

## Krayani Hussein Ali, an SPbPU professor from Lebanon spoke about his life in Russia

Krayani Hussein Ali came to Russia from Lebanon about 10 years ago. His life is closely connected with Polytechnic university: first, he studied here in the university foundation program, then - he began to teach mathematics to Russian and foreign students. He also studied astronomy at a university in St. Petersburg, has been to many Russian cities, has excellent knowledge of the Russian language, and has visited the Hermitage at least 50 times. In an interview with SPbPU International Office, Krayani Hussein Ali spoke about how to master Russian from scratch and why he teaches mathematics in English, and also gave valuable advice to future foreign students and teachers at Polytech.



**- Hussein, tell us why you decided to come to Russia?Hussein, tell us why you decided to come to Russia?**

- Since childhood, I loved technical subjects - mathematics, physics, astronomy. I did well in school, and after graduation, I started looking for opportunities to study abroad. I chose between two countries - Russia and Germany. At the same time, because I was afraid of not getting a visa, I entered the Lebanese University and

even studied there for a while. But then they gave me a visa and an invitation and I came to Russia. At that time I didn't know Russian at all.

**- So you arrived in a totally unfamiliar country, with strange people around you, no one spoke your native language, and, you must admit, the climate was different. What were your first impressions?**

- I arrived in Russia together with the other students. As I remember now, we were met by two women who didn't speak a word of English, and I'm still surprised that they found us and how we managed to understand each other. I only found out which city I was going to at the Moscow airport. At first, I thought I was going to Rostov-on-Don, but then it turned out that I was going to St. Petersburg. And, by the way, it was on the way to St. Petersburg, sitting in the Sapsan compartment, that I first became acquainted with the character of Russian people.

**- Tell us about that incident - what was it like?**

- I arrived in Russia, and I had a fever. On the train it got really bad - I knew I had to take medicine right away. And there was no water to drink the pills with. I went to buy a bottle of water, but my money was in dollars and I didn't have time to change it. And they only took rubles. While we were trying to sort things out, some man, seeing that I did not feel well, came over and bought me the water. I offered to give him the money, but he refused. When people help each other - this is about humanity. I think that's how it should be. But it's a little frustrating that the train staff at the time did not go out of their way and they didn't have a glass of water to just drink the medicine. And, by the way, this was not my last adventure of the day.

**- Here I want to ask - and then what happened?**

- Then a friend from Lebanon met me at the Moscow station. Since he spoke Arabic, life became easier and clearer. We drove to the metro station Akademicheskaya and we went to eat pancakes. That's how that day, for the first time in my life I took a plane, commuter train, metro, "Sapsan," and tasted pancakes. It was January 9, 2010.

**- Were the pancakes good?**

- They were great!

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- The first two weeks were especially difficult. I had to take medical tests, and those few days while I was waiting for the results, I was terribly afraid that something would go wrong and I would have to leave Russia. And then a few days go by and they call me and say: "Come, there are questions about so-and-so indicators. It even took my breath away, but then it turned out that it was just a mistake and everything was fine. The fact that I didn't know anyone in Russia and didn't have any friends also added to the difficulties. I lived on the outskirts and

didn't even know that there was such an incredibly beautiful historic center in St. Petersburg.

**- When did you realize that you were beginning to get used to Russia?**

- In about three or four months, when I had already begun to understand Russian a little bit. We developed a very good relationship with our Russian neighbor, we went for walks, discussed history and politics. And gradually things got better.

**- You speak Russian very well now. And how did you learn it?**

- We had a very good teacher, Darya Skubchenko, who still works at SPbPU. I did my best, did all my homework, and communicated a lot in Russian. Of course, there were not only "A's" - I got "B's" and "C's" as well. After four months, we were already discussing historical questions with our neighbors. Our teacher also gave additional tasks - to watch a video clip, a film, to communicate with my friend in Russian. In general, I think that if you come to a country to learn its language and continue to communicate in your native language - it's just a shame. You'll never succeed that way. Communicate with classmates who are not from your country. Otherwise, you will never learn the language. I have a story to prove it.

