

Midshipman Spends Semester in Russia



Midn. 1/C Luke Scott stands in front of the famous fountains at the Palace of Peterhof in St. Petersburg, Russia. Scott spent four months in St. Petersburg, living with a Russian family and studying the Russian language and culture. Photo courtesy of Midn. 1/C Luke Scott.

Midn. 1/C Luke Scott spent the spring semester studying at St. Petersburg University in Russia through an exchange program run by the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE). CIEE is a U.S.-based organization that sponsors study programs around the world.

“My time spent in this historic and cultural haven was one of unparalleled experiences,” said Scott. “Everyday I learned something new about the city or the culture that can only be learned by living in the environment. Just to walk the streets and witness buildings and canals that are nearly a century older than our country was amazing to think about.”

In 1703 Peter the Great founded the city of St. Petersburg on the mouth of the Neva River which flows into the Gulf of Finland. His goal was to establish a city that would bridge the gap between Europe and the Moscow-Russian Empire.

Scott lived for four months with a Russian host family in St. Petersburg. This served not only as a place to stay, but also provided him with constant exposure to the Russian culture and language.

Scott described the Russian home as unique. Comparing it to what he was familiar with in the U.S., there were many aspects that he found strange. For example, St. Petersburg homes are usually very small apartments. The toilet, sink and shower are each in different rooms, and there is rarely a bed. Most Russians sleep on a couch or a fold-out bed to conserve space. On entering the apartment, Scott was required by his host mother to take off his shoes and wear slippers. According to Scott, no one walks around the house without slippers. Tea is the most common drink, and a glass of cold water is rare.

Two of Scott's favorite memories from the semester were attending the banya, the Russian public bath, and a professional soccer game.

“The banya has a culture of its own,” said Scott. “Everyone brings in snacks and beer and spends a good two hours going between the sauna, the cold tub, and the locker room. The experience is very relaxing.”

Scott and his fellow students attended classes on the grounds of an old monastery. Studies focused mainly on the language, but also included two courses in Russian culture and history.

“The professors were superb,” said Scott. “Some had spent time in the U.S. and understood American culture very well. They encouraged us to take advantage of our time in a foreign culture to look at our own through different eyes in order to see the negatives and be more appreciative of the positives. This was good advice as I was able to walk away with a good perspective on both cultures.”

CIEE organized excursions for the exchange students to ancient Russian cities like Novgorod and Suzdal, which were the foundation of an empire that dated back hundreds of years. Scott said these trips showed him how extremely diverse Russia was as a country.

“Living in St. Petersburg I had every comfort of modern western society, and yet on these trips, within a few hours, it seemed as though we had gone back in time,” said Scott. “We visited forts and villages that had been in existence for nearly a millennium. We also witnessed many of the social difficulties that the country is currently facing.

“The exposure and experiences that I walked away with are unlike anything I would have been able to find at the Academy,” said Scott. “I was extremely privileged to have spent those four months in a foreign country.”