

Granada Placement Report 2016

Reasons for choosing the European Studies programme

Having spent some time living in Andorra during my school years I was keen to try and maintain and improve on the Spanish I had learnt there. I applied to the ES programme on transferring to Manchester from St Andrews. During my three years at St Andrews I had had little opportunity to practice my Spanish other than some time spent travelling round Mexico during the holidays and the occasional conversation group that I had attended. I was hence quite nervous about starting the ES Spanish programme half way through my degree, but after an initial interview with the department I was very happy to be offered a place in the class.

Another reason I wanted to take part in the ES programme is that I wanted to improve my medical and general Spanish in order to improve my chances of working or volunteering in a Spanish speaking country later on in my career. With Spanish being the third most spoken language world wide it is an incredible advantage to be able to speak the language, and the Spanish European studies programme offers the great opportunity to not only receive regular classes and hence improve grammar and conversational skills but also the opportunity to spend 4 months in Spain and hence really get to grips with the Spanish culture and language.

I found the regular classes during year 3 and 4 very useful and I think they really helped me in preparation for my time in Spain. In order to prepare myself further for my four months in Spain I also undertook a one month elective in Cuba during the first block of 5th year. I found this opportunity really useful and also incredibly fun! I know that lots of people are put off the ES programme because they feel it limits their ability to undertake an elective in a country further afield than Europe. However, this is not the case and I think I really benefited and appreciated the opportunity to essentially have two electives in two Spanish speaking countries: one in Cuba, a very exotic and developing country with a very unique healthcare system, and Spain a much more developed country, but with its own unique differences from the UK. Although undertaking an elective in block one before finals was slightly daunting as I was worried I might miss valuable revision time, in hindsight this was not the case and I am really glad that I went for it. The time I spent in Cuba also made me feel much more prepared when it came to moving to Spain for 4 months and I think it made me integrate into my new temporary home much more quickly than I would otherwise have done.

Living in Granada

Granada is an amazing city to live in. The whole city is beautiful, especially round the center and with lots of tapas bars and cafes there's always something to do. It's quite a small city which makes it very easy to get around. I chose to live in the city centre (plaza nueva) in one of the main city squares which is surrounded by tapas bars, but which could get very busy during peak times due to all the tourism! This was a great location for socializing as all the bars and restaurants were literally on my doorstep! It was also great for shopping as the main shopping street was only 10 mins walk, and the main tourist attraction, the Alhambra was only 15 mins away, and I even had a view of it from my terrace. The hospital is about a

25-30 min walk away from the city center. You can choose to live near the hospital, and rent tends to be cheaper near there, but there's a lot less things to do in terms of socializing in that area. The other great thing about Granada is that rent is really cheap compared to Manchester and also much cheaper than other parts of Spain. I chose to live with two other girls from Manchester who were also doing their ES placements in Granada. For a newly renovated, penthouse apartment with a HUGE terrace we paid 300 euros per month each not including bills, although this did include a weekly cleaning service. Bills worked out at being around 50 euro per month overall. This is quite a high rental cost for Granada, and I know lots of people who paid as little as 150 euro per month, but obviously the quality and location of their accommodation was less ideal. Initially I had looked at living with ERASMUS students from other countries or Spanish students. However, the issue with this was mainly that it was difficult to find flats with non-smokers. In Spain everyone smokes, and most people smoke in their rented flats, something which I was not keen on.

When I arrived in Granada I initially booked into an airbnb for two weeks with the idea of finding somewhere more permanent to live during this time. I found it very easy to find rooms for rent for ERASMUS students, I looked around a lot of these in my first two weeks. The standard of the rooms was very variable, and it really depends how picky you are. Personally I wanted somewhere slightly nicer than the standard student flat, which is why I ended up paying slightly more rent. Another thing to be aware of is that lots of flats in Granada don't have central heating. This is a non issue in summer, but in January and February the temperature can be quite cold, we even had snow on a few occasions, and I was very glad of having a radiator in my room on these occasions!

