

Granada placement

Why I chose the MBChB European Studies programme

For my medical elective I chose to go to Granada, which is situated in the Andalusian region of Spain. It has been a fantastic experience being able to spend four months in this great city and I wouldn't have been able to do it without studying the European option that is offered alongside medicine at Manchester University.

When I decided I wanted to do medicine I was currently studying Spanish, Mathematics, Biology and Chemistry for my AS levels. I was quite disheartened by the fact that I wouldn't be able to carry on my language and I looked into options of studying Medicine with Spanish. As you'll know Medicine is a difficult degree anyway and so studying both subjects as a 'combined honours' for example isn't an options. Most universities told me that it would be possible to carry on with my Spanish at the university language centre, but this would have to be separate from my degree. Then I came across the Manchester Medicine programme and was delighted.

The MBChbB European Studies offer students the opportunity to continue their language (either French, Spanish or German) within a medical context. In the second half of first year, students receive an email inviting them to sit a very short exam, evaluating the level of your language. The language tutors advise a level of AS level or above but I do know a few people who only had a GCSE in their respective language and coped very well. After assessing your level, you are invited to join the classes. The classes take place around your medicine timetable so that your medical studies do not clash with the language classes. You will have a couple of hours of language classes a week, with good time management this is more than manageable and offers so many benefits.

One of the great benefits offered is the medical elective in the fifth year of medical school. In Manchester, all medical students are offered an 8 week elective, however European studies students are able to go abroad for 16 weeks to a European country of their chosen language. Therefore, the French European students are able to live in France (Paris, Lyon, Rennes or Nantes) or Switzerland (Lausanne), the Spanish European student are able to go to Spain and live in Madrid or Granada and finally, the German European students can go to Germany and live in Berlin, Hanover or Saarbrücken.

Why I chose Granada for my medical elective

I chose to go to Granada, Andalucía for a variety of reasons. First of all, the tapas. Granada is one of the few remaining cities that offers free tapas with very drink. Yes, you did read that correctly: the tapas in Granada are free – or, to put it slightly more accurately, included in the price of your (already very cheap) drink. Sizzling little earthenware pots of spicy prawns, delicious, stewed meats served with hunks of rustic bread, crispy fried fish, classic Spanish tortilla – it's all on offer in Granada's tapas joints and it's all complementary with beer, wine and soft drinks. Living in Granada is also very cheap in comparison to the bigger cities such as Madrid, you can expect to pay between 200-300 euros per month for an apartment in Granada. Andalucía is a fantastic region in Spain, with some of my favourite cities in the worlds all within a couple of hours of each other; Granada, Malaga, Cordoba and Seville. This was the general appeal of Granada for me.

Overview of my experience of living and working in Granada and its surrounding area

When I found out that I was only able to go to Spain for my elective and nowhere in South America – especially when I heard all my friends planning to go to really exotic places I was of course slightly disappointed that I wasn't going on an 'adventure' in my eyes too. However, I've got to say after 4 months of living 'la vida loca' in Granada, I wouldn't have changed it for the world.

1. Living in Granada

Living in Granada has been invaluable. The big pull of Granada for me was the quality of life I was able to have – let me tell you it's a lot different being back in Manchester now. For example with housing, in Spain, you can get a large penthouse for the same price as a small one in Stockholm, New York, Paris, Amsterdam and so on. Except for Barcelona (about the same, however unfortunately not an option for us), you get much more value for money in Spain. Almost everything is cheaper; thus you get a better life for the same money you would otherwise be spending in Sweden, France, Germany, Britain and so on. The locals can be interesting. Spaniards are generally pleasant and familiar. As long as you show interest, they'll welcome you with open arms. They are not afraid to say what they feel and think about things. The Spanish are a very expressive population, they speak with a lot of passion and force which a lot of people can mistake for being rude and shouting. I've spent all of my summers in Spain so I was more used to this speech. Do bear this in mind though. Spanish people are very direct and won't 'beat around the bush' so to speak. However, most are very lovely.

