

## **End of placement report - Granada**

### **Reasons for choosing the European Studies programme**

I chose the European Studies programme because I have always enjoyed studying languages (I studied French and Spanish at A-level) and, because I thought it would provide a creative outlet as well as a diversion for the day to day life of a medical student, especially during the first two years when university contact time is limited.

I chose not to take any of my SSCs in Spain, as I thought 4 weeks was insufficient to make any real headway in learning the language.

Indeed, the possibility of language study was one of my principal reasons for choosing Manchester ahead of other medical schools.

### **Living in Granada**

Granada is a beautiful city. It is said that there is nothing worse than being a blind person in Granada. It is in a prime location, about 40 minutes to the coast for the beach and about the same distance to the mountains for skiing. When I arrived in early February, it was warm enough to walk around without a coat, although it rains heavily now and then. In March and April, the weather is warmer, dryer and more humid. At the start of April the temperature broke 30°C for the first time, with no cool breeze. In mid-April, it was too hot to stay in the sun at midday.

Finding accommodation in Granada can be easy if you aren't picky, or more difficult if you are. The most sensible option is to arrive a week or so before the start of hospital placement, book a hotel or hostel and spend time viewing apartments. Personally, I dislike so much uncertainty, and for this reason I decided to book my accommodation before arriving. It is easiest to Google 'accommodation in Granada', or in Spanish using google.es and go from there. There are a number of websites that cater specifically for ERASMUS students. The university website has an accommodation section, but I found this to be of little help.

Personally, I did not wish to live the typical ERASMUS lifestyle of living with other foreign students, many of whom would be younger than me. I thought that living with other foreign students would inevitably lead to the conversation deteriorating into English, and it would be completely impossible to get a real taste of Spanish culture. While searching the Internet for accommodation, I happened across an advert from a Spanish 'host family' who were looking for a student from England to stay with them. I knew that host families existed but I immediately rejected this as an option as I thought it would be restrictive and strange sharing someone's family home. However, at this point I was quite desperate for accommodation, and I decided to get in touch anyway.

I eventually elected to stay with the host family, and I am extremely happy I did. I stayed with a family with 2 young children in the outskirts of Granada (about a 10 minute bus ride to the hospital), and had a fantastic experience. I cannot describe the extent to which my Spanish improved while staying with the family, and how much I learnt about the Spanish culture. I was completely immersed in the Spanish way of life.

Of course, this option was more expensive than a simple room rent. I paid 550€ per month for bed, all cooked food, drinks, cleaning, washing all-inclusive and all the free Spanish lessons that I

wanted. This is in comparison to approximately 300€ or less for a simple room rent. Contrary to my preconceptions, it wasn't at all constrictive. The family was open minded; I was allowed to come and go as I pleased (no curfew), I could choose to stay in my room if I wished, they would specially cater for my food tastes and helped me in any way possible. I was included in family gatherings, going out with family friends, weekends at the beach and parties. They really tried their best to make me a member of the family.

## **Working in Granada**

### **Differences in Day-to-Day Hospital Life**

My first placement was A and E at San Cecilio. This was a good placement. The doctors made me feel like a true part of the team and I was not left to my own devices. Typically, I would follow the doctor to whom I was attached. This meant that we would start work at 9am and finish at 2pm, in a 'consulta' (clinic) seeing acute patients. This is very similar to GP, indeed the doctors in this particular A and E department are also trained as 'medicos de familia'. There were very few seriously ill patients here – mostly chest infections, palpitations etc. All the seriously ill patients, such as chest pain and cardiac arrests, appeared to go to other hospitals (there are several in Granada). We did clinic work 4 days a week. The other day of the week, my consultant was on call. This means that in the morning from 9am he is responsible for the short stay ward which is overseen by the A and E consultants (mostly urinary tract infections and acute COPD exacerbations) and then stays in the hospital on call until 9am the next day. The ward was quite boring, and the consultant encouraged me to follow a colleague in clinic on these days.

