

Lindsey Collier: «Every Day in Russia an International Student has something to be Proud of"



Lindsey Collier, student of the University of North Georgia, USA, is studying political science and peculiarities of the great Russian language. Having come to Russia for a term program in September 2015, Lindsey decided to stay here longer and continue her studies in our university. After completing the program, Lindsey plans to return back home to her university, but now she is an enrollee of the program "International Region Studies" at the Institute of International Educational Programs, SPbPU.

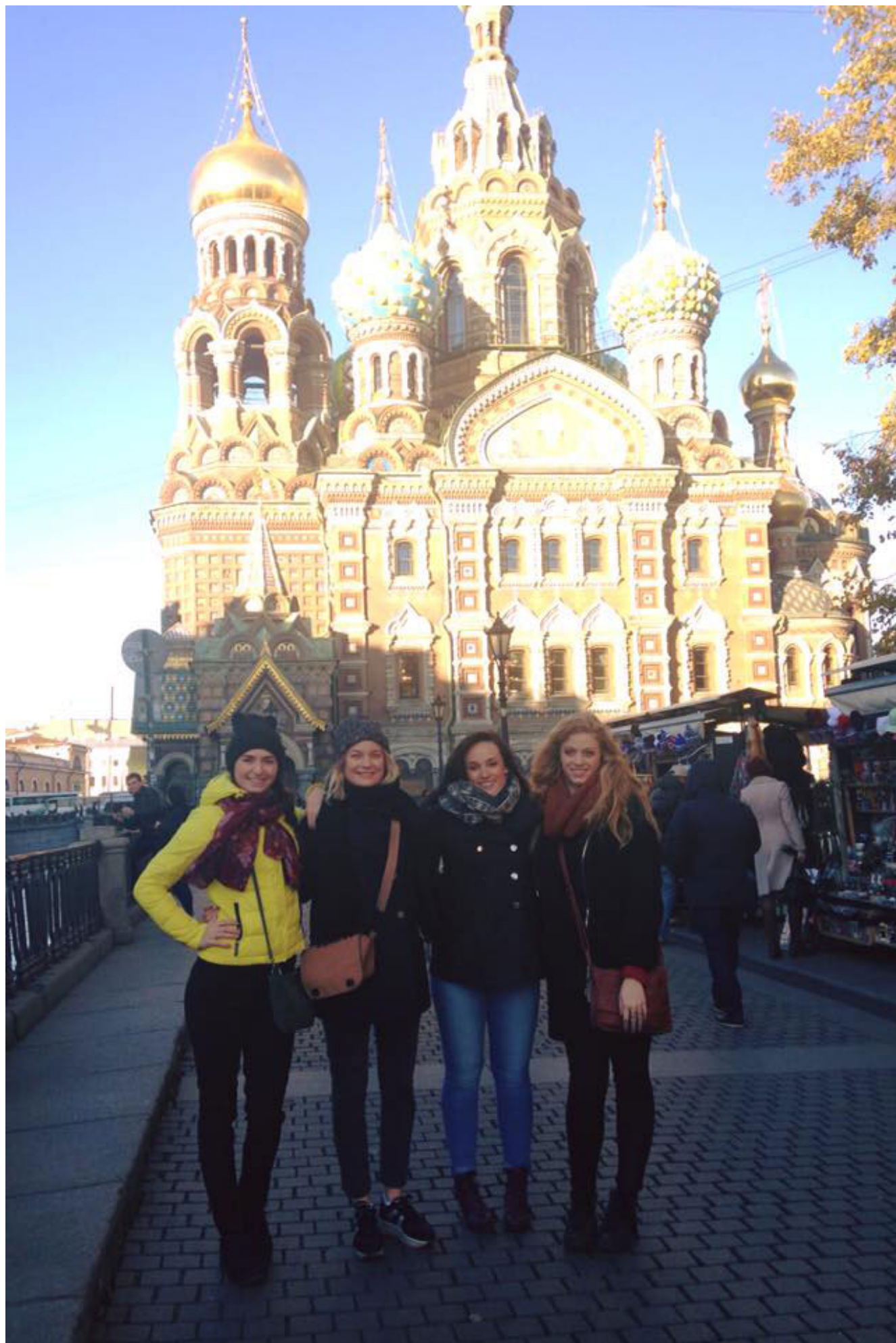
Today she is not scared of St. Petersburg's metro, enjoys eating borsch and Olivier salad (Russian salad), keeps a blog where she dispels the American myths about "gloomy and malicious Russians". Lindsey told the Media Center's reporter how she had planned her trip to Russia, how her parents had regarded it as a suicide. She said who and how helped her learn Russian, and why in Russia even a very small cake can cause a great feeling of shame.

