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A Student's Guide to Studying Abroad in Spain

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A Student's Guide to Studying Abroad in Spain

*Una guía de estudiantes para sus
estudios internacionales en España*



*El Palacio
Real (Royal
Palace) en
Madrid*

*Una
estatua
(statue) de
Sancho
Panza and
Don
Quijote en
Alcalá*



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More Resources

Más recursos

Here follows a list of varied media which I found helpful during my time abroad. Some of these sources were also given to me by other students or professors because they found them useful for studying abroad. If you are looking for more resources than are included on this page, please check the bibliography at the end of this guide too as it will have additional sources of information about studying abroad in Spain.

Spain by Eyewitness Travel This book is a travel aid, but includes sections on the History of Spain, Travelers' Needs, and a Survival Guide.

Madrid's 25 Best by Jonathon Holland This book includes detailed descriptions of important places to visit in Madrid as well as a section describing the bare essentials for surviving in Spain.

Spanish at a Glance by Heywood Wald This book is fantastic if you came to Spain with only a beginner's knowledge of Spanish. Also, there is some very helpful situational vocabulary, for example banking words.

<http://www.guiadelocio.com/madrid> and lcallemayor.net You should check these websites or the paper copy of *la guía del ocio* for any types of events in and around Madrid. It includes information about movies, plays, concerts, restaurants, and a lot more.

It's Not About the Tapas by Polly Evans and **Ghosts of Spain: Travels Through Spain and it's Silent Past** by Gilles Tremlett These books were recommended as a more interesting way to learn about Spanish history and a unique way to learn about Spain.

Author's Note

Nota de autora

Hello my fellow study abroad students! I want to let you know a little bit about myself before explaining why I wrote this guide and what you can expect from it. I majored in Spanish and Social Work at Bowling Green State University and I spent my semester abroad in Spain during the summer of 2010. My own history with Spanish included four years of Spanish in high school (1 year in middle school) and three classes here at BGSU when I studied abroad. I was a rising junior (20 years old) and I spent that summer living with a host family and a roommate from the same program. In terms of my knowledge of Spanish, I was a fairly advanced student in the summer program. However, in Spain I learned how to speak much more fluently than in the U.S. I hope this brief description of me and when I studied abroad gives you an idea of my perspective as you are reading this guide.

If you are reading this guide, then I assume that you are preparing to study abroad in Spain. I would like to offer you my congratulations for making this choice. I know that the experience seems overwhelming now, but it is one of the most worthwhile experiences you will have during college. It gives you the opportunity to see the world in a different way and to experience traditions, customs, and norms unlike those in the U.S. I decided to write this guide because I wanted to help other students feel confident about their decision to study abroad and know what to expect when planning to study abroad. This guide consists of three parts: the first with topics to read before you study abroad, the second dealing with topics while you are studying in Spain and the third concerning places to visit if/when you plan to travel while you are abroad. Much of this information was gathered through my own experiences while abroad and from the experiences of other students who have studied abroad. I have compiled all of these tips, tricks, hints, and advice in the hope that you will read and use this guide to have a better experience studying abroad. I hope that you find this guide useful and entertaining. *¡Buena suerte con su viaje!*

Part I: Culture Shock

Parte I: Choque cultural



La bandera de España



La paella



Pizza



American flag

General Information about Spain

Información general sobre España

Spain is a country that is filled with different cultures and united by similar beliefs. There are at least three distinct cultural groups in Spain: Basque, Catalan, and Galician (1). A cultural group is very similar to an ethnic group which is defined as “people of the same race or nationality who share a distinctive culture” (7). These ethnic groups have existed in Spain since before the unification of Spain. The Basque people live in the region that covers north-central Spain and south-western France. A high frequency of O type blood, a unique language (*Euskara*), and a “strong desire to preserve their national character” define the Basque culture (8). Catalonians live in north-eastern Spain and south-eastern France and speak *Catalan*. The Catalan people are known for their pragmatic view of life and are historically agrarian (9). Galicians mainly live in the Spanish provinces of A Coruña, Lugo, Ourense, and Pontevedra. They speak *Gallego* and are known for a strong oral tradition shared with Portugal (10). Besides these distinct ethnic groups, there are many other distinct regions in Spain. Each region has its own specific traditions, festivals, and commonly used phrases. In geographic terms, there are two distinct climates in Spain: the interior and the coast. The coasts have milder summers and milder winters, while the interior has very hot summers and cold winters (1). The population of Spain is approximately 47 million and its capital is Madrid (1). The Canary and Balearic Islands are also considered parts of Spain. The terrain in Spain varies from high plateaus to mountains and coastal plains (1).



*La playa
(beach) en
Mallorca*



*El rey, Juan Carlos I, and
la reina, Sofia*

Spain has a 97.6 % literacy rate and school is compulsory until the age of 16 (1). Most children/teenagers attend public schools, but approximately 30% attend private schools operated by the Catholic Church. The government in Spain is a constitutional monarchy (1). The current king of Spain is Juan Carlos I, though his position is more ceremonial than political. He is the figurehead of Spain, but is not responsible for the day-to-day tasks involved in running the government. The current head of the government, considered to be the Prime Minister (*Presidente*), is Mariano Rajoy Brey (1).

The prominent religion in Spain is Roman Catholicism; however, Protestant and Islamic faiths have a significant following (1). (It is important to note that the youth in Spain, like in many other countries, are somewhat less likely to be Roman Catholic or to belong to any form of religion.) The official language of Spain is Spanish, which is spoken by 74% of the country. However, 17% speak Catalan, 7% speak Galician, and 2% speak Basque (1). The country has been influenced by at least three important religions/cultures and all three of these have left marks on the buildings and traditions of Spain. These three influences are Catholicism, Judaism, and Islam. Spain has deep Catholic roots because it has been ruled/governed for centuries under Catholic leaders. Many of those leaders used their political, economic, and social power to force or strongly encourage the Spanish people to practice Catholicism. From approximately 700 to 1500 BCE, Spain was ruled by Muslims who left their marks on Spanish culture, especially in terms of architecture and language. Members of the Jewish community were mostly involved in the financial aspects of governing and maintained a modest, but still influential presence throughout early Spanish history.

