

Here's my Study Abroad Story

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Major: Psychology and Spanish

Program: The IES Salamanca center is located in the center of the city, about a 5 minute walk from the Plaza Mayor. It is very small, consisting of only four staff members, a few professors from the local university, and about 30-35 American students.

Everyone lived with a host family, minus the select few that lived in the residence hall. I took three of my classes at the IES center, taught by local Spanish professors, and the other two at the private University. You also have the option of taking classes at the well-known University of Salamanca. Salamanca is a college town, so taking classes at the university allowed you to meet many locals that you can get to



know and actually spend time with. Classes varied in all different subjects, so there is plenty to choose from. IES also offered many cultural events, such as concert tickets, cooking classes, dance classes, etc. to allow students to immerse themselves in the Spanish way of life. They also offered various field trips to other Spanish cities, including Segovia, Toledo, Sevilla, Granada, and Zamora.

Typical Day: I would wake up between 8 and 9 every morning, eat a very small breakfast, and head out to class. My closest friends in the program all lived in the same area, so usually we met on the corner and enjoyed the 15-20 minute walk to class, having the greatest conversations about everything you can think of. Some days I would stay in the center and have all my IES classes, and other days I would go to my university classes. But every day of the week, we had our Spanish grammar class from 1-2pm at IES. After class, everyone went back home for lunch, the most important and biggest meal of the day. My host mom made the most delicious meals for my housemate and I, and we would sit for about 45 minutes every day, chatting about our day, the news, or other topics.

After lunch, I would either have class, take a *siesta*, or meet up with friends at a coffee shop for some pastries and homework. At night, I would eat dinner at home, a much smaller meal, or go for *tapas* with friends. On weekends, we would have a field trip to a new Spanish city, go out with friends and enjoy the college town nightlife, or travel to a new country.

Highlights: The list of highlights could go on forever. But the most important one was immersing myself in the Spanish culture and learning their way of life. I was very lucky to get the chance to visit so many different cities in Spain. Although there are many aspects of the Spanish culture that are the same throughout the country, there are also a lot of regional differences. I got the chance to experience these differences first-hand during my weekend travels to different cities, including many in Castilla y Leon, Sevilla and Granada in southern Spain, Santiago de Compostela and Galicia in northern Spain, and Barcelona in Catalonia. Another unique highlight was walking the last 100 kilometers of the Camino de Santiago. It was an optional field trip with IES during the first weekend, so a group of 13 of us walked the pilgrimage together in 5 days, reaching the final destination, the Cathedral of St. James. It was an incredible, once-in-a-lifetime experience that I will never forget.



Challenges: The hardest thing for me was being so far away from my family. Although I was having the time of my life, there were times when I really missed home. During the beginning weeks of winter, I was really, really missing L.A. and my SoCal sunshine. I had never been away from home for that long, and I definitely had never missed a holiday, so spending Thanksgiving away from my family was very difficult.



Advice: 1) GO! Don't even think about it, just pick a place and go. Go out of your comfort zone, take risks, and I promise you won't regret it. 2) Make friends with locals, and take advantage of living with a host family. There is no better way to immerse yourself in the culture than to directly be a part of it. These people are going to help you improve your Spanish, tell you what is appropriate and not, give you advice on places to go and things to do, and give you the chance to visit in the future.