with Starr Session Varga**

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**STARR** [00:00:00] So, before moving here, just like many of us do, we always go to Google and we put in Black in said city. It's a cultural thing. It's the thing we do, just so we can figure out hair products, makeup, things to do, where to go, whatever. So, in my research, I found literally pages and pages of fetish sites. No true information on anything in Hungary. So, I yelled to my husband, I'm like, “Where are you taking me?” And he was like, “It's fine. It's fine. It's fine.”

**CHRISTINE** [00:00:41] Hey, everyone. Welcome to *Flourish in the Foreign*, a podcast that celebrates, elevates, and affirms the voices and stories of Black women living and thriving abroad while exploring living abroad as a pathway to wellness. I'm your host, Christine Job. A Black American business strategist, and podcaster based in Barcelona. I went from burnt out in the States to thriving abroad, and I want you to do so as well. As a business strategist, I help Black women and women of color, leverage their talents and their expertise into viable and sustainable online businesses. Businesses that make them professionally fulfilled and financially abundant. I helped my incredibly ambitious and competent and brilliant clients utilize their magic in the pursuit of their own dreams. I take my clients through my signature 12-weeks sprint, in which we go from ideation to purpose-driven business and sales. If you are interested in Building A Business Abroad by taking your talents and your expertise, and really utilizing them in the pursuit of your own dreams and the pursuit of your own life vision, get at me, go to the website, [www.flourishintheforeign.com/resources](http://www.flourishintheforeign.com/resources) and get my free Build A Business Abroad guide. And then go ahead and check out all the many ways that we can work together from helping you with moving abroad questions to helping you launch the business of your dreams. You can find out all the information at [www.flourishintheforeign.com](http://www.flourishintheforeign.com). *Flourish in the Foreign* is a labor of love, but y'all know it is labor, nonetheless. And that is why I asked all of you to please support this beautiful Black woman podcast. You can support *Flourish in the Foreign* by becoming a Patreon member at [www.patreon.com/flourishforeign](http://www.patreon.com/flourishforeign) where I have an amazing library of articles all about moving abroad and thriving abroad from all around the world. So, check that out and other resources exclusively for our Patreons. You can buy me a coffee at [www.buymeacoffee.com/flourishforeign](http://www.buymeacoffee.com/flourishforeign). You can cash out the podcast at \$flourishforeign. You can purchase a piece of a sorely needed podcast production equipment via our Amazon wish list which you can find at [www.flourishintheforeign.com/support](http://www.flourishintheforeign.com/support). And as always make sure that you rate and review this podcast. It is so important to share it amongst all of your friends and your family and on social media. Tag *Flourish in the Foreign* at *FlourishForeign* and I'll be sure to repost the digital nomads beyond 50 summits taking place June 22nd through June 24th has over 20 panelists and is covering over 25 topics and it is a virtual event of information and inspiration for those in their late 40s and beyond who are aspiring to have a location independent life. I'm looking forward to being a panelist where I'll be talking about how you can leverage your talents and your skills into a viable and sustainable online business. And you can

learn from other experts who will share their experiences and can let you know all about your many many options for making your location independent dreams come true. You are ready for this register now as an Early Adopter and get \$10 off 10% of profits will be donated to charity **water.org**. Grab your ticket today via my affiliate link. It is at no extra cost to you but does support this here podcast. You can find that link on the resources page of the website. [www.flourishintheforeign.com/resources](http://www.flourishintheforeign.com/resources). You can also find the link in the description of this episode, and on the show notes page of this episode. See you there. All right on to the next episode.

**CHRISTINE** [00:05:40] Today's guest is Starr! And the Starr is an incredible, incredible woman living in Budapest, Hungary. I really enjoyed talking to Starr not only because of her journey of how she got to Hungary, but also all of the community and the resources that she has helped to create for other Black women in Hungary, specifically in Budapest. She is incredible but I'm gonna let her tell you all about it.

**STARR** [00:06:16] So my name is Starr Session Varga. I live in Budapest, Hungary, and I'm 35 years old. So I grew up in the performing arts field as a dancer and it just led me to begin my traveling experience for competition and moving around to compete. Then from there, when I turned 16, I wanted to kind of make it a professional thing, and as a dancer, you have to start early. So that's where my traveling began because every summer I was out of town, just practicing my craft, and in different cities and exploring. When I was 16, I moved out of my home and went to a performing arts school, which was two hours away from my family. And I was the only one in my family to ever really leave home. From there, I moved to New York City to continue my dance career. From there, I moved to Los Angeles to continue my dance career. And then from there, just traveling was just something that I had to love doing. I love seeing new cities, and it was a thing. So I wouldn't say that it was something from childhood but it was my curiosity of bettering myself and being who I want it to be, which was a dancer. Of course, ultimately, life changes when you get older, and I turned into a journalist and that also helped me to become a little bit more than a traveling bug and see the world.

**CHRISTINE** [00:07:20] I asked if she had the opportunity to attend university and if so, if she studied abroad?

**STARR** [00:07:44] As a dancer, I didn't want to get a dance degree because I thought I had trained enough. And so, I went to University to become a journalist because I love to talk. So, if I could fall back on something, I want it to fall back on something else, just in case there was an injury or anything that could ever happen to my physical body. And I studied in Los Angeles at Cal State University with my journalism degree. And I did not actually study abroad, but I did travel abroad, which was amazing on my summer vacation going to Europe, going to Spain, going, you know, doing the whole of France and all of that. So, I absolutely love that. And within that travel period, we stayed at my friend's family home in France and their kids were speaking to me in English, reading the newspaper at the breakfast table. Mind you, they were like seven, reading the newspaper in French. And I was just in awe of that. And I was like I would love that

in the future for my family to be multicultural, multilingual, and sitting at the breakfast table reading, having croissants, and reading the French newspaper.

