

## **European Studies Report: Granada**

### **Why I chose European Studies**

The European Studies option is an incredible opportunity to be able to learn a language alongside medicine, and the fact that it's only offered in Manchester makes it even more unique. Though I didn't do an A-level in Spanish, I worked as an Au Pair in Madrid in my gap year which gave me the level of Spanish necessary to do the European option. I wanted to keep up my language skills throughout university, with a view to one day working in Latin America with a charity like MSF.

### **ES years 1 - 4**

It must be said that sometimes it was hard to find the motivation to attend the Spanish classes, particularly in clinical years when they are held 6-8pm. Saying this, they were a great way of continuing to talk and learn new grammar throughout medical school. And the teachers tended to be very enthusiastic and understanding if we were tired. At the end of third year, when we were given the opportunity to go abroad for a PEP all the hard work and extra hours became worth it. I then spent a month in A&E in Madrid and absolutely loved it. It was then that I realised that actually, the opportunity to settle and live in a Spanish city for 4 months could offer far more than a two-month elective elsewhere.

### **Why I chose Granada**

Though the choices for Spanish option may seem limited, having lived in Madrid and Granada for 4 months, I can safely say they are both fantastic cities. They are, however, very different. Madrid is grand, impressive and enormous, meaning that you'll always find your cultural niche, whether it be a certain genre of music or an unusual sport. Granada has a more informal vibe, the pace of life is slower, the proportion of students is higher and, coming from Manchester, it is small. I chose Granada because I wanted to go somewhere new, and I don't regret it for a second. Another thing, on a backdrop of the Sierra Nevada with an enormous Moorish palace (the Alhambra) perched on a hill in the middle, it is breathtakingly beautiful.

### **Preparing to go**

Before going there was some paperwork to fill out. We were required to submit a 'learning agreement', which is a document that includes the placements you've chosen (we got a choice of 4 of A&E, Cardiology, ENT, Internal medicine and general surgery) and the dates of your placements. If you ask the Erasmus office in Manchester they'll tell you where to find a blank learning agreement. If you write one out yourself, it then won't be accepted. In addition, there were a couple of extra bits of paperwork which weren't too taxing. If at all possible, I would say get any outstanding UPSAs/U-CEX/U-CMDs signed off before you go. It is certainly possible to do them while you're away (I've done 2 UPSAs and 2 U-CEXs here), but think it's easier to chase people up about them and explain what you need to do etc while in the UK. The medical students here don't have similar tasks, so it can seem quite

alien to the tutor. Equally, everyone I approached to do it was understanding so if you haven't got them done before you go, don't worry too much.

### **What to take**

One great thing about hospital in Spain is that no smart clothes are necessary. Which is good news if you need to fit all your possessions into a suitcase. The doctors, particularly the 'residentes' (junior doctors), are genuinely very casual. I get the impression that people just wear similar clothes to what they wear outside of hospital, and there are always a lot of people in jeans and trainers. What you do need to wear is a white coat or 'bata', so if you manage to find the one from pre-clinical years then you might as well bring it. Otherwise you can buy one there ranging from €10 – 25 depending on where you go.

### **Finding accommodation**

It's possible to sort out accommodation both before you go or when you get there. I stayed in a hostel for a couple of days at the beginning to give me time to find somewhere, and then found a flat that was only available a couple of weeks later (mid-February) because that's when the University new semester starts so it's the big changeover time for Erasmus students. Where you live and who with is one of the things that will define your time away, so choose carefully. I'd say first choose whether you want to live with Spanish people or Erasmus people, if you decide the latter you may well end up in an English-speaking house. I think the most important thing is probably to go and see places and chat to the people there and see if you get on with them. Whatever nationality they are, if they seem friendly on first impression then that's a great sign. If you opt for an Erasmus house where all tenants are changing, you may well not get that opportunity when you choose, which is a potential downside.

