

ERASMUS Report Granada 2015

Why did you choose to study on the European Studies programme?

I have always been a keen linguist having studied French, German and Spanish for GCSE, and Spanish at A-level. Although I was keen to study Medicine, I was also adamant I wanted to improve my languages, which is why Manchester with its European Option fast became my top choice University. The opportunity to study Spanish alongside Medicine, in addition to studying abroad, was highly appealing to me, as I have always relished the idea of working in a Spanish-speaking country in the future.

I enjoyed the European Option component of the course and didn't find it too taxing. The lessons were quite relaxed, however, finding the motivation to attend classes in the evening after a full day in hospital was sometimes difficult! I didn't feel as if much extra work was required to pass the exams and it was not a hindrance to my medical studies – in fact it was often a welcomed break! I would definitely recommend European Option to anyone with a background and an interest in languages, not only for the extra qualification, but more so for the opportunity to undertake an Erasmus placement which I have enjoyed immensely!

An overview of your experience of living in Granada.

I was originally wanted to be placed in Madrid for my Erasmus, so when I was allocated a place in Granada I was disappointed to say the least. However, having spent 4 months in Granada I do not regret my allocation at all and wouldn't have wanted to spend this time anywhere else in the world. I have honestly had an amazing time and would recommend visiting this city to anyone – doing your ERASMUS here would be a much better option though! I had heard very positive things about Granada before arriving here, however, I didn't quite believe it all until I experienced it for myself.

The city

The city is absolutely beautiful and has everything you could want. It is small enough that you can orientate yourself quickly, but also big enough that you won't ever be bored. Granada is ideally located between the Sierra Nevada ski resort and the coast – both a 45 bus ride away in the opposite direction. It is often said that you can spend the morning on the slopes and the afternoon on the beach! The city is steeped in culture and has many different areas to explore including the Albayzin, Realejo and Sacromonte, as well as being home to the beautiful Alhambra and many Miradors. In addition to being pretty, Granada has a very large student population and is said to be Europe's Erasmus capital, which means it is also incredibly cheap. One of the advantages of living in Granada is that the tapas culture is well and truly

alive – every drink purchased comes with free food. Each drink usually costs 2€ (beer, *tinto de verano*, soft drinks etc) and the tapas are usually fairly large and can range from anything from hamburgers and sandwiches to fish, meatballs, paella and much, much more! The tapas has definitely been a highlight of my time here, I've eaten out almost every evening here and as it is so affordable it hasn't been much of a strain on the purse strings, however, the same can't be said for the waist line! Fortunately, Granada is a very hilly city and everything is within walking distance so this does help slightly with the calorie burn. I also joined 'BeOne' gym, which was incredibly modern and well equipped – you had to use your fingerprints to enter the building! There were a lot of machines and classes throughout the day, I would definitely recommend this gym to anyone, although there are a lot of other gyms in the area, such as Yo10 on Camino de Ronda which is also very popular.

Accommodation

In terms of accommodation, I read many of the reports of past students who undertook their placements in Granada, and noted that the majority stayed in hostels for a week or so and found shared flats through adverts either online or attached to lampposts around the city. At the time of reading these reports I was revising (or procrastinating) for my finals, and the thought of not knowing where I would be staying in Granada only added to the stress of exams. I knew that I can be quite fussy about accommodation and so spent some time looking at rooms in shared flats online; however, I wasn't too impressed with what I found. During my searches, I came across university halls of residence called *Residencia Universitario Carlos V*, located in the Cartuja campus which is a 20-minute walk from the city centre up a very large hill. The halls appeared modern and each basic single bedroom came fully equipped with an ensuite bathroom, fridge and microwave. There were also the options of staying in a double room with another student or having a shared kitchen. Despite the fact the halls were more than double the price of a room in a shared flat in the city centre, I decided to apply for a place as I thought it would not only be fun, but would also be a good way to improve my Spanish by being surrounded by almost 400 other Spanish students.