**CHRISTINE** [00:08:54] I asked Starr to walk me through her journey to Budapest.

**STARR** [00:09:00] Well, I always have it in the back of my mind that “Oh, I could see myself moving my family and giving them a little culture and seeing the world in a different way.” So, that always kind of stuck in my mind. And then I ended up marrying a Hungarian guy. And we met in Los Angeles and from the moment we started dating, we love to travel and he wanted to see this place in that place, and we were doing our relationship. So I was like, “I’ll go with you. Let’s go!” We ended up having a destination wedding in Hawaii and in Hawaii, we called the family members that were in Hungary that couldn’t make it and they were like, “You have to come to visit us next summer. Please, please, please!” And from there, we were like it’s a deal. We will be there. So the next summer we planned our summer vacation. We came to Hungary starting first and we went to the village and met 30 of his family members all at once. So it was just like Hungary on my face right as I got off the train from Vienna, it was amazing to see where he came from and his culture, and his background. And so just from that little trip of being here, we finally came into the city. And we landed and I was like, I could totally live here in Budapest, that there was a hustle and bustle, the trains were moving, the trams were going, people were walking. And I was like, I can do this, a little bit of countryside where you can walk around and be in the fields, and then you hit the city and go two hours on a train, and you can have this hustle and bustle, totally something I was interested in. And literally, two months later, we moved to Budapest, Hungary on a whim. So I finally got back home to Los Angeles and we were in a world when European month vacation was so fun and then my husband’s like, “We could make this a possibility where we’re not doing just one big trip a year, we could have a home base, I can reconnect within my country, with my family, with my language and we can make Budapest a home base where we can travel to Italy on the weekend.” And we were looking at like \$20 hopper flights. And we’re like, oh my gosh, like, let’s do it. We don’t have kids when we are young. And the beautiful thing is that there was a company here in Hungary that he was interested in working at. So he sent an email, had an interview two weeks later, and got the job Three weeks later. And then we started packing, it was tough to start selling things to put it all into a reality of what that would be. We had to sell our cars, we had to switch over mailboxes, and cell phones, it was just like a lot of things that you don’t think about that had to be taken care of. So it was definitely a tough two months, I wouldn’t say it was easy, I had my first-yard sale, and made a little bit of cash to help subsidize the move, which was great.

**CHRISTINE** [00:12:01] I asked Starr to describe to me the day of her move, leaving California and landing in Hungary.

**STARR** [00:12:11] We ended up leaving two days after the New Year. So, we had holidays with our families, and we got to say goodbye. And we started the new job in the New Year. And my husband ended up flying out first to secure everything, which was two days before me. And then, I’m so glad we staggered it that way because there were just so much things that needed to be done. But of course, it’s the beginning of the year, so much was closed that returning a

cable box was impossible. So I'm glad that I stayed a little later to help finish up those little things because we were moving during the Holiday season. But yeah, that heading to the airport, I headed to the airport and a tank top living in California in January, had a tank top and some jeans on and I threw a jacket in my bag for the travels. Landed in London for a layover. Then I flew to Budapest for a two-hour flight from London. And it was for freezing snow and ice. And this was the first time the Budapest river had frozen over in 20 years. And I literally landed and I was like, "Where did you take me?" Like this is winter. I'm not used to that living in California. So it was a shell shock. But it was pretty cool to be like, in a different season in the same month and a different country. So, I enjoyed it and I embraced it. And I was scared at the same time.

**CHRISTINE** [00:13:39]

Your first year of living abroad is unlike any of the other years of living abroad. It just is what it is. So I asked Starr to tell me about her first year abroad, the ups and downs, and how she found an apartment in Budapest.

**STARR** [00:14:00]

So, it was luckily because my husband had a family. We did a little Google search on our part and he gave us the link for the best places to find apartments. So literally, we stayed in a hotel for one night. We had an interview with the owner of the apartment we actually still live in today. That next day and we got the keys two hours after seeing the apartment. And so it was a very smooth transition. We ended up leaving the hotel early, staying in our furnished flat, and when I tell people that part of the story, they were like "It took me weeks and months to find the perfect spot" and it was just so, we definitely, we have that world when the story where it just all worked out. And it was amazing. But from there it was like, well if you want to have this apartment, you need this paperwork, that paperwork, this signature, that translation.... I quickly realized that Hungary is a country that loves paperwork. And when I say paperwork It's like you need to have every government office, you need to have that folder. And I was like, where does this paperwork go? And I like it was just crazy because I'm so used to the digital world of America that I was unable to, like, slow down and backtrack that this country is just a little bit behind in their ways, and that paper is what they want to prove that you can live here and citizenship and getting my visa and all of that. So that was a shell shock for me with paperwork, because I was just so far removed from the paper. From there. I mean, honestly, the hardest thing was going to the grocery store. I tell people this all the time. Grocery shopping with Google Translate is the hardest, longest chore you can ever do. Because all you want is Greek yogurt. And you can't figure out which one is the Greek yogurt, or all you want is just things that make you feel at home, you want almond milk, but you don't know what brand this is if it's organic, different things like that. So being able to read the Hungarian labels was hard for me and made a 20-minute grocery shopping experience into like an hour-long because I was translating word for word, but over time I got used to it.

**CHRISTINE** [00:16:12] Language is always an interesting conversation, because, in some countries, there are multiple official languages, perhaps you'll be able to speak English. Or perhaps you already have experience with that language. Like I had some experience with

Spanish before I moved to Spain. Now Starr have moved to Hungary, where Hungarian is spoken. So I asked her if she was fluent in what it's like learning Hungarian.