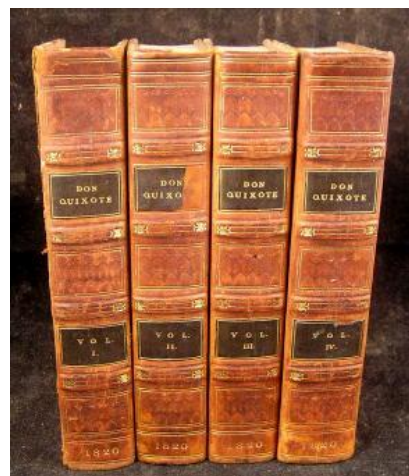
El Mapa de España



Alcalá de Henares

Welcome to Alcalá de Henares: your new home! The city has a population of just over 200,000 people (2) and is considered an eastern suburb of Madrid. The city of Alcalá has a unique history dating back to Roman times. When the Romans ruled Spain (from approximately 200 BCE to the 4th century), they founded the city Complutum on the banks of the river Henares (1). Throughout the centuries, Alcalá has grown from this ancient city to a much more modern one that still retains historical importance. In 1491, Christopher Columbus met with Isabel and Fernando at the *Palacio Arzobispal* in Alcalá (2). Though they did not grant his request to fund an expedition to find a new trading route with Asia at that time, Isabel did fund his expedition (about a year later) in 1492. The city gained national fame when Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros founded the University of Alcalá, which was recognized by the Holy Pontiff in 1508 (3). The university continued to flourish with studies including theology, art, music, and grammar until it moved to Madrid in 1836 (3).

Possibly the most important historical figure born in Alcalá de Henares was Miguel de Cervantes. Cervantes was born in Alcalá in 1547 (2). In his late twenties, he joined the Spanish army and was injured in the Battle of Lepanto, in 1571, from which he lost the use of his left hand. Cervantes was captured by Turks and taken as a slave to Algeria for five years (4). He didn't gain fame until the first part of *Don Quijote* was published in 1605 (4). Cervantes continued to write and published the second part to *Don Quijote* in 1615 (4). He died a year later in April of 1616 (4). *Don Quijote* is considered to be an extremely influential novel and a foundation of Western literature. It is also the second most translated book, after the Bible (11).



*El libro (book) de
Don Quijote*



*El interior de la
Catedral de los Santos
Niños (left)*



*El Monasterio (monastery)
de las Bernardas (right)*

Some important places to see in Alcalá are the *Colegio de San Ildefonso*, the *Casa de Cervantes*, the *Monasterio de las Monjas Bernardas*, the *Catedral de los Santos Niños*, the *Calle Mayor*, the *Plaza de Cervantes*, and the *Palacio Arzobispal*. Each of these places has its own unique story so make sure to read information about them or take a tour; don't just snap a few photos and leave. Besides sight-seeing, some great places to shop are the *Calle Mayor* (and many other shops near the *Plaza de Cervantes*), *Alcalá Magna* (a mall near the *Escuela Universitaria Cardenal Cisneros*), and *El Val* (a small mall in the south-eastern part of Alcalá). The best way to find places to shop is to walk around Alcalá and look for them because there are many small clothing shops throughout the city. Another great way to spend time with friends after school is to visit a *terraza* (restaurant with seating outside), restaurant, or bar. These are great places to just relax and order a drink which is normally accompanied by a small appetizer (usually referred to as a *tapa* or *pincho*). There are also plenty of *discotecas* (nightclubs) in Alcalá if you enjoy going out in the evenings.

Packing for Spain

Hacer las maletas para España

A great place to begin when packing for Spain is to start a list of important items you want to bring. You should begin creating this list about a week in advance and plan to update it almost every day, because you will be constantly remembering new items to add to your list. Your basic list should consist of some combination of clothing (including footwear), electronics, school supplies, and miscellaneous items (including gifts for your host family). The miscellaneous items are the easiest to forget, but also very important, which is why creating a list is so beneficial. After you have created your list and updated it a few times, it is a good idea to show it to someone else, a friend or family member so that person can assist you in remembering more important items to bring to Spain. If you know other students who will be studying abroad with you, then it would also be a good idea to compare lists with him/her. My own list is shown here as an example of what yours might look like.

8 dresses
4 shirts
3 undershirts/camis
1 pair of jeans
2 skirts
2 jean shorts
1 jacket
Pajamas
Bathing suit + towel
400 euros
Passport
ISIC card
Debit/Credit card
Driver's license
Copy of important
cards (*in italics*)

Tennis shoes
1 sandal + 1 flip-flop
1 pair of black + 1
white formal shoes
Exercise clothing
Shampoo + body wash
Conditioner + lotion
Toothbrush + floss
Toothpaste + contacts
Contact solution
Chapstick + hair bands
Hair clip + deodorant
Hairbrush + tweezers
Hand sanitizer + razor
Sunscreen + nail
clippers

Batteries
2 converters
**Gifts for host
family**
501 Spanish Verbs
Spanish dictionary
Book bag + purse
Pens + pencils
Highlighter + paper
Plastic + Ziploc bags
Sunglasses + money
belt
Laptop + cord
iPod + cord
Camera + cord
Cell phone + cord



Now that you have your list of items, you can choose the type of luggage you want to bring to Spain. The best advice that I can give is to travel as lightly, and take as little, as possible. Your study abroad experience may seem like a long time, but you should still be packing a small amount.

A very good way to control the number of items, especially clothing, that you pack is to create a list of items and to pick your suitcases ahead of time. My program coordinator gave me a piece of advice on the amount of luggage to bring which, though I didn't believe it at the time, is completely true. She said, "Pack your luggage, then hike a mile with it. If you can carry all of your bags for a mile then you will be fine." I brought one heavy rolling suitcase, one backpack, and one large duffel bag and my arms nearly collapsed while walking through the airport. You will walk a lot longer and farther than you initially imagined around the airport to meet up with other study abroad students and you need to be prepared to carry your luggage the whole way. From my own observations and discussions with other students, the best luggage to bring is two, wheeled suitcases, one to check and one to carry-on, and a back-pack to carry on as your personal item. This is most effective and beneficial if you have a method of connecting the two, wheeled suitcases. But even if you don't, this is still easier than carrying two bags on your shoulder throughout the airport.

