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mytripblog



## *Volunteering in Brasov*

(written by Julia Zemiro, teaching volunteer)



You can't get lost in Brasov. It's a beautiful town in a valley surrounded by mountains with a huge B-R-A-S-O-V sign a la Hollywood, on the closest hill. Unexpected sure, but you can see it from wherever you are in the town so it's a beacon home. It used to be S-T-A-L-I-N. They cut down trees on the mountain in the shape of the Dictator's name. That's gone now. Clearly.

For some reason I am enjoying getting up at 6.30 am, dressing in the dark, not to disturb my roommate Victoria who is still sleeping, and trekking off for a 20 minute walk into town in close to zero temperatures, munching on a sandwich.

A short bus ride to Scoala number three where from 8 am to noon, I assist my wonderful supervisor English teacher Ada with four classes a day. The kids are 12-13 years old. Usually I take four students from each class to another room for conversation practice. It's wonderful. All care and no responsibility. Not like real teachers.

The kids here need fluency practice. I am theatre trained so we do some physical warm up games to relax. Four kids line up and tell an improvised story one word at a time: to help ground them with some information, I get the name of a person that the story will be about (David! a kid calls out), their occupation (Football player!) and then for fun, an animal (Victoria Beckham!... no I'm joking... monkey! Another shouts out)... a random element that we may bring into the story later.

They begin:

'David... '  
'was... '  
'a ....'  
'Football ...'  
'player.'

Good start. But even this seemingly easy sentence is still grammatically correct and they have built it together. They continue:

'David... '  
'wants... '  
'play... '  
I correct them and say 'to play' ..  
'a.... '  
'championship!'

And we have a story forming. This is now about a footballer with hopes and dreams. Who knows how the monkey will come into it but the point is when I remind them of the animal, it makes them laugh. They are so engaged with the story now; they actively search for words...amongst themselves... sometimes in Romanian, which is fine because they are working together. I am always calling out 'English... in English!' and we grapple for tenses, grammar, articles...and bananas eventually do come into it. And bananas are always funny.

At one point I say let's do word at a time story in Romanian. Their eyes light up. To be honest I am not quite sure what the outcome will be, but I assume it's an opportunity to let them be freer with the language, that they will go faster and FEEL more successful.

But at every level I do it with over the next 4 weeks, be they younger, older, advanced, or beginners, they don't necessarily go faster in their mother tongue. They still have to share the story and think. So it gives them a little layer of confidence that in English, they were pretty good.

That's the interesting part of volunteering with Projects Abroad. You can create and discover the angle you would like to explore while you are here.

There has not been a drop of rain... sunny every day.

The kids tell me there should be snow soon. And there was. Bliss.

## *Drama Project Update by Pascal Tosco*

When I joined Projects Abroad, I had the clear intention of getting a real drama teaching experience, and trust me, I wasn't disappointed!

The students were smart, fluent in English and passionate teenagers who already had a play in progress. They had written it themselves and had started rehearsals. From that starting point, my job was to adapt to what was in place, and then improve their own aptitudes to impersonate their characters and make that play as alive as possible.

No need to seek too far or go too much into conceptuality. Learning through playing was the key. Voice projection, breathing techniques and getting them in touch with their own body language were the first steps of this playful experience.

The play was meant to be performed at one point, but we decided that if we had it on this date, it would be fine, but we wanted it to be great! So we postponed it and I wasn't able to see it... Honestly, the achievement isn't in the result but really in the process.

I gave some other classes in another school, just a few, but enough to be rewarding as those younger kids aren't used to having fun in school...

I also gave two cinema workshops with the intention of showing the importance of being aware that moving pictures are not innocent in a world where we are surrounded by them. And also the different jobs available in the cinema industry, as not everyone can be a director!

I could tell you about the endless nights of fun in the bars, the blossoming friendships or the contemplative value of a nature only waiting to be explored, but, this is another story, one that you, the next volunteers, should live entirely!

Pascal Tosco, fulfilled volunteer.





## *Drama Mini Project Update*

by Victoria Waldthausen

Writing this article was like savoring the last piece of birthday cake: you want to enjoy every delicious bite before the last rose made of icing melts on your tongue and before the last crumb of chocolate disappears from your plate.

