

My English Language Assistant Experience



Alto Adige is an autonomous region in the north of Italy with a strong Germanic influence. Abbey Cameron talks about her experiences as a language assistant in the ski-mad town of Brunico.

Why did you choose to be a Language Assistant with the British Council?

I wanted to take a year abroad as part of my degree to really engage with the language and country and I had always known about the British Council's program as my mum was an assistant outside Paris in 1980. Therefore I had always liked the idea and, as I was also considering teaching as a possible career, I thought being a Language Assistant offered the perfect option for me.

What type of school or institution are you teaching at?

I am teaching at the German-language Istituto Tecnico Industriale (Gewerboberschule) in Brunico.

Who did you teach?

I teach 14-19 year olds, the vast majority being boys.

What does your teaching involve on a day-to-day basis?

I work with each of my school's four English teachers and each has a different approach as to how to use me best in the classroom. This means I teach the youngest to the oldest pupils and am constantly using a variety of techniques. For example, although team-teaching the majority of the time, sometimes I take the class through an exercise while the teacher concentrates on individuals or vice versa. Other times we split the class and teach one half each allowing more time for speaking.

At first, I was daunted by the idea of working in a German language school but it has actually not had a great effect on my role as an assistant. I can only ever speak English in the classroom so it's good for the students in that respect.

What has been your most enjoyable teaching experience?

That every lesson is different. It's always a surprise and it is good to know that for every lesson where your plan goes wrong or the behaviour is bad, there will be another lesson which is great.

How have you integrated with the local community and experienced the culture?

I decided as soon as I had arrived in my town, which is overwhelming German in its bilingual mix, that I would take up German. I started a German for Beginners course with a local community school and it has been good way to settle in. It has helped both with everyday living and as a way to get to know people. Also, I train with a local Karate club twice a week and participate in an informal Italian conversation club once a month.

NAME: Abbey Cameron

DEGREE: English and Italian at the University of St Andrews

TEACHING LOCATION: Brunico/Bruneck, Alto Adige, Italy



My English Language Assistant Experience

“When recommending the British Council’s program, I would say that it offers a wonderful opportunity to have a well-rounded time abroad.”

“The most important thing that I have learned so far is how to adapt to living in a different culture...”

Do you feel that your language skills have improved? If yes, why and what ways would you recommend to others?

I do feel that my Italian has improved though perhaps not quite as much as I had first envisaged. I feel that my overall confidence in being able to understand and be understood in most situations has improved the most. I had to seek out ways in which to speak Italian while I’ve been here and I’ve done this with the monthly informal conversation club as well as getting Tandem partners. I advertised in the local library for these English-Italian partners and it has been great to have a couple of hours every week or so dedicated to speaking Italian.

Have you taken part in activities which you wouldn’t normally have done?

Brunico, and the Alto Adige in general, is a golden opportunity for any snow-sports lovers. The town’s proximity to a good ski area has given me the opportunity to get a season pass there and snowboard on a very regular basis which has been wonderful.

If you were to recommend the British Council Language Assistants Programme to someone else what would you say?

When recommending the British Council’s program, I would say that it offers a wonderful opportunity to have a well-rounded time abroad. You have the chance to really get to know a region as a local, to experience what life is truly like in the classroom and have time to explore and travel. And you get paid for it!

What advice would you give future assistants?

I would tell any future assistants that were coming to the Alto Adige/Süd Tirol to enjoy the differences. It may not be the Italy you expected but, if you take the chance, you will see how unique and exciting the combination of Italian and Austrian cultures can be from the food to the local dress and celebrations. Embrace the culture and you’ll be the better for it!

What is the most important or most valuable result the experience has given you so far?

For me, the most important thing that I have learned so far is how to adapt to living in a different culture, particularly when it’s one that you may not necessarily share a language with. I now have the confidence and the thirst to go out and explore as many other cultures as I can- starting with the rest of Italy and then maybe Germany, if I keep up the language!