It is also important to check the size limits for your suitcase and carry-on bags online. (For most airlines, the size limit for a checked suitcase is 62 inches and 50 pounds and for a carry-on bag it is 45 inches and 40 pounds.)



When deciding the number of clothes you want to pack, it is important to consider your own preferences and style. Plan to pack clothes that you enjoy wearing in the United States or you are unlikely to wear them in Spain. While it is important to keep Spanish style in mind so that you can more successfully blend in, you have to be comfortable wearing the clothes you bring or you will not wear them. For example, I personally dislike wearing pants so although most people wear pants in Spain (even in the middle of summer) I decided to pack fewer pants and more shorts which I was more likely to wear. I ended up regretting this choice because it rained for almost a straight week and a half, during which time I could have really used one more pair of pants. The moral of my story is to bring more than one pair of pants!



The amount of clothes you should pack will depend on how long you will be studying abroad. If you are studying for the Fall or Spring semester, or the entire academic year, then you will need to pack a larger variety of clothes as the weather will vary more during those times. During the summer semester, you can get by with a week and a half's worth of clothes, including some summer dresses, shorts/pants, shirts, and more formal clothes in case you want to go somewhere upscale. During the Fall and Spring, you may want to bring two or two and a half weeks' worth of clothing, making sure to include clothes for both hot and cold weather.



From my own experiences in Spain, I advise every student to bring at least one outfit you would wear going out to a club or bar. Even if you do not “go out” in the United States, you probably will at least visit a bar or two in Alcalá or Madrid.



*La calle mayor
(main street) de
Alcalá.*

Another important item to bring to Spain is a present/gift for your host family. It is a good idea to bring one as a small way to say “Thank you” in advance for allowing you to stay in their home while you study abroad. This gift doesn’t have to be extravagant. It can be a small item that represents the United States or the state/town you live in. When I studied abroad, I brought a decorative wooden basket made by the Amish from a town near my home and a handmade cheese plate and knife made by a local artist from a wine bottle. If you have children living with you, then it is also nice to buy them a small stuffed animal from BG or something similar. Giving your host family a gift is a wonderful way to start off your semester in Alcalá and will make both you and your host family feel good about the beginning of the experience. Bringing a gift will also help you for the return trip when you will need to pack souvenirs; however, you should still remember to save some room in your suitcases for any souvenirs you plan to buy while in Spain. Try to have an idea of the items you want to buy in Spain to make estimating the amount of room you’ll need easier. It may be a good idea to bring an extra bag to hold souvenirs just in case if you plan to buy a lot of them.

Relationships At Home and Abroad

Llevarse bien en los Estados Unidos y España

My first piece of advice to all students is to plan on contacting your friends and family back home no earlier than the first night (probably after 5pm Spanish time) you arrive in Spain. Not knowing this fact gave me some trouble because at the time I had planned to speak to my boyfriend, I hadn't even moved into my host family's house. It was a hectic time for me, although other students helped me calm down and get through it. This advice is to save you time and energy, and to prevent you from worrying too much on your first day. Make sure to tell your family and friends that the first contact you will be able to make is the first night you spend in Alcalá. (In reality, even this may be too early for some people as the jet lag affects everyone differently and internet access may not be available in every home.) Waiting to contact people in the U.S. will give you a little time to settle in, meet your host family, and eat with them. You can also use the time to unpack and set up your internet connection or get directions to the nearest cyber-café if the internet is not available in your home.

Due to the difficulties in staying in touch with friends and family back home in the United States, it is very important to develop relationships with the other students in your program and with your host family. These individuals will be invaluable support systems when you are feeling stressed, lonely, or disconnected from your normal life. In some ways your host family can function as your family in Spain just as members of the program can become close friends throughout your time abroad. Therefore, it is a good idea to try to become close with your host family and with other students in your program.



On a more emotional note, I recommend seriously thinking about the kind of person you are before studying abroad. People study abroad under all types of circumstances: single/dating, outgoing/shy, relaxed and flexible/plan-oriented, underclassmen/graduating seniors. While none of these circumstances are inherently problematic, it is important to understand yourself before leaving for Spain. If you are in a relationship, or just very close to friends and family, then you need to be prepared for difficulties managing relationships from thousands of miles away. No warning can come close to preparing a student for the feelings that he/she will have during those first few weeks abroad; but it is fairly common to become depressed and distraught when trying to juggle long-distance relationships. It is important to discuss these potential feelings before you leave so that you and your friends and family have ways to work through the kinks of multi-country relationships. If you tend to be shy, then it may be difficult for you to step out of your comfort zone, especially in Spain. However, you can overcome this with just a little extra effort and still experience all that studying abroad has to offer. All students need to prepare for a difficult time abroad, not just a vacation in Spain. Students who have a more structured personality may also find Spain particularly hard to adapt to because the Spanish way of life is a much more relaxed one than life in the United States.

These students will have to learn to go with the flow and be flexible as they study and live in Spain. Finally, life experience can be an important factor in studying abroad. For those students who have seen little of the world or who have potentially less life experience, it can be more difficult to adapt to a new and different way of life. However, the only things required to have a wonderful study abroad experience are an open mind and a positive attitude.



Una fotografía de nuestro grupo
(a photograph of our group)

Your Host Family

Su familia Anfitrióna

Living with a host family is quite possibly the most beneficial experience you will have in Spain in terms of enhancing your Spanish-speaking abilities. There are many programs where students do not have the opportunity to live with host families, so while I know that the experience isn't always wonderful, it should still be appreciated. An important thing to note is that every host family is different; some are traditional families with children still living in the household, while others are made up of only adults (though this could include adult children). From my own experience, I thought that my host family would only be adults, but they babysat their grandchildren most days during the week. (This in itself was a great experience though because I got to help teach the young boy Spanish!) Being prepared to live with any type of family is important because of these differences. This experience is an amazing way to immerse yourself in the language and the culture of your host country. As I said above there will be difficult situations throughout your stay (especially if you don't know any Spanish), but if you keep an open mind and treat your host family the way you would treat your own parents then you will have no problems.