When people think of Spain they think of sunshine and sea and generally, a lovely and hot climate. You have to remember that you're going for 4 months!! You are going to experience ALL WEATHER. We were particularly on the year we went out. We had about one solid month of torrential rain, rain that meant you couldn't leave the house. Our last few weeks were gorgeous and we were able to sunbathe and wear shorts. But do remember to bring your boots, jeans and waterproofs too! Spain doesn't always equal sun!

Favourite places to go and eat

1. Bar Avila (I & II) – amazing tapas that you can choose, I cannot recommend the jamon asado and papparonnes enough
2. Bar Poe
3. Los Manueles
4. El piano
5. La Posaila
6. Las alpujaras – you can pick your own tapas here.
7. Siete gatos (best tortilla in Granada)
8. Los diamantes
9. El tabernaculo (great atmosphere in this bar, especially around Semana Santa time – you'll see what I mean when you go there)

ERASMUS trips:

When you arrive in Granada, search Best Life Experience Granada on facebook and join the group. It is an ERASMUS organisation and organises good nights out and weekend trips with other ERASMUS students. Below are a few of the trips I was able to go on.

1. Las Alpujarras
2. Sevilla

3. Toledo
4. Morocco
5. Cordoba
6. Malaga
7. Costa del Sol
8. Cadiz

2. Working in Granada

Working in Granada was very chilled. I had 5 different placements over the four months, I had placements in ENT (5 weeks in total), Urgencias (4 weeks), Nephrology (2 weeks), Cardiology (2 weeks) and Internal Medicine (2 weeks).

As a general overview, you go to placement for the 'sesiones clinicas' in the morning at around 8 or 9am depending on your speciality and usually after clinics are the ward round you were allowed to leave. I would usually be able to go at 1 – 3pm depending on how generous my supervisor was feeling that day. You are NOT expected to do on-call or the 'guardia' so don't feel pressured to do so unless you really want to. In terms of time off, you are allowed a week off during Semana Santa at Easter, this is a really good chance to explore Andalucia a bit more. The working day itself isn't too taxing in Granada, as I had you have a meeting or a 'sesion clinica' each morning and then the doctors go for breakfast for about an hour. After this depending on what you have been timetabled to do, you may be going on a ward round or to 'consultas' with a particular doctor. You are emailed your coordinators for each placement at the start of the term when you arrive so you can email the relevant coordinator before each placement to know where to go and to know who to look for etc.

My first placement was in ENT in Hospital Virgen de la Nieves. This hospital is about a 20 minute walk from the city centre. I spent this placement with two other Manchester students so it was a good first placement. The majority of our time was spent in consultas seeing a variety of conditions including laryngeal cancers, there were opportunities to observe histories and ENT examinations but unfortunately not so much opportunity to take histories and to do examinations. One day a week we went to surgery to see laryngectomies and biopsies mostly.

My second placement was in Urgencias in Hospital Inmaculada, this was about a 35 minute walk from Gran Via de Colon and is close to Centro Commercial Neptuno. This placement was quite long and I was placed with different consultants each morning. Urgencias isn't the same as A&E in UK, it works more like a general practice, which for me was more beneficial as I was able to practice my Spanish with the consultants each day. Although I spent the majority of the time sat in on consultations, the patients and conditions were varied and overall there was a lot more time to chat to patients and doctors. While there wasn't much opportunity to practice skills, it was a good placement to practice your Spanish.

My third placement was Nephrology in Hospital PTS or Hospital Campus de la Salud, it is very easy to get to. The bus takes around 20 minutes. The bus you need to take to get there is the SN4, which goes every 10 minutes. It's very easy take the bus from Gran Via de Colon. The bus itself is also very cheap, it is about 80 cents for students per journey. My nephrology placement consisted of going to the meetings with all the nephrology consultants each morning to discuss difficult cases and then I was put in consultations for the day. Again there was little opportunity to take histories and practice examinations but in terms of practising my Spanish, it was an excellent placement to improve my language.

My fourth and fifth placements were Cardiology and Medicina Interna in Hospital Virgen de la Nieves. For both placements I tended to start at 9 and finish at 2. Cardiology was less interactive as I was sat watching the different procedures for the first week. The second week in Cardiology was in clinic with an enthusiastic consultant who was keen to get me involved, and taught me how to do a transthoracic echocardiogram which was interesting. For the whole of Medicina interna I was with a doctor on the ward, which was variable depending on which patients were there, but I got the opportunity to go and take some histories alone which really increased my confidence.