My second placement was in Internal Medicine in the Hospital General. This placement involved sitting in clinics dealing with quite rare, complicated conditions such as autoimmune diseases, patients with multiple pathologies, endocrine disorders and rare infections. If you like the TV programme House, this is the placement for you. This was a really interesting placement, as these doctors are sent all the complicated patients that other doctors are unable to diagnose, or with vague symptoms (e.g. asthenia, patients with constitutional symptoms etc.). This placement is excellent for practicing differential diagnoses.

There are immediately obvious differences between the Spanish and English healthcare systems. Immediately on entering the ward or clinic, the things I noticed were that a) there was rarely any alcohol hand gel and b) the doctors all wear extremely casual clothing with a white coat. Looking deeper, it is obvious that the Spanish are much more relaxed with regard to patient confidentiality (for instance, on hearing of a patient who inserted a bottle of perfume in his rectum, my consultant pulled up his X-ray (complete with identifying details), took a picture and sent it to a number of his colleagues. Furthermore, privacy in A and E doesn't really exist. Clinic doors are often left open, catheters are placed in rooms with people coming and going, and patients never get asked if it is OK to have a medical student observe.

That being said, the doctors appear much happier in their work than in England. Doctors will take time to have breakfast together, to chat between themselves (for example about politics or football) and to general enjoy their time at work. They would often leave patients in the waiting room while they texted their friends or phoned family members. The general 'stressed' atmosphere that is sometimes present in England was absent during my placements in Spain, although the doctors work more hours!

Furthermore, the nursing staff in Spain are absolutely fantastic. They are absolutely professional, courteous to patients and genuinely caring. They are responsible for all practical procedures such as taking blood. For me, this seems sensible, as they are often much more experienced.

Unfortunately, I do not feel that Spanish clinics run very efficiently. Rather than dictate a letter after the consultation, the doctor does it while the patient is in the room and hands it to them. This can mean that the patient has to wait in silence for 10-20 minutes after the consultation for the doctor to hand them their 'informe'. I think they could double the number of patients seen in each clinic if this wasn't the case.

### **Medical Training in Spain**

The Spanish medical degree is 6 years in duration. Students appear to have very little practical experience in the hospital- they are expected to learn the practicalities of being a doctor (history taking and examination) on day one of residency. The few medical students that I saw did not get involved, and were often left standing in the corner, not taking notes, and not engaging with what was going on around them.

The final year or so of medical school is spared for preparation for the final written exam, the MIR. The score in this examination determines which specialty the students can work towards. For example, a low scoring applicant would be unlikely to succeed in an application to a competitive specialty. Once they have passed the MIR and become doctors, students start to earn salaries and perform the same tasks as F1s in the UK, minus practical procedures, which are done almost always by nurses. The MIR is a completely theoretic exam, and many doctors that I talked with thought this was a terrible idea. I agree; while I was extremely impressed with their factual knowledge, the quality of the history taking and examination skills was sometimes poor. Furthermore, communication skills were sometimes lacking; little empathy was shown in some circumstances, and even the consultants appeared nervous or unsure about how to break bad news effectively.

After the MIR, the new doctors do 5 years of work as doctors while being continually assessed, and after this time they are 'especialistas', or consultants, if they are able to find a post. There is a great deal of unemployment amongst Spanish doctors. There is no final exam such as the MRCP. Five years of postgraduate training seems very little, especially in certain difficult specialities such as neurosurgery.

### **Personal development**

#### **Linguistic development**

My knowledge of Spanish, from my ability to manipulate grammar to my vocabulary has increased immensely. Before I arrived in Granada, my Spanish was, at best, rusty. I didn't feel that the university Spanish classes were particularly helpful, and I also took a year out to intercalate. I had a good knowledge of grammar and non-medical Spanish from A-level, but my day-to-day conversational skills, i.e. my ability to speak with and listen to native Spanish speakers was poor. Now, at the end of my placement, I am able to understand nearly all Spanish, regardless of regional accent or technical language. Producing language is more difficult, and I still think that I would like to speak a little faster, but that only comes with more practice.

The Andalusian accent is extremely difficult to understand at first. Speakers of this accent tend to cut the ends off words ("Soy de Grana") and miss out the final 's' from verbs. This takes a number of weeks to get used to, but eventually it becomes second nature.