Nuestro piso (apartment)

If you don't know any Spanish, then you should try to learn a few key phrases before you leave the U.S. which will aid in communication during the first few weeks. You should attempt to speak completely in Spanish when talking to your host family as many do not know how to speak English. This will also help to improve your Spanish at a faster rate! Also, you can rely on your student roommate (if you have one) when you are having difficulties communicating.



*Nuestras madres
españolas* (our host
moms in the program)

It is important to remember, though, that the cultures are different and even if you prefer customs in the United States, while you are in Spain you should do your best to observe their cultural norms. These norms should be upheld during any interactions you have while in Spain, whether with your host family, professors, or friends you make throughout your stay. This will help you develop strong relationships with your host family and with other native Spaniards. One such custom is that you talk to your host family on a regular basis. This could be talking over *comida* (lunch, the main meal of the day) or taking a break from school work to watch t.v. with the family in *la sala* (living room). It is also important to tell them when you are leaving the house/apartment and when you will be returning, especially if you are planning to miss a meal. Little things like saying “please” (*por favor*) and “thank you” (*gracias*) when talking to your host family show gratitude and appreciation. Also, saying *hola* (hello) or *adios/hasta luego* (goodbye) every time you leave the house will help you develop a better relationship with your host family and all of these small customs will help you practice and enhance your Spanish-speaking abilities.

Stores in Spain

Tiendas en España

The first thing you will notice in Spain is that store hours of operation are different than in the United States. Stores in Spain are mainly open Monday-Saturday from either 9:00 or 11:00am, depending on the store, until 1:00pm. (Banks are not open on Saturdays.) Then almost every store (except restaurants) will close for the afternoon (to accommodate the Spanish *comida* and *siesta*), but will reopen at approximately 5:00 or 6:00pm and close between 8:30 and 9:00pm. You will also find that many of the stores in Spain end with the letters *-ría*. These stores often sell items specific to their name. For example, a *heladería* sells *helado* (ice cream) and a *papelería* sells *papel* (newspapers, magazines, paper, notebooks, and other similar items). At a *peluquería* (*pelo*) you can get your hair cut and a *farmacia* (pharmacy) is a store where you can buy medicine. This is not to be confused with a *droguería*, which is often combined with a *perfumería*, and sells shampoo, body wash, and other hygiene products. A *ferretería* is a hardware store and *cervecería* (*cerveza*) is a bar. At a *panadería* (*pan*) you can purchase bread and at a *pastelería* (*pastel*) you can purchase different types of pastries and cakes. The *librería* (*libro*) sells books and the *joyería* (*joya*) sells jewelry. I even saw a *relojería* (*reloj*), a store that sells watches, once while strolling along the streets of Alcalá. One of the most popular grocery stores in Alcalá, which you can see on almost every street, is the *Ahorra Más* (Save More). Walking along the streets of Alcalá is a wonderful way to relax for an evening and to absorb the Spanish culture. The more you know about the city, the more it will feel like a home to you.



Pan (Spanish bread, left)

Churros (Spanish dessert, right)



Spanish Customs

Costumbres españolas

Though Spanish customs are very different from customs in the United States, it is important to understand and follow them while you are living in Spain. If you at least try to follow the Spanish customs, then you may even find that you prefer the Spanish way than the United States way. The very first custom you are likely to be exposed to in Spain is the *dos besos* (two kisses). When you first meet your host family, they will greet you with *dos besos* (one kiss on each cheek). It makes for a better impression if you do not look utterly bewildered by this custom and an even better one if you follow suit. If this is something that you think may be awkward for you, then just mentally prepare yourself for it and the moment will pass smoothly. For those of you who do not speak Spanish this first meeting may involve more than one new custom. After you're introduced to the member of your host family who came to pick you up, that individual (most often the woman of the house) will begin to ask you questions about yourself, in Spanish. Therefore you should be prepared to answer some basic questions in Spanish. For example, *¿Cómo se llama/te llamas?* (What is your name?), *¿Cuál es su/tu especialización?* (What is your major?) o *¿Qué estudia/estudias en la universidad?* (What do you study at college?), and *¿Cómo está/estás?* (How are you?)

I give this advice because of my own introduction to my host mother. I was in a group of five other students (one was my roommate) and two other host mothers. One of the students didn't speak any English and so she could not answer any of her host mother's questions. The host mothers looked to me to translate their questions which I did. And while the situation worked just fine, it would have been much easier if she had been able to understand and respond to their questions.



Una estatua (statue) de Cardenal Cisneros en Alcalá de Henares



Mis primeras tapas: gulas
(baby eels)



Ponche de Segovia (famous
pastry from Segovia)

Another custom that is very different from the United States is the mealtimes. Spanish people eat their biggest meal of the day (called *la comida*) between 2:00 and 3:00pm and they don't eat their third meal (*cena*) until around 9:00pm or later in the summer or 8:00pm in the winter. This custom will be a little difficult to get used to at first, but after a week or so it will seem normal.

Breakfast in Spain is eaten whenever you get up. Before school I ate at about 7:45am every morning, but during the weekends I ate closer to 9:00am with my host mother. The food here is also very different from the United States and every host mother/family has their own way of cooking. My best advice is to try everything and to be honest about whether you like the food. Your host family will want to feed you food that you enjoy so don't be afraid to tell them your preferences. They will usually work around your preferences when choosing specific Spanish dishes to serve. In Spain, eating everything on your plate is considered polite. If you usually eat a small amount of food, then I would definitely recommend telling your host family this so they do not think you dislike the food.

Remember you don't have to eat food that you don't like just make sure that you at least **try** every dish.