3. Surrounding area of Granada

Sierra Nevada

In Granada you can do everything. If you like skiing you can ski in the Sierra Nevada. I went skiing about 3 times during my time on ERASMUS. There is a bus from the bus station in Granada that takes you up to the Sierra Nevada resort. The company that provides Granada-Sierra Nevada bus services is Autocares Bonal, leaving from the Granada bus station located in the north of Granada city, in Jaen Road. **Departure times:** Monday to Friday: 08:00, 10:00 and 17:00. Public holidays, Saturdays and Sundays: 08:00, 10:00, 15:00 and 17:00. You can take the bus back to the town at either 16:00 or 18:30 also. The bus only costs about 9 euros. A day ski lift pass can be bought when you get to the resort and costs about 48 euros. In terms of ski hire, you can rent all your boots, skis and poles for 30 euros at the resort. There are plenty of places in town to get salopetes, jackets or goggles if you don't already have them.

Monachil

Monachil was one of my favourite places in Granada to go for a walk in, and is located only 8 km from the city centre, the walk is called Los Cahorros de Monachil. The walk takes about 2.5 hours depending on how fast you walk. The walk is suitable all times of the year, but is particularly stunning in Spring and Autumn. The lush valley is home to numerous fruit trees (apple, cherry, pomegranate), wild flowers and herbs (lavender, thyme, rosemary), all interspaced with almond and olive trees. If wanting to swim, I suggest going closer to June time. The Monachil river has its source in La Velata - one of Spain's highest mountains. The water is clean and cold. Very cold. A kind of cold that is only really welcomed on a hot summer's day. The village of Monachil is a very picturesque, quaint village with a few lovely tapas restaurants which are perfect for a post walk lunch and pint.

Salobreña and Almuñecar

Salobreña and Almuñecar are two beach towns close to the city of Granada. Both beach areas are great for a few good bars and for locally caught fish. If you want to mix in with the locals, I would say Salobreña is much more your sort of place. I love the place - it's also pretty accessible to the Granada centre. Almuñecar does have its plus points – it is livelier but also a lot more touristy. You can easily get an ALSA bus to both of these places from the bus station.

Differences to UK hospitals and practice, the medical training programme, the contrasting medical cultures.

The main difference I have noticed between practice in the UK and in Spain is the patient approach and approach to confidentiality. Having studied medicine in Manchester and after spending my practical years in the UK where there is a massive emphasis on patient confidentiality, it was really interesting and shocking to see that patient dignity and confidentiality isn't valued as highly in the Spanish healthcare system. The manner in which doctors talk to their patients is very direct, and I found it difficult to take histories at the beginning of my placement as the British culture is a lot more restrained and polite and a lot less direct. So I was worried that I would offend the Spanish patients. It is an interesting comparison and it did make me wonder if the Spanish population simply expect the more direct approach or if they would prefer the breaking bad news structure of SPIKES that we are taught in medical school. I have been in clinics where doctors have reprimanded their patients and rolled their eyes at them which has made me feel a tad uncomfortable but then on the other hand I think British doctors skirt around sensitive topics and should be more direct with their patients. In terms of patient dignity, the Spanish do not place a lot of emphasis on it at all. I was surprised by the lack of permission asking for the doctors and the lack of explanation to the patients. For example intimate examinations would be performed with the doors wide open, and with other staff in the room. On another occasion I saw a patient being left half naked during a procedure in plain view of other patients and staff. Another stark difference I noticed in Spain is that the doctors really over investigate their patients. Instead of taking a detailed history of a patient which is more of a focus in England, the doctors would simply subject their patients to an array of investigations that usually came back as negative. To me this seemed nonsensical as it was just a waste of time and resources and put the patients through unnecessary stress.