My medical Spanish could still do with a degree of improvement. To future students coming to study in Spain, I would encourage them to find a list of common medical Spanish abbreviations and learn them. Also, it is essential to bring a writing book to write down vocab, as you can sometimes learn 50-100 new words over the course of a clinic. I bought an extremely useful book prior to travelling, called ¿Qué pasó?, which was very useful for vocabulary and medical history taking. And, if you are in Granada, expect the doctors to not know a word of English.

I am aware that other students decided to take Spanish classes while I was in Spain, however, given that I received excellent A level Spanish tuition and that I was mainly lacking in my conversational skills, I decided to give this a miss. My colleagues who attended complained that the class was not sufficiently challenging and a waste of time and money. It is a much better use of time to try and completely immerse yourself in Spanish through radio, TV and books or newspapers.

### **Inter-cultural understanding**

I feel that I gained an unparalleled experience of learning about Spanish culture by living with a host family, and I think that I was able to learn more about the nuances of my own culture by spending time with them.

The most striking difference is the general daily routine. School and work start at 9am. School finishes at 3pm, but children have extracurricular activities until 5pm most days, and then do their homework and relax until 9 or 10pm. I consider this extremely late, especially for children under 10. Adults typically go to bed after midnight except on the weekends, when they habitually have dinner parties or go into town to socialize and stay out until at least 2-3am, with their children. Nights out finish as 6-7am!

I disagree with previous reports that have called the Andalusian people unfriendly. I have been to Santander in the north and found the people there to be infinitely less approachable than in the south. In the south, waiters are polite, shopkeepers helpful and most people friendly and willing to help, especially if you are willing to try and speak Spanish with them.

I think that 'machismo' is still very much a factor in Spain, but is slowly dying out. For example, the family that I stayed with was very much led by the maternal grandfather. When he visited, everyone seemed much more on edge than normal, almost like he was the leader of some mafia-esque organization. It was said that he greatly preferred his sons and grandsons than his daughters and granddaughters. This seems a little ridiculous to me, especially in these modern times, but I think the majority of younger Spaniards are more open-minded and this type of behaviour will die out with this generation or the next.

I feel that Spanish people are a friendly people who tend to focus on what they have, rather than coveting things that they don't have. Their sense of humour can be difficult to understand, and they have no qualms about talking about taboo subjects or obscenity such as sex, with colleagues and friends. The mother of the family that I lived with said that if you have a dry sense of humour, you will do well in Granada.

## **Ideas and future plans**

I came to Spain in order to graduate with European Studies and to perhaps increase my level of conversational Spanish, both of which I have achieved. I have never considered living in another country, and I still feel the same.

## **Practical issues for future students**

Do not forget that most students going to Spain are eligible for the ERASMUS grant. This is a grant paid on two occasions that totals around 2000€, which is a huge help with paying for flights and accommodation.

The administrative process that occurs before actually arriving in Granada is incredibly frustrating. There was absolutely no communication between University of Granada and the Manchester students for months during 5<sup>th</sup> year, and then suddenly multiple emails arrive all at once asking us to register. Then it is impossible to upload a photograph to the Internet because of image size constraints, and when asked to specify the time we are in Granada, this is impossible as we straddle a portion of semester one and semester two.

Furthermore, we were never explicitly told until late November when the placement starts. In fact, we received mixed messages from both Manchester and Granada Universities. This makes it extremely difficult to book flights and sort out accommodation. I would advise that if this problem occur again to email the 'responsable' at the University of Granada, and if the answer is not clear, to have a week at home after the exempting examination and start the week after. For reference, our agreed placement dates were 03/02/2014 to 16/05/2013.

Previous students have complained that the process of registering as a student at the University of Granada is fraught with administrative difficulties. I didn't find this to be the case. I went on the first day in Granada to the International Office to talk to the 'responsable', and I filled in a couple of forms, in exchange for a matriculation form. Following this, I went to the International Student Office for the general University where I registered and received my student card. I took this back to the medical school and handed over my card for verification and the completed matriculation form.

Apart from this, starting in the hospital is the same as commencing any placement, such as an SSC. I emailed the doctor a few days prior to starting to ask for reporting instructions and turned up on day one.

