

## **Laura Blomvall (English) – Uruguay, September 2012**

I travelled to Montevideo, Uruguay, 14<sup>th</sup> September 2012. I stayed there for ten days. I lived with a young student, Nefeli Ferni, who is half Uruguayan, half Greek. We spoke mostly in English and French, but she also helped me with my Spanish. I attended lectures in her university, Universidad ORT Uruguay, which is a member of World ORT, an international education network founded in 1880 by the Jewish community in St. Petersburg, Russia. After getting used to the Latin American pronunciation, I was able to understand and participate in the lectures, which were more interactive than those in Cambridge. Being exposed to different teaching methods gave me a stronger appreciation for the uniqueness of Cambridge as an academic institution.

I worked in a bookshop where Nefeli was employed, and met many local Uruguayans. Getting used to different ways of greeting and cultural subtext in communication required an adjustment both in behaviour and perspective; but I met many people, representative of different subcultures, who were friendly and welcoming. Differences in income were dramatic and were clearly perceptible in differences in life styles. The country's problems with drugs, crime and finance were manifest in everyday lives of ordinary Uruguayans.

On my free time, I read plays in Spanish for my Tragedy paper – Federico García Lorca, Pedro Calderón de la Barca – and my knowledge and appreciation of Spanish improved rapidly. Although both authors are Spanish, Uruguay is in many ways deeply attached to Spain; a phenomenon that became evident in the reception of Diego el Cigala, a famous Spanish Romani flamenco singer, whom I went to see in a concert. The culture of the Spanish speaking world has clearly become globalised, even though Uruguayan art and Latin American literature has its distinctive local colour. Nefeli's boyfriend is an artist who works with ceramic; he introduced me to new movements in Latin American art.