

## Nice language, shame about the people

### Young foreign students talk about the challenges of coming to England to improve their language skills.

*The English have a reputation for lagging behind other countries when it comes to the study of foreign languages - but we seem to excel at teaching our language to others.*

Every summer, hundreds of thousands of young foreign students descend on England to soak up the language and create pedestrian jams of colourful backpacks around our national monuments. But are they happy here? What do they think of us?

I came here because knowing more English will help me in the future, said Leila, 13, from Dresden, Germany. I miss my family, but they think three weeks here will be a good experience for me.

Leila has come to study at Buckswood International Summer School in Uckfield, East Sussex, where pupils' families pay more than 400 a week for a programme of study and visits. Yes, we do hear about the English not liking foreign things like the EC, but that doesn't stop me from wanting to know how to speak English, she said.

Thirteen-year-old Mathias, from Sao Paulo, Brazil, studies in France and has nearly completed his four weeks at Buckswood. He already speaks Portuguese, French, German and Arabic. His father, a businessman, has stressed to Mathias the value of being multilingual.

I first started learning English when I was eight, he said. My father told me it was the best way for me to get on.

Nicola Evans, Buckswood's course director, said many of their pupils came from high-achieving backgrounds, with parents who wanted real improvements in the English-language abilities of their children. Up to 70 pupils at a time attend the school.

Ms Evans said the children were expected to speak only English during their stay. Ensuring they did not feel alienated in the foreign surroundings was essential, she said. The further a child is from home, the more likely it is that he or she will stay the full 10 weeks of the summer course.

Sheelagh Michelmore, chairman of the Association of Foreign Language Schools, said up to a million young people visit the UK each year to improve their English.

Sergei, 15, from Moscow, is studying for the full 10 weeks at Buckswood. I was a little depressed when I got here because I did not know anybody, he said. But it got better when I improved my English. Of course, it is important to study English in England - it is the biggest advantage in coming here.

For 14-year-old Marik, from Greece, the language training was the only reason to come. She complained about our food, our weather, and the general grumpiness of English teenagers.

They don't help you. If you ask for something, they don't want to listen to you speaking. It is a bit upsetting. Older people are more friendly, she said.

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### About the team

Interviews conducted by editors Erica Rutherford, 14, Sharon ODea, 16, and Shahi Ahmed, 14. This article was published in [The Observer](#).

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