There are a lot of rooms around, and it's generally quite easy to organise viewings. I found that it was also quite a good way to get to know the city, and on any one day you can quite easily see up to 10 flats. I'd say try and see as many as possible before making a decision, just so you get a feel of what's available and what the prices are. Also, have some priorities in your head, mine was to have a balcony, since that is pretty much an impossibility in the UK, whereas here it's really common. The main ways I arranged viewings was through people posting on facebook groups e.g Erasmus Granada, Pisos en Granada and Erasmus Granada Best Life Experience. There are loads and loads of these pages though so with some searches you'll be able to find the current and most active ones. In addition, there are property rental websites such as Idealista and Erasmusu, though I tended to find these were slightly more expensive. You can expect to pay between €180 – 300 per month for a room in central Granada including bills, and if you're on a tight budget it's worth searching hard because, even though they're less common, there are plenty on the lower end of that range available.

### **Where to live**

Central Granada is quite small, so if you live around the centre then you're not really far from many places. In terms of the hospitals, there are two on different sides of the city,

Virgen de las nieves/San cecilio are north of the city centre and the PTS is in the Parque tecnologico ciencias de salud, in the south of the city, right next to the faculty of medicine. Considering you probably won't know how many placements you'll have in each when you arrive, it's probably sensible to live somewhere in the middle of the two.

A lot of students live near Camino de Ronda/Pedro Antonio which is good for going out and being in the middle of student-ville but if you're on a main road it has the potential to be very loud with people going out until 5/6am pretty much every night of the week. Another studenty area is near Triunfo, which is near Virgen de las Nieves but a half hour bus ride from the PTS.

### **When you get there**

It might seem daunting arriving a few days after finals, with only a few days of accommodation booked, but there's a few things to get done first in order to settle in. I would say priority number one is sort out a Spanish sim/internet on your phone. I went to the phone house on Calle Mesones and bought one there. A sim deal for 6 euros a month provided enough internet, and since all the communication here is done by Whatsapp internet is all you really need. In addition, having this sorted is useful for when you start contacting people about accommodation.

If you feel at a loss socially, there are also loads of language exchange events which are great opportunities to meet new people, both from Granada and abroad. The biggest one when I was there was a Couchsurfing-organised meet up on a Wednesday in a different location each week. There were usually around 30-40 people present speaking a mix of languages and a mix of permanent or more temporary residents of the city.

### **Living in Granada**

I don't think I can stress enough in 3500 words how great Granada is. It's an absolutely ideal city to live in for 4 months – small enough to get to know, big enough not to get bored. It'll be hard to summarise my favourite things to do/places to go here, but I'll try my best.

### **Attractions**

Alhambra – The beautiful Moorish castle on a hill in the middle of Granada is well worth a visit. Tickets in advance are a must and by April or May they're sold out around a month before. I'd recommend going in Spring to see the Garden in full bloom, and the Nazari palace looks much nicer in the sun.

Flamenco – There are a lot of very touristy flamenco nights which tend to be expensive and less good quality than others. I found one good flamenco jam session at vivaambi (Cuesta de san gregorio) starting at 10pm on a Thursday for €4, but was well worth it when I went.

Miradores – Hang out at these beautiful viewpoints overlooking the city! San Nicolas and San Miguel Alto are the two best and most famous, and there are often people playing live music which makes them a great place to take in the city from up high.

## **Tapas and city**

Granada is famous for being one of the last places where you standardly get a free tapas when you order a cold drink. Free tapas mean that there's a whole culture of going out for a few drinks and to eat something small. There are absolutely loads of tapas bars – go to as many as you can to find a favourite. My highlights included those in the Realejo for example Botelleria and the others on those streets, and Chanterela, which does enormous and good quality tapas.

## **Going out**

Going out in Granada is a very relaxed and stress-free affair. You don't need to buy tickets in advance, and you certainly don't need to get to the club by 11. In fact, a lot of them don't open till 1am and even then, they're empty. There are bars which tend to have free entry and open and close earlier (normally open until 4am), then there are the real clubs that open later and close at 6/7am, and vary in entry price but the price usually includes a copa (spirit + mixer). On a standard night, you might head to a bar at midnight or 1 then onto a club at 3 or 4. If you don't know or don't like reggaeton, you should try and learn to love it, because you will hear it everywhere.