- Lindsey, how did you learn about our university and why did you prefer St. Petersburg Polytechnic University to many others?

- It took me about a year to find an academic program in Russia. The problem was in my university - the University of North Georgia - that it had no contacts with your country. But I was so eager to study in Russia that had to transfer to another university for a year in order to apply for a Russian academic program.

I chose the Polytechnic University because my friend had advised me to do that: she was happy to study in SPbPU's Summer School. She told me a lot about the University and your city, but when I arrived, everything proved to be different from what I had imagined. My friend stayed at the dormitory of the Institute of International Educational Programs, she lived together with international students, whereas I am living in dormitory No.8 together with Russian students. Our dormitory has some rooms only for international students, all other rooms are for Russian students. It gives us the chance to socialize a lot, which is very interesting experience!





As I provided all the documents through Valdosta State University, I did not get in touch with Polytechnic international offices. I knew only contacts of the University and dormitory. But it was not a problem: I bought airline tickets, arrived in St. Petersburg, from the airport I took a taxi, got to the dormitory and checked in. Some days later I met the staff from the International Office, and everything, of course, got better. To tell the truth, I was a little scared to do everything on my own, but I was ready to do everything to make my dream come true (Smile)!

- Why were you so eager to visit Russia?

- In my university I study political science and international relations. When applying to university, we chose a region to study. My choice was Russia, because the political situation between our countries is not easy, and I wanted to tackle this problem. In addition, I study Russian history, culture and language. I admire the history of your country, that is why I decided to come here. I was so delighted with St. Petersburg and Polytech that I decided to stay here longer. Your university offers many educational programs, I picked out one of them, later I extended it.

- Why did you choose St. Petersburg, but not Moscow, for example?

- Valdosta State University, which helped me with the documents for studies in Russia, did not provide so many options for academic programs. I had an opportunity to go to Moscow, but I always wanted to be in St. Petersburg. This is a cultural capital, the city that saw a lot of historic events. I had to see everything with my own eyes - personal experience is different from what we read in books.

- What was your family's attitude to your decision to study in Russia?

- My mother strongly objected: "No! You'll never go to Russia!" My grandma still thinks that Russia is a country behind the Iron Curtain. She told my parents: "Lindsey will die there! It is the last time we have seen her!" Surely, my relatives were worried, all documents I prepared myself. However, the family supported me. From coming to Russia, I have kept my blog, where I shared my stories and emotions. It is read by my parents who often phone me. Now they are proud of me doing my best to make my dream come true and to study in St. Petersburg. I have been dreaming of that for two years since I entered the university. Eventually, my dream has come true. Nothing is impossible!

- Where are you learning Russian?

- I've been learning Russian in the US for a year, but when I came to Russia, I spoke Russian only a little. In the Polytechnic University I am studying Russian as one of the American students within the program of the American Institute of Foreign Languages, I do love these classes! I've learnt the Grammar block and now

I'm working at vocabulary improvement. Learning Russian in the country is much better, because you always listen to the Russian speech, think what to say in this or that situation.

- Does the life in the dormitory help this?

