

Steph Spreadborough – St Petersburg, Summer 2013

This September I was fortunate enough to spend three weeks on a Russian language course in St Petersburg.

I had three hours of lessons every afternoon at St Benedict's School, in the centre of the city. These classes included a mix of grammar, conversation, phonetics and lexicon, as well as looking at news items. One aspect I found particularly useful was going back over things we learned last year during part Ia, as we covered them in more detail, going further into the specifics and sorting out any sections we hadn't fully understood. We were also set work to complete at home to consolidate what we had covered.

There was a bit of confusion over where I would be staying, but I ended up living with a lovely old woman a few metro stops out of town. Despite her complete lack of English ('merci' was the closest she ever managed!), we got on really well. We had several conversations about her interesting life, often over tea and ice cream. I was repeatedly surprised by how much I could understand and the improvement in my ability to respond. I also learned a lot about Russian culture from my 'babushka' and her flat, including how to use a match-lit gas shower!

As well as the classes, we also had the chance to explore St Petersburg in the mornings. I was able to visit most of the 'classic tourist destinations,' including the Hermitage, St Isaac's Cathedral and the Church on Spilt Blood, as well as several places we had studied or heard about during our Part Ia course, such as the Bronze Horseman and Palace Square. I also visited several historical monuments and museums, went to the Russian Ballet and sampled plenty of the local cuisine. All in all, this trip gave me far more than I ever expected. It did wonders for my Russian fluency and grammatical understanding, but it also gave me a real insight into a culture I have never properly experienced before. I returned home inspired and ready for Part Ib.