Other important Spanish customs include the concept of personal space. In the United States, many people have a “bubble” of space that surrounds their body and that no one enters except in very intimate situations. However, in Spain, there is no such personal space. People are much more informal with each other and it is very common for Spaniards to brush past others when they are in a hurry. This is one custom that may take a little longer to get used to, or you may never feel comfortable with it. Spaniards are also more intimate in some situations. For example, saying *Hola* and *Hasta luego* when you enter and leave a shop or to the people you are riding on an elevator with is common and a polite thing to do. If you do not do this, then you will look out of place. It is also important to know that Spaniards are not as “politically correct” as people in the U.S. For example, they are much more direct about observing physical features. It is not uncommon when referring to a chubby person to call him/her *gordito (a)* in Spain. Here is another difference: In the U.S., friends often meet up at someone’s house to hang out, but in Spain this is extremely rare. If a group of friends wants to hang out, then they meet in the plaza to sit and talk or have drinks at a local bar. It is the Spanish custom to go out to be with others and spend time at home with family. It is also common to stay out later at night and to take a small *siesta* during the afternoon.



Nuestro grupo a una restaurante
(Our group at restaurant)

Though all of these customs may seem a little overwhelming at first, giving yourself time to adjust to them is important. While you are not expected to like every custom, you should try to understand and follow as many of them as possible while you are in Spain.

Part II: So I'm Here, Now What?

Parte II: Estoy aquí, ¿Qué hago ahora?

*La estatua de
Cervantes en
Alcalá de Henares
(Statue of
Cervantes)*



*Un carrusel o tiovivo
en la plaza de
Cervantes (Carousel
in Alcalá's square)*

Fashion in Spain

Moda en España

In Spain, fashion is more important than it is in the United States. In fact, the Spanish are considered to be “ahead” of the United States in terms of fashion. However, this love of fashion does not necessarily translate into being rich. For example, many host mothers will have one beautiful designer blouse, but they will wear this blouse over and over again. So instead of having many cheaper blouses of lower quality, an individual will have one very high quality blouse. In my own experience, my host mother would wear comfortable clothes around the house to cook, clean, and play with her grandchildren. However, for any trip outside of the home, whether grocery shopping, attending church, or taking the grandchildren to play in *el parque*, my host mother would put on a nice outfit and heels. To many of us in the United States that seems illogical (especially if we’re playing in the park). But in Spain it is important to look your best whenever you leave the house. This often translates into dressing in a more formal manner. This is different than the U.S. where people often leave their homes in sweat pants. (This is not always the case in the U.S. because I know many people who would never leave their house in sweatpants.) As in most countries, youth tend to follow a different pattern than other generations and Spain is no exception. Spanish youth are more likely than their parents or grandparents to wear clothing that differs from society’s norm or leave the house “underdressed.”

This “different” clothing can range from a style similar to Goth in the U.S. to simply jeans/shorts. This differs from the norm because a traditional Spanish outfit would most likely include pants, a dressy shirt, and formal shoes.



Social Life in Spain

La vida social en España

Social life in Spain is different than in the U.S., though admittedly I had no experience with the night life in the U.S. before I left for Spain. According to other students who studied abroad with me, people don't go out until later in Spain. Most youth do not leave the house to go out to a bar/club before 24:00 (midnight), unless they are meeting up to hang out first. A huge difference between youth in the U.S. and Spain is how much they drink while going out. In the U.S., most youth go out just to drink and often drink before they go to a bar/club. In Spain, things are more relaxed; youth are more likely to spend all night dancing or talking to friends than getting drunk. However, the nights usually last longer, sometimes until 4:00-5:00am. An important part of Spanish culture is that drinking is always associated with eating. When you go to a restaurant in Madrid and order a drink, you will automatically receive a *pincho* (an appetizer that changes from restaurant to restaurant) for free. In my own experience it is a lot of fun to try the different tapas in all of the local restaurants. Some of the tapas I tried were *tortilla española*, *pizza*, and bread with baby eels (*gulas*) on it. Spaniards often go out and spend time with others while drinking and eating their tapas. It is also very common to see people meeting to spend time simply relaxing in the plaza. This is a popular activity not only for youth and young adults, but also for families, couples, and groups of friends of all ages.



La universidad española

The first thing you need to know about classes in Spain is that they will not be easier than your classes in the U.S. Classes at *la universidad* are actually long and difficult, though it may seem otherwise. During the summer semester, each student takes two classes each month, a total of four classes during your time abroad. Each of these classes meets for two and a half hours a day adding up to five hours of class per day which will most likely leave you feeling tired and hungry. Here are some tips that will help you get through the long day. Remember to bring a water bottle and ask your host family for fruit and maybe a *bocadillo* (sandwich) which you will eat during your break between classes. My advice is that you try to eat just a piece of fruit (an apple was my favorite) for the first day and then if you need more food feel free to ask your host mom for a *bocadillo*.

During the fall and spring semester, you are more likely to take four classes, two on Monday and Wednesday and two on Tuesday and Thursday. These classes are about one and a half hours, but are held different times during the day. Therefore, I would recommend bringing a water bottle and fruit or a *bocadillo* to help you get through the day. The nice part about the long day is that you get to go home to *comida*! It is the perfect way to end the school day and potentially even better as you can take a *siesta* directly after. Some of the professors teach during all three semesters in Alcalá though the classes may be different. They each have their own teaching style, but you will learn much more than you could imagine from any one of them.



*Una de mis aulas
(classrooms) en la
escuela*



*La entrada de
su escuela en
España (the
front of your
school in Spain)*

The professors at *la universidad* are wonderful, but may not know how to speak English. This is extremely beneficial to learning Spanish, but presents difficulties in understanding everything that is said. Therefore you will need to pay very close attention during class or you will risk missing things, for example the question your professor is asking you to respond to. No matter what level of Spanish you are at, your classes will be difficult. However, you will become more accustomed to having your classes in Spanish the longer you spend in Alcalá.

Even though classes in Spain are difficult, there are some things that you can do to ensure your success. The first of these is homework. You will likely have homework every night and completing it will not only make sure that you understand the material, but that you are prepared for the next day in class. There may not be as much free time as you think throughout the week, especially because some students may not be used to having homework every night. This may make it difficult to juggle your time in Spain, especially if you plan to take a *siesta* or spend most of your nights in the *Plaza*. Therefore, learning how to manage your time is an essential part of studying/living in Spain. I recommend spending the first two or so weeks completing your homework before spending time with friends at *la Plaza* (square). These two weeks will help you learn how much time your homework will take and then allow you to plan your time much more effectively.

