



# Arpine's

## EVS Story



# HOW CAN YOU TRAVEL ABROAD ALL ALONE TO VOLUNTEER!?


You're a girl, it's dangerous...

Are you sure the organisers aren't charlatans to steal money, then they may vanish away? If at least you were married, husband might accompany you. But now nobody will be there around to watch you.


I'm not a feminist but I can't be indifferent towards a bunch of discriminatory practices females encounter almost every single day in different stages of life in my home country. If your baby is born a girl, it doesn't mean they are weak and are always in urgency of one's protection day in and day out.

Girl is a human and social being who has got her priorities and strategy to lead her to a success. I will never accept the reality that most parents think by closing their daughters in cages is going to help bring up clever, well-balanced personality. Continuing to still observe this old conservative tradition you are limiting your girls to access perspective opportunities, feel insecure and make them feel that their own mission in life is to settle down while leaving behind all their aspirations.






Most parents think they know for sure what is best for their children. Sometimes they dictate children to opt in for a type of education they have been long wishing their children to have no matter we want it or not because everybody else, in particular a neighbor's son or daughter chose it and succeeded. In result, we study at university, attend some clubs and in the meanwhile we don't have a clue what it is aimed for. In the end, when we graduate and start searching for a job, the process turns out to be pretty complicated as we haven't been prepared for real "harsh" market conditions. Only in this case we realize what mistake we have made by selecting something we did not enjoy. I don't know why parents are scared to let their children fly away from the nest, experience freedom, let life teach them good, valuable lessons nobody's able to.




I don't know why parents think only education at university is enough to get a better-off life. They have to understand once their kid turns 18, they are already adults to change their life course the way they want. It's us young people to decide what way to choose. We are certainly thankful to our parents for having financed us so far to get a proper education, but it doesn't mean we are now parents' ownership. Each of us is individual, has his own preferences and a right to take a decision about life choices, be it relatable to education, marriage or specialization, etc.




Parent's job is to raise such a responsible person who will always take a huge accountability of all his steps in life. Parents must not limit their sons but mostly daughters' freedom and independence to observe lifestyle they want. It's ok if your child slips once and falls down. This way they will learn to bravely get up and stand on their feet more confidently.







When you don't let them walk on their own, they remain dependent and always count on parents' guidance during all their lifetime. Taking your child's hand anywhere they go will harm his ability of self-expression and self esteem. Often you need to let the bird fly away from the nest to inspire confidence, determination, self-expression, perseverance for hardships.



Dear parents, make your daughters capable enough in order you don't have to worry who she marries. Stop saving money for her wedding, spend it well on education and most importantly, don't prepare her for marriage, prepare for herself. Teach self-love and confidence.



Many people today confuse EVS only with travelling across Europe, yes, partly it is but believe me, it's much more than just a travelling opportunity. Now I will try to make it crystal clear for you how EVS revolutionised my life. I managed to abolish my shyness of public speaking in front of a big audience. Doing a presentation and public speaking in general have always been a problem for me, I always thought I am not able to connect two sentences together and speak what my mind entails. I always thought my speech sounded too illiterate and people would never give a second to listen to me. This is what EVS turned upside down. More than thrice a week I was at schools, we were presenting cultures to a classroom of 15 , 20 students for 45 mins, at first it was hard, but then I created a strategy for me to feel confident while telling a story in the classroom.



# I learnt to lead.

This is another priority I really appreciate much that i was able to develop. I used to always be left behind at home by not trusting my power and ability to push forth my opinion .

Being away from people I had known for 23 years who most frequently were dragging me down by their unstoppable complaints, “advice” that I had to cope with what I had, I was just an ordinary, ugly girl who wasn’t brainy enough to achieve her dreams on her own. Locating myself in a new environment gave a new force to believe in myself. Just approaching people and talking what I think of things is not very bad at all. I understood if I work in this place, my voice must also be heard no matter what others might think. I would never expect I would be able in Slovakia to improve Russian.

Since the early childhood I was feeling insecure to speak Russian because of some relatives who were continually nagging me to feel down about myself. Now I’m really excited I can join any conversation in Russian even if it’s slang.



# I WANT TO TRAVEL, BUT I'M AFRAID...


Since I returned home, I had been receiving a bunch of questions how my family compromised to let me out, how my dad gave in to my requests, how I dared to speak up.




To tell the truth, I can't exactly recall now how I let my family be aware of what was awaiting me in the near future. I just said, "Dad, I'm leaving for Slovakia in a few months". He was sitting in the kitchen and drinking a cup of coffee. He didn't even say a word of refusal. I was shocked because before I had been invited to study at the English department of the international faculty of the Sheffield's university in Thessaloniki, he then jerkly didn't allow me to get there. Then I was 19 - a first-year student. I was certainly devastated by this decision as I passed an English placement test, spent so many efforts to get invited. I decided that I just needed to step by step get them closer to my idea of traveling abroad alone.