**STARR** [00:16:41] So luckily, I also moved here with a Hungarian husband. So I leaned on him as a crutch to help me get through many things like government paperwork, even ordering at dinner or whatever. But I went out with a friend that I had recently met during my first few months of living here, and I was struggling to order my food. And she literally says to me, what do you want in English? Like, what would you like? And I was like, oh, I don't have to know Hungarian. I'm like, Oh, I would like that. So, I was finding that on the posh side because Budapest is split up between the Buddhist side and the patch side. And the patch side is a little younger, hipper, Vivier. And so if you rule of thumb kind of is, if they look under 30, they most likely speak English. So, I was able to get by a lot when it came to using English. But I moved to this country, I live in this country, I think it's respectful to try to learn the language. So I use it as much as I can, having apps like Duolingo and little things like that and having my husband like, if I hear things, a lot of times I ask my husband what it is because I'm like, I like the way that sounds. What does that mean? I'm hearing it a lot. But quickly after we moved here, I did get pregnant with my daughter, and I thought I was gonna have all this time to study and take classes and it didn't work out that way. So I'm actually learning Hungarian with my daughter, which is kind of beginner, elementary, Hungarian, and it's helping me get by a whole lot faster, I think. But living in Budapest, there is an expat bubble, and I live in that bubble, and I'm at the playground in the afternoon playing with the kids and hanging out with the moms and we're speaking English but I like to use my Hungarian as much as possible to order the ice cream or play with the kids. The other kids that speak Hungarian.

**CHRISTINE** [00:18:40] Then Starr moved to Budapest with her Hungarian husband. So I asked her what it has been like meeting an extended Hungarian family.

**STARR** [00:18:51] Meeting my husband's family. It was a big rush, and as I told you, I love to be the talker. I love to be the center of attention in a way, and I literally had to sit back and listen. And pantomime. Like play charades. And it was just really difficult honestly because I want it to be a part of the conversation and everyone is smiling at me and nodding at me and shoving food in my face because all they know how to do is to show me love through food, which is beautiful, but I don't want to eat like we've been eating all day. So it was very difficult for me to explain how I felt and I want it to and it was also difficult for my husband because although he speaks Hungarian coming back he left when he was five so he has like what they call like kitchen Hungarian like what little words little sentences he can speak fluently but there'll be some phrases that he says wrong. So he's even improved his Hungarian while being here also he left at five so reading his Hungarian also had to be improved by moving back here. So with me being like, "What they say? What did they say? What did they say? What's going on? Why is everybody laughing?" That's when he was like, he would get frustrated because it was hard for him to be in the conversation and be a translator because he is not a translator, and then we found each other fighting like he's like, I'll tell you tonight, and I'm like, I want to know now, like, I want to be a part of the conversation now and then... So anyway, we just had to get over that

struggle of being a part, me just having to sit there smiling and nodding, which is kind of hard, and eating the food, too. Now, when I go back to the village, I can actually pick up what they're talking about, I can't speak it back to them as fast. But I have an overall just that, okay, they're talking about this family member who was wearing this or you know, whatever gossip happening around the kitchen table, or who cooked that or whatever. So I can pick up what's going on where I don't have to be like what they say when they say. So it's an interesting thing to be a part of, but I've learned to embrace it and come hungry, so I can just stuff my face.

**CHRISTINE** [00:20:57] Starr has such a lovely daughter who actually made an appearance during a recording of this interview. And so I asked Starr what it was like for her to have a baby abroad.

**STARR** [00:21:11] Well, I never thought that my mother would not be in the delivery room when I had a child. It's just something I always... it thought wasn't. But when I got pregnant here I realized that she has a job and she has a life and she only has this many weeks off for vacation. It was really hard dealing with that. But for me, it was about research and I'm a researcher. And I think the moment you become pregnant, or the moment you do something new in your life, like moving to a different country, then you do become like a journalist in a way where you want to know all the information you can possibly have. So I spent a lot of time on Facebook groups reaching out to other expat moms, and that's how I found the ex-pat mom community here, which is amazing. Although we talk about the most ridiculous things, there's a ton of great information in there that we all want to know and need to know. So it's a great resource for me and other ex-pat moms that I meet. I always say to join this group. But it was hard because of my journey. I really want to be able to understand my medical journey in Hungary. And so that meant having an English-speaking doctor. So I was able to find where the expats go and I had an English speaking doctor, an OB-GYN, I got to meet the pediatrician who's English speaking as well who actually spent some time in America so she can understand my concerns when it came to vaccinations in America versus vaccinations in Hungary, blah, blah, blah, blah, just little things that I want it to know and feel comfortable about. I think giving birth was a beautiful experience but it was also a hard one because everyone was speaking English. And everyone was telling me the process and we were going through it but at the moment there was a complication. During my delivery, everyone literally switched to Hungarian and from there just for them to communicate faster. I was okay with it because I understood that something was happening. And it was definitely scarier to hear people speaking over me in Hungarian in a very harsh way because there were beeps going off, things were wrong.... And they were just like, and I was left out of the conversation, and it was about my body and my child. Ultimately, I had a C section an emergency C-section and the baby came out fine. And everyone switched back to English and it was all good in the hood but yeah, definitely an experience. If you're an expat Mom, what it's like it's it's nerve racking. It's scary. It's liberating. It's exciting. And I'm definitely proud to be able to say that I could have done that.

**CHRISTINE** [00:23:48] So if you have been longtime listeners to the podcast, and even if you haven't, very early on, I believe it was Episode Two of the podcast with lovely Deanna who was based in Hong Kong and also had a child abroad. I had her break down the cost of having a

baby in Hong Kong and all of y'all were shocked. It was incredibly, incredibly affordable in Hong Kong for her. And so I had to ask Star, what was the cost of having a baby in Hungary.