Bars:

Pedro Antonio – A street/area full of student packed bars, some that play rock and indie music, and others that play reggaeton. The street is always heaving, even on weekdays. Some highlights include:

- La Habana, in a pass between calle Socrates and calle Obispo Hortado, next to a restaurant called Panevino (which comes up on google). Very small bar that plays salsa and bachata and tends to have people dancing really well. Always some shady characters, but if you want to practice your salsa then this is the place.
- Pub Wall Street – A bar on Pedro Antonio full of the best groomed of the Granada student set - you won't see a hair out of place. The prices of the drinks change on screens depending on their popularity, but generally are very cheap e.g. gin and tonic for €2-4 (and we're not talking small measures). Music usually reggaeton and there's also table football.
- Bar La Marisma – on Pedro Antonio. Cheap copas here, for €3.50, and all drinks come with Pipas, or sunflower seeds, which people here manage to eat with ease despite being in a shell. Again, a studenty crowd, more a place to chat than to dance but a great stop before moving elsewhere.

Elsewhere:

- Pata Palo – Great music here, playing a mix of cumbia, reggae, dub and soul, but depends on the night. Very Granada hippy crowd, expect to see a lot of dreadlocks and piercings. But worth coming to check out and a great place to dance.

- Entresuelo – Very similar vibe and music to pata palo with a mixed crowd and friendly atmosphere.
- La Sal – fun gay bar that ONLY plays reggaeton, and has €1 shots. Worth going even if only to further your reggaeton education.

#### Clubs (open until 6/7)

- Boogaclub – one of the biggest clubs in the city, with a variety of music depending on the night. Tends to be €6 entry including a copa or two beers on the weekend. Friendly atmosphere and always fun. They also do live jam sessions from 11.30 on Thursdays and Tuesdays which are usually busy and great value at only €2 entry.
- Mae West – One of the biggest student clubs. Can be pricey and the music mainly reggaeton depending on the night but with a glitzy terrace.
- El Cambario – Yet another student club with reggaeton, but does have an amazing terrace with great views of the Alhambra. Tends to be free before 1.30 if you put your name on the facebook page, so worth coming just for a drink in front of the view (Alhambra lights get switched off at 2), even if you then move on elsewhere.
- El Granero – A big, modern club right in the city centre.
- La Copera – An electronic club on the outskirts. I never managed to go but they attracted an impressive selection of international DJs, though tickets were usually around €20 which is incredibly expensive for Granada.

#### Day trips

Granada is surrounded by beautiful and diverse countryside, which is generally easily accessible by bus. The following are some of my highlights:

- Las termas de Santa Fe – Some natural hot springs with a very hippy vibe just a few kilometres from Santa Fe. The water is genuinely really warm so a good destination for the colder months. Best way to arrive is by car if poss, but if not then a bus (15 mins) to Santa Fe then about an hour – hour and a half walk (through pretty stunning countryside) to the hot springs. Location on google is accurate. In mid-March there's a Psytrance and gabber festival here called Dragon fest. This festival is very weird but also fun, worth going just for the experience.
- The beach – Once the weather gets warmer the beach is a welcome break from the heat of the city. There are a number which are easily accessible by bus but my favourite is Playa de Maro near Nerja, not the nearest one but certainly the most beautiful as its not overshadowed by large hotel and has a small wooden restaurant on the beach serving fresh fish.
- The Alpujarras – Just an hour from Granada are the Alpujarras, the beautiful mountains on the south side of the Sierra Nevada. In May the flowers are in bloom and the weather is nice, and there are some beautiful and affordable airbnbs that make going for a weekend very accessible.

## **Further afield**

There is no doubt that Andalucia is full of beautiful places – Sevilla, Cordoba and Cadiz just to name a few. I would say that its worth making a few trips, however, 4 months actually passes very quickly and if you want to really integrate and settle into Granada life it's important to spend a good few weekends absorbing the atmosphere in your new hometown as well. You can always come back to Andalucia as a tourist, but the opportunity to live and study here again won't come so easily.

## **Being on placement in Granada**

Before arriving, we got a choice of four rotations of ENT, Internal Medicine, Cardiology, A&E and general surgery. Due to my general aversion to surgery I chose the first four, and did them in that order.

### **ENT**

This was my only placement in the PTS, the new hospital further from the city centre. It consisted of four days a week in clinic and one day in theatre. I was generally there from 9.30 until 2. My supervisor was friendly and un-intimidating, but he also didn't involve me much in history taking or examination of the patients, which meant that clinic did become tedious. He was also a throat specialist and, as he and I agreed, a month on throat medicine as an undergrad was certainly too long. However, it was a good gentle introduction to Spanish hospital life, and at the beginning, at least, I was glad that I wasn't given any responsibility and was just allowed to observe and improve my medical Spanish. In addition, I saw some interesting operations such as a total laryngectomy and a parotid gland excision, and also improved on how to interpret a CT head and neck.