I should get them accustomed to my absence at home, they should understand I am able to take care of myself, I am not in need of anybody's guidance and protection all day long. I took to applying to various local volunteering programs. First, I volunteered in a camp for 20 days as an animator, then translator or interpreter in a number of international festivals happening in Armenia which conditioned me to spend more than 2 weeks in the countryside with organizers away from home. So constantly for a year I had been leaving home for several weeks for volunteering. This was the main way I got them used to my not being home and made them believe I am in total power to protect myself.






In summer 2018, I graduated from university with an honor and decided that I did not want to track the traditional pathway all my friends had gone for. I wanted to explore the world, see what other people do and how they do outside Armenia; I wanted to broaden my mindset; I was seeking new adventures, new opportunities to travel, grow my network, improve my English, Russian, Greek; I was wishing to get rid of the narrow-minded environment that was then dragging me down to make sure that a girl's only mission is to settle down as soon as possible and produce heirs. I wanted to change this stereotype by my personal example.



Fortunately, I stumbled upon a project in Slovakia and doubtlessly I applied to it. Probably a week later I received a positive response. Since then I had been certain that EVS was what would give me a space and independence to initiate my ideas that had long been hidden in mind, present the enriching Armenian cultural and historical heritage a few had yet spoken about. The waiting period to prepare documents for visa was a bit tormenting, but I had a strong faith in the light at the end of the tunnel.





On December 5, I embarked on the brand new journey that had so many surprises in store for me.

I was one of the first volunteers in Ruzomberok. My Slovak coordinator was willing to make legendary

volunteers out of us who would do a

revolution in the town. I felt a huge responsibility on my shoulders to actively work in developing social and cultural life there. EVS even surpassed my expectations. I did not have specific timetables; at the very start, I did not even have tasks at all. We were free designers. It both had its pluses and minuses. However, now I will definitely say it was much better than five days a week spending time at schools or kindergartens for 8 hours. I could display more creative attitude into initiatives I wanted to organize in Ruzomberok.

My first initiative was to organise an English talk club in the evenings not only for students, but also for anybody who generally wanted to practice the language, because I think today English is an absolute necessity for anybody who wants to stay on track with the rest of the world. English is a mental food. Therefore, every Tuesday on a weekly basis we were getting together in one local central cafe and had long meaningful chats about anything that might come to our mind ranging from excessive media usage to cultural differences.







The second initiative of mine was to conduct a workshop on how to write a CV and motivation or cover letter. I find it really important for students to know how to present their advantages and disadvantages to a recruiter, and from this early age, they

have to know and work on it, later on to have a rich and ready portfolio for a better career and be prepared to new upcoming challenges.





The third one aimed to talk my Armenian heritage and culture. Armenia is a small country squeezed between Turkey and Azerbaijan that deserves a good recognition it has not yet achieved as many other comparably small countries. Hence, I cooperated with the coordinator of the gallery of Ludovit Fulla to accomplish all the points I had in mind about this Armenian party. It was devoted to highlighting special traditional parts of Armenian Easter celebration. I had been preparing for this day so long, I spent one week to decide what I was going to speak about, as I wanted to make a decent presentation to the people who did not know much about my country, I spent a day to cook all typical dishes we used to have on this day at home. In frames of this party, I managed to be acquainted with an Armenian jazz opera singer who had been living in Slovakia for 20 years, got to know her closely and invited her to add a nice twister to my event by singing Armenian folk songs and playing the piano.

I remember I was spending nights in my bedroom choreographing a kochari to later dance with Slovaks there, found so many cool nationally themed games.





I even managed to invite the local TV to make a commentary on the event and broadcast it. I proudly consider it as a true cultural expansion as people were keeping asking me the recipes of dishes I had cooked then or the song names Karin performed in the gallery. Additionally, I also held movie screenings in the gallery and local university regarding the Armenian genocide to honor innocent people slaughtered by the Empire and Martin Luther king to open up on current discriminations and inequality we are facing daily followed by heated discussions and quizzes.

The fourth initiative was a cooking workshop in the retirement house in Ruzomberok, I had visited the elderly for a couple of times before, and by the way they helped me a great deal to learn Slovak. They knew me well, that is why I decided to also bring here the other fellow volunteers and do a multicultural cuisine day. The elderly were so much into knowing the ingredients of our recipes; they were asking questions, trying to hold a conversation with us. In the end, we sat around the table together and tasted food. They enjoyed and we managed to make a day a big feast for them.





Definitely, I was visiting local secondary, high schools for 3-4 times in a week mainly in spring and fall alongside with my friends to assist in English and sometimes Russian classes. We were in constant touch with teachers to know what we need to prepare for the coming lessons. In summertime we were also participating in camps to help coordinators schedule activities for kids.

One of my tasks was also visiting a kindergarten twice a week in Ruzomberok and helping kids with English. It was a bit challenging, as nobody was speaking English there, but I overcame the obstacle and learnt some of the most crucial expressions to talk to them.