While I don't think I'll be rushing to practice medicine in Spain, I do think they have a good work-life balance in comparison to the UK. For example, a breakfast break is scheduled into their day each morning after their clinical meeting. The doctors within the department all have breakfast together which provides a more relaxed atmosphere and I think, improves working relationships. Moreover, the working days are much shorter and slower paced. 'Mañana, mañana' is a classic expression that literally means tomorrow morning. In Spain things do not always go particularly fast. There is a culture of enjoying life and not get stressed out. This expression can also mean something like "don't worry, things will work out on its own" or "no stress." Coming from other cultures it can be frustrating at first, but once you learn to embrace and accept mañana mañana you'll begin to enjoy life more. With shorter working days the doctors are able to go and enjoy their afternoons, and take more time for themselves which has a brilliant impact on them.

How you have gained from this experience in terms of i) linguistic development, ii) inter-cultural understanding, and iii) in terms of your ideas and future plans.

1) Linguistic development

I would say my Spanish has improved immensely, I wouldn't categorise myself as fluent at all but I do think spending time with a lot of ERASMUS friends I made and living in Granada where less English is spoken anyway has helped a lot. It's always tempting to spend a lot of time with people from back home; they get your language and your cultural references. But you might miss out on the very thing you came for, leaving with a British expat's experience and a small vocabulary. Staying outside of big cities can be a big help when practicing a language. English is often less likely to be spoken in smaller towns – bear this in mind when looking at your university options.

2) Inter-cultural understanding

I have already talked about the inter-cultural understanding from working in the hospitals but there was a lot to be learned about the culture more generally also. To immerse myself in Spanish culture I made sure I spoke a lot to the doctors, patients and other medical students in the hospital and I went to a lot of the ERASMUS events held by Best Life Experience. I would advise next students to find accommodation with locals also to improve your Spanish even more.

3) Ideas and plans for the future

Whilst I enjoyed the experience immensely and I am determined to live abroad at some point in my future for an extended period of time. I don't think I would like to practise medicine in Spain because I think it would be very challenging to sit the MIR for example and communicate in a second language where I cannot use the same nuances that I know I can in English unless I spend a lot more time in Spain before working.

Practical issues

Advice before you go:

Before you go to Granada there are a few things that you should do in order to make your first few weeks in Spain run as smooth as possible.

1. Make sure you've signed up to the University of Granada after receiving your emails from them. This will make your first day when you go to the medical school to collect your cards and passes go a lot more smoothly.
2. Bring documentation – I packed my passport, a letter from Manchester University confirming I was a student, copies of vaccinations, copies of birth certificates, my student ID and also my European health card.
3. Book an Air BnB for your first couple of weeks – I stayed with two other friends from the European studies programme in an apartment on Calle Melchor Amagro, very close to the city centre for two weeks.
4. Bring clothes for **ALL** weather – going for 4 months from January – May in quite a long time and spans winter into the end of spring so there will be a lot of variation in weather. I cannot stress this enough. When we arrived in January, Granada was extremely sunny, however we then had about one month of constant rain before we had any more sun. So bring coats as well as your sandals.
5. For hospital – Bring your white lab coat from first year. In the hospitals where you'll be on placement, the students can wear comfy clothes (jeans and trainers are perfectly acceptable), the dress code is not strict at all but of course within reason. However, **what is compulsory is that you need to wear a white lab coat at all times**. My friend forgot to bring his and was able to buy one quite easily in Granada for about 30 euros, however it is just easier all in all to bring it with you from Manchester.
6. Money – I bought a cashpassport card with me and found it very easy to use. The university will also supply you with a cashpassport card for you ERASMUS grant so make sure you don't get the pin numbers confused.
7. Student card – on one of the first days go to the University of Granada Facultad de la ciencias which is located just off avenida de Fuente Nueva. You can go to the Santander bank in the faculty and get your student card there for la Universidad de Granada. You will also receive an email saying that you will be able to change your student card into a bus pass. This takes

5 minutes and is definitely worth doing especially if you are placed in Hospital PTS for any of your placements as you will get cheaper bus fares.

Any addresses, phone numbers and contacts that might be useful for future students.

The Erasmus Departmental Coordinator in Granada is Prof Dr Blanca Gutierrez and her email address is: medori@ugr.es

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