**STARR** [00:24:23] I was talking to other expert moms and when it comes down to doing anything in Hungary, no one goes about it . There's no step one, step two, step three, step four. Everyone has to start with step four or three and then go to one. It's like no one has the same path as my point. So even with having a baby in Hungary, no one has the exact numbers. I will say that I went to all private health care, all private doctors, in the most expensive way possible. Not because I have it, just something that I felt comfortable with being new to a new country is just doing private, private, private. So out of pocket without insurance was \$10,000 to deliver a child, which, in America with insurance, \$10,000 is nothing because having children can be up to like 20 \$30,000, right? For one child. But then other moms have gone through the local health care, and they have their child for virtually free. So and then some people are in between who switched back and forth, did a little private, did a little state, did a little whatever and so then people are at 5000 mark. So honestly, it's unfortunate to say there is no exact number or science when it comes to doing anything in Hungary. And I don't understand why that is, even with getting your driver's license, one person has to go through it this way and another person goes through it this way, and no one seems to cross paths with how to even switch over your driver's license, something as simple as that. So it's hard to navigate. But that's why we all just kind of lean on each other and take a deep breath and get through the best way we all can.

**CHRISTINE** [00:26:10] And now, I was curious about healthcare in Hungary. What was the system like? How expensive was all of that?

**STARR** [00:26:20] So, there is the national healthcare here, and you will receive your (inaudible) card and everyone gets that unless you are not a citizen. So as of right now, I don't become a citizen until this year. So, I don't I am not covered under the national healthcare. So, I have to have health care myself. So. I usually go to private clinics here, where there are English-speaking doctors, and that is actually double the price. So, even for them speaking English at the same hospital. So, if you speak Hungarian at this private hospital, it is half the price. But because it is a specialty to speak English and translate all of your transcripts into English, it is double the price. So, that totally sucks, right? Unless you have insurance, and it goes to your insurance and you just don't care because you're already paying your premium. But that's a big thing for ex-pats here is understanding where we stand and what healthcare means for us. Because although I take my daughter, I take her to both, depending on what we need, if she's just having a cold and I know they're just going to prescribe her cough medicine, we go to the free healthcare in our district, right down the street, we're in and out in 15 minutes, there's no way they give us a prescription, we go to the pharmacy. So, I think it's great. It's a great health care system. I know that financially, they're struggling in a way, but I think many people are struggling during this time of COVID. But I know that politically wise we have amazing stadiums and the current healthcare system is struggling. So it's like where's the money going? But yeah, overall, it's decent.

**CHRISTINE** [00:28:07] I asked her to describe Hungary's response to COVID-19 and share some of her impressions of Hungary's response.

**STARR** [00:28:17] Yeah, I mean, leading up to the lockdown that everyone have had on March 12, or something. I was supposed to be in Italy that week. But of course, it got canceled, thank God, because Italy got hit really hard when I was going for a blogger travel conference. And I was really looking forward to going to that and being a part of that. But in the end, the moment March 12 hit, schools closed, everything closed, and masks were required. And I really appreciate and I am really happy to be happy to say that I was in Hungary during this time, because I really appreciate the measures that they took to keep us all safe. And with that said, it's very alarming when I hear like oh, in America, North Carolina three months into it are just now requiring masks to go to the store. And it's like we were doing that on March 12th. So I'm happy to say that I did COVID, did my lockdown and quarantine style here in Hungary.

**CHRISTINE** [00:29:18] So, I don't know if you guys are tapped into Hungarian politics. I'll just say from what I have learned and I have seen that it is quite lively, to say the least. And a lot of changes have been made in recent years in Hungary so I asked Starr if or how Hungary's politics affect her day-to-day life.

**STARR** [00:29:44] So, politics in Budapest are really tricky because our Prime Minister is often compared to Trump and his values and his ways... and some. It's like I understand that you want to keep the Hungarian bloodline pure, but I am here mixing it up with one of your Hungarians. So I get where you're going with that, but that's not how it's going to happen and how it's going to always be. And on the politics wise, I don't like getting into politics, I'm not even going to get into it any further, because it's just not really something that I have to worry about unless it comes to immigration, which is another huge thing that he doesn't like immigration, which is just like Trump, like they are very similar and a lot of ways but I live in this bubble. I hold that American passport, which is shit right now due to COVID. But I am always able to, and my whole family is always able to go back to America. If anything were to happen in my day-to-day life. It's not something I think about. It's not something that I have to worry about. I'm only reading the news due to COVID. At this time, and personally right now, it hasn't affected me in any way. People asked me this question all the time. And I just try to stay out of it and stay in my expat bubble. It's the best.

**CHRISTINE** [00:31:06] I also want to know whether Starr felt that the politics of her home country, the United States ever affects her life abroad?

**STARR** [00:31:16] No, yes, of course, it does. Receiving stimulus checks, receiving all of this stuff still matters to me, because I'm still an American citizen. My family's in America. You know, gun violence, you know, moving back to America, it's like, do I really want my daughter to have not just a fire drill, but also like a mass shooting drill? Like, do I want to have to deal with these things? And there's Black lives matter? Do I want my daughter to have to? Do I need to teach her systemic racism at this early age of two years old, like it's just too much? So I'm definitely

loving my bubble over here, although it's affecting me, it's just like something that I get to step away from. But, unfortunately, all my family is there, and they're in the middle of it. So it's a yes or no answer. Like it doesn't bother me, but I have to always be relevant on both sides to just make sure that I'm safe everywhere.

