Fall Exchange 2011
Universidad de Navarra
Pamplona Spain

*In Paris (Back of Notre Dame de Paris)
Introduction

During Fall 2011 I went on exchange to Pamplona, Spain to study at Universidad de Navarra. I’m a business major in my forth year. Ever since I graduated from high school, going on exchange before the completion of post-secondary studies was a number one “must-do” for me. Europe as my destination was decided long before, the question was WHERE in Europe should I go? After considering cons and pros of each available country, I decided to apply for Spain. But shortly after realizing how dreadful and complicated the whole application process to Spain can be, I backed off, and changed my first choice to Italy, making Spain my second choice. But ironically I didn’t get into the University of Bocconi, Italy, and ended up going to Spain after all. One thing I can tell for sure, this was the best outcome and I’m extremely happy that everything worked out this way.

Travel & visas

As visa process in Spain is disorganized and very draining, it is crucial that you get your student visa done as soon as possible, and I can’t stress this enough! My advice is as soon as you find out that you got into the exchange program and you’ve received your acceptance letter do the following:

Be careful, there are thousands of websites out there providing information about Spanish visas, that are outdated and contradictory. So, to get the most accurate information regarding your visa application, visit the following website:

www.maec.es/SUBWEBs/CONSULADOS/TORONTO/EN/MENUPPAL/SERVICIOSCONSULA RESENCANAD%C3%81/VISADOSDELARGADURACI%C3%93N/Paginas/Long%20term%20visas.aspx#sec2

(official website of Spanish consulate in Toronto, no consulate in Vancouver anymore)

Accommodation & living

Once all the crazy visa application process is done, you should take the second step and try to arrange your accommodation. I would definitely recommend doing it in advance, however you’ll find out that it is nearly impossible to make any arrangements with Spanish people without a headache. But don’t worry, I can assure you at the end of the day it will all work out, you just have to be patient. To start looking for housing go to the following website:

http://www.unav.es/futuosalumnos/alojamiento.php

Here you can find shared apartments, residencies and other means of accommodations and contact the landlord via email/phone. These postings are hosted through the university website; therefore, it is the safest way to find an apartment outside of school. It is worth to note, that most of people in Pamplona don’t speak English, so it’s a good idea to write emails in both English and Spanish.
Even if you don’t manage to make housing arrangements before leaving Vancouver, during welcoming days there will be people in charge of housing who will try to group students with the same problem and help them find a new home. Do make sure though, attend welcoming days.

Also, a lot of students come to Pamplona and stay at hostels until they themselves meet other exchange students and look for an apartment together. This is just another option for you.

**Arrival and orientation**

I was flying to Madrid, from where I took a five-hour bus to Pamplona. Once I arrived to Madrid, it was extremely easy to get to the bus station. If you chose the same route, you have to take Bus 200 from T1 of Madrid airport, the last stop is the bus station you need. You can buy the bus ticket to Pamplona right there, or if you want to be safe you can buy your ticket online: [www.movelia.es](http://www.movelia.es)

If you are flying to Barcelona, you just have to take the train from T2 of Barcelona airport and get off at the station called “Estacion Sur”. That’s where you take the bus to Pamplona. Same deal, tickets can be purchased at the station or online at [www.vibasa.com](http://www.vibasa.com)

Once you arrive to Pamplona, it is very important to attend the “Welcoming Days.” Orientation organized by university is very comprehensive and extremely helpful. Should you have ANY questions, you’ll find answers during orientation; as they cover housing, academic details, cell-phone, banking etc. That’s where you will be introduced to other exchange students and other people who will be guiding you throughout your exchange term.

*Pictures from orientation of August 2011*

**Academic details**

I was surprised how registration process at University of Navarra went easily and smoothly. In the second day of orientation I received a timetable of all of the classes offered in English. I had 2 weeks to decide which ones to take. During this two-week period I was attending different classes and finally chose the ones I wanted to take. Afterwards, I simply filled out a registration form and returned it to the International Office. Done! So, don’t worry if you were not able to
figure out your classes beforehand, once you get to the University you’ll have more than enough
time to register. The best thing about Universidad de Navarra is that you never have to worry
about not being able to get into a course due to overcapacity, because this university ensures
that each student takes classes he/she wants.