But thankfully, birthdays are one of those glorious events that you know will come again in a year, so the sadness at the last sight of wrapping paper, at the candles blown out, or at the last piece of cake devoured, remains only for a moment. This article, however, truly is the last one I am writing of my experiences in Romania, and with my stay ending last month, these words have lingered at my fingertips ever since.

Now, immersed back in the real world, I long for the freedom I felt in Romania, for the hills of Transylvania, for the beautiful autumn foliage, for the winter nights filled with friends and vinfiert, and the snow that is now covering the beautiful city of Brasov.

So what is the final story I have left to tell?

Part of the drama project, in addition to teaching, is gathering the volunteers and putting on a play to perform for the orphanages around Brasov. After some brainstorming, we decided on a classic: *Beauty and the Beast*. Good morals, funny costumes, and a happy ending. It can't get much better than that (although, I may as well admit that we didn't have dancing dishes or a French-accented candelabrum, taking inspiration from the actual fairytale rather than looking to Disney for ideas).

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. English-speaking volunteers putting on a play for children who don't speak English? Sounds like a recipe for disaster. With a lot of (sometimes tedious) practices and coordinating of schedules, we rehearsed a pantomime that would be accompanied with a Romanian narration, first learning stage directions in English, before venturing to the Romanian version of the story.

Working together on *Beauty and the Beast*, and having the additional challenge of familiarizing ourselves with the Romanian language, taught us how important it is to work together and really listen, even to a language that was new to us. We learned how to pick out certain words so that we were acting in accordance with the narration, a skill that didn't just help for the performance, but also for every day life in Brasov.



The greatest reward, of course, was seeing the smiles on the faces of the children (most of whom were under the age of seven) when we had finished performing and when Ali, our narrator and translator, asked them questions pertaining to the play. We all know that *Beauty and the Beast* teaches us to look past people's exterior—past the superficial aspects that many societies have instilled in us as being important—and to instead take the time to discover a person for who they really are. Hearing these kids, many of whom have an unknown future, talk so optimistically about the importance of seeing and appreciating a person for who they are, was one of the most touching moments of my trip.



And where better to apply a moral like this, than with a bunch of volunteers from around the world who are thrown together and, almost by default, become friends. In the one, two, or three months that you spend in Brasov, you may get to know more about your new-found friends than you ever thought was possible, and, at least in my experience, learn to really appreciate what they can bring to the program (and, if you're as lucky as I have been, to your life even after the program has ended).

Of course, it always depends on what the volunteers decide to bring to the program. Most approach the experience positively, and full of energy and ideas. Trips like this are not just altruistic experiences, but also opportunities for them to see a new part of the world and to get to know cultures different from their own. They are a way for them to open their minds to the traditions and customs of people in a new environment. For others, whether it is intentional or happens naturally as a result of distance from routine, it can also become an adventure of finding a part of themselves that they may have gotten, lost in the chaos of every-day life. Being forced out of our comfort zones can be the best way of rediscovering the bits and pieces of our selves that have gotten lost in the rubble along the way.

I have now settled back in at home, and place I am always very happy to come back to. However, the nostalgia of two-months well spent remains. I think fondly of my time in Brasov, of the good days, of the exhausting days, and of the freedom—sometimes scary but, when looking back, always worth it—I had to do something completely new and different. I may not be in Romania anymore, but memories bring their own kind of magic. They are special because you tend to always remember the good ones: the kids you taught and the appreciation they showed when you left, the friends you made, the late nights, the laughter, the host family that you never understood but felt a connection to nonetheless.

What has all of this taught me? Probably that while savoring the last piece of birthday cake is always a moment of complete enjoyment, the knowledge of its yearly return makes it a memory that is quickly forgotten. The memories of this unique experience, however, will provide me with stories for many years to come.



## Telephoning in Romania

Having difficulty telephoning in – or to – Romania?

### **THIS GUIDE SHOULD HELP**

When phoning a Brasov number from a Brasov number, use the prefix 0268/0368 followed by the six digit local number.

When phoning a Brasov number from out of county, dial 0268 before the six digit number

When dialling a mobile phone number from within Romania that begins with 07x always include 07x

When dialling Romania from overseas dial up your international connection (usually 00) then 40 (for Romania), followed by the area code without 0 (that's 268 for Brasov, and 7x for mobile phones) and local number.

Callers from overseas are reminded that the time in Romania is GMT + 2 hrs