**CHRISTINE** [00:32:16] I hope you're enjoying this episode of *Flourish in the Foreign* and if you are, be sure to take a screenshot and tag [@FlourishForeign](#) across your social media and share it with the world. Let everyone know that you are listening. I appreciate all of your continued support of the podcast. Please consider supporting the podcast via Patreon at [www.patreon.co/flourishforeign](http://www.patreon.co/flourishforeign), via buying me a coffee at [www.buymeacoffee.com/flourishforeign](http://www.buymeacoffee.com/flourishforeign), via cash app at \$flourishforeign or purchase a piece of production equipment via our Amazon wish list at [www.flourishintheforeign.com/support](http://www.flourishintheforeign.com/support). Any amount is greatly appreciated. To learn more about this episode's guests Be sure to check out their show notes at [www.flourishintheforeign.com/episodes](http://www.flourishintheforeign.com/episodes). And if you are looking for resources to help you get, stay, and thrive abroad, be sure to check out the *Flourish in the Foreign* resource page at [www.flourishintheforeign.com/resources](http://www.flourishintheforeign.com/resources). All right, let's continue the show.

**CHRISTINE** [00:32:42] I was really curious to know what the cost of living difference was between Los Angeles and Budapest.

**STARR** [00:33:49] So, the average salary in Hungary is \$1,000 a month. So most people their wages are in this \$1,000 their rent is usually depending on their apartment and size. Usually, people are living in studio flats or whatever. They're spending 350 bucks to 600 euros on or dollars on their flat, which gives them some room for food and also a little bit of play. Because going to the opera there are like free to cheap days. There are, you know, great deals you can like, go to the opera, go to the ballet, go do all these great things on a budget, which is beautiful. So I think people have a really amazing way of life here on a small scale budget. For us coming from Los Angeles to Budapest, it took us a year to understand the value because we're like, oh 1000 Forint, that is \$3 like, easy. We'll get whatever we'll buy that for 1000 Forint but 1000 Forint are almost as close to like a \$5 bill Or a \$10 bill, like, that's a lot of money to be throwing at a bagel or something, I'm just a bad example or whatever. So a year into it, we were like, okay, 1400 is a lot of money. Do we really want to spend that it's not worth it kind of money? So it was a big shock for us. But we were able to finally understand it because we moved here, making American wages. So that was also a jump for us. Most people actually just kind of eat out every day and then the European lifestyle, you go to the market almost every day or every other day. And you just pick up what you want to eat for the day. Being an American woman, I go grocery shopping once a week, and I'm the only one creating a line because I have a full cart. But I can't break that habit of mine and my husband's habit as well. So we like to just go shopping for the week, and then we'll go to the market to pick up whatever is missing... the bananas. So culturally, that's a little different. It's probably where we're wasting money, and they're saving money because things go bad.

**CHRISTINE** [00:36:07] I asked about getting around in all the transportation options in Budapest, is public transport readily accessible? Do you need a car?

**STARR** [00:28:17] Living here, you do not need a car, living in the city. Now due to COVID. I wish I had a car because everyone's driving in the countryside and doing it makes it a lot easier. But my monthly pass for the train, the tram, the bus, the (inaudible), she can go through any mode of transportation is 35 bucks a month, for unlimited. And so I think that's really reasonable and amazing. If you're just going, one ride is one euro. So that's kind of the price points they're going around the country. It's great because the train rides are really reasonably cheap. Unfortunately, they're sometimes unreliable. But things break down and things happen. But it's an easy way to travel and it's cheap. So from here to Vienna, which is the border, it would cost me like 10 \$12 just to get to another country. We went to the lake here, which is about an hour and a half drive away. We took the train and it was about \$6 to get to the lake. So I always think it's a great option for anyone to get out of the city is by using the trains.

**CHRISTINE** [00:37:36] I asked her to share a little bit about her daughter and her daughter's day-to-day life in Budapest.

**STARR** [00:37:44] Every district in Budapest has several playgrounds, as well as an outdoor space where you can easily access across the river from our window is Margaret Island. And it's an entire island of outdoor space. You can go to the singing fountain, there's a Japanese garden, there are several playgrounds, there's a huge landscape, there's a water park, there are things you can rent to have fun, and even during COVID we were able to just go over there and do some social distancing, and be outside even living in the city life. In these large apartment complexes on top of each other, we were able to escape from our flat and have some outdoor space, which was great and so even just the commute in the morning, we're not hopping in a car and I'm dropping her off like she gets to ride her scooter to school because it's walking distance and she's like speaking several languages to different kids at school and going back and forth. So I absolutely love that Budapest as a whole is a family-oriented city. It's literally like this morning it was like 57 strollers on the way to school hustling and bustling and she being able to say hi to people that she knows. So it's family-oriented. She's having this outdoor life, even though we live in a city, which I love and I just don't know how much of that she would get commuting in a car from here to there and everywhere. So I love that and I love that she gets to have the baby where I get to do things I wouldn't do in America. I wouldn't be baby-wearing my child on my back like a backpack and we're just hustling bustling, you know, like going on a tram going on a bus. Like it's fun. It's fun for me.

**CHRISTINE** [00:39:30] Being an intercultural international relationship, and marriage has its nuances. So I was curious to know how moving to Hungary, her husband's home country, affected her marriage?