I know a few people who booked long term accommodation before arriving in Granada. Some people ended up with really nice flats, but for others they found the flats were not quite what they were hoping for once they arrived. On balance I think the best thing to do is to book somewhere to stay a couple of weeks and spend some time looking once you arrive in Granada, that way you can be sure of getting something you're happy with.

One of the things that I was very keen to do in arriving in Granada was also to join a gym as I wanted to run the Madrid marathon in April so needed somewhere to train. There are lots of gyms dotted around Granada and I ended up joining a big one on the outskirts of the city called O2 centro neptuno. The main attraction of this one was a big outdoor pool which was open for all of May, perfect for relaxing after a day at hospital! This gym also offered hundreds of fitness classes every week and had a running club which was ideal for me. It was a bit pricier than some of the other gyms at 50 euros per month, but was definitely worth it.

Working in Granada

I did four placements whilst I was in Granada. These were at either Hospital Universitario San Cecilio or Hospital Virgen de las Nieves. These two hospitals are located next to each other, about a 25 min walk from the city center. Both are very large and busy, but Virgen de las Nieves is much more modern than San Cecilio which is supposed to be being shut down next year and moved to a purpose built hospital on the outskirts of the city.

- **Placement 1: Pediatrics, San Cecilio**

San Cecilio has a huge pediatrics department. On the first day I met the “Jefe” of the department at the morning meeting which happened every day from 8-9am. This usually involved a handover of all patients on the ward and a teaching session which I always found to be very useful. At this meeting the Jefe introduced me to some of the juniors whom I would spend the month shadowing. This was a very relaxed placement as I found I was able to spend my time in which ever part of the department I chose. I spent quite a lot of time in the pediatric A&E as I found this the most useful aspect. I also spent time on the general peds ward which mainly consisted of attending the daily ward round. Another useful clinic was the peds cardiology clinic where the doctor gave me a lot of teaching on ECGs and echocardiograms. Lastly I spent a few days in the peds ICU. All the doctors on this placement were very friendly and happy for me to get involved in whatever was happening in the department. They also always invited me for breakfast with them after the daily meeting, before the start of the ward round and clinics.

I did learn a lot on this placement and would recommend it, however as I found was the case during quite a few of my placements I did spend quite a lot of my time watching the doctors complete paper work. I did however get quite a few opportunities to examine patients, especially in A&E, but history taking is not something that was done often or in much detail so these opportunities were somewhat lacking.

- **Placement 2: A&E, San Cecilio**

A&E in Spain is very different from what I had experienced on previous placements in the UK. In Spain GP is much less used by the general public and as a result lots of patients attend A&E for routine things such as coughs, colds and back pain. The A&E department at San Cecilio was hence divided into different sections including routine consultations, minors and majors. One thing I noticed during this placement is that in Spain there is very little emphasis on history and examination and the doctors tend to go straight to the investigations in order to look for or confirm a diagnosis. Another thing that stood out during my time in the routine consultations sections was that lots of times the doctors would refer straight to the relevant specialty , i.e ENT for a cough or ear ache, without examining or taking a history from the patient first. This seemed to me like a huge waste of time and resources and on speaking to the doctors they also seemed frustrated with the way A&E was organized and the lack of triage. The majors section of A&E was much more useful in terms of learning and having the opportunity to examine patients on a regular basis. I also got the opportunity to shadow the surgeon on call on multiple occasions and so had the opportunity to take histories from and examine lots of acute abdomens.

Another thing to be aware of is that in Spain there is little opportunity to practice practical procedures as almost all procedures including cannulation, catheterization, venipuncture and ABGs are all carried out by the nurses. As a result it is difficult to perform these as a medical student as preference is usually given to the nursing

students for these. This was a bit of a shock as I was hoping to complete my final few UPSAs during this placement. My advice for future students would hence be to try and get almost all of your UPSAs completed before arriving in Spain.

Overall this placement was not what I was expecting, however the nature of A&E did mean that I had lots of opportunity to speak to patients, doctors and other medical students which certainly helped to improve my Spanish.