In general, classes are easier, as long as you complete all the work required. It is normal in this
university to take 8-9 courses. WOW! So if you get goose bumps when you hear that somebody
is taking 5 courses at SFU, inhere it is a normal course load, and in fact, this is the ideal amount
of courses I’d recommend to take. As each course is worth either 4.5 or 6 ECTS, that transfer
as \(2 \text{ ETC} = 1 \text{ SFU}\), keep in mind and plan accordingly, if you don’t want to fall behind your
academic schedule.

Pamplona

Pamplona is located in the north of Spain in a region called Navarra. The North of Spain is
extremely different from the south of Spain in matters of weather, culture and architecture.
Pamplona is a small, quiet and charming. Unlike the south of Spain, Pamplona’s climate
varies even more than Vancouver’s does. So if you thought you’d get away from the rain and
the cold, this is not the case with Pamplona. Pamplona’s population is about 220,000 people
and the majority of the population is university aged students and older people, which makes
this city one the safest in Spain. I have never lived in a small city and never thought I could get
used to a small city life, especially when I applied for Milan, Italy and didn’t get accepted. My
general mood about a small quite city was rather mixed. But soon enough I came to realize that
such environment is the best for students, particularly for exchange students. Living in the city
where everything is a walking distance, you can’t help but seeing same people every day, and
you end-up becoming closer to people due your proximity and having profound relationships.
Relationships that you would never be able to realize in the short 4 or 8 months of you
exchange period if you were in a big city that is full of distractions, deadlines and distance.
Another great thing about this experience is that you meet people from all over the world:
Austria, US, France, Germany, Japan, Africa, Denmark, Switzerland, Italy, Poland…and this list
can go on forever. It was very interesting to learn about each of cultures and observe the
coeistence of such a huge variation of nationalities.
Below is a picture of me and some of my friends:
**Casco Viejo**
Pamplona’s got a great old town called Casco Viejo which is lined with narrow streets with bars and shops with unique eccentric treasures. In this part of town you truly feel like you’re in Spain. On the right is the picture of one of the charming narrow streets of Casco Viejo.

**Ciudella**
This is probably the most unique feature of Pamplona. It’s a huge castle structure that is located in the park “Vuelta del Castillo” between Iturrama and Casco Viejo. It’s surrounded by grassy areas and is divided by bridges.

**Yamaguchi Park**
Yamaguchi park of Pamplona is one of the most modern areas of the city. The park was designed in 1997 in an oriental style by Japanese landscape gardeners, which is why it contains all the features typical of a garden imported from the land of the Rising Sun, with all its refinement, delicacy and attention to detail. The park is a symbol of the twinning of the cities of Pamplona and Yamaguchi

**San Juan**
If you want to know where the clubs are, you’ll find them all here. Wednesdays and Thursdays are big party nights in Spain. Every Wednesday there’s a party called Crazy Wednesday which is put on by students of the school. The party is held at different bars every week and there’s a Facebook group that you should join to find out where the upcoming party will be held at. Unlike Vancouver, parties in Spain end no earlier than 6 am. Some clubs get busy only around 5 am. However, I could never make it until the very end, as much as I tried 😊

**Iturrama**
Iturrama is where I lived. I recommend living in Iturrama over all the other areas in Pamplona. It’s where all the students live and it’s close to the university. Rent ran between 240 to 360 euros per month including gas, electricity, internet and water. DO NOT live on campus if you want to have any sort of independence during your stay. Unlike university residence in Canada and United States, residence at Universidad de Navarra is completely different. In addition to regular dorm rules, in residence everyone must wake up at the same hour in the morning. As well as, you cannot come home past 11pm on weekdays and 2am on weekends. So if you stay there you can basically write off your chance of partying. However if you’re ready to stay on your own and if you want to have a more religious experience while you’re in Spain, the college residence might be a good option for you however; it will cost you. Approximate cost to stay at the residence is about 800 euros per month including food.
Lessons Learned a.k.a. Words of Wisdom

All being said...

- Plan early, get everything done on time
- Keep an open mind
- Embrace the new and unknown that comes across during your exchange period
- Learn to feel comfortable being outside of your comfort zone
- Travel every time you get a chance
- Make the most out of your exchange experience