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American ballerinas leap at chance to train at Moscow's Bolshoi academy

By Yonatan Pomrenze, NBC News Producer

MOSCOW – For some teenagers, the idea of spending part of the summer indoors and in class would be a punishment. For 16 young American ballerinas, though, it is a privilege. Chosen to take part in a State Department funded six-week trip to Moscow, the group is spending their days in intensive ballet training at the Bolshoi Ballet Academy while also learning Russian language and culture.

The academy is one of the world's oldest and most prestigious for classical ballet, and the opportunity is not lost on the participants. "I'm ecstatic," said Precious Adams, a 17-year-old from Canton, Mich. Adams reapplied this year after a broken hip kept her from going last summer.

It's definitely no lazy summer vacation. First the girls spent three weeks in intensive training by Bolshoi teachers in New York, sponsored by the Russian American Foundation. In Moscow, they live at the academy and spend each weekday doing three hours of ballet and two and a half hours of Russian class. There is no better way to learn a language than immersion, and the group is clearly immersed – when I entered their studio to film them, the first thing they all said when I spoke to them was "English! He speaks English!"

Meals are taken in the regular academy dining room. "Borsht, cabbage salad, cabbage bun, rice and then this beef nugget of happiness," said 16-year-old Laurie Nielsen, as she ticked off what she just ate for lunch. Nielsen, from Hudson, Ohio, said the food is an adjustment, but "it was a good adjustment. Something new, something to experience...it's really good."

Weekends are spent with host families, so they can get a taste of real Russian life, and cultural programs like museums. It's a full schedule in a busy summer, but one which all the participants know is worth it.

"Just being able to say that I trained with the Bolshoi teachers is a big deal," said 17-year-old Taylor Fikes, from Bowie, Md. She has been dancing since she was 4-years-old and sees the Bolshoi experience as a stepping stone to being a professional dancer in a major company.

[Video.](#)