- **Placement 3: Cardiology, Virgen de Las Nieves**

This was probably my favorite placement during my time in Granada. It was very well organized and on the first day I was met by my supervisor who immediately introduced me to the team and gave me a timetable for the rest of the week. This placement involved alternating between the different units of the cardiology department and also spending time on the ward. During this placement I attended pacemaker clinics, general cardiology clinics, cardiomyopathy clinics, cath labs and echocardiology clinics. I also attended a few of the cardiology ward rounds. During this placement I got to see a lot of pathology from acute MIs and AF to rarer diseases such as Steinert disease. As a result I feel like I learnt a lot during this placement and had lots of opportunities to revise ECGs and frequently used cardiac drugs. I also got the opportunity to examine lots of patients with murmurs and other signs during the cardiology clinics which I think definitely helped improve my clinical skills in this specialty. Overall I would definitely recommend this placement to anyone wishing to improve their knowledge of cardiology before foundation.

- **Placement 4: Internal Medicine, Virgen de Las Nieves**

This was my last placement in Spain, and I was keen to do internal medicine as I thought it would provide the opportunity to go over lots of general medicine in preparation for foundation. During this placement I was mainly based in clinics, although I know other students who were allocated mainly to the wards. For future students I'm pretty sure that if you ask the secretaries on the first day you'll be able to specify a preference for either clinics or the ward.

I found the clinics quite useful, they consisted of quite long 45 minute appointments during which the doctor would do a very thorough history and systems review followed by an examination. As a result this was a good opportunity to improve my history taking skills and also my Spanish. The patients were a mixture of follow up patients with numerous pathologies (COPD, Hypertension, diabetes) and also a few patients with rheumatological pathologies such as behcets, sjogrens, SLE and arthritis. I did find this placement helped me revise my general medicine, however a lot of the time in clinic was also spent watching the doctor type up his notes for the patients "informe", which meant there was also a fair amount of wasted time during the day. Having spoken to other students who were on the ward, I think the clinics gave the best opportunity to see a wider range of pathologies and also practice history taking, something that I think was not done often on the internal medicine ward rounds.

Differences between Healthcare in Spain and UK

Life in the hospitals in Spain is very different from that of the NHS, much more so than I had originally expected. The culture is much more relaxed, and although the doctors do work long hours, they have a much better work life balance than I have seen in the UK. Most of the doctors will stop for breakfast between 9 and 10am, and will also often have a couple of coffee breaks during the morning. The atmosphere between the staff is also very relaxed, with doctors and nurses stopping for chats with one another frequently, often for 30 mins at a time! The dress code is also very informal. Most doctors and medical students wear jeans and trainers and just stick a white coat on top.

The attitude and interaction with the patients is also much more informal. There is much less emphasis on patient confidentiality with doctors often discussing patients in the corridor, café or lift and patients often being examined in rooms with the door wide open, or in a ward with no curtains or privacy. A lot of the patients who are referred to clinics also seem to be friends of friends or relatives, who are being seen quickly as a favour to a friend or colleague, something which I had not seen very commonly in the UK.

This relaxed atmosphere does create a very enjoyable working environment, although I do sometimes think that patient care suffers as a result. Especially when sometimes jobs are delayed until after breakfast or patients are made to wait whilst the doctor and the nurse discuss the football in clinic!

The lack of confidentiality and concern for patient dignity is also something I found hard to cope with, especially in the first few weeks as it made me feel very awkward and uncomfortable. However, over time I became more accustomed to it, and it is obvious that the patients in Spain don't seem to mind having their cases discussed openly in places where others can hear. I think this again is probably just part of the healthcare culture in Spain and something that everyone grows used to even if it is not necessarily in the patient's best interest.

Nightlife and Socializing in Granada

On arriving in Granada I found it very easy to meet people as there is a huge ERASMUS network in the city. The ERASMUS group were really good at hosting numerous events during the first couple of weeks of the semester including tapas bar crawls, film nights and nights out in local clubs. This made it really easy to meet other students. There were also a few other students from other parts of Europe on ERASMUS placements in the hospital which was nice as it meant I had people to chat to during quite periods on placement.

Socializing in Granada mainly revolved around going to tapas bars followed by nights out. Granada is great as you always get free tapas with every drink you order, so you could essentially get a free dinner every time you went out for a few drinks! We found that the best place for tapas was a street called Calle Elvira, which was always busy and very popular with students. A personal favourite was a tapas bar called babel which offered what they described as "ethnic tapas" such as guacamole, arroz con curry and cheese risotto!