Long live Russian for supporting me to learn Slovak! :D






Also, I cooperated with our other volunteers to organise a training course aided by Erasmus plus about volunteering management. It was difficult but at the same time interesting, as lastly I was given a chance to develop leadership and public speaking skills at a larger scale as I was leading some sessions. We wrote the whole program activities, contacted with speakers, arranged their coffee breaks.

Being volunteers ourselves I think it was a good practice to hear specifically from us what volunteers are mostly in need to adapt to the new country faster and start the project in a way more productively. It was fun all in all.


The most majestic thing my friends and I worked hard on during volunteering and can be considered our own success was the youth exchange “Startup your future” supported by Erasmus plus. We came up with the idea, filled out the application form, and submitted the program of activities, contacted speakers. You can imagine how difficult it might have been for us as newcomers in the field to deal with 30 people from five different countries but we did it.








Our teamwork lived up to our expectations. This is a number one project I am and will always be proud of that I have been a part of. We brought five young people per group aged 18-30 from Russia, Armenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Spain and Greece to sit together and discuss the idea of entrepreneurship, how people establish business, we tried to encourage them to initiate their own projects.




As I have always had a curious eye for social media, I also tried to manage content planning for Mladiinfo Dolny Kubin and Ruzomberok on Facebook and Instagram. Engagement grew over 20% on both accounts.



I also helped the other fellow volunteers to organise welcome parties for Erasmus students who travelled to Ruzomberok to study at the university for one semester.

I would never imagine myself to do fence painting, but I did with IBM workers.

You might ask how I dare to do so many things; the key secret essentially lies just in approaching people and talking to them. As I did a million of times speaking to the vice director of a highschool, teachers, librarians, gallery coordinator. I just offered ideas and they approved it, supported these ideas to bring into fruition.



# Don't be afraid to make big changes!

Since the very first day, I had known this one year should be truly fruitful in many effects. I made a vow to myself to be as active as possible, show my true self and be worth a good appraisal.

## Set goals before you start anything!

In result, I got selected one of the three best foreign volunteers of 2018/2019 across Slovakia. In compliance to this busy schedule I created for myself there, I successfully managed to often hang out with friends. Almost every weekend was an excuse to go hiking in the High Tatras or just any nearby forest or cave.

Friends from all over Europe are one of the most important advantages EVS rewarded me. Now I am sure I have a family in any European country, they are there to back up my ideas, support me .

There's a popular saying that reads

**"DON'T HAVE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS, HAVE MILLIONS OF FRIENDS."**

This is true as that was one of the reasons I fell head over heels in love with Slovakia. You might ask why? My bond with the country has been so strong by now due to some of the special people who stepped into my heart and built a cozy nest in here. Now I only understand it was not Slovakia that made me cry so badly upon departure, but **people**.



In a year I managed to travel all over Slovakia and absolutely immerse in the culture to feel more connected to people.

Now I would confidently say that Slovakia is my second home, Sometimes even people could not identify whether I am a local or not.

Besides, for exchanging my knowledge with locals, I also did not miss the opportunity to brush up my set of skills. I took part in training courses in Novi Sad, Liptovsky Mikulas, and Nitra on topics like public advocacy, modern means of teaching, journalistic tools. In result, I wrote two articles and they are now published accordingly in organizers' websites.





# I WAS FRIGHTENED TO BE ABLE TO BUILD A NETWORK IN SLOVAKIA.



Different people, different mindsets, different cultures... internally I was uncertain if I could get along with the locals or not. Maybe they might not enjoy my presence there and I will exhaust them easily.

*I was wrong.*

Exactly on the second day of my journey, while I was traveling to Ruzomberok with my heavy suitcase, when I knew only two words in Slovak ( Ahoj! and Dakujem), a middle-aged man helped me to carry my heavy suitcase along the aisle on the train.

A week later when I was again on the train to get to the police station for my residency permit, we weren't yet figuring out well about the train routes, I doubtfully dared to approach an old man who was sitting next to us in the same cabin, and tried to ask him in my fetus Slovak what stop we had to get out. He so pleasantly explained to me, then as he noticed we were foreigners, he started a chat with us to know why we had come to Slovakia. In 10 mins, the chat got so appealing, I didn't even see how fast time was flying by listening to his family story, surprisingly enough I was also speaking somehow about myself in Slovak 🌍.



I remember when I got invited by a school teacher to teach English there for a week. The whole teaching staff demonstrated such a warm attitude towards me. I was so moved when every single morning for a week she was specially preparing breakfast for me because I had to be in the school at 7:55 a.m. for my classes and the hotel breakfast time was at 11:00 a.m.

When teachers were inviting me to join them for a hike. Parents of kids were socializing with me in such a caring way as if I was one of them.

