

Russia: Forever Inside Me

Ballet has always been a part of me for as long as I can remember. I don't recall a day as a child without dancing--whether twirling around my house or taking class in the studio. Then, when the NSLI-Y opportunity of training at the most prestigious ballet school in the world came to me after 10 years of dancing ballet, I took it as fast as I could! However, I knew that going to Russia was no piece of cake. The country, the language, and the lifestyle seemed so foreign to me! How was I going to live there? How was I supposed to take class from teachers who only spoke in Russian? I would have to attend Russian language classes for two and a half hours each day and go out on cultural excursions at least twice a week-- if not more-- on top of the intensive dance program the academy offered.



Thankfully, though, spending six weeks in Moscow really broadened my horizons, in all aspects. Not only was it amazing to have such extraordinary dance teachers that made it



the best summer experience, but living in such a different country really amazed me! I learned not to just observe, but to actually be apart of the Russian ways of living, eating, and speaking. Everything had seemed so strange when we first arrived, but by the end, we all practically felt like we've been living there all our lives!



Furthermore, staying at a host family over the weekends in pairs was a great treat. There, we were able to communicate with regular Russian citizens, that had nothing

to do with the ballet world. I found it very effective when trying to speak in Russian to them, trying their favorite restaurants, and living in a normal Moscow apartment. It was interesting to note that the Russian culture was similar to what I was used to back home. Raised in a Chinese household, I grew up learning numerous Chinese values and traditions, which shared some



common characteristics the Russian's culture. For example, both ethnicities highly respect elderly and are extremely appreciative toward teachers. Things that I



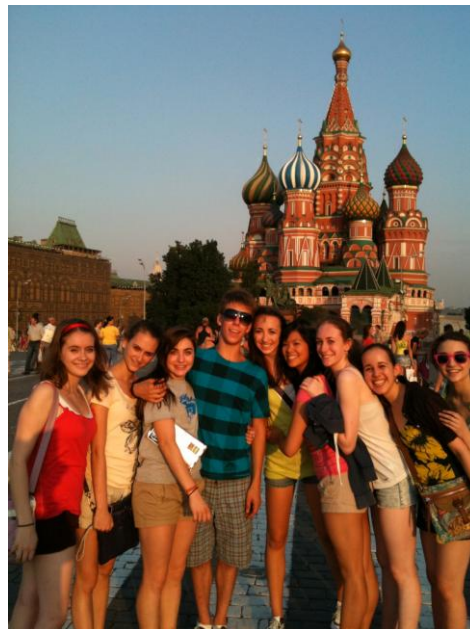
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found comforting living in Moscow, made me want to learn even more about this fascinating country. Moreover, I made incredible friends, both American and Russian, and I learned that there are so many different cultures out there in the world when I thought the United States seemed like a pretty big melting pot of nationalities and people.

I liked it so much, that I decided to continue to train at the prestigious Bolshoi Ballet Academy for the rest of my senior year in high school. This was yet again a tremendous experience for me. Once I touched down in Moscow, I felt that I had never left. My friends and I started reading regular billboards and signs immediately; our Russian language was coming back to us! Being in Russia was truly the best thing that ever happened to me. Not only was I able to train at the one and only Bolshoi Ballet Academy, where so many of my idols were trained at, I also would be able to be apart of the culture I had grown to love so dearly. Though there were parts of living at the academy that I did not enjoy-- the living conditions of the dorm, away from the comfort of my home, and the race riots happening in Moscow-- I know that these aspects only made me a stronger person overall mentally.



One of the most rewarding parts of studying overseas for my passion of dancing was that it helped shape me into a unique person. I changed the way I saw things and how I treated people. Not to mention, that this unique experience eventually led to my early-acceptance to Columbia University in New York City. I know that I would never have been able to stand out amongst thousands of early applications to such a distinguished school without my journey to Moscow; it was the Russian part of me that flourished. I am also considering taking Russian language and culture in college. It is something that really interests me. Russia has truly

enriched my life this past year, and I know that Russia will be a part of me forever, no matter what I do or where I go. I can even predict that sometime in my future, I will be visiting this wonderful city again with all its rich history and culture to offer.

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