

# Here's my Study Abroad Story

## Mackenzie Dallas IES Granada Granada, Spain

**Major:** International Relations

**Program:** IES Granada is a wonderful program with a dedicated staff. The program has its own building located in Plaza Nueva, one of the main plazas in the city, and has a wonderful rooftop view. Classes are taught by professors from the local university, and everyone is required to take a Spanish language class as well as other elective courses. In addition, interested students can take classes at the University of Granada. I took four courses at IES, including my language class and took my fifth class at the University. IES can also organize internships, volunteer opportunities and some trips to other cities. My favorite was the 5 day trip to Morocco! The majority of people lived in homestays and had an intercambio (a Spanish university student learning English) which can help you make great local friends. A final note about the program is that it does not cover dinner and in most cases you do not have access to a kitchen, but fear not because there are tapas!

**Typical Day:** My day would begin between 7-8 am when I would wake up and eat breakfast before my 10 minute walk to class. In the mornings I would have my Spanish language class followed by one or two other classes. In between morning classes I would go to a nearby café and get tostada con tomate (bread and tomato) and either coffee or hot chocolate to help me make it through the long break until lunch. Around 2 pm everyone would go home to eat lunch with their families. Lunch is the largest meal of the day and typically took an hour; this included eating and talking with my host family. After lunch I would generally take a siesta (aka naptime!) and do some work at home or at a local café with friends. Sometimes I would have an afternoon class. My favorite class was Islamic Art and Architecture which had weekly afternoon field trips to different important historical sites. I got to go to the Alhambra 5 different times (go look it up, it's beautiful)!



Me with my host parents (and their dogs!) while on a walk to a view point above the city.

In the evenings I would either go out to eat with friends or make myself something at home. For most people dinner is generally eaten out, bars open around 9 pm and you can get a drink for 2 euros or less, which includes a free tapa. A tapa is a small plate of food like an appetizer, and ranges from simple olives and bread to the more elaborate fried eggplant and honey. This is how many Spaniards eat dinner, a couple of drinks and you have your meal! However, often this was not enough food for me so I would supplement my meal with snacks from the grocery store. Granada is a very student heavy city and there are a significant amount of foreign students, both Americans and Erasmus (European Study Abroad) this means that there is a very active nightlife often geared towards the students. On weekends I would explore the city, surrounding areas, travel and study!

**Highlights:** One of my biggest highlights was when tourists, either foreigners or Spaniards from other cities, would ask me for directions in Spanish and I was able to respond without them disregarding me as a foreigner! I lived near some big sites so there were always some tourists around. I loved that I could communicate with people and that my Spanish had improved to the point that people would not dismiss me as soon as they heard my Spanish. Although it was obvious I wasn't Spanish, my speaking abilities had improved to the point where most people didn't immediately know I was an American.



Me with a monkey in Gibraltar!!

**Challenges:** Electricity and water are very expensive in Spain, and my homestay (like most homes) did not have heating, even in the dead of winter. Showers were often cold and short. I was not prepared for it to be this cold. Adjusting to these basic changes in my daily life were very challenging, but I found ways to overcome them through talking with my host parents. Another basic difference that took a while to adjust to was the food schedule: breakfast (typically small) is at 8 am, lunch (very big) is around 3 pm, and dinner (again fairly small) is around 10 pm. The long breaks between meals was very unusual for me, but I quickly became a fan of "second breakfast" which I would buy from a café in between classes.

The other large challenge while studying abroad is to not fall into a routine. It is nice to become comfortable in your new environment, but after a while I felt myself set in a routine and that I had stopped exploring my city. I had to actively push myself to find adventures in my city and not just live in my now comfortable routine.

**Advice:** Study abroad is an incredible opportunity that everyone should take advantage of (if they can)! My advice is to make sure you choose a location that pushes you outside of your comfort zone and adds to your academic experience. Once you go abroad don't forget to continue to push yourself to do adventurous things and make an effort to get to know locals and your host family. These relationships can add tremendous fulfillment to your experience and should not be neglected.