This all might seem minor things to you. But these unique moments made my stay in Slovakia unforgettable. These moments always make me reflect upon those joyful days I was spending with friends from all over the world. Our differences were what united us so tightly, we became a powerful family of like-minded soulmates by both laughing at each other head off and reaching out to one another in any circumstances.



# WHY DID I FEEL SO COMFORTABLE IN THIS SMALL TOWN?

I was born into a comparably big city, so since the early childhood I grew accustomed to hustling "bees", vibrant environment where everybody is occupied with their jobs and household chores. Nobody has a minute to stop, chill out because if they relax for a bit, time will go against them. That's why I was looking to move to this peaceful town away from urban hustle and bustle.

Ruzomberok is squeezed between splendid mountains and spruce forests. I felt like I was translated into a fairytale where anyone just tried to live every single moment. Time was ticking fast, but people seemed to have been transformed into a slow living mode. It was way pleasant and helpful. At the start, when I was going out for a walk, I was feeling like the apocalypse broke out in town. However, here you enable your mind to rest from overthinking, you are energised, first off, to prioritize your health.

They taught me that mental and physical health comes first. Especially, at the beginning I was stunned to see older people jogging in the mornings, hiking and camping in the mountains, walking hundreds of miles.



Everybody was living his own life. Most importantly nobody was poking his nose into others' privacy like it's widely accepted in South Caucasus.

People were very generous and lovely once I found the right approach to get closer to them. I remember how my landlady was often bringing fresh apples from her orchard or chocolate biscuits. She was like a mom to us, helping us whenever we had an issue in the apartment.

I felt differently appreciated for what I was doing when i was kindly greeted by students on the streets with whom I had had English classes or presentations at schools. I felt like an integrated part of this town. Anytime I was asking a local about anything they were wholeheartedly helping me out. This is what has warmed me up about this super cozy place.

We truly built a wide community there.

And I am pretty happy that I have managed to build good relationships with them all and continue to keep in touch by now.

**REMEMBER** any experience meant to bring new priceless skills and people to our life nothing could be replaced with.



# MOJE SLOVENSKO JE NAJLEPŠE...

No, it's not a part of Russia. Yeh both countries have somewhat in common. Anyway, both countries inevitably have Slavic roots.

However, Slovakia occupies a special place in my heart, probably the reason is I have lived in this culture for a year and more or less managed to grasp their points of view over certain things, like daily routine, shopping, cooking, got to have many friends who helped me to get acquainted with the real Slovak soul.



# Slovakia is a land of castles.

If you're history driven enthusiast, you should have this country in your bucket list to visit.

I've been in many sites there, but two places really made me fall head over heels with their country, history and people.



**1. Bojnice** is one of the most visited castles in Slovakia built in the 12th century. Apart from being a popular tourist attraction, it was also widely known being a filming stage for fantasy and fairy tale movies. It is a Romanesque castle with some Gothic and Romanian elements.



One peculiar thing that is really attention grabbing here is the theatrical performance. As soon as you step into the castle, actors dressed up as historical figures who then played essential roles in reconstruction of the castle, walk you through all rooms, corridors by telling the story of each corner. It's a magnificent experience.



**2. Orava's** located on a high rock above Orava river in the village Oravsky podzamok. It was built in the 13th century in the kingdom of Hungary. Many scenes of the 1922 film Nosferatu were filmed here representing Count Orlok's Transylvanian castle. It's in Romanesque and Gothic styles. The Turzo family, one of the richest in the Austro-hungarian kingdom took a charge of the castle in the mid16th century. The Turzo family is the clan this popular castle has a lot to thank for rebuilding after fire.

Orava is the place where you totally get immersed in medieval times and for some time forget what era you're living in now.





# Slovakia is a land of the gooddest food




In this country you have to forget what is dieting and losing weight. Portions of food are so delicious you can't say a no.

Below are 4 super delish dishes I'm still craving:

**Halušky** is number 1 dish I fell head over heels in love with. It's so flavorful. One spoonful is enough to melt down your throat and make you want more. Halušky is a traditional type of thick and soft noodles made with special sheep cheese. It's often served up with well-fried small pieces of pork.








**Soups** require a special attention. I really enjoyed tomato soup with melted cheese. Probably as the country is close to the northern Europe, hot soups are widespread in all cafes and restaurants.



**Fried cheese and french fries with raspberry jam** for me was a bit weird to chew. The combination of these tastes "salty and sweet-sour" is just unmatched for me. Yet, I continued to order it from time to time having the waiter alerted in advance about my preferences.



**Pirohy** or **dumplings with sheep cheese**. Initially, I was thinking they were the same Georgian khinkali, and frankly speaking, more or less they are alike. It's a spoonful of sheep cheese wrapped with dough served up with sour yoghurt and fried pieces of pork or green onion.

What seems the most mouthwatering to you?



# Slovakia is a land of untouched flora and fauna




If you are nature driven enthusiast, if you feel like nature is calling you to its cuddle, then this country will amaze your eyes.