### **Internal Medicine**

This was probably my favourite rotation of the four as the medicine was certainly the most interesting. I generally started at 8.15 and finished at 2. Internal medics in Spain are called to complicated patients, often geriatric patients but also to younger patients that has an unclear diagnosis. This means that you see a lot of rare diseases, such as TB, haematological malignancies, Brucelosis and Leptopriosis, a few of which are extremely rare in the UK. My supervisor talked through the patients with me and then we would go to see them together and I would get the opportunity to examine them. I definitely improved my ability to listen to murmurs on this placement. We were also called to different areas of the hospital, such as A&E and various other wards, which gave the day a bit of variety. In addition, you would often see the same patients over the course of a week or two, which gave you the ability to build a relationship with them.

### **Cardiology**

This placement was broken up in to four one-week rotations. I tended to start at 9 and finish at 2. The first was in Interventional Cardiology, which was interesting as I'd never seen it before, but probably the least interactive week as you just sat watching the procedures

from the other side of the glass. The second week 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. The third week was Easter so my supervisor was away and I therefore had the week off. And the final week 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 for the first time, which really increased my confidence.

## **A&E**

I enjoyed the A&E placement as you end up seeing a wide variety of presentations and types of patients. I started at 9.30 and finished at 2.30. I stayed with my supervisor who rotated around the areas – effectively minors, majors and resus. My supervisor was very friendly but not incredibly keen to teach, though she was also quite flexible with my hours which was nice because it gave me more flexibility when I had family visiting etc. I was glad that I had this placement last as by then I felt confident in my medical Spanish and in A&E you obviously see patients with a diverse range of signs and symptoms.

## **Hospital routine**

The working hours varied depending on the placements (see above). Generally, you either need to start at 8/8.15 for the morning meeting (e.g. handover and sometimes an informative presentation), or at 9.30 after the meeting and after the doctors have gone to have breakfast together. Generally, you are with your supervisor the whole time, and don't get sent to do tasks like taking histories.

## **Cultural differences in Spanish medicine**

There is a fair few differences in terms of clinical practice and clinical team-working in Spanish hospitals in comparison to the UK. The first, and perhaps most shocking, is the complete disregard for patient confidentiality. My first experience of this was when a doctor started discussing an adjacent patient's case with one patient, in an attempt to further explain the effects of a certain condition. In addition, don't be surprised at the lack of confidential note disposal bins and general lack of care when handling confidential information.

Another difference is the doctor-patient relationship, which is far less formal than in the UK. The doctors often use affectionate terms and sometimes can come across quite rude to the patient, though this is hard to distinguish from normal direct Spanish culture where swear words are used much more frequently

Something that I noticed particularly in ENT is the different culture around ordering investigations. It seemed that all patients, even the young ones, got given a CT head, which is something I've never really seen happen in the UK. Even in other departments CT scans were a far more common occurrence than in the UK. This was interesting as at medical school something that is emphasised to us is both the cost and danger (due to radiation) of ordering unnecessary CTs, which did not seem to be taken into account much in Spain.

The role of the doctor and nurse in Spain was also different, but seemed to me sometimes to work better than the UK system. In Spain, doctors and nurses have very distinct roles that do not overlap. Nurses perform all clinical skills, such as ABGs, cannulas and catheters, while doctors do not have the skills to do this. Doctors, on the other hand, see patients briefly, prescribe and order investigations. These distinct roles mean that, unlike in the UK, there is a clear division of responsibility, and rather than a sense of hierarchy, there is just a sense that each professional fulfils their role which could not be performed by the other.

### **Linguistic development**

Both my social and medical Spanish increased substantially over the 4 months. Living in a flat of Spanish speakers was key for the former, but of course my time at hospital improved both. At first, hospital life was difficult, particularly while getting used to the Andalucían accent. However, it quickly got easier and by the end of my last placement I felt comfortable talking to both colleagues and doctors.

### **Future plans**

I would like to use my medical Spanish in the future, and am still looking to work in Latin America with a medical charity at some point, potentially MSF. This placement has encouraged me further that this is a career path that would interest me.