- Of course! Within half a year I have made a lot of friends - from Russia, Kazakhstan, Brazil. All of us are trying to communicate in Russian. Two months ago I shared the room with a student from Turkmenistan, she didn't speak English at all. At first, I was very nervous because of the language barrier, I didn't speak enough Russian. But my roommate is wonderful! We've got along well with her. She corrects my mistakes and helps to do my homework. I am happy to live in here. In US we also live in dormitories, but the Russian dormitory is unique!

- Are the educational systems in Russia and US different?

- As a whole, the campus layout and the structure of study in the Polytechnic University are similar to my university. The main difference is exams. In the USA you have to hand in numerous papers during the course and to get the score A,B, or C. In Russia passing the course depends on the final exam. As for me, I passed all my exams as early as December.

-Did you have oral or written exams?

- Both, oral and written. Exams in a written form are more difficult for me, because when you speak, you can correct or restructure the phrase, which is impossible in a written exam, and you can make mistakes.

- Which is your favorite subject?

- History of Russia is my favorite one. At first, it was hard, because in the US the History of Russia is taught differently. I remember writing my university teacher that I cannot not study here - too much information, too complicated. But I study hard: read books, watch historical films; and I have been convinced that the History of Russia is my favorite subject. I often write my teacher: "Guess what I've learned about the History of Russia today!"

- How many classes do you have every day?

- Usually we have two classes a day - from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. We have to write papers in history, but the total load is average. Such a schedule allows students to explore the city. This system is different from what we have in America, where lectures lasted no more than an hour, and a student spends a lot of time on independent work. Moreover, in the US lectures are given to a small group of students, whereas the Polytechnic University organizes all-student lectures for about 300 people.

- What do you do in leisure time?

- I often go on excursions with my Russian friends - to Gatchina, Vyborg, Peterhof. In summer I had a boat trip on rivers and canals of St. Petersburg. From the water the city looks much more wonderful! I am eager to go to Moscow and to travel around the Golden Ring. We spend a plenty of time in the dormitory: we go to concerts, hockey matches, play games, watch movies. Besides, we enjoy cooking together. It's great that there is a big kitchen in our dormitory. Each student cooks a national dish, we spread the blanket on the floor and make themed dinner parties.

- Which dish that the Russian students cooked did you like most?

- I liked borsch and Olivier salad, but jellied meat (kholodets) is not my preference (Smile).

- Have you got used to living in Russia?

- I admit, at the beginning I felt uneasy and scared. I remember my first trip in the metro, without friends, when I phoned my mother with pride and shared my "deed". Later I got used to this, and now I am not in trouble. Shopping is not a problem either, recently I've gone to the pharmacy. In general, every day in Russia an international student has something to be proud of (Smile)!

Russian people are very friendly, they are always ready to help, I know that I can rely on them. For instance, when I came to St. Petersburg, I lost my phone, and an unacquainted girl from the dormitory accompanied me to the store in order to buy a new phone. She did me a favor, I was so pleased! We have been friends since then.

Initially, I thought that Russian people are gloomy and malicious. At first I remember my heart beating so loudly that I thought everybody could hear that. I was so scared! But when I had Russian friends, things settled down. They are always with me, take me for a walk. As soon as you overcome the emotional detachment, you understand that Russians are the best friends.

- What Russian traditions and habits surprise you?

- For instance, the tradition to take off shoes when entering a room, in America it is not common. Another example is personal space. When Russians talk to you, they come too close. I am not used to this. Another thing that surprises me is how Russians speak over mobile phones. They just shout at the phone. When you ask them what is going on, they say everything is good, they are just speaking.

I am also amazed that Russians are always ready to share everything. When some time ago my friends and I were eating cakes, and the last one was left on the plate, I took it. My friends told me that it was obvious I am not Russian, because in such a situation Russians would offer to share the cake. I felt ashamed.

-The final question. Lindsey, do you feel any disappointment that you came to study to our country?

- As I am studying at the Polytechnic University, I will graduate from the US University with delay. But I am not disappointed at all. I would like to live the full life in Russia. This experience is invaluable!

Media Center, SPbPU

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