

My Experience

Bacau Romania

By Luisa



I went to Romania in July 2008, a shy 17 year old with no knowledge whatsoever of Romanian! I was extremely nervous and unsure as to what Romania would be like, though meeting the other volunteers at the airport helped to put my mind at rest. Naively, I imagined that once the flight was over there wouldn't be too much travelling – in fact there was hours on a train from Bucharest, definitely an experience! Beggars put their feet in the door and refused to leave the carriage when we didn't give them any money. We arrived at Casa Pistratul (a home/centre for street children) in Bacau a little sweaty and tired but definitely excited about the trip. The volunteers in the centre were extremely welcoming and we soon found that there were ways of communicating despite the language barrier.

The first few days involved settling in, getting to know the volunteers that we would be staying in the camp with and seeing a little of Romania. We visited the mountains and played volleyball with the kids in the centre. I found it hard to settle in at first due to the sad death of a friend a few days before I was due to leave, but the Romanian volunteers couldn't have been nicer in showing us around Bacau, in addition to speaking excellent English! I'd like to say I was fluent in Romanian at the end of the trip, but in truth I only know a few useful sentences ('I don't speak Romanian' is particularly handy).

After spending some time in Bacau we went to stay in the village Podu Turcului, where we would be helping with a summer camp for disadvantaged children. The children were the highlight of the whole trip and after all the reason we were there. Their smiling faces and constant enthusiasm made it feel like we were bringing some happiness into their lives. The village was fairly basic, but we were told that our village was one of the most comfortable – other villages didn't even have toilets! We originally stayed at the centre built for the camp but had to move to the high school after a scary cockroach infestation. There was no hot water and we had to share just the one toilet (which didn't flush and was crawling with cockroaches), but our conditions were a lot better than many of the homes in which the children lived.

Each day began with music and dancing to energize the children, followed by games. After, we would split the children into groups to do dancing, sport, arts and crafts, English and music. It was great fun and so nice to see the children really appreciating all the work the volunteers put in. Lunch was a real eye-opener; some of the children would hoard the food because they didn't have much at home, or save half to give to their brothers and sisters. In the evenings we cooked dinner together and then the children returned for music and games. At night we would relax and play cards or games. The Romanian volunteers had seemingly endless energy, though we soon discovered the reason – a power nap in the afternoon!

Leaving Romania was a real wrench – we'd got to know all the kids so well and it was awful to think we might never know how they all turn out. I felt lucky to have missed the bout of diarrhoea and sickness that plagued all the other volunteers, but I still came home covered with flea bites! (about 30 at the last count). Despite all this, Romania was one of the best trips of my life and I honestly cannot wait to return. The children made the trip special and I've made some great friends. To anyone considering going to Romania, I'd tell them to go for it!

