

Claire Burchett - St. Petersburg, Summer 2017

This summer I spent two months studying and working in St. Petersburg. The programme at the Liden & Denz language school was perfect for me: I worked there as a blogger doing occasional translations and in exchange had free language classes in the morning.

The teaching was of a really high standard and the classes proved to be an excellent complement and boost to the skills I had acquired throughout the year. The teachers managed to weave in grammar revision with culture topics and the class groups were small enough that I got a lot of speaking practice. Staying in Russia until the end of August meant I felt a lot more confident going into my oral exam at the end of September.

My work as a blogger for the school meant I was constantly trying to find inspiration around the city so I could write interesting (and occasionally even funny) blogs for foreign students to read and maybe feel inspired to come to Russia and learn Russian. I discovered St. Petersburg's vegan scene, went on a rooftop tour which included some fascinating architectural facts about the city, collected some Russian proverbs and found out about little-known traditions. And it was always a good excuse to try out a restaurant or café that I fancied! Although it was not my first time in the city, there were still plenty of tourist attractions I had not managed to visit yet so I really enjoyed being able to tick a few more lesser-known ones off my list, such as Peter the Great's Botanical Gardens and the Museum of the Defence of Leningrad.

I loved the international environment the school promoted, a few of the interns stayed for the same length of time as me and it was great to meet people from Switzerland, Italy, France and Sweden who all shared the same goals of improving their Russian language. The informal atmosphere meant that by the end of the course I counted many of the staff as friends, and they provided me with insights into Russian culture that are impossible to fully grasp whilst in Cambridge.

I also managed to go to Moscow for a weekend, which I visited several times during my term abroad in Yaroslavl and absolutely loved. It was wonderful to see it in the summer sunshine and show my friend around who had never been before. Red Square never ceases to impress me, and the sheer scale of the Moscow metro is incredible.

By the end of my trip I felt completely at home in St. Petersburg, it is a beautiful city and as my Russian improved I felt more at ease there. The only down side was the incessant rain! However, my time there was hugely important and I now feel ready and motivated for my final year of study.

Many thanks to Pembroke for helping make this trip possible with their generous financial contribution.