

Hattie in Kyrgyzstan

8 September 2016

Hattie spent three weeks volunteering in Kyrgyzstan. She recounts some of her experiences here...

“I think I speak on behalf of the whole volunteer team in saying that the short three weeks that we spent in Kyrgyzstan were some of the most fascinating, humbling and rewarding of our lives...”

We were greeted on that first day at the airport by Father Remy, who is priest and director of Caritas NGO 'Light of Love' (Meerim Nuru), the charity for whom we would be working. He was accompanied by a smiling Father Leszek, priest, student and soon to

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Restaurants were often in yurts, the kind of tents that are typical of this part of the world. One of my favourite meals was in one of these yurts, where we ate Lagman and Beshbarmak, both typical of central Asia, and sipped tea from cushions on the floor, around a low table.

With the lake and beach a one-minute walk away, and the snow-capped mountains surrounding it, the primary function of the house and charity where the camps take place is a rehabilitation centre for disabled children and young adults and it really couldn't have been built on a more perfect spot. One thing that we noticed was how little equipment and medical treatment was available to them. I found this to be very humbling and put into perspective the free access to healthcare which we take for granted in our country.

Of course, the main reason we were there was to teach. As none of us were teachers and we did not know the ages or abilities of our students prior to their arrival, this was all quite experimental at the start. However, we quickly began to realise what worked and what didn't. Posters, acting and games were surprisingly more popular than grammar exercises.

We were given free rein with what we taught, which actually made it very fun, as we could tailor the lessons to topics that would interest everyone, rather than having to follow any strict syllabus. I taught the highest level group and so was able to get some very interesting debates going among them, as their level of English was very high.

I was particularly impressed by the awareness and informed opinions that the teenagers had of the problems that exist in their own country, such as corruption within the government and in education.

In addition to the teaching, we had plenty of free time to enjoy swimming in the lake, as well as to organise evening activities for us and the students. One of my fellow volunteers had the excellent idea of organising a mini Olympics, as the actual Olympics were on-going in Rio at the time. We also arranged other things such as bingo nights and other countless evenings spent playing 'mafia', which seemed to be everyone's favourite game and on the final night a talent show and disco.

We were lucky enough to get to go on a series of 'school trips', which were like no school trip I've ever been on in England! It would be difficult to match the incredible mountain walks or running around a 'Fairy-tale Canyon' that we got to do in Kyrgyzstan. These were some of my favourite days, even if some of the drives were 'hairy' at best. All of these activities were great opportunities to get to know the children outside lessons.



One thing that I would say was perhaps the only slightly impeding factor on the trip was my lack of Russian/ Kyrgyz. Among the students it was fine, but I would have liked to have been able to communicate a bit more with others around me.

For anyone who is considering taking part in this particular Jesuit Mission or one similar, I will say that it really was the most brilliant and informative experience. For the people you meet and the things you learn, I couldn't recommend it more. We were told before we went that we would probably find that we took more from the experience than we felt we were giving to the children and that much is certainly true.”

Will travelled to Kyrgyzstan in Summer 2017. Read his interview [here](#).

