

Immersion Course in Salignac

In January I applied to attend a French immersion course run by Le Français en Ecosse- an Edinburgh-based organisation offering language training across the UK. LFEE offer week-long courses for primary and secondary teachers. For me, it seemed an ideal opportunity to improve my own French and improve my classroom practice- I have been teaching French to Year 3 and Year 4 for the past year. So, a few days before the end of term, I left school, flew to Paris and caught the train to Souillac, where I was met by Richard Tallaron, head of LFEE, and driven 15km to the small, picturesque village of Salignac in the Dordogne. As teachers we are used to burning the candle at both ends- grabbing 10 minutes at lunch for a sandwich whilst marking maths tests. Free coffee and biscuits on SATs courses are a real bonus. By contrast on the first evening in Salignac, 16 of us assembled in the courtyard of the Centre International de Séjour de Salignac in the sun, conversing in French of varying abilities, sipping glasses of kir while waiting for the first of many staggering meals. "Ici, tout est possible" said Richard. Salad, bread, soup, main course, cheese and dessert followed, after which we staggered slowly to

our en-suite chalets for a good night's sleep. Lessons started in a classroom on site the following morning. These generally started with activities to break the ice, and we quickly got to know one another. Mornings tended to focus on improving our own French- I now understand many grammatical points which no one had explained to me before. The afternoons were focused on classroom practice- swapping ideas with colleagues, looking at games, resources and materials which will help in the classroom. Morning sessions were in two groups, so that less confident French speakers were able to proceed at a slightly slower pace. We were given a CD-ROM containing activities and many useful handouts. Al fresco lunches were as vivid an experience as the evening meals- again, wonderful salads, local dishes (including foie gras), exquisite deserts and jugs of white, red or rosé continually replenished. Vegetarians were also catered for! Lessons finished shortly after 4pm, when we were free to swim in the centre's outdoor pool, borrow a bicycle or simply snooze. What made the experience so powerful and intense was the genuine immersion in all things French- evenings of pétanques, wine tasting, sessions looking at the French media. We

had guided excursions to Sarlat- an exquisite medieval town, and to the amazing village of Rocamadour. Email addresses were exchanged, useful contacts established. On the last night we were entertained by a group of visiting inner-city Parisian children, who we thanked by attempting to teach them Auld Lang Syne. So 'immersed' was I that I started ordering a taxi in French at Leeds Bradford airport at the end of my journey home. My head is still spinning. Richard and his assistant Sophie were inspirational and charismatic teachers. All the participants finished the course smiling, and we are looking forward to a follow-up session in Edinburgh this coming October.

To apply for a place, consult the LFEE website www.lfee.net. Funding is available through the British Council. The grant will be paid in euros in two instalments to your school bank account.

If anyone would like to talk to me about the course, email me: g.rickson@ntlworld.com.

Written by Graham Rickson
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Graham's photos of Salignac are now in the picture library of the Languages Collaboration Zone

