

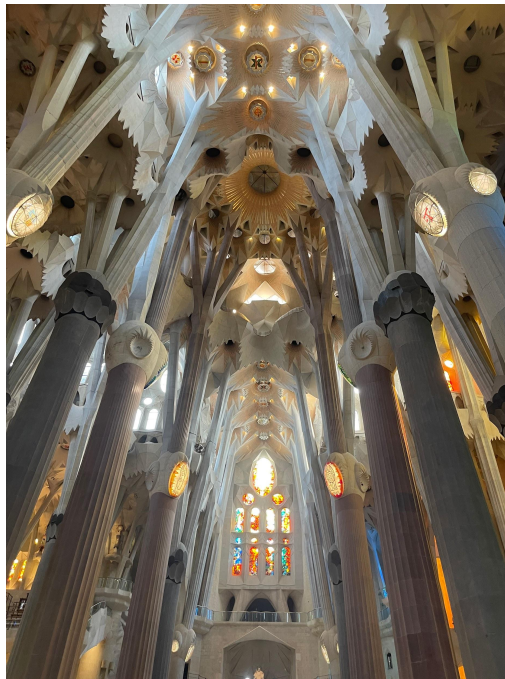
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Study Abroad Program: SPANISH: SPANISH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE (SESSION 1: JUNE START)

Traveling abroad can be intimidating. Having never traveled outside of the United States before, I was scared to embark on a month-long trip around Spain, but my excitement for adventure and experience outweighed all of my fears and anxieties. As a student in the beginners Spanish 2/3 course, I was not confident in my knowledge and skills of the Spanish language; however, after meeting my peers, the professors, and the TAs, my anxieties were eased knowing that I had a support system with me.

Through the Spain study abroad program, we got the opportunity to explore at least seven cities in Spain throughout the month, and study in three. Beginning in Barcelona, we were immersed in the buzzing city life and culture, touring multiple famous landmarks, such as Gaudí's La Pedrera and La Sagrada Familia, which were even more stunning than pictures can do justice. Our very first tour was of the Picasso Museum and Gothic Quarter. Already nervous about not fully understanding the Spanish language, I was surprised when our tour guide began only speaking in Spanish. Come to find out later, there was a miscommunication and we were supposed to have been taking the tour in English! After only one day of class, I could pick out certain words like "azul" when speaking of Picasso's blue period, but as I glanced around at the rest of my class with confused faces I felt less alone. As the days went on, I became more comfortable with the area and basic phrases to order food in Spanish, and then just like that, we were on to our next city!



Next in Madrid, after a day of class, we had the weekend to explore the city. Stopping by places such as Plaza Mayor, I was in awe of the gorgeous landmarks I had only seen in pictures and had always assumed they would remain that way— a still image; however, the program offered me the opportunity to create my own memories in places I could only ever imagine and take images of my own. While I wandered with a group of friends, we stopped to try the churros con chocolate and all I can say is that they were as delicious as they sound. We were lucky to be in Madrid at the time of the annual Madrid Pride festival— one of the largest Pride events in the world. With people traveling from all over to experience the parade, it was a beautiful sight to behold as the city gathered to celebrate!



The majority of our study time was spent in Granada, a smaller city in southern Spain. Unlike the other two major cities we studied in, Granada offers a peaceful experience and is home to my favorite landmark of the entire trip, La Alhambra. A typical day in Granada began with class from 9:30 am to 2:00 pm, where our wonderful TAs supported us in learning the vast Spanish language. Unless there was a planned excursion, we would then have the rest of the day to ourselves. After lunch, most days, I would rest and do homework until finding dinner in the main city center with friends. After a couple days, a nice routine began to form and living in Spain became less and less intimidating and more and more stimulating. Along our bus routes, we also had the opportunities to explore the cities of Zaragoza, Toledo, Córdoba, and Sevilla— all offering a new view of Spanish life and the history that accompanies it.



Over the weekends, we also had the opportunity to plan our own trips. As an avid beach lover, I decided to travel to Málaga and Nerja for my two free weekends. Alongside friends I had made over the past few weeks in the program, I spent my weekends relaxing on the beach and enjoying a good book. Sometimes the “study” in study abroad can feel a little overwhelming especially with such a fast-paced course, so having these weekends to enjoy time with friends and lay in the sun was much needed.

As I previously stated, having limited Spanish experience, I was worried about my ability to pick up on the concepts in an intensive course. Although it was far from easy, I felt supported the entire way with TAs going out of their way to support students and genuinely wanting them to learn! I cannot say that after the program I am fluent or near-fluent by any means; however, I have seen a tremendous improvement in my knowledge and production of the language. Having the opportunity to be surrounded by native Spanish speakers while learning Spanish is an experience unlike any other. Each day I saw the improvement in my understanding due to these unique classroom environments— one in the confines of our room and textbooks and one outside of our hotel, in the gorgeous cities of Spain.

It was bittersweet to say goodbye to Spain. Not only did the program provide me with an opportunity to view some of the most beautiful sights I’ve seen in my life, I also got to meet fellow classmates and form friendships that I intend to make last past our month-long trip together. Some of my favorite memories from the trip are of myself and friends simply sitting down for dinner and enjoying our time getting to know each other. Traveling the cities of Spain was an experience unlike any other and I am grateful for the people I got to experience it with. Ultimately, I can walk away from this program with a greater knowledge of a language that I plan to continue practicing and learning beyond Spanish 3, friendships that I hope will continue beyond our travels, and memories that will last a lifetime!