

Expeditions Fund Report - Margherita Mazza

I requested an Expedition Fund Award in order to help fund 4 weeks in Berlin during August 2016. I chose Berlin because I study German as a degree, and using the language on daily basis is the



most efficient way to become fluent at it, which is what I am hoping to achieve by the end of this year, when I will graduate. I had visited Germany twice before, but never Berlin. I knew of so many of my friends who had been there before and loved it, so I decided to jump in and hope for the best!

My time in Berlin has been awesome, far above my expectations. I was scared at first, because it was my first trip completely alone (I was alone when I

moved to London from Italy, but I had been there before and I was welcomed by a friend of a friend) but I like to say that I found a way to thrive :)

I signed up for a 4-week course to deepen my knowledge of German at the DeutschAkademie. I was afraid I would end up having mostly older classmates, especially considering the immigration and refugees situation in Germany, which would have made it harder to find people to have something in common with, and who would hang out with me outside class. Luckily, I was wrong: I found a lot of amazing people my age, most of whom were in Berlin on their own and looking for friends, just like me. We formed a group almost immediately, we got along really well and easily. I became especially close with a girl from Switzerland, Marielle, whom I also visited Potsdam on a daytrip with.



Also, a couple of people I met in New York during my year abroad and that were studying German with me were in Berlin during part of my stay, so I got to catch up with them and I was introduced to their friends, whom I kept hanging out with after their departure, too. In particular one of them, Lukas, took me on days and nights out as if I were a real Berliner, which made me feel really welcome and never like I did not belong.

Thanks to all the people I met, I never felt like a tourist. I barely visited any touristy place in Berlin or around it, and I always preferred spending the day like I normally would (going to the pool, having a drink with friends, going to the market) while making the most of it and never staying home. Still, some things simply have to be visited, for example the Mauer



Park on Sundays, when there are markets and a huge public karaoke area, and the Berlin Wall, an amazing landmark that almost makes you feel the history it carries.

Something I am very grateful for is the girl that hosted me. Before going to Berlin, my hometown friend, who has spent a few months there last year, added me to a Facebook group for Italians in Berlin. There I asked whether anyone was letting a room for the month of August, trusting that Italians

abroad are usually a very tight, welcoming and trustworthy community. Despite never seeing the room before other than on Skype, I was not disappointed: the room was as good as I could ask for, which is not nearly as important as the fact that the location was incredibly central and safe for such a price, that a bicycle came with the price of the rent, which I got to use throughout my whole stay, and that my landlady and her husband were amazing people. They welcomed me with

open arms, never making me feel like a guest. They recommended some places I should go, gave me advice, showed me around the neighbourhood, shared dinners with me, went above and beyond their duties as landlords.

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