**STARR** [00:39:45] Yeah, I mean, we were one year married, what a year and a half before moving here. But within that time, we did a lot of traveling. So we've definitely been able to be like, "Can you believe that we were in Greece?" and we went to Spain, we went to so many places and we explored different cuisines. And so I feel like our life is a lot more enriched here because we're able to just see and do a lot more. It's definitely made us stronger, going through

a lot of things together versus having a ton of family around. Because I'm a family-oriented person, I love going home and being home. I'm usually the weird person that flies all the way home like three to four times a year, that is a given on any given year. Doesn't matter how far I've lived or anything like that. But it's hard. It's interesting, like having a baby with me and him together, like me and him making decisions together in a different country. And it's all different. Even though it's this, this is his mother country, this is very much hard for him too. He was definitely culture-shocked moving back here. Like, he experienced that probably a lot more than I did. But I feel like as a whole, we're able to communicate, we're able to have a more enriched life on an \$8 train ride to the lake. Like, it's just so easy to live our life in like a cheaper manner like that. We're not stressed about bills and things like that, that we're just literally getting to live life. Like, Oh, "Where are we gonna go this weekend? Let's do that. It's gonna cost this much. So cheap. Let's go." So I definitely think our lives are very enriched here.

**CHRISTINE** [00:41:23] So, she left her family in the United States to move to Budapest and had a child abroad. So I want to know what her family thinks about her living in Hungary, raising her daughter in Hungary.

**STARR** [00:41:38]

So, when we moved to Hungary, my husband and I were like, "Oh, we're just gonna go for a year." We were lying. We knew we were going to go longer than a year, but it was just to get them over the hurdle. So after the year, they're like, "When are you coming back?" We're like, "Oh, we were never coming back." So for the year, they were like, Yeah, go for you guys are young. The moment I had my child, the whole conversation switched to we want to be near our grandchildren, we want to be near our niece, my uncle, my didn't, everyone is just like we want, it's all about the child. So once the child was born, it was all about wanting to see the child we wanted to be. We wanted to grow up and be a part of her life. And I understand that but there were so many things that so many positives of living here, not having to work million hours a day to live this amazing life in America that everyone has sitting in traffic like it just wasn't this rat race that we got to slow down living this European lifestyle and going to the market and bringing a basket to put your fruits and veggies in like it's just like a different way of living. And I absolutely love it. Although I'm like missing certain foods, or Trader Joe's, or whole foods are just things being a lot easier. In certain ways, things are a lot easier here as well. So it's hard for them, and it's, you know, we wanted to plan to move back, then COVID happened and right now, it just makes the most sense to stay here. And though we are always getting teased to come back and be closer to family, we do want our children to grow up and be close to family. It's just definitely, it's hard, and it's not easy, and the phone calls are hard, the persuasion is hard, and it's stressful. But overall, we're thriving here, and I would have to say my husband's happier, I'm happier, we're not as stressed and my kid gets to live a different life and has all this culture and living in a bilingual household. I can only see the positives right now, who knows if we'll stay here forever. But right now we are happy.

**CHRISTINE** [00:43:58] Starr is on the pathway to gaining Hungarian citizenship and so I asked her to describe what that process is like.

**STARR** [00:44:08] As I said before, in Hungary, there's no one way to do anything. So I've asked my girlfriend, she's also married to a Hungarian with a child and she says she can't because she's not eligible until after year five, and I was like, "Well, my lawyer told me after year three", so although I say after year three, I'm eligible. I could who knows until I go to that office, and they tell me I'm missing 24 more pieces of paper or plus one more year but as the story goes, if when you're married to a Hungarian, and your marriage is registered in the embassy, then you are eligible after three years of living in the country to receive your Hungarian passport and citizenship, which makes me an EU citizen, which is one thing that I want because my husband and any future children that I have, and my daughter will always be dual citizens. I'm the only one that's just an American citizen with a residence card. So I'm looking forward to having that because I don't want to be the only one in the family that doesn't have it. With this, because I'm married, I don't have to take the exam, which is spoken and written Hungarian and so I'm glad I get to skip that but yeah, it's just literally all the same paperwork, I need it for my residence card, that whole folder. It's like literally a book and takes that in, fills out the application and hopefully, I'm good to go.

**CHRISTINE** [00:45:44] I asked what it is like being Black in Budapest and her answer reveals why she decided to create a Black girl in Budapest.

**STARR** [00:45:58] So before moving here, just like many of us do, we always go to Google, and we put in the Black and said city. It's a cultural thing. It's a thing we do, just so we can figure out hair products, makeup, things to do, where to go, whatever. So in my research, I found literally pages and pages of fetish sites. No true information on anything in Hungary. So I yelled to my husband, I'm like, "Where are you taking me?!" And he was like, "It's fine. It's fine. It's fine." So leaving my career behind, and also, continuing my journalist background. I just started to start a blog called the Black Girl in Budapest. So before I moved, I knew I was going to create this journey for other people because I knew I wasn't the only Black girl coming and looking up in Google, Black in said city, whatever. So I started this community. The year I moved here, three months in, I started, you know, blogging about it, and after three, almost four years, I can say that we have a small community. I love it because it's multicultural, just because we're Black. We're from all over the world, and it's beautiful and I love learning about everybody's culture for the Black girls from the UK, Africa, and Italy. Like we're everywhere, and so it's just cool to learn about other people's cultures and backgrounds, and I have a monthly meetup that I do with the girls and we meet up and go out and have fun. We talk about our problems. We talk about our good times, we talk about anything that comes up with hair products, where do you get the beads for your braids or this kind of makeup or Shea Moisture. So I love doing the meetups because I get to see the girls and meet them but we also have a Whatsapp group that's only for the people who actually live here, and it's our safe space. It's what we call it. And we literally can talk about anything there, ask questions, and it's an open forum. So it's great. I love that there's a huge community of ex-pats that are students that are studying at the university, we just have some doctors that just graduated, some dentists that just graduated, lawyers. So we are out here making a name for ourselves and I love it.

