

albanian adventures



Sarah Tresidder is a fourth year medical student in Southampton

Sarah Tresidder reports on a medical mission week in Albania

Cskemi. That's 'Hi' in Albanian - the first (and very useful!) word I was taught by the lovely lady next to me on the plane. Thankfully, Albanians speak impeccable English so my limited language skills went untested for the next seven days.

I'd first heard about the students in Albania via local doctors in Southampton. I was amazed by stories of Christian students boldly refusing to pay a bribe to pass finals (and so having to retake their final year twice). Southampton CMF student group were recently twinned with the Albanian equivalent BSKSH at Tirana medical school, and we'd had some email contact. Intercalation this year has afforded a little more flexibility, and I jumped at the opportunity to get out there this spring.

Each year the BSKSH group run a week-long mission. There are three days of lunchtime medical seminars on campus, followed by a four day evangelistic conference titled 'How to save a life: Christ in Medicine', at the seaside resort of Durres. Seminars gave an opportunity to promote the conference, as well as serving the students with top quality teaching. American doctors Al Weir and Mark Johnston have come over for the week for around 20 years, and Alex Bunn from CMF more recently.

Great food, comfortable rooms and a packed and varied programme made the conference an easy invite to non-Christian friends, and it was hugely encouraging to see about 30 Albanian Christian students and around 80 of their non-Christian friends. Albania was the world's first



atheist state, and the attempt to stamp out any faith group during communism in the late 20th century was very thorough. Many of the Christians I met were the first in their families to come to faith, often through local missionary work. Several came to faith at the conference in previous years. It was exciting to hear how they had been disciplined through the BSKSH group meetings. Being the only Christian in their families is often tough.

A highlight of the week was the friendship I had with some of the fifth year girls. They were lovingly hospitable and a lot of fun. I was surprised at how similar our sense of humour was; they even love our slapstick comedian Norman Wisdom! It was genuinely a wonderful privilege to see these women sharing Christ with their friends, a couple of whom are now following Christ themselves.

It was a tiring and packed week, with just one humiliating moment. Apparently my English accent demanded The Beatles at the karaoke, and I was literally dragged to the microphone. Being taught Albanian dancing later that evening made up for this! The more competitive of us also enjoyed beach games, basketball and American football.

Meeting these students, who are so excited about what Christ has done and how that changes the way they study and prepare to be doctors, has spurred me on and humbled me. Having met them I'm even more compelled to pray for them. Would you pray for them and others like them, too? =