

Anna Mochar – St Petersburg, September 2018

This September, I spent three weeks in Russia, taking a language course at the Benedict School in St. Petersburg. I chose to this particular course, as it was recommended by the Department of Slavonic Studies and as an ex-ab initio student of Russian, I realised that this would be an invaluable opportunity to build on the language skills I acquired during my first year of studies. I am, therefore, extremely grateful to Pembroke College for their generous travel grant, without which I would not have been able to seize this opportunity to visit Russia for the first time in my life, while taking improving my language skills with my course mates from Cambridge.

The course providers arranged homestay accommodation for us in St. Petersburg. This was a wonderful way of being immersed in Russian life for three weeks. My host was extremely kind and did her utmost to make sure I made the most of my time in St. Petersburg, giving me tips for restaurants, museums, and introducing me to many traditional Russian dishes. Having hour-long one-on-one conversations with my host in Russian was exhausting at first, but did wonders for my comprehension skills and made me less shy about speaking Russian. In this way, living with a host family did almost as much for my language skills as the course did.

While the mornings on weekdays were taken up by lessons, we had the afternoons and weekends off and we were free to make our own plans to fill this time. In this regard, we were spoiled for choice, as St. Petersburg and its environs are incredibly rich in culture in history. Visiting authors' homes, art museums, former royal palaces, and other sights was a wonderful way of making the cultural side of my Russian course at Cambridge more immediate to me than it had ever been before. I was stunned by the cultural wealth of the city and this trip has made me keen to return to St. Petersburg on my year abroad next year.

Overall, this trip was a unique experience. I advanced my abilities in speaking and understanding Russian and was also able to improve my cultural knowledge of Russia's past and present through visits to many varied museums. Finally, I would once again like to thank Pembroke College for making this trip possible for me through their financial help.