**CHRISTINE** [00:48:28] I wanted to know more about Starr's experiences being Black women in Hungary.

**STARR** [00:48:29] So my story is, when you come to Hungary, you do feel like the only one right, even if you're Asian, Indian, I have to say that Hungary is a country that has values and morals and America's history is not Hungary's history. So all of these negative things that like "Why is she staring at me?" I think it's more of curiosity, personally, versus a negative look. And you can tell the difference between a curious look and a negative look, right? So I always find that but I get treated differently with my mixed baby. Everyone is like, "She's so cute and talkative to me." And "Where are you from?" And once I dropped my daughter off at school, no one looked my way. Like, so no one cares that much. But I do have to say having this Whatsapp group there are we do have our moments where we're like, "Can you believe this guy touched my butt today?" Or I'm saying like, "This guy winked at me and called me", 'Hey, what's up Africa, Cuba', that... and so it just feels weird. And it's great that we can like, touch base with each other and talk about these things and so yes, there is the bad side. But I think that's in every country. I think that's all over the world. There's racism everywhere but I think overall because Hungary has its beautiful, long, rich culture of just Hungarians that we're just now seeing more immigrants in this country and people from all over the world that they are seeing more curiosity versus hate, not to say that there isn't hate all over the world. So overall, I think it's a great place to be. I'm always a champion for people moving, exploring it, seeing it, and living it for themselves. But if you ask everybody, everyone's gonna have a different response to that question.

**CHRISTINE** [00:50:21] I was curious to know if haircare and skincare products that we as Black women require, are available in Hungary.

**STARR** [00:50:32] I put together a list of Black-owned businesses here in Budapest, and I'm proud that there are over 40 on the list, and it is amazing. With this list, there are hair salons, where you can go to a barbershop, where you can get your hair products, we have bakers in the group we have, what is it called seamstress and people who make clothes and it's just great, there's a wide range of people here in Hungary that are owning businesses. So it took hard to go to the Indian shop to get our hair products or the Asian shop to get our hair products because they were importing them for us. But now we have a Black-owned business that is also importing them as well. So if she doesn't have it, she can get it for you. So then we have a group called Black Girl hair in Budapest, some girls just do braids from their home, but the African girls, the Caribbean girls, they could just do it from their home and they'll put your braid, your box braids in for you and you just come to your house. So it's not super easy and simple as it is in America where you just Google, whatever it's all about a recommendation. And it's all about just wanting to get this hairstyle and someone in the group will say, "I do it" or "This girl can do it." "I want crochet braids, I want a weave." So we're definitely a community and I'm so glad that we've started this community that we can all reach out to each other because when I got here, I was flying home to go get my weave in, like giving back to America every three months to get a fresh weave. So now I'm glad that I can just go down the street.

**CHRISTINE** [00:52:14] Starr created Black Girl in Budapest, just as a way for her to connect and create community and share about her experience living in Budapest, and now she has made it into a full-fledged business.

**STARR** [00:52:32] So Black Girl in Budapest started as a blog. It's just a journey of my life seeing things in the city and going to all the monuments. And so from there, it turned into a whole lot more where people were asking me questions about becoming an ex-pat. So I have ex-pat services where I help you. We can get on the phone call, I can answer any questions. So people reach out to me in that capacity on helping them get connected with the right people looking for a realtor or a school for their child. And sometimes it's just to ask, how is it being Black in Budapest? What are the problems? So I'm always open and willing to have a conversation. So there's always that service that I provide, and then the tourists are always coming in, and they're just looking for what you do for the weekend. So I have a book coming out. It's for the tourists. It's called Black Girls Guide to Budapest and I'm excited I have delayed the launch, but you can get on the waitlist. I delayed the launch due to COVID, and I can't wait to launch this, and it has a three-day trip guide planner with tips and tricks on saving money and how to get around and different things like that. So I can't wait for that to launch but you can head over to my website and get on the waitlist and get the book once it comes out. As well as yeah, just doing the monthly community events where we meet up and do karaoke and things like that. So for tourists, ex-pats, and definitely for moms because I became a mom in Budapest and I can help with that journey because it is very hard to figure out where the dance camp is or the cheerleading camp or whatever you're looking for. And I'm tapped into so many communities at this point that I can always help out.

**CHRISTINE** [00:54:22] Wait, there's a cheerleading camp in Hungary?

**STARR** [00:54:26 ]Yes. And there's a Black cheerleading coach, she's amazing. I'm telling you, you have to find them, but I found them. I found them for everybody. So there's cheerleading, there's dancing, there's soccer, there's even football, American football if you want it. So yeah. It's all about being tapped in.

**CHRISTINE** [00:54:42] As a fellow entrepreneur, I'm always curious to learn about how easy or how difficult it is to be an entrepreneur, as a foreigner in countries, what are the regulations? What are the requirements, and how long does it take? So I asked Starr how she has built her business abroad.

**STARR** [00:54:22] So yes, like in America, there's the LLC, you have to incorporate or whatever you decide to do, you have to incorporate your company, everything I do is as if I'm in America. So it was just the easiest way for me. So everything gets paid to my American accounts, it was just the easiest way for me. But in Hungary, there is this thing called Costa, which is a long process with a ton of paperwork, where you can do billing and things through your company that way. So that is also why in creating this list of Black-owned businesses in Budapest, some people took their names off the list, because they're working under the table, which is why I support that, like live your best life. But with the Black Lives Matter movement happening, they

wanted their name off the list, just in case, there was a backlash. On my account, people were calling me the N-word, Hungarians calling me the N-word, and whatever. So I did have to go through this, like blocking people due to Black Lives Matter. And me just being out there promoting our Black-owned businesses, me and this lady who has an amazing business, she's an English teacher. And she also teaches Hungarian, she's Black. And we're going to teach a course to all the Black businesses on how to incorporate your business here in Hungary, the legal way the right way, because it seems like the people that were backing out, just hadn't gone through that process yet. And we're also just learning. And so they want to go through that process. So I'm excited to get that going.