Jobs in Spain

Trabajos en España

Before you leave for Spain you should discuss with the program director whether it would be a good idea for you to have a job abroad. If you are studying abroad for the summer, then it doesn't make much sense to try to find a job. However, if you are studying for a longer semester or better yet a year, then you may want to consider finding gainful employment. The first thing you should look into is the host country's economic situation because knowing if the state of the economy is poor will help you understand that it will be more difficult to find a job. For example, the current rate of unemployment in the U.S. is 9.1% and in Spain it is 20.9% (5, 6). Therefore, trying to find a job in Spain now is difficult under the best circumstances and potentially even more difficult for a non-citizen of the country as citizens are generally hired over non-citizens especially during difficult times. Some potential jobs to look into while abroad: tutor for individuals wanting to learn English (especially children) or a host or server at a restaurant. A tutoring position is often an easier job as you mostly speak English to enhance the language skills of your student. The benefit to working in a restaurant is that your grasp of the language is enhanced as you speak only Spanish with customers and co-workers. Working in another country is another activity that could potentially enhance your speaking skills immensely; however, it could be extraordinarily stressful too. This stress will most likely occur due to misunderstandings between you and your co-workers.



In order to work legally in Spain, you have to obtain a work visa in the United States. If you intend to get a job while studying abroad, you need to have a job offer from a Spanish company. Even after obtaining a job offer, this process can be long, taking up to two months so make sure that you plan ahead if you plan on trying to get a job while studying abroad. Because I studied abroad during the summer, I did not have to consider working abroad. However, I think that it can be a valuable and educational experience for those students daring enough to attempt it.

Part III: Travel in Spain

Parte III: Viajes en España



Madrid Barajas
Airport (left)



El tren (train,
right)



*Mi amiga y yo en un
autobus* (My friend
and I on a bus)

Types of Transportation

Tipos de Transportación

The main methods of transportation in Spain are bus and train. Some Spaniards have cars and use them to travel around their city or to other places, but this is not an option I would advise when you study abroad. Gas can be very expensive which makes this form of transportation undesirable and often costly. You will mainly use buses to travel around a city, Alcalá or Madrid for example. However, travel between cities will mainly happen on a train (or a bus for those frugal travelers, myself included). Using a bus or train is necessary when traveling in Spain, and some students will even need to ride the bus to school. When I took weekend trips, I used buses both times (mainly because this was the cheapest option). The downside to riding a bus is the length of the journey which is almost always longer than the train ride would be. However, it is a cheaper option and if you can spare the time, then it is a good way to go. Trains are great at getting you where you want to go fairly quickly, but they can be expensive and I found the schedule difficult to understand.



Un autobús

The schedule for main train lines was listed by station online, but the smaller train lines often didn't have a schedule online or they had an incomplete one. The bus schedules were a little easier to read and were often found at the bus station.

Planes are also an option for travel in Spain, but this will be reserved for travel between cities or more likely for travel between countries. Even the cheapest flights are expensive at about 100-150 Euros (170-255 dollars); I suggest looking for flights with Ryanair if you decide that you want to fly to your destination as it traditionally had the cheapest flights and some that are cheaper than the above listed prices. Flights do ideally save time; however, you must remember to factor in the time spent passing through security when you depart and arrive as well as possible flight delays which happened to me almost every single time I flew. In my own experience, planes are most useful and really only useful when traveling from country to country. This saves you from day-long train or bus trips. However, I found that planes are a great way to get to know other people. Once while I was flying to Paris, my plane was delayed for three hours in Madrid. I met this young man from Peru and spoke with him for a while as we sat and waited in the airport. It was a great experience and another fantastic chance to practice my Spanish. On the same flight, I sat next to another young man from Spain and we spoke throughout the whole flight. My advice would be to take every opportunity to practice speaking Spanish, especially with strangers who you will most likely never meet again.





*La estación
de tren de
Atocha*
(Atocha train
station in
Madrid)

I also want to briefly speak about the Eurail Pass for those students who are contemplating purchasing one. A Eurail Pass is designed to save money on train trips throughout Europe. The pass can be used to earn a discount on nearly every train line. However, my advice would be not to purchase one. I bought a pass at the beginning of my trip and never used it because I discovered that you had to pay a fee every time you used the pass to ride on a train (this is on top of the price to purchase the Eurail Pass). However, if you are planning on spending more time in Europe after your semester studying abroad, then you should consider the Eurail Pass. In this case, you would likely be traveling more often than every other weekend and you may be traveling through different countries which the Eurail Pass can help you with. Either way I advise you to speak to other students about your travel options before leaving for Spain.

Important Places to See

Lugares importantes que debe ver en España

It was important to me to add this section to a guide to studying abroad because traveling to other cities and countries was, for me, one of the most exciting parts to traveling abroad. In the following pages there is a list of the places I saw when I studied abroad as well as some pictures of those sites. Some other important cities which I did not have time to visit are as follows: Sevilla, Valencia, Pamplona, Zaragoza, Salamanca, and Córdoba. If you have more than a summer semester to spend abroad, then I absolutely recommend visiting as many of the listed cities and more and traveling to at least another country in Europe. While I studied in Spain, I visited Paris, France, and Marrakesh, Morocco, though I did not include any information about these cities in the guide. If traveling in Spain is something you are interested in, then make sure to do some research before leaving the U.S. which will make planning in Spain much easier.



El Escorial (a palace built by Felipe II) just outside Madrid in a city called San Lorenzo de El Escorial

Madrid

Madrid is the closest city to Alcalá de Henares and is probably the easiest and most convenient city to visit. As the capital of Spain, it is a bustling city filled with many wonders. Here are some great places to see in Madrid: *Campo del Moro* (famous park near *el Palacio Real*), ***Palacio Real*** (the royal palace), *Catedral Almudena*, *Plaza de España* (a main square), ***Plaza Mayor*** (center of the city), *Puerta del Sol* (the geographic center of Spain, *kilómetro cero*), *Gran Vía* (a famous street), ***Parque del Buen Retiro***, *Museo del Prado* (the most famous museum in Spain) and *El Centro de Arte Reina Sofia* (museum of contemporary art). These places are all worth a visit and the sites in bold are emphasized for good reason. These sites also have pictures in this guide. From my own experience, the museums in Madrid are wonderful and worth spending an extra day in Madrid. Here's a tip: you can visit the museums for free on Sundays. Make sure to double check with your host family or program director and take advantage! You should also check *La Guía de Ocio* for updated information on everything to do with Madrid. You should also show your ISIC card whenever you go places because you could receive a discount or even get in free (*Reina Sofia*).

