Expedition Fund Report
Jessica Townson
Bayreuth via Prague
August 2017

I used my expedition grant to go towards accommodation and travel costs in order to attend a summer school in Bayreuth, Germany. My summer school was comprised of a language course in the mornings and a subject course in the afternoons, called Music and Musical Life in Germany. I had first heard of Bayreuth during an A level music class whilst studying Tristan and Isolde, so was familiar with its musical significance and thrilled to have the opportunity to improve my German and play in ensembles of people from all over the world in such a beautiful place.

There is no airport in Bayreuth and one of the closest is Prague, so I took the opportunity to travel via the Czech Republic, birthplace of two of my favourite composers, Dvorak and Smetana. I then took the coach to Bayreuth, in northern Bavaria. I had never been to the south of Germany and was really looking forward to exploring the regional culture.

I was really not sure what to expect from the music course, how much it would be focussed on performing, and if so, what kind of music etc., particularly considering that I am a cellist and so was unable to bring my instrument. The University of Bayreuth totally spoiled me however, hiring me such a beautiful cello, it was a pleasure to play. The standard of the other musicians was really high; they were predominantly music students and from Hungary, Japan, Indonesia, the USA, Mexico, France and Finland, singers, violinists, pianists, a flautist and a classical guitarist. We formed several small ensembles together and after learning a lot of musical vocabulary, were undertaking rehearsals in German, culminating in an incredible concert at the end of our stay.

Performing with other participants

I also participated in the choir. Although I had never sung in one before, really enjoyed it, and will look out for choral singing opportunities in future.

The summer school took place during the Bayreuther Festspiele, a festival of Wagner’s operas held annually at the Festspielhaus designed specifically for performances of his works. Although I am not really a Wagner fan, for many reasons, I would have really liked to see one of his operas in this setting. A classmate and I got all dressed up with the intention of finding a ticket on the day, but unfortunately couldn't find anything even remotely affordable, I would
like to return next year with some more foresight.

Internationaler Chor

There were trips within Bayreuth, for example a tour of the town and a trip to a brewery, but we also had the chance to take part in many excursions, so as well as enjoying the sights of Bayreuth, I visited Bamberg, Nuremberg, Weimar and Dresden too. The architecture was breathtakingly beautiful and such a contrast to London or Berlin.

Die Eremitage, Bayreuth

I study French and German and am currently on my year abroad in Berlin, so taking the summer school prior to starting the semester here has been beneficial beyond measure in preparing me for studying and living in Germany. Not only has it massively improved my vocabulary and grammar, but also, perhaps even more importantly, has had a tremendous impact on my confidence in German. I am no longer as apprehensive of initiating conversation and feel much more comfortable expressing myself in any situation. The trip also gave a lot of insight into German university life, and I am really grateful for having received an Expedition Fund Award so I could have this great experience.

My language course group

After the summer school I travelled directly up to Berlin for my year abroad, and went swimming in the lakes with one of my classmates from Bayreuth. I would really recommend a language summer school to anyone interested in acquiring a new language, as the progress that can be made in such a short time through the combination of an intensive language course and simply being in a country where that language is spoken is remarkable. I will always have fond memories of Bayreuth and really appreciate the friendships that were made during my time there.