**CHRISTINE** [00:56:36] And I asked her to share some advice, for all of you who are thinking about starting travel blogging or getting serious with your travel blog.

**STARR** [00:56:45] I would say find your niche, there are a ton of travel bloggers, tons, right? But there's not a travel blogger in Budapest, right, that's Black, that's doing it the way I'm doing it and just finding my niche. And maybe there are, I just don't know them but what I'm saying is like finding what makes sense for you, and living in that space because not everyone is right for everyone. I'm not giving up, even though I've been to Paris, I'm not a travel blogger, I'm just literally saying, this is how you get from Budapest to Paris and back again, on a budget or whatever. So I'm finding my space, and I'm finding my niche, and I'm talking to that group and when it comes to monetizing it, you will only over time and consistency, find where you can monetize because the things I started off doing three years ago, some of them stuck, and some of them didn't, and it's interesting to see that I have been able to grow and been able to monetize in ways that make sense. And I'm excited about this next chapter because I am more clear, more than ever. It just only comes from time, effort, and knowledge. So I'm always researching, like, people are asking me, what's my next book? And literally, what do you mean, what's the next blog that I'm reading? Or what's the next article that I'm reading, because I just always want to have the next knowledge, what's the next iteration of Instagram, like, I want to know what's next and if you thrive for that, I think you can only succeed. Consistency in perfection is the way I live my life. So sometimes it's just put it out there, push publish, press send, and you can only improve it later. Or if you want it to be improved. And you will see how that needs to be improved over time. So I'm all about publish, publish, publish, doing the best that you can, and living your imperfect, perfect life until you succeed.

**CHRISTINE** [00:58:45] I asked her to share some advice for all of you who are thinking about moving abroad.

**STARR** [00:58:51] Well, I would say, it's not that we lied to our parents that we were coming for a year, we also just didn't know. And if we were in the back in our back pocket, we knew that if we don't like it in a year, we can just come back and pick up where we left off. Everything's gonna be okay. And I think that's the advice is like, you just have to try it and see, not everyone's gonna like it. Not everyone's gonna like that you're moving. And you may not even like that you moved. But it's something that says that it'll help you grow in a way to be like, but I didn't like this, or I didn't like the way I did that, and you just learn from it, and again, you can

always go back to your life before exactly how it was. So I say get out there try it and there's nothing wrong with saying I didn't like it and moving back. So all you have to do is try.

**CHRISTINE** [00:59:40] I asked Starr to describe to me her definition of wellness, and how living in Budapest changed or influenced her practice and definition of wellness.

**STARR** [00:59:55] It's like I had two lives living here in Hungary, before the baby, and with the baby. So culturally wise, Hungary itself lives on the bed of over 100 Hot Springs. So going to the bath, and the thermal spas are just a part of life. You should be doing this weekly, you should be going weekly to the spa, and you should be getting your nails done. It's just like a drop in the bucket, facials, adding eyelashes like whatever you want. So I feel like it's a part of life and the Hungarian women do it well, although it might be over the top and it could be a little tacky. They are definitely all getting their hair done, their nails done and living their best life. So I've taken that on as well. I'm excited to go to the thermal spas tomorrow when my child is in school and take a moment for myself. I try to make Fridays for me, my wellness day. I think it's so important to me to like getting ready for the weekend, from cleaning the house, cooking laundry, hustle and bustle to and from school working from home managing the site in the third. But I make sure I do every Friday, even if it's just going to the dentist. It's something that I do on a Friday. It's just like it's my wellness day. But in America, I don't know when I had time to do that. To be honest, it's just like, maybe I would have a nail spa day with a girlfriend but that was far fewer in between because it was just the hustle and bustle of getting it done. Do it fast. Go there. So it's been a change here and I like it. I like having my nails done or taking care of myself or joining a mask.

**CHRISTINE** [01:01:34] Thank you so much star. I enjoyed interviewing you. And if you want to keep up with Starr you can via social media.

**STARR** [01:01:45] So I have my blog called [TheBlackGirlinBudapest.com](http://TheBlackGirlinBudapest.com). and you can find me on all social media sites like Facebook and Instagram and YouTube at Black Girl in Budapest. And my name is the Starr you can always say "Hi" I'm always eager to give you tips and tricks on this beautiful city that I call home, and I can't wait to see you all in Budapest.

**CHRISTINE** [01:02:06] Thank you again Starr, and if you want to learn more about Starr you can via her show notes page on the website, [www.flourishintheforeign.com/episodes/Starr](http://www.flourishintheforeign.com/episodes/Starr). Thank you again for listening to this episode. I hope that you enjoyed it and if you did, please consider becoming a supporter of the podcast. You can do so via Patreon. Buy me a coffee, cash app, or by purchasing a piece of production equipment via our Amazon wishlist. You can find all the links to all the ways you can financially support the podcast at [www.flourishintheforeign.com/support](http://www.flourishintheforeign.com/support). Make sure you rate and review the podcast on Apple podcasts or anywhere else you listen to this podcast and while you're at it, be sure to head over to the website where you can get more information about getting, staying, and thriving abroad. You can learn more about each of the guests that have been on the podcast, you can see their pictures, you can read their bios and you can stay in contact with them via their websites and

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**CHRISTINE** [01:06:25] In the next episode of *Flourish in the Foreign*:

**NEXT EPISODE SPEAKER:** People should keep in mind that Instagram is a lie. The people that post there are vacationers and that's a huge distinction to keep in mind. They go with the equipment, they go with their time off, they're going to get their content. If you are a digital nomad, you're living somewhere else. You're washing dishes somewhere else. So the lifestyle is just different. There may be cool things that you see and do you know you make time for that. But that is a distinction