**Orava river** passes through the picturesque territory of the Orava county in the northwest. It flows into another river Vah. Locals love to go rafting or kayaking on this river.

My friends and I also did kayaking but it wasn't the best experience. We were making eternal circles around the river. I was feeling frightened as only in 15 mins we could hardly get to the bank.







**Vah** is one of those water resources I was walking by every single day to get to the bus stop. Very often I was noticing some fishermen carrying sweep nets into the water to catch fishes.

**Orawskie jaziero**(lake) was another jaw-dropping site. It's located at the border with Poland. It's a water reservoir which fostered the protection of forests from erosion.

**Liptovska Mara** is a reservoir in northern Slovakia. When first time I visited the lake, the impression was like as if I had been transported to Iceland. The view looked wild.



**The High Tatras** is a range of mountains Slovaks hugely take a pride in. It's their most favourite place to go hiking and camping. It's located on the border with Poland. As far as I remember this sight, it has always been thinly covered with snow.



# I WARDED OFF A COUPLE OF STEREOTYPES

EVS was a time when I discovered many hidden gems, visited millions of breathtaking sights, met many inspiring people, broke hundreds of stereotypes.

★ Russians are reluctant to reach out to the needies.

★ I've heard this statement so often before.

★ Since the very start when the airplane landed in Moscow, there hasn't been a single Russian speaking citizen we approached and didn't get a right support.



★ We landed in Moscow at 23:00. It was already pretty late, and we were pretty knocked out to pull together and turn on sound conscience. We couldn't find a way out of the big airport.



Hardly could we get out of the airport, we didn't know how to continue our way to get to the hotel. It was probably a fortunate coincidence I noticed a Russian boy approaching us who later turned out to be on the same flight from Gyumri as we had been. He helped us get to the bus stop.

Even due to his efforts we saved 100 rubles 🙏 by not paying the driver. (In Yerevan the system is different, the boy hadn't warned us and we didn't know). He guided us all the way to the metro station. We exchanged contacts in case he might come to Armenia again or we might go to Moscow. I even passed him a list of sights to visit next time in Armenia.

However, I didn't even ask his name 🙏 but then he looked like a angelic creature to my eyes who happened to be at the right place and right time.

On the wagon also another woman fondly explained us the structure of metro station, where we needed to get off as you might know the Russian metro looks like a ball of yarn. When we were breathlessly running to transfer from one route to another, people inside the wagon held the doors for us as if not to close. We couldn't contain our excitement when we get out of the station and there was the hotel in front of us.





We had only one day to saunter through this majestic city. Certainly, we visited one of the most important historical sites. It was the **Red square**. It was breathtaking moment to walk through a site which witnessed so many historic events, which welcomed so many important public figures. It was freezing but cold weather didn't stop us from feeling the greatness of this megapolis.



# Viennese magical spell...



A few days later after my arrival I headed to Vienna for Christmas with a friend. I wanted to feel the real Christmas spirit we had so much heard and watched in movies.

I believed there was a certain magic about European way of celebrating Christmas: socks hanging by the chimney, mistletoes on the doors, constant visits to Christmas markets, jingle bells floating in the air, smell of hot wine, people all buying beautifully wrapped presents for their loved ones despite their ages. This all seemed pretty magical to me as in Armenia firstly, our Christmas is celebrated in a very religious way on a different day. More festive is the New Year, but it starts and ends around a table of numerous meaty dishes and alcohol, nothing more.







Vienna was another eye-opening experience. As I was studying German, I decided to buy a book to brush up my language skills.

I went up to a stall of books, I was looking over the books, christmas postcards, magnets to take back to Slovakia, discussing things with my friend in Armenian when suddenly the guy behind the counter replied to me in Armenian. We were shocked as we weren't expecting to meet any Armenian in the middle of Vienna. That was really surprising. His colleague got so stunned by listening to our Armenian conversation. Furthermore, this Armenian guy even told us where the Armenian church was located in Vienna. We went and found it, but it was closed. Anyway, we had a short talk with one of the members of the Armenian community in Vienna. We kept in touch with him later.





I will definitely suggest if you find a compatriot abroad, don't lose connections with them. You are in a foreign country, the best person who will reach out to your call of support, will be your compatriot, even though you have never met each other before.





I have also visited Vienna in summertime. We went there to celebrate my friend's birthday. We sauntered through the whole downtown. I think now I know every corner of the Viennese centre. But this time we didn't limit ourselves to only walking squares, streets and watching monuments, in Vienna. Also, we bought tickets to visit the **Leopard museum** for the **Gustav Klimt** exhibition and the museum of **Sigmund Freud**.





Travelling doesn't only mean to rush from one site to another to take photo of as many places as possible. Often we have to slow down to enjoy and get to know the details, architectural ornaments, get acquainted with those remarkable faces who shaped the world's views, made the city stand out from others. Learning the histories of cities allows us to picture and understand the stories, fates of people who live there.



