

## **Expeditions Fund Report 2016 (Ilayda Nijhar)**

### **Moscow State University – Moscow, Russia**

For my summer excursion to Moscow, I generously received 300 pounds from Expeditions QMUL, which heavily contributed to my month-long language course at Moscow State University (MSU). The purpose of my trip was not only to strengthen the skills I was already learning for my degree (Russian and Politics), but also crucial as a cultural study of Russia, a nation that is consistently stigmatized by Western media and impossible to understand without a firsthand experience. While last year I had attended a similar language course in St. Petersburg, a city generally accepted as 'more European' than the Russian capital, the city of Moscow provided a wildly different experience altogether. Though the city is large and home to an incredibly rich history, making it impossible for me to explore its every aspect even within the span of a month, I was able to experience Russia as if it were my new home, slowly integrating with its people and even celebrating with them in their summertime festivities.

The university I chose is one of the most beautiful buildings in the city and a stunning example of architecture. It is the nation's largest, holding over 50,000 students with language courses that run all-year long, the length of which is up to the student. I had the privilege of meeting students from several different nationalities, extending far beyond Europe, and who were all there for various reasons; whether they were learning Russian as future diplomats, hotel managers or

even just to ingrain ones self within a culture so radically different from Western ones. Learning amongst these students was a warm experience as it allowed me to enjoy Russia with foreigners who were there for the same reason as myself.

In terms of the city itself, Moscow is cheap, particularly in comparison to London. This is in part due to the sanctions imposed on the nation by the EU, which decreased the value of the ruble to a third of its original worth. 1 pound is the equivalent to 80 rubles. To put this in context, a single ride on the metro only costs 50 rubles, making it a third of the price a tube ride would cost in London. Public transportation in Moscow takes a while to get used to, but becomes easier after a couple days. There are metro stops at every significant tourist destination, and while the majority are free, some museums such as the Kremlin costs as much as 1000 rubles to experience. This can be avoided however through student discounts, but only if one is a member of a domestic university.

My purpose in Russia was twofold; I wanted to improve my Russian, but also explored famous sights in order to enhance the content of my articles for a newspaper I write for back in London (covering Russian affairs). Above all, the trip to Moscow was not only incredibly helpful in increasing my proficiency with the language as a BA Russian student, but also allowed me access to a wondrous amount of beauty and history that I appreciated immensely. It also allowed me to speak to and interview local people on some of the issues I was writing about. In the future, I would like to visit Russia during the wintertime, as I have heard it is an outstandingly beautiful experience.