

Ciara Rowland-Simms (Physics) - Lyon, France, Summer 2015

During the 2015 long vacation I spent two weeks living with a French host and studying at a local language school in Lyon. I had visited Lyon once before during a French exchange at the age of 14. Having vague but very fond memories of the city I thought it would be an excellent place to begin patching back up and furthering my knowledge of the French language.

My host fortunately spoke very little English, giving me ample practice speaking outside of classes, which consisted of five 45 minute lessons each day. After lessons finished there were activities available such as food and wine tasting as well as a few tours of famous areas of Lyon, which I booked myself in to as often as possible. Lyon is a city with a great deal of fascinating history and the school organised some tours of areas such as Vieux Lyon and the Musée Urbain Tony Garnier.

The tour of Vieux Lyon allowed us to walk through the old 'traboules' which run through the courtyards of the houses, directly connecting the streets. We were told that residents agreed to these doors which allowed us through being open during the main hours of the day in exchange for the local authorities paying for their electricity bills. The tour was done entirely in French, which was challenging with my very basic knowledge, but I picked up enough of the general meaning to still get a lot out of it and being fully immersed in the language was definitely one of my favourite parts of the experience.

As I mentioned my host spoke very little English and sharing meal times with her gave me a great chance to practice my French and we both managed to make ourselves understood with relatively little difficulty. Speaking to her gave me an insight into some of the more surprising parts of Lyon's living history, for example her apartment flat is opposite a Jewish school, which a year before had been the victim of a car bomb attack, giving an indication of some cultural issues still rife within Lyon which were certainly not obvious in the city centre and other parts of the city easily accessible to tourists.

The lessons moved at a slightly slower pace than I would have liked. I think this was mostly due to the fact that, although I had forgotten much of my French GCSE which required me to be in a beginner class, I was able to pick up the parts I had learnt before fairly quickly as it was essentially recap. I combatted this by asking for extra homework and did not find it to be a huge issue. The entire lesson was taught in French and all of the staff spoke French and indeed most of my classmates had as basic English as I had French, resulting in constant exposure to the language and as a result I now feel much more confident at understanding French, even if I didn't progress as much as I'd have liked with speaking.

I absolutely loved Lyon, from its music to its food to its fantastic free museums - and would definitely like to go back. I would perhaps choose a different school or request a higher stream of class if I did go again. I plan to continue chipping away at my French, with my current plan being to read *Le Petit Prince* in original language, translating as I go. My time in Lyon was wonderful and I have no doubt that the memories and language skills gained will stay with me for a very long time!