# The Country of 'fire'

Probably I am one of those weird people who have never been in love with Spain and anything that's related to the country of fire.

My heart belonged to somewhere else, It's alive even today. My friends might guess what I'm speaking about.



However, I travelled to Spain for one week, in particular Valencia as one of my friends who was also a volunteer in Slovakia, invited us to his place and we accepted the offer.

Why not, there would be no need to rent a room in a hostel, every day take care of food, just enjoy time there.





It was the beginning of March- a period of time when all of Valencian folks no matter young or old get out to the streets to celebrate the biggest festival of the year - **Fallas festival**.

From early morning till late night they were non- stop singing and playing their musical instruments. Hundreds of women, men, children were wearing their traditional costumes that seemed pretty thick and heavy to have on in the extremely hot temperature. At dawn everybody was gathering in the downtown to watch the fireworks. Until now I can't get the meaning of blowing fireworks in the daylight, but they were screaming and whistling so loudly to these blow ups. All days in and out were eternal parties in tents. There was even a song which we danced to in these days in Valencia, since then it has become the symbol of our friendship.







Since February wooden dolls of different shapes and colors were being built specially for Fallas days. Later on, after the festival they were burned down as a sign of fertility and ressurence of nature.

I felt like a local in Valencia. My friend's mum was cooking a variety of mouthwatering dishes. But paella still remains my favorite.

In Valencia first time ever I have been at sea. It was springtime and quite breezy, but a number of people were noticed on the beaches running. I was wearing swimsuits, though it was still cold for swimsuits...my swimming skills weren't at the best. The Mediterranean sea looked mind-blowing.





The one thing I can't yet forget: it was the smell of orange trees on the streets, while walking by them, the wind felt like odoring us with orange smell. I was surprised at seeing that nobody was approaching to pick one orange. Branches of trees were so heavily bended.



# Gone Greek forever

The next country I had planned so long and traveled to was a real dream that came true. It was my Ellada, my **Greece**. Again it was for one week. As I speak Greek at some level, it was totally a different experience to be there, see everything in the reality, compare what was true and what was fake as read in the books. I was hosted by one of my fellow EVS friends.



Greece showed off its warm hospitality from the very first moment I stepped there. On the metro station I got into conversation with a Greek girl in Greek, we kept conversing together until I got off, exchanged contacts, by now we are close friends. Since the very first day, I dared to stroll in the city, felt closer to the culture.







One day when I was coming back home alone after a long walk, i was trying to unlock the door, a Greek woman approached and told me I was using the wrong key, this way we got into conversation and she would never guess I wasn't a local if I hadn't

let her know.

My Greek journey wouldn't be complete if I hadn't visited the **Acropolis**, ancient temples of gods, museums where all Hellenic history was honorably exhibited. I was literally living my dreams.

As for Greek food, let me just stay silent for it. It was hyperlicious, if there's such a word to describe.

I spent five unbelievable days in **Athens** and 2 days in another town, **Rafina** which is the second biggest port in Greece. From here people set out on the road to **Mykonos** - one of the popular islands for vacations. And exactly in Rafina I got so sunburnt I was scared I wouldn't be able to go back to Bratislava. I wonder who had told me to lie in the sun on the beach all day long?





The Aegean sea was a piece of heaven, it was so blue, so clean, so beautiful i couldn't stop admiring. Hope I will be able to be back there soon. Greece looks like a real paradise God has gifted us even though Adam and Eve ate the forbidden apple and got cursed away from the Eden.

I will never cease to admire Greece.



## Why????!!

Because it's different. It proudly stands on its own solid soil holding more hearts in captivity. It continues to capture everybody's attention due to its vivid difference from the others. The difference makes it special. It has gone through a timeline of economical crisis. Once it was even the bad man of Europe. The mass media didn't stop to throw a dirt towards it. However, presently it's one of the rarest countries which more or less succeeded in the fight against the invisible enemy. Only after this some popular media published articles to praise its success. And today I don't know anyone who leaves this country disappointed.



# The Balkan adventures

Another country I have been to was absolutely an unplanned trip. It was Serbia. The Balkans are actually both different and similar to Europe. Balkan countries both share things in common



with Europe and South Caucasus. People were too friendly; I felt like I was a local there, but also were keeping distance, were never poking into others' privacy.

I arrived in **Novi Sad** in the middle of night at 4 a.m. You might ask how I wasn't scared in a new city. You know when you feel confident and strong inside, others also feel it, never dare to approach. You can't believe but I started another cosy conversation with the taxi driver who took me to the hotel. He was speaking Serbian and I was obviously speaking English.

## Long live Slovak!





I was in Novi Sad for three days for a one training about public advocacy. Again I found so many friends from the Balkan countries. Three days in a row were about partying hard in the clubs and bars with those super crazy people. We were even playing weird outdoor games in the square, screaming out loud, thus drawing everybody's attention to us outside. It was a long journey, because I had to cross Hungary to get to Serbia, but totally worth it.





