Exchange Report: La Universidad de Navarra

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8/23/2012
**Introduction**

My name is Isabel and I went on exchange to La Universidad de Navarra in Pamplona, Spain during the Spring 2012 semester.

**Preparation for exchange**

**Before Leaving:**
Instead of applying for a student Visa, I was eligible to apply for a British passport (since my dad was born in London). Because all EU nationals can stay in other EU countries indefinitely, I didn’t have to get a student Visa. The passport cost $244 USD and took 4 months to get.

I also registered online at [www.voyage.gc.ca](http://www.voyage.gc.ca) so that the Canadian embassy could help me if I was experiencing an emergency abroad. It is also useful to research safety issues overseas.

Insurance with RBC cost $177 (the deluxe insurance package). I was told by International Services for Students that had I not opted out of the Student Medical/Dental Plan at SFU, I would have not had to find travel medical insurance elsewhere.

The university had a mentorship program where they assigned you a mentor if you signed up on the international student website: [http://www.unav.es/servicio/internacional/](http://www.unav.es/servicio/internacional/). The SFU students were all assigned the same mentor, a Spanish girl named Maria who previously went on exchange to Waterloo, Ontario. We connected with her on facebook and by e-mail before leaving and asked her questions.

The same website also has an accommodation webpage (see “alojamiento”) where you can find information on apartments or residences. Because I read a previous exchange report warning about the religious residences that are single-sex, living with nuns/priests with 10pm curfews and mandatory prayer circles/Mass participation, I shied away from living on residence and decided to find an off-campus apartment instead. While in Canada, I e-mailed landlords during the month of December to set up appointments with them to see apartments in January.

**Leaving:**
I left for Spain on Dec.22nd, 2011. I travelled there with British Airways; from Vancouver, to London Heathrow, to the Madrid Barajazs airport. The plane ticket, round trip, cost $1,530.20. I have some distant family living in Madrid, so I stayed with them for 11 days and celebrated Xmas (Navidad), New Year’s (La Noche Vieja) and a Spanish holiday called the three kings (Los Tres Reyes) with them.

I knew two other students coming from SFU during the same term (there were actually four of us from SFU total), Jenny and Dominika. On Jan.2nd I met up with Jenny in Madrid and spent the day touring the city with her while she roomed at a hostel. The next day, Dominika arrived in Madrid and we met up at the Madrid bus station to go to Pamplona. There are two bus stations in Madrid, and the one that has busses to Pamplona is called “Intercambiador” on “Avenida de America”. We bought our bus tickets online at [www.movelia.es](http://www.movelia.es). It was a 5 hour bus ride.

Dominika took an expensive cab from the Madrid airport to meet us at the Madrid bus station. This ended up being a waste, because right after leaving the station, the bus went straight to the airport to pick up passengers before continuing on to Pamplona. Also, the airport lost one of her suitcases, and she gave the university’s address in Pamplona for them to send it to.
**Arrival:**
When we got to the bus station in Pamplona our mentor, Maria, picked us up and walked us to our hostel. Jenny booked us Hostel Hemingway, which was recommended by the Spain Lonely Planet book. We stayed there for 6 days while searching for apartments. The hostel owner, Javier, who is only 27 years old & a Pamplona native, was super helpful and actually took us out to the Old Town (El Casco Viejo) on several nights for pintxos (Basque appetizers) and to dance in bars. We also met heaps of other international students (and Canadian students!) who were also looking for apartments around the university (=potential roommates). You can book a room at the hostel online at: [http://hostelhemingway.com/](http://hostelhemingway.com/).

We recovered Dominika's luggage with some difficulty. The airport sent her luggage to the university hospital instead of to the international student office. Make sure you have the address of your hostel in Pamplona written down so in case your luggage is lost they can send it directly to you.

**During Exchange:**

**Orientation:**

The university had an orientation for international students to help us get to know the campus and meet other international students. You had to sign up on the international student website (same link as before). We got campus tours and an introduction from the faculty and international committee. There was also a networking event where they served pintxos and wine. We also got to sign up for a field trip to San Sebastian, a city about an hour away on the northern coast. The field trip was the very next day, which also happened to be the first day of school- so we got to skip class.

**Accommodation & living:**

When searching for an apartment, you need to consider the following things:

- Cost
- Proximity to University
- Furnishings & Appliances
- Room mates

You want to find an apartment in the Iturrama neighbourhood, which is closest to the university. If you live on Iturrama street, or on a side street near it, then you will be a 5-15 minute walk from the university. Rooms there cost between 250-300 Euros per month, plus utilities (water, heat, lighting etc.). Internet isn't always included and you might have to buy it temporarily. Most apartments are quite old, so there are very few electrical outlets in each room (try buying a power bar from the dollar store if this is an issue). They rarely have dryers either (the Spanish dry their clothes on a clothesline or rack). However, the apartments are quite spacious and usually have between 3-5 bedrooms.
I had two appointments with landlords that I had set up previously in the month of December using the university’s accommodation website (http://www.unav.es/futurosalumnos/alojamiento.php).