I would say that getting a Spanish Mobile phone number on the first or second day of arriving in Spain is imperative. Without one, you cannot register at the university, organise flat viewings or contact other foreign students about social events. I used a company called Toggle, which allows you to register both your English and Spanish number to the same Sim card, and means you avoid paying roaming charges. However, the Internet is more expensive, so it is only worth it if you are usually in a Wi-Fi zone (Hospital General has Wi-Fi and the university has Eduroam) or if you don't use the Internet frequently on your phone. Also, whatsapp is the principal means of communication between Spaniards so I would say this is essential.

I would definitely consider getting a bus pass while you are in Granada. The red buses cover the town centre and the suburbs, and for these you can get a "credibus" pass for 5€ deposit from the bus driver. You charge the card and then any bus journey costs 80 cents, regardless of distance.

You recharge the card with the driver when the money runs out, and scan every time you enter the bus. Buses can be especially busy around 8-9am and 1-3pm and can be extremely crowded so I would avoid travelling at these times.

From a tourism point of view, within Granada itself there are a number of must-see attractions. A number of tourists come to Granada each year, mostly for the Alhambra and the free tapas, which is provided with most alcoholic drinks all day. It is possible to eat well in Granada without ever paying for a meal, however, tapas can sometimes be limited, and sometime you don't have a choice.

For the Alhambra, the most well-known tourist attraction in Spain, it is best to book tickets online via Ticketmaster **as soon as possible**, and then follow the instructions to pick the tickets up at an ATM. The Alhambra is cheap, and is definitely worth the time to visit. It is easy to access on foot, or by bus. Be careful as it has a limited number of tickets available each day, and often sells out months in advance.

The Mirador de San Nicolas is the prime location for getting brilliant views of the Alhambra, and the walk there is extremely picturesque through the Albaizin (Arab quarter). It is sometimes very busy, especially at sunset on the weekend.

There are no bullfights until June onwards, but there is a good tour which costs 6,50€ which allows you walk round and across the bullring and learn how bullfights work, and some of the history. I really enjoyed this tour. I would, however, avoid the tapas bars in the bullring itself as these are set up mostly for tourists and the drinks are more expensive and the tapas is poor.

There is a red hop-on, hop-off tourist bus, but it is expensive and the quality of the commentary is poor.

From an excursion point of view, the bus station is just outside of the town centre, and there are daily buses to all parts of Spain. For the beach, the nearest location is Salobreña, but there are few amenities around. Nerja, Benalmadena and Malaga are more touristic, and I would say worth the extra time on the bus. I would recommend spending time at the beach from April onwards, when it is warm enough to go in the Sea.

Seville, the capital of Andalucia is definitely worth a visit, but the bus to here can cost upwards of 50€.

Madrid and Barcelona are also accessible from Granada, but I would suggest booking early and travelling by plane, as the journey time by bus or train is very long. Of course, it is also more expensive.

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

Sonia-Gil Chantal is the administrative lead for International Students in the medical school, and she should be the first port of call for any problems.

### **Facultad de Medicina (International Office is on the first floor, left hand side)**

Avenida de Madrid  
Granada  
18071

**International Office (get your student card here, it's the last building on the right, up the stairs)**

Avenida de Hospicio  
Granada  
18071

**Hospital Virgen de las Nieves/ Ruiz de Alda (Hospital General)**

Avenida Fuerzas Armadas, nº 2  
Granada  
18014

**Hospital San Cecilio**

Avenida Dr. Olóriz  
Granada  
18012

**Bus station (for buses to other Spanish towns)**

There are ticket machines immediately on entering the bus station, where you must buy tickets prior to travelling. It is necessary to show these to the bus driver before getting on the bus.

Calle Minerva  
18014 Granada

**Websites:**

**Accommodation:**

<http://erasmusu.com/en/erasmus-granada/student-housing>

<http://www.room-granada.com/en/>

<http://estudiantes.ugr.es/alojamientos3/>

<http://studentmundial.com/student-accommodation-granada>

**University Website:**

<http://www.ugr.es>

**Faculty Website:**

<http://www.ugr.es/~facmed/>

**Words: 3558**