My rent was around 575€ per month, which is a lot for Granada standards; however, it did include two meals per day. I originally opted for breakfast and dinner, but soon changed from dinner as it was served too late at 9:30pm, and chose to have lunch instead. Breakfast was served from 7-10:30am and consisted of *tostadas* with a selection of toppings (butter, ham, cheese, tomato, chorizo), cereal, cakes, pastries and coffee. I must say it was very convenient to go down to the *comedor* on my way to hospital every morning- I certainly didn't miss having to make my own breakfast! Lunch was served from 1-3:30pm and was generally very good quality food, however, the portion sizes were a lot bigger than expected. Each meal consisted of bread, two courses, a dessert (usually fruit but sometimes cakes) and even a glass of red wine! A siesta was often needed afterwards!

I thoroughly enjoyed my time in the residence but didn't make as many Spanish friends as I had envisaged, as they tended to stick within their 'cliques'. However, I

did manage to improve my Spanish somewhat in the halls, as many students were keen to practice their English so I often did language tandems with them over breakfast/lunch. I made good friends with a group of students from England and Ireland in the halls and ended up doing a lot with them, although it wasn't really beneficial for improving my Spanish!

Social events and Travel

There are a number of Erasmus groups in Granada that organise events each week and so I also made a lot of friends by attending these. I would definitely recommend the events, especially during the first week, as it's a great way to make friends with people from all over the world! You will often find that conversation usually descends into English when socialising with these groups, so again it is not always useful from a language point of view but definitely worth it! The Erasmus groups also organise day/weekend trips to nearby places on a regular basis, which are generally very cheap and a good way to travel around Spain. I personally didn't go on any of their trips and instead organised my own travel with friends, usually opting to travel by BlaBlaCar or on Alsa buses and staying in Airbnb accommodation. Again, this wasn't too expensive and meant we had more flexibility with our stay. I travelled to Madrid, Sevilla, Salobrena, Marbella, Monachil, Almeria and the Sierra Nevada during my stay in Granada, and definitely would have liked to see more if I had more time!

An overview of your experience of working in Granada.

My hospital placements consisted of four 4-week blocks in either *Hospital Universitario Virgen de las Nieves* or *Hospital Universitario San Cecilio*. Both were in very close proximity to each other and only a 10-15 minute walk from my halls of residence. The working day would start at around 9am however would finish at roughly 3pm, when the on-call shift would start.

My first placement was in *Medicina Interna* at Virgen de la Nieves. I was given the details of Dr. Juan Jimenez Alonso who assigned me to my supervisor Dra. Monica Zamora Pasadas. I had a great time on this placement and got on really well with Monica and the other members of the team. The placement consisted of attending the morning ward round followed by helping the team write in the notes, order tests and looking up results.

My second placement was in ENT with Dr. Juan Garcia-Valdecasas Bernal at San Cecilio, which involved attending clinics and observing in theatre. I was really pleased I chose this placement, as I hadn't had any previous experience in ENT during my time at medical school. Although the clinics were quite long and repetitive they helped me to become familiar with the common presenting complaints in ENT. I was also able to examine most patients, however, the equipment used was rather old-fashioned and the method for holding an otoscope is very different to how we are taught in England, so be prepared to be told that you're doing it wrong! I really

enjoyed observing in theatre, as I was able to see many operations that I hadn't had the chance to see before, including stapedectomies, laryngectomies and cochlear implants.

My third placement was in General Surgery with Dr. Benito Miron Pozo, again at San Cecilio. I found this placement to be rather dull as I spent everyday observing in theatre, which became quite tiresome, especially as I wasn't interacting very much with patients or doctors. I did, however, get to move between theatres to ensure I saw a range of operations. I asked whether it would be possible to attend clinics so the days weren't so repetitive, but was told that it wouldn't be possible as students from the medical school had priority to attend them.

My final placement was in Cardiology with Dr. Juan Jimenez Jaimez at Virgen de las Nieves. I really enjoyed this placement and was able to go over a lot of Cardiology, including interpreting ECGs and examining patients. Juan was a great supervisor, as he was very keen to teach and was highly supportive. In addition to attending clinics, I went to the catheter lab, watched Echocardiograms, performed cardioversions and even attended the 'Andalusian Society of Cardiology' conference!

What you have learnt on the placement with regard to any differences to UK hospitals and practice, the medical training programme, the contrasting medical cultures?

