

Volunteer Trip Report: Bacau, Romania 2008

By China Green



Without sounding too cheesy, the two weeks I spent in Stanisesti were two of the most rewarding and enjoyable weeks of my life. When people tell you that they had a “life-changing experience” you never really understand to what extent it has an impact on your life; until I went to Romania I have to admit I felt exactly the same. I never realised how attached I could feel to one particular place and the people that live there before I visited Romania. For me it was a place that I didn’t want to leave, and will most definitely be going back to.

I spent two weeks (which certainly wasn’t long enough!) helping to run a summer school for disadvantaged children living in poor rural areas in the county of Bacau, Romania. Our team worked with the Romanian charity ‘Fundatia de Sprijin Comunitar’ (FSC), alongside their Romanian volunteers, to run activities for a hundred children, who arrived at the school each morning. We helped run all the activities: whether it was teaching gymnastics to the older children on the playing field, to making bracelets and anklets by plaiting wool, to dancing to the “Venga Boys” over and over again.

Admittedly, it did seem slightly hectic at first. I mean, no signal on my mobile phone set me a bit back and it took a day or so for me to adjust to such a different environment. However, once I’d made that all important leap in breaking the language barrier with the children, I felt right at home. The children in Romania were the friendliest and most appreciative people I have ever met in my life. It made you tingle inside with their soft attempts to say “thank you” with their Romanian accents and watch their faces light up when you brought out the bag of Haribo’s! They enjoyed the camp so much that they would arrive about half an hour early in anticipation of getting the best ball to play with or to catch your eye with their eager wave from the door of the school. Like I said; they are most definitely the most amazing people I have ever met and writing this I can’t find the words to describe all the great times I had there.

If I had to choose, I think my most memorable moment was on the final day when we were leaving. The whole time that we’d been there, they repeatedly sang the song they had been singing in music club and over the week it had been finely tuned into my ears. Truthfully however, I had no idea what any of the words meant or what the song was about: but when they sang that song to us as we stood in front of all the children who I had spent the week with I couldn’t help myself but fill up. They really did make you feel like special and that you had truly done something worthwhile. I know it sounds slightly over the top but it is certainly a moment that I will never forget.

However, the experience isn’t all about helping the children. I made some amazing friends out there who I will never forget and never lose contact with. Not forgetting to add that there was only a toilet about 300 metres away from the school (which was a hole in the floor!) you can’t help but be close friends with the people you went with for your morning’s “communal wee” but hate them for that split second when they poured a bucket of ice cold water over your head to wash your hair. Never mind Leeds and Reading festival, this was what you can officially call “roughing it”! Admittedly, before the trip I was the kind of girl who hated not washing her hair every day and didn’t care much for dirt but I did find it easy (and it did open my eyes) and grew to love the carefree attitude of Romanian village life!

Romania is a place that I will certainly never forget and will definitely be returning again next year. It was the most amazing experience of my life: the people, the place, the lifestyle and just that funny feeling that you get inside when you feel right at home and that you have done something good and worthwhile. I just can’t wait to go back in 2009 and see all the people that I have missed so much!