Plaza Mayor



Madrid



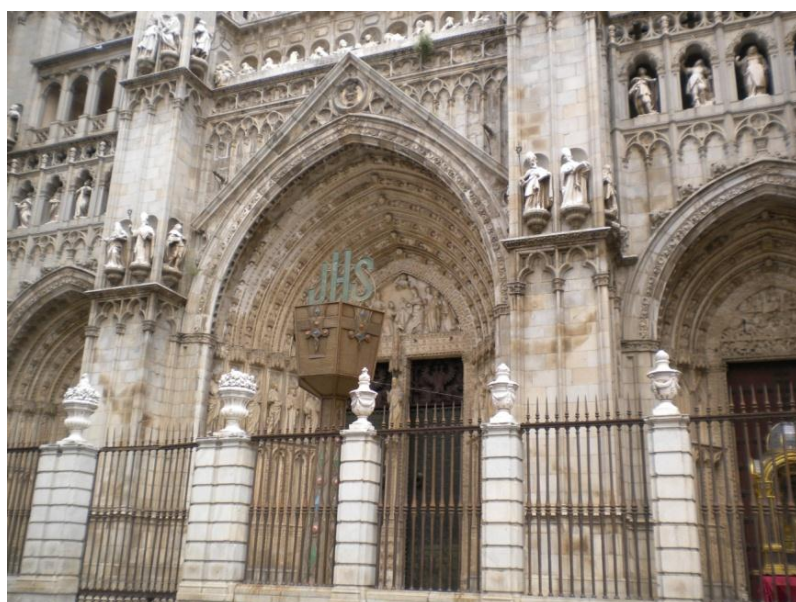
*El
Palacio
Real
(Royal
Palace)*

*Una fuente
(fountain)
en El
Parque del
Buen
Retiro*



Toledo

Toledo was my second favorite city in Spain. It is an absolutely beautiful city founded in the very history of Spain, but with a slight touch of modernity visible on occasion. This city is only a short trip from Alcalá and is well worth a visit. Here are some of the sites you should check out while in Toledo: *San Juan de los Reyes* (a monastery), *Museo Sefardí* (a museum about the Jewish history in Spain), ***la Catedral de Toledo***, and *Iglesia de Santo Tomé* (a church). The *Santo Tomé* is worth a visit because it contains a painting by *El Greco* (one of my favorite Spanish artists) entitled *El entierro del Conde de Orgaz* (the burial of Count Orgaz). ***La Catedral de Toledo*** is in bold because a picture of it can be found below. Also, it is an absolutely magnificent church and a must-see if you visit Toledo.



La Catedral de Toledo

*“El entierro del
Conte Orgaz”*



Segovia

Segovia is another beautiful town in Spain. It, more than other cities in Spain, has a history which extends back to Roman times. In fact, the main attraction to Segovia is ***el Acueducto de Segovia*** (Roman Aqueduct) built during Roman occupation of the city. Two other important places to visit are *el Alcázar* (a fort and once royal palace) and *la Catedral de Segovia*. It is another city close to Alcalá which makes it even more worthy of a visit. In my own experience, the best part of this visit was taking a long walk through the city. You'll experience more of Spanish culture, especially if you visit the local shops as well. In my own wanderings, I also found and sampled a famous local pastry called *ponche de Segovia*. I recommend giving it a try with some friends! During this trip, my friends and I also had a fantastic packed lunch provided by our host mothers under the shadow of *el acueducto*. When you go on a trip, your host family will often provide you with a lunch (most likely a *bocadillo*) if you ask for it.



El Acueducto en Segovia

Barcelona



La Sagrada Familia

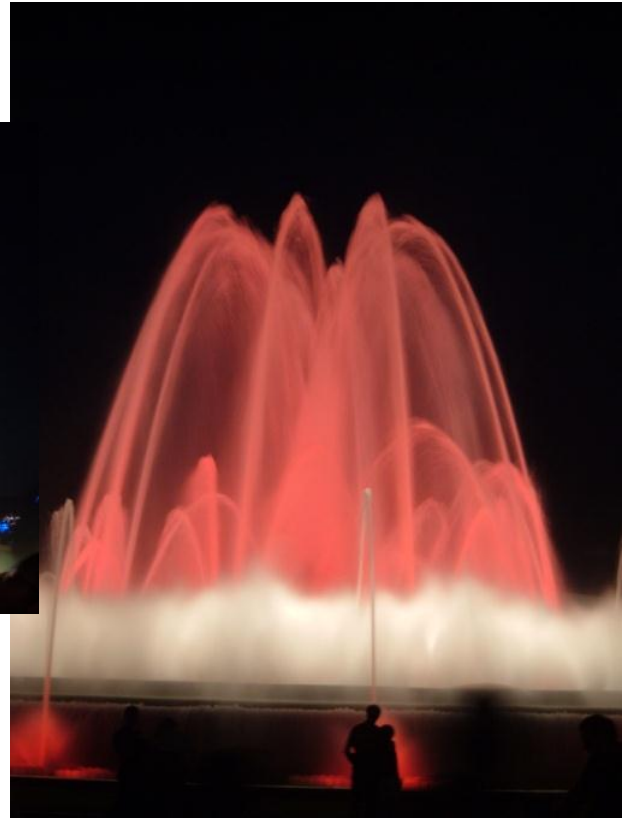
My favorite part of Barcelona was the *espectáculo de luces* (light show) in the *Plaça d'Espanya*. It was a magnificent show that lasted for over an hour and is held on Friday and Saturday nights during the summer. It was an absolutely fantastic show and a highlight of this trip. Make sure to check it out!