No travel is done without paying a visit to a fortress or castle. So, i also visited the **Petrovaradin fortress** there. It served as a shelter and warehouse for the military men to keep their weapons there during the wars, get to their enemies' military bases in disguise through secret passageways of the fortress.





# Real Disney city discovered

The Czech Republic is a must for everyone. This country has so much to tell and offer. First, we went to **Brno**- a small city with a big heart. The most impressive was **St. Peter and Paul's cathedral**, we went up the tower for the overlooking view of the city. Here I fell for the creamy trdelník with a lot of chocolate. The best ever thing to eat while sauntering in peaceful Brno in the evenings. We climbed up the mountain as well to see the castle but it was unfortunately closed.







Prague seemed like a city from a Disney movie- narrow streets, Romanesque buildings, a castle, lots of people outside. Especially, the Charles bridge looked heavenly, when the dusk set. In Prague we didn't lose the opportunity to visit another museum dedicated to a well-known author, **Franz Kafka**. The interesting fact about this museum was that it was constructed in the way that the rooms started telling the stories of Kafka's vivid childhood memories up to the modern days of his adulthood.



# City of Dragons



Krakow, a city in Poland that changed me upside down. It is a city which catches every history-driven enthusiast and dragon lover. This is the city of stories and legends. The trip to Krakow had been constantly postponed due to some circumstances, but as it says **“better late than never”**. We were there for three days, but now I think we needed more to explore the city vibe out there. For your information, the main square we were walking by every day is the largest in Central Europe. We had a real tour around the city with a tour guide who fondly explained the story of every corner, every building, every street, every church.





The Wawel castle deserves a mention here, it was one of the most splendid castles ever seen and still in perfect condition.

The Auschwitz and Birkenau concentration camps emotionally hit me really hard. it was so heartbreaking to enter a building, a room where a century ago innocent people were harassed, tortured, starved to death.






# HOW DID EVS IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF MY LIFE?

★ I will be honest with you all. The first month was desperately tearful to overcome. I was demonstrating too nostalgic behaviour in terms of putting up with my old environment. I felt I was disconnected from everything. I was literally comparing anything to what I got accustomed to see on a daily basis in Slovakia. Even a thought sparked in mind why I had returned to Armenia.


★ Life in Slovakia seemed too perfect, I wasn't ready to leave it. I was there all on my own organising my day, making important decisions about plans, cooking, cleaning. I was the only one to control my lifestyle. I gained the freedom I had been craving for so long.

Back to Armenia after a one-month depression I resolved to pull together and take my further life into my hands. I set a goal to dive in digital marketing, to become an on-demand expert. I knew it would be going to be a long way, but I was determined to record another achievement aimed at boosting my personal brand. ★





After properly having laid out all my recently piled-up experience, I turned into sending my resume and motivational letters to some of the most relevant vacancies. Sometimes the response was coming in no time, sometimes the email message would get totally disregarded without a single explanation. I was getting disappointed but I was sure I would find where I was supposed to belong to. I was having interviews after interviews, everybody was praising my perseverance of doing a project abroad so successfully, nonetheless, most often I wasn't getting offers due to the lack of specific experience in digital marketing.

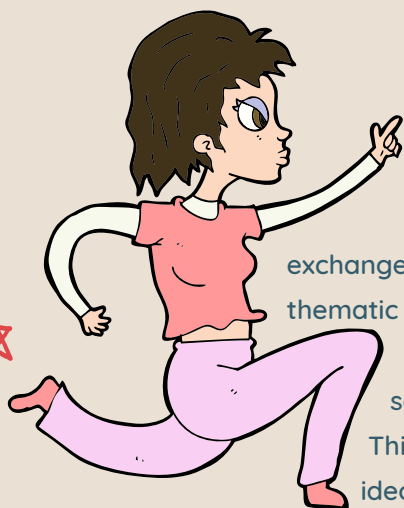


I didn't lose my faith in positioning myself in this super rapidly evolving field. I was continuously seeking new opportunities to help me fill this gap.

Luckily, one day I came across a Facebook ad which was encouraging to apply to a recruitment program for three months to learn about the specifics of the digital marketing. It was the Growth formula. I opened the form and right away started filling it out, but some inner voice held me back by persuading to stop, I still had a lot to improve myself for this particular program.



# GO THE EXTRA MILE!



Participation in three training courses, organisation of a youth exchange and a training course, armenian thematic party, workshops on writing CVs and motivation letter, movie screenings, lots of teaching, etc.


This one more time validates the ideology that it all falls on us how

we spend time. I could just travel to a few countries, do 2 or 3 presentations a week at schools, sit at home and waste the pocket money, drink alcohol.