**- Tell us, which one?**

- There was one case - it was told by our chemistry teacher. It happened that one day there were nine people from Latin America and one, I think, Chinese, in the same group. He did not know Russian very well, but by the end of the school year, he spoke fluent Spanish. I mean, how much communication with my classmates influences the process of learning a language. If there were guys from Russia in his group, he would have learned Russian. But as it is, he would start speaking Spanish. To tell the truth, I don't know how it helped him in Russia.

**- As far as we know, even though you know Russian very well, you teach mathematics in English. What does this have to do with?**

- In Lebanon, they taught mathematics in English. I know "mathematical English" quite well. Here at Polytechnic University, I started by teaching foreign students, later I switched to mixed groups - where there are both Russians and foreigners. In November it will be three years since I taught mathematics in Russia.

**- And why did you decide to teach at Polytechnic University?**

- When I graduated from the SPbPU pre-university program, I continued to communicate with many teachers. I found out from them that there was a vacancy. My future colleagues introduced me to Victor Krasnoschekov, director of the Higher School of International Educational Programs, and after the interview, I started to work.

**- And what do you plan to do in the future?**

- To continue to teach, also to be engaged in science, translations, international activity. I also like organizing different events. I enjoy cultural life and symphony concerts. I had a very good friend, an astronomer and musician. It was our professor Veniamin Vityazev. He held wonderful amateur concerts where students performed. Unfortunately, he passed away in 2018. Then we organized a concert in honor of him in the White Hall of SPbPU. After Professor Vityazev's illness, I started holding concerts at the faculty where I studied, and I plan to continue this and hold concerts here at Polytechnic University and IMOP when the pandemic is over.

**- How often do you visit museums and cultural sites in Russia?**

- Often! I've been to the Hermitage about fifty times. I love the Russian Museum, the Local History Museum, the Museum of the History of St. Petersburg, and the Navy Museum. I also like going to concert halls, theaters, and the Philharmonic Hall.



**- When did you become so interested in Russian culture?**

- When I was a preparatory student here, I read a lot and watched a lot of movies. When I went to museums, I always talked to museum curators - it was very interesting to talk to them, they knew so much! They tell me things that you can't find in books.



**- Speaking of books, you probably have a favorite Russian writer, don't you?**

- It's hard to choose. Chekhov, Tolstoy, Pushkin... I probably can't do without Chekhov's stories.

**- And what about films?**

- I like Soviet cinematography. "The Big Break", "Office Romance", "A Station for Two" are my favorite films. I watch movies with military themes, such as "Officers".

**- Surely in those 10 years, you have traveled a lot all over Russia. Can you tell us which places you remember most of all? Where would you like to visit?**

- When I was studying astronomy at university, we had two internships in the south in the mountains. We lived in Kislovodsk and then, a year later, in Nizhny Arkhyz. Then we also visited Pyatigorsk, Essentuki, Mineralnye Vody, and Cherkessk. Not far from Nizhny Arkhyz the largest telescope in Russia is located. At one time I visited Yekaterinburg, Yaroslavl, Moscow, Obninsk, and Saransk. I dream to visit Baikal and Kamchatka, and of course, the Crimea.

**- In one of the webinars for Arab applicants in which you participated, you talked about safety. What should prospective students know?**

- Sometimes it's not enough to just say, "Be careful." It needs to be repeated many times and given concrete examples. You should not walk through unlit streets at night; it is important to keep a close eye on your valuables, and it is also important to be conscious of your documents. For example, I once went to Lebanon in winter, came back to Russia, and a few months later, when I came to renew my visa, I was shocked to learn that I had not renewed my registration, so I was living in Russia illegally. And that I urgently needed to fly to Lebanon. Because of this situation, I could not get access to examinations. To avoid such cases, keep a close eye on the validity of your documents.

**- We often ask foreign scholars, professors, and students for advice for those who are just about to come to Russia to study or work. What would you advise?**

- First, prepare well for your trip. Read more information about Russia, read Russian literature and cinematography, explore the websites of universities, and ask your friends who have studied or are still studying in Russia. It's important to hear the opinions of both because life changes very quickly. If I had come to Lebanon in 2016, I would not have been able to tell you about Russia what I know now. If you don't have such acquaintances, visit the relevant groups on social networks - there are plenty of them on the Internet. Secondly, study well and don't skip classes. Make sure you communicate with Russian people, go to museums, theaters, and cultural centers more often.

**- Hussein, thank you for the interesting interview! We wish you success and good luck!**

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