Barcelona was my favorite city in Spain. It held such a variety of attractions (from cathedrals to beaches) and activities. The weekend that I spent in Barcelona was filled with bike riding, walking along the beach, hiking through *Parc Güell* (a park designed by *Gaudi*), and shopping at *Las Ramblas*. These are some of the most important places to visit in Barcelona: ***La Sagrada Familia***, *Las Ramblas* (a road filled with shops), *Catedral de Santa Cruz*, *Castillo de Montjuïc* (a castle and fort built on a hill overlooking the sea), *Catedral de Barcelona*, *Hospital de la Santa Creu*, ***Plaça d'Espanya***, and *Estadi Olímpic de Montjuïc* (a stadium built to host the Olympics). On a side note, it is important to remember that the locals in Barcelona speak Catalan; but this shouldn't hinder your enjoyment of the city.

Barcelona



*El espectáculo de luces
(light show) en la Plaça
d'Espanya*



*La playa (beach) en
Barcelona*

Granada

Granada is found in a part of Spain with tremendous influence from the Muslim world. There is a lot of Islamic influence in this region because it was occupied by Muslims for several centuries. This is evident in the buildings and types of art found throughout the city. The most important sites to see in Granada also show signs of Islamic influence, including *La Alhambra* (a palace and fortress), *La Capilla Real* (a pantheon of the *Reyes Católicos*), and *La Catedral de Granada*. When I visited Granada, we also took time to visit another local city to spend a day at the beach. Salobreña was a beautiful beach town which we enjoyed even though the weather was bad.

During our exploration of Salobreña, we also found an outstanding ice cream shop which we ate at during our free lunch time. This is yet another example which proves that walking around a new city is a great way to absorb and learn more about Spanish culture!



La playa (beach) en Salobreña

Granada



*Parte de La Alhambra en
Granada, La Alcazaba*

*Una fuente
(fountain)
en La
Alhambra*



Basic Spanish Phrases

Frases básicas en español

Hola	o-la	Hello
Adios/Chao	ah-d-os/chow	Goodbye
Hasta luego	ah-sta loo-ay-go	See you later
Hasta mañana	ah-sta mah-nya-nah	See you tomorrow
Buenos días	bway-nos d-ahs	Good morning
Buenas tardes	bway-nos tar-days	Good afternoon
Buenas noches	bway-nahs no-ch-ays	Good evening
Cómo estas?	co-mo s-tas	How are you?
Estoy bien	s-toy b-n	I am fine
así-así	ah-sea ah-sea	... so-so, alright
muy mal	moy mall	... really bad
Yo tengo _ años	yo tehn-go _ ah-nyos	I am _ years old
dieciocho	d-ace-e -o-cho	... 18
diecinueve	d-ace-e-new-a-bay	... 19
veinte	bane-tay	... 20
veinte-un	bane-tay oo-no	... 21
Yo tengo _ hermanos	_ air-mah-nos	I have _ brothers
hermanas	_ air-mah-nahs	... sisters
Me gusta mucho...	may goo-stah moo-cho	I really like...
Me gusta...	may goo-stah	I like...
No me gusta...	no may goo-stah	I don't like...
Yo (no) prefiero...	yo (no) pray-fi-ere-o	I prefer...
pescado	pes-cah-do	fish
pollo/bistec	poh-yo/beas-tec	chicken/beef
sopa/ensalada	so-pah/n-sah-lah-dah	soup/salad
pan/fruta	pahn/froo-tah	bread/fruit
Yo estudio...	yo s-too-d-o	I study...
ciencias	sea-n-sea-ahs	... sciences
negocios	nay-go-sea-os	... business
artes	r-tays	... arts

More Spanish Phrases

Más frases españolas

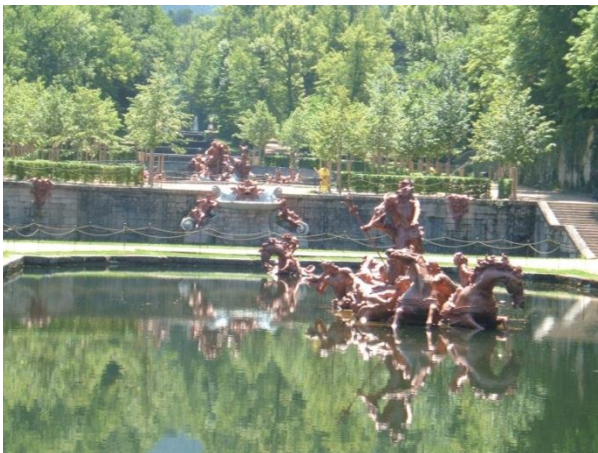
This section provides a list of uniquely Spanish phrases designed to help you become comfortable more quickly with the language in Spain. Some of the list will be commonly used words and some will be phrases that are different in Spain than in other Spanish-speaking countries. The best advice I can give on how to improve your Spanish is simple: **use your Spanish!** The best way to improve your Spanish is to practice speaking it in every situation possible, from talking to your host family to renting a movie to making small talk with locals when you go out. I know that it can be intimidating, but the more you speak the better you will become; and who better to practice speaking with than people who you will never see again! In Spain, the vosotros form, 2nd person plural, of verbs is very common. It is probably a good idea to study up on this form before leaving for Spain if you aren't familiar with it. People in central Spain also pronounce their sounds slightly differently; C's and Z's are pronounced as TH. Knowing this will make it slightly easier to distinguish words and understand local speakers.

Vale	bah-lay	Ok, alright, used to express understanding, agreement, etc.
Joder	ho-there	****, used to mean crap, darn, ****, etc., Caution this is a <i>palabrota</i> (bad word)
Conducir	con-due-seer	Drive, used in place of <i>manejar</i> (normally used in Latin American countries)
Un coche	oon co-chay	Car, used in place of <i>carro</i> (normally used in Latin American countries)
Dígame	d-gah-may	Talk to me, used when you answer a phone and sometimes by servers in restaurants
¿Cómo?	co-mo	How, used in the same way that “what” is used in English

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*Los jardines (gardens) en
La Granja*

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El pozo en el patio a la universidad (A well in the patio at the university)

