

Isabel Husband – Russia, Summer 2015

This summer I was fortunate enough to travel to Russia for 3 weeks in order to complete a course at the Benedict School in central St Petersburg. The course was organised by RLUS and took place in September. My main objective was to develop my vocabulary and understanding of Russian language, but also to encounter Russian culture and history on a closer level, especially as I am studying Russian ab initio. I took language lessons for 3 hours a day in the afternoon, and there were 10 students in every class. The topic of our classes alternated from day to day: we practiced either grammar or speaking, and studied vocabulary, the mass media and cinema, which was by far my favourite and consisted of watching a Russian film and discussing the events and characters of the film.

The location of the school was fantastic as it was a short walk from the main road, Nevskii Prospekt. This enabled us to reach the centre of the city quickly, and make the most out of our time there.

When we were not studying, we spent a lot of time exploring the city of St Petersburg. We visited nearly all of the main sites, such as St Isaac's Cathedral, the Peter and Paul Fortress, the Church on the Spilt Blood and the Bronze Horseman. We were already familiar with the latter, as we had studied a poem of Pushkin, which is both an ode to Peter I (to whom the statue is dedicated) and a mythology of the creation of the city of Petersburg. We went on a bus tour, which helped to acquaint us with the city. On the weekends, we went to the Hermitage or on day trips outside of the city. During this time, we managed to see Catherine's Palace in Pushkin, and palace and gardens in Peterhof.

We also went to some sports events. We went to see Zenith football club play one weekend, and later went to see the ice hockey. The latter experience was a highlight of the trip: the atmosphere within the arena was incredible: music was played within the arena every time the home team scored.

I stayed in a local hostel (which they called a hotel), along with most of my course mates on the trip. We were near several 'stolovaya', which is a Russian version of a canteen. Eating out in Russia was better, and cheaper than any of us had realised. The range of food available is rather varied, however the best restaurants were those linked to Caucasian cuisine, such as Armenian or Georgian. We also discovered a great vegan restaurant, a Dostoevskii-themed one and an old Soviet doughnut shop.

I would highly recommend this language course! I hugely enjoyed my time on this trip: it allowed me to get to grips with parts of Russian culture that I had not yet engaged with, I became closer to many of my course mates, and most of all, it has made me certain that I would like to spend my Year Abroad in St Petersburg.