Although the apartments didn’t meet our standards, we ran into a Dutch girl who was checking out the same apartment as us, who had found a really nice condo and was looking for roommates. That is where Jenny ended up staying.

Dominika and I found our roommates at the International student Orientation networking event. Dominika stayed with three students from Boston. An Italian guy gave me his number and I ended up rooming with him, a Brazilian guy and a German girl. Check out my “familia” here! →

The “piso” cost me 250 + utilities, which was on average 300 euros per month. Heating was central so you couldn’t control it yourself, and it got turned on between 2pm-6pm (in the winter months only). Because our piso was only heated in the afternoon, the nights and mornings of January/February were absolutely freezing. Luckily, Jenny lent me some extra bedding.

Cell Phone & banking:
I got a cell phone from The Phone House while I was staying in Madrid, with the phone company Yoigo. Because you need to pay for at least 1 year if you get a plan, I decided to get a phone that I could “charge” with a certain quantity of money on the Yoigo website, at Yoigo stores or at Tobacco shops. I got an Android phone.

When we were staying at the hostel in Pamplona, we set up a bank account with Santander. This bank has a special agreement with the university for international students. They can set up a bank account for you, wire your funds over from your bank in Canada, and give you a debit card that can also be used as a Mastercard. They’ll also give you a little booklet that will keep track of your expenditures, deposits and withdrawals. You must, however, go to their location on Iturrama street, where the university specialists are.

Academic Details:
Course registration at UNAV is quite complex. At the orientation, they gave us booklets with hundreds of classes listed at different times. The business faculty has different program streams, such as business+economics, business+law, bilingual business degree etc. This is why there were so many classes- because they gave us the schedules for every single program stream for us to pick individual classes from.

We were also assigned to an individual meeting with Amaia, the business coordinator, to discuss our course choices. During the meeting she goes over the learning agreement that you originally submitted from SFU and asks if you want to make any changes. If you are unsure, you can go to any class you want for the first two weeks of the semester to see if you like it. When the course registration deadline approaches, however, you must confirm what classes you will be taking. Amaia then adds you to ADI, the university’s online course system (similar to WebCT).
You need to be registered on ADI because your professors will post the course outlines, information and assignments all on this site. It took me 40 days to be registered on ADI because I didn’t know you had to register at 3 different offices- at the business office, at the ILCE office (if you are taking Spanish courses), and at the general academic advising office. This was a huge source of stress for me because I was unprepared for class not knowing what the homework was or not having the reading material for an in-class quiz. So register at all of the offices!

If you plan on taking Spanish courses, you will have to write a test first to determine your level. The test is sent to you in December and I took it online while I was still in Canada. It comes in two parts, multiple-choice and long answer. During the first week of school you find out what “group” you were put in for the courses in which you are registered. Group A is beginner, B intermediate and C is advanced. Here is a list of the Spanish courses available and the number of credits they are worth: [http://www.unav.es/centro/ilce/segundo_semestre](http://www.unav.es/centro/ilce/segundo_semestre)

Here are the course outlines of the Business courses taught in English: [http://www.unav.es/facultad/econom/asignaturas-en-ingles1](http://www.unav.es/facultad/econom/asignaturas-en-ingles1)

The university is currently trying to switch from their own credit system (UNAV credits) to the European credit system (ECTS). For exchange credit purposes, 2 ECTS = 1 SFU unit. The UNAV credit conversion is trickier. You can check which courses have received credit in the past in the exchange credit database of the BBA portal: [http://beedie.sfu.ca/exchange/course-planning/](http://beedie.sfu.ca/exchange/course-planning/)

**Country Information:**

*Weather:*

Pamplona weather is quite extreme – it is generally very cold (-10°C was the coldest) or very hot (37°C was the hottest). There isn’t a lot of in between and nothing you could call a definitive Spring- it goes straight from Winter to Summer. I didn’t wear the majority of my clothes because I was either too cold or too hot wearing them (they were all Spring clothes). Having said that, because the university is a Private Catholic school, there is a strict dress code and security will not let you in unless you are properly covered (no shorts or skirts without tights underneath).

Also, the international website said to bring an umbrella because it “rains a lot” in Pamplona. I think it rained 3-5 times during the whole semester. Nevertheless, an umbrella is useful for when you travel to other countries.

*Spanish Culture:*

Spain has many big festivals across the country. Pamplona is famous for *San Fermines*, the annual bull run that takes place in Mid-July. I also travelled to Valencia in March for *Las Fallas*, a huge festival where artists create massive 50-foot paper mache/wooden sculptures for a competition, and burn the losing ones to the ground. I also went to the South of Spain (Sevilla, Granada, and Malaga) during the Easter Break for the *Semana Santa* processions, in which catholic brotherhoods parade down the streets, dressed in white, point garments (famously stolen by the KKK). *La Tomatina* is another famous tomato-fighting festival held in August.