The ERASMUS network in Granada also organizes regular trips away including trips to Cadiz for carnival and Valencia for Las Fallas, as well as long weekends away to places such as Lisbon and Morocco. These were always pretty well organized and also comparatively cheap, and so it's a great way to travel around if you're on a budget or travelling solo.

Day trips and Long weekends away

Granada is ideally located between the mountains and the coast which means you can ski in the first half of your time and hit the beach in your second! One of the main reasons I choose Granada was because of its proximity to a ski resort called Sierra Nevada, which is only 45mins by bus from the city. I definitely made the most of this and went skiing almost one a week during my first couple of months in Spain. The ski resort is pretty big, with around 140Km of slopes and a good variety of runs. It's not cheap at 45 euro for a daily ski pass, but is definitely worth going to once or twice for a fun day out. Being so far south though the snow does get pretty dodgy come March so I would recommend it more in January and February.

The beaches are also very close, with Salobreña being only 45 mins away and also very easily accessible by bus. We also spent a long weekend in Cabo de Gata which is a beautiful coastal nature reserve about 2.5 hours drive from Granada which was lovely and very relaxing. It's not easy to get to by public transport though so I'd recommend hiring a car for that one.

I also spent some time visiting Seville which is the capital of Andalusia. This is another beautiful Spanish city and well worth the visit. It takes about 3 hours to get to by bus from Granada. From Seville I also decided to go to Portugal for a few days. I spent some time in the Algarve as I wanted to do some surfing. The bus system in Spain is great making everywhere very cheap and easy to get to, and Granada is ideally located for exploring the southern coast.

During my time in Granada me and my flat mate signed up for the Madrid Marathon, so a group of us travelled there for a long weekend and spent our time sightseeing and eating in preparation for the big day. Again we decided to use the very efficient bus system to get there, which took about 5 hours in total.

If you don't want to travel too far however, there's also lots to do around the outskirts of Granada. There's a really pretty village just 8Km from Granada called Monachil which has a beautiful nature reserve surrounding it where you can hike past waterfalls and canyons and the Alpujarras are also very close by.

What have I gained?

My main reason for wanting to do the ES programme was to improve my Spanish. Living in Spain has definitely helped this and I now feel much confident speaking to patients and colleagues in Spanish, as well as socializing with Spanish speaking friends. Being in Granada I have also had the chance to see and experience the Spanish culture, from flamenco to tapas and very late nights out! I have also had the opportunity to travel and explore other parts of Spain, and meet lots of new and interesting people who I'm planning on staying in touch with once I'm back home. I think the laid back nature of southern Spain and the friendly

nature of the Granadinos makes life in Granada very easy and enjoyable, and it really is a fantastic city to live in.

Practical issues

- Registering at the medical school is a bit of a pain. The new facultad de medicina is pretty far out of the city at the campus de Salud so I'd recommend sharing a taxi if there are a few of you going. Its best to do this a few days before the start of your first placement if possible.
- The ERASMUS grant can take a while to get sorted so don't be reliant on it. At the end of our placement we still hadn't received our last installment.
- For accommodation I'd recommend using the ERASMUS Facebook groups where people post rooms that are available for rent. I found that people often didn't get back to me on the other websites and that they tended to be more expensive.
- Bring comfortable walking shoes, you will walk A LOT in Granada.
- Take a lab coat, everyone in Spain wears them, don't worry too much about clinical clothes.

Useful Contacts

Alsa bus company for travel: <https://www.alsa.es/en/home>

Pisos en Granada Facebook group for accommodation:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/188001737960263/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/pisosalquilergranada/>

ERASMUS Granada Facebook Group for activities and meet ups:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/825729687464944/>

Best Life Experience for organized day trips and weekends away:

<http://www.granadaerasmus.com>

O2 Centro Neptuno for gym membership:

<http://www.o2centrowellness.com/msite/Home.aspx?ID=NEP>

Sierra Nevada for skiing:

<http://www.sierranevada.co.uk>

