

## **Candice Griffiths (Modern and Medieval Languages) - Berlin, Easter 2017**

I set off to Berlin in the hope of polishing my spoken German in preparation for the upcoming oral examination and came back with so much more. My two week's stay far exceeded my expectations as it developed my linguistic, cultural and social understanding of this iconic city.

I stayed with an elderly German couple in East Berlin who really were the perfect hosts, giving an authentic insight into Eastern Germany beyond the classroom. Gerd has a passion for cooking and created a typical German masterpiece every evening. Whilst sampling the German cuisine, they would share stories of their experiences in the GDR, which gave a personal touch to the facts I had learnt at school. They talked fondly of their time in a divided Germany, showing a real sense of 'ostalgia.' Contrary to what my school text books had suggested about East Germans, they had no desire to flee to the West and now miss many aspects of their life back then, particularly the level of gender equality that Christa felt existed in that society and has since evaporated.

I attended morning lessons at the DiD Deutsch-Institut where the mix of nationalities meant that the only common language was German, thereby leaving us unable to fall back on our native tongues in the face of linguistic challenges, which forced us to persevere and find creative German solutions. This skill proved invaluable in the exam. I spent the afternoons of the first week exploring the vibrant city with students from my class, visiting everywhere from the large touristy monuments and museums to quirky underground bars and smaller independent galleries. During the afternoons of the second week I completed work experience at a hotel, where my tasks were to man the reception, taking care of arrivals, phone calls and incoming electronic bookings. Taking phone calls in German was initially quite daunting but as the days went by, I became more able in this role. The hotel team was extremely friendly and supportive, which made the afternoon shifts here lots of fun.

Not only did this trip increase my proficiency in German, but it improved my confidence and gave me a greater cultural understanding of Berlin and its history. It was an action-packed, engaging and enlightening trip where I learnt so much at the school, with my hosts, at work, and out and about exploring.