But I understood once I applied to the program, I took a huge accountability of my further steps why I was there, I had to undertake things that would compensate the financial support EU contributed in me to stay there for a year. I had to accomplish those things that would later foster my self-development and positioning in the society. I knew I had to pick the maximum out of EVS. In result, managed to have one article published in a Slovak youth magazine about climate change, an article was written about my successful activities at schools, later published on the school's website.








Don't ever do things in  
the sake of just doing it  
because it's modern nowadays,  
because everyone does it, first ask  
yourself if it is what YOU want,  
not parents, relatives,  
neighbors.




Remember every project you take part in, should bring you value. Every step you take should be conscious. Have in your mind, later you may not have the same time and resources to repeat.



Well, after a year of joyful and mischievous moments, European freedom, creativity flow, outings with craziest friends, living in an apartment with like-minded mates, traveling nonstop, less responsibilities back home seemed quite distressing.

2019 seemed another spectacular lifespan in the parallel world where I tried to discover a new me. Every EVS story is unique in its own way full of some ups and downs, momentums of happiness and disappointment, cultural shocks, surprises, smiles, all-day long chats. Once you opt in for this experience, you expose yourself to different situations where sometimes you'll have to stay sound and accept as it is as it's new for you, but completely normal in the local community.

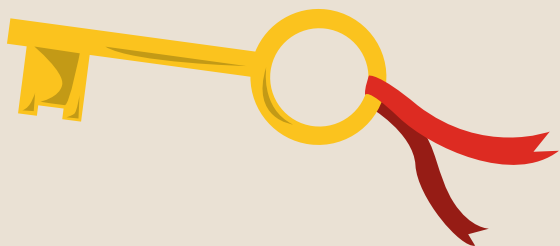




Finishing up EVS and returning home is like closing an important life door you're not yet ready to say a goodbye to where you weren't you, even better you would like to be so back home as well, but it's impossible. Because at home old patriarchal clichés are still dominant. Living in a host country during EVS looks like a life on another planet where you're disconnected from the whole world and enjoy what you've so long desired to get.

Coming back honestly I felt like I had been cut out of this reality, I didn't anymore belong to this place. Everything seemed strange. Longings for those past irreplaceable days were chasing me anywhere. It was too good to be true.

First 3 months were the hardest to cope with homies again. Afterwards, I realised unstoppable reflections wouldn't make me go further. EVS gave me a key to open a door to other opportunities and I determined to let them in.




# DON'T BE AFRAID TO GO BEYOND THE ORDINARY ROUTE.


I had been permanently receiving the same question over time from the eldest why I had been wasting time by volunteering. How it would be going to support me to find a job and earn money. Better I just had paid more attention to the studies.

Once and for all, I want to make it clear. Times have by far changed dramatically. What was then regarded a proper education today is nonsense. There were not then so many opportunities available literally for anyone to educate themselves both in formal and non-formal contexts. Education isn't only about sitting in the classroom for hours, learning texts by heart, getting good grades for what you've learnt by heart. It's much more. Talking to a passer-by on the street may also be observed as an aspect of education because you listen to his story, pick the best from it, later on maybe imitate his behaviour, or he may inspire you to go and read the book you've been calling off so far. Education is about not limiting yourself to broader expansions. It happens anywhere anytime. Being educated means to free up yourself off all the existing clichés, taboos long reigning in the society, being educated means to overcome all the barriers to reach your goals.





All my previous volunteering experiences, EVS combined all together made me feel strong and powerful. Especially, it brought so many cool people to my life. My network was what contributed greatly my self development. Volunteering during uni years helps you appear in professional platforms, test your skills in real and see what gaps you still need to work on. Volunteering is your 1st step to position yourself in the job market.




Any experience we have, be it good or bad, gives us a key to more opportunities, helps us become the better versions of ourselves.



*Be curious, ask questions, travel.*

The aforementioned example of Greece may relate to many of us not to be afraid to be different.

It's ok not to track down the traditional path, but walk your own way. It's ok to fall down sometimes, get up, resist all hardships, gossips, move forward. It is normal to do what you've been called to do no matter who comes against you. You have to find the path that brings you to fulfillment and happiness even though if it means to go against the traditional path your family has long paved for you.



Difference means you're unique, you do something better than others. Difference means you overlook things on your own way, it means you're able to show off a critical approach to your life decisions, weigh them in, then bring to fruition. Being different means you're now an adult to take the course of life into your own hands. Being different from what society has always dreamed to make out of you is ok, and it already upscales you from others.

Be different and seize more because it's always hard for people to believe in your power in the beginning of what you start. When you get to your destination, when fortune smiles upon you, everyone suddenly becomes so proud, everybody starts flooding you with the most universal appraising words. All in all, what you needed was their support at the very start, not in the moment of limelight.

**So always trust yourself.**

**You are your best friend,  
accomplice, partner.**

**It's you who knows both your strong  
and weak sides at the bestest.**



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