*SanFermines*
The Spanish aren’t known for their punctuality, and professors often come in or start the lectures late. There is also a three hour siesta that is observed every day around 2pm-5pm, and almost all stores close during this time, and reopen in the evening. Everything is closed on Sundays (yes, grocery stores, malls, community centres, post offices and banks too), so make sure you get all your errands done by Saturday.

Almost everyone in Spain smokes heavily. As of last year, it is illegal to smoke indoors in Spain (last year you could smoke indoors in the university, even in the classroom while the professor was teaching! There are “no smoking” signs in many classrooms). You will notice that many students smoke at the entrances to campus buildings. You may be asked on the street if you have a lighter or a cigarette (they will be shocked when you say no!).

There isn’t a lot of ethnic diversity in Spain, and much less in Pamplona, so unless you look/are Spaniard, prepared to get stared at a lot. Also, in Spain there is a general obsession with blonde-haired, blue-eyed people, so if you fit that description, you will be even more noticed.

The Spanish believe that one person should be generous and pay for everything, instead of getting separate bills. Keep this in mind when you go out! Drinking happens at any time, you can see adults enjoying beers at 11am while their kids play in the park. Spaniards are also very family-oriented, and it is natural to see all generations of a family together (grandparents, parents and kids at the playground). They stay up very late and it is normal to see kids playing outside as late as 10pm.

The Basque Population:

The province of Navarra is close to Basque country, and the Basque separatist population claims Navarra to be part of their original land. The Basques have wanted to separate from Spain for centuries, and are very proud of their distinct culture and heritage- especially their language. You will notice that all the street signs in Pamplona are written both in Castellano (regular Spanish) and Euskera (Basque). There is a much bigger Basque Influence in San Sebastian, however.

The ETA, the Basque terrorist organization, has been a big problem in Spain. In 2005, bombs were placed in cars of the university parking lot and injured many students. Although not as active, the university has very tight security because of this past incident. To get into every building, you must scan a student card (they give it to you during orientation) which moves a turnstile to let you in. A picture of your face will also appear on a computer screen for the security guard to compare with your physical self.

On Iturrama Street the Basques sometime hold protests, asking the Spanish government to put imprisoned ETA criminals into prisons closer to home, where their friends and family can visit. The protests are non-violent but you should avoid them, just in case.
Social & Extra-curricular activities:

The international committee organizes “crazy Wednesdays” at different bars or clubs in Pamplona and gets good deals for international students. Marengo, Negro Zumbon and El bafle are a few of the most frequented places. Note that clubs don’t usually open until 2am, and close around 6 or 7 in the morning.

The Casco Viejo (old town) of the city is where you can go out for pintxos, which are Basque appetizers (known as tapas in the south of Spain). On Thursdays they have a deal called “Jueves Pintxos” where you can get one appetizer+ a drink (usually wine) for 2 euros.

During the daytime, you can go for a walk around the Ciudadela, an old military fortress. There is also Parque Yamaguchi, a Japanese-style park. There is a community centre on Iturrama street where you can go to the library or go for a swim. The university has a gym, tennis courts and sports fields as well. El Corte Ingles is a famous mall and there is one in the Casco Viejo of Pamplona. If you want to see a play, the theatre Baluarte right beside the mall has some great shows. I saw “The Magic Flute” Opera.

Travelling:

Spain is quite easy to travel around. For bus travel, you can get tickets at www.movelia.es Traveling by train is a more expensive but faster option, and you can buy a pass online if you are planning to travel many days in succession:
http://www.raileurope.ca/index.html
http://www.eurail.com/

There are also low-cost carriers if you want to fly within Spain or to other countries. Check out EasyJet and RyanAir for the best rates.

During my exchange, I travelled to:
- Portugal (Lisbon, Sintra, Porto, Guimaraes)
- Spain (Madrid, San Sebastian, Olite, Sevilla, Granada, Malaga, Rhonda, Salamanca & Barcelona)
- France (Nice, Cannes, Monaco, Marseille, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Paris, Versailles)
- Italy (Milan, Venice, Rome)
- Greece (Athens)

They were all great places and I would recommend them to anyone! I mostly stayed in hostels wherever I went (see www.hostelbookers.com).
Reflection After Exchange:

Going on exchange is a valuable, life-changing experience that can be beneficial for anyone. Exchange has allowed me to experience another culture abroad and learn how to quickly adapt to it. As a result, I have become more open-minded, patient, independent, outgoing and confident in my own abilities.

Words of Wisdom:

- I think the less expectations that you have about your exchange, the better off you will be. If you come with pre-conceived notions about how things are going to turn out, you might be disappointed.
- Maintain a positive attitude at all times. If you really aren’t enjoying yourself, just remember that it is a short-term experience and it will be over soon. Otherwise, have fun and enjoy the ride!

Saying Goodbye to the University of Navarra- and Thanks!

I’m going to miss all my new friends!