I found life in Spain to be much more laid-back and relaxed, and they seemed to 'work to live' instead of 'living to work' as I feel we do in England. This attitude was also reflected in the placements that I did, and I noted many differences between the practices of Medicine in Spain compared to at home.

- Confidentiality

There appeared to be much less of an emphasis on patient confidentiality in Spain. It was commonplace for patients to be accompanied by at least one family member at all times during their admission to hospital, and these relatives would always be well-informed and updated of the patients situation regardless of whether the patients permission had been asked.

During ward rounds, the relatives would be asked to leave the bay so the doctor could carry out their examinations. After this, the doctors would return to the corridor and explain anything new to the family, however, no precautions were taken to stop the family members of other patients from hearing, in fact most of the time they would be actively listening and contributing to the conversation! This meant most patients and their families were very well informed of not only their condition, but the conditions of most patients on the ward around them.

I also noted that there were no confidential waste bins and patient sensitive information would be ripped by hand and thrown into normal bins. In clinics, I

saw on a number of occasions that the notes of family members would often be checked without their permission, for example when checking for any relevant family history.

- Patient dignity

There did not appear to be the same stress on patient dignity that we are very conscious of in the UK. There were rarely curtains between patients on the wards and they were often undressed and washed in front of each other and their families. In clinics, when patients would need to undress, they were not offered drapes to cover up before an examination and often other members of staff would walk freely into the examination room without knocking or asking permission.

Infection control

White coats are still worn in Spain and there are no rules with regard to tying back hair or being bare below the elbow. Alcohol hand gel is available on the wards, but very rarely used except perhaps after seeing a patient who was barrier nursed. I noticed in ENT clinics that non-sterile equipment was used and often re-used for many patients, and the fibroscopes were handled without using gloves and only washed with a fairly-liquid type detergent between patients.

- Professionalism

Doctors would often have their phones on loud and would answer calls and messages during ward rounds and consultations in front of the patients. Often, friends of the doctors would appear in clinics without appointments and would ask for consultations, which not only disrupted the clinics but also disregards any rules we have about treating friends and family, which obviously aren't applicable in Spain! I noticed that relationships between doctors and their colleagues, as well as with patients, were far more tactile and personal.

How you have gained from this experience in terms of:

i) Linguistic development

This time has definitely improved my linguistic ability but I do not feel that I am as fluent as I expected to be. I am much more confident when speaking and have certainly improved my vocabulary, especially my knowledge of colloquial phrases – especially profanities, which you will probably hear in almost every sentence! Although the Andalusian accent was difficult to understand at first, it does become much easier after a few weeks.

ii) Inter-cultural understanding

Before coming to Granada, my only real experiences of Spain were those of holiday resorts, mainly full of British tourists. My time here really helped me to immerse myself in the Spanish culture, and to appreciate just how different it is compared to other countries. It took some time to get used to certain cultural aspects, for example, the lack of queues and customer service, but despite these shortfalls I absolutely loved the culture in Spain. I was warned of the 'malafollá granaína' before arriving in Granada, but I can honestly say that I didn't experience it at all. I found the Spanish people to be very friendly and they tended to be much more relaxed and trusting in nature. In addition to getting to know the Spanish culture, this experience also allowed me to meet people from all over the world and opened my eyes to their lives and cultures.

iii) Your ideas and future plans.

I already have plans to return to Granada to holiday and would love to spend some more time living and even working there as I love the culture and the way of life. I'm unsure whether it's something I would do long term as the job prospects for doctors aren't great in Spain. This experience has opened my eyes to the practice of medicine abroad and has made me appreciate what we have with the NHS, so although I would like to live abroad for a period of time in the future, I ultimately feel like I will always settle in England.

Any practical issues that future students on this placement should know about.

Getting there

I flew directly to Granada airport with BA from London City Airport, which was really convenient and cost around £130 return. There is a bus transfer to and from the airport by a company called Jose Gonzalez, which only costs 3€. Alternatively, you can get a taxi for around 20-30€. You can also get to Granada by flying to Malaga and then getting a bus from the airport or the bus station for around 12€. Flights are usually with Ryanair, Easyjet or Monarch, with Ryanair generally being the cheapest – if book enough in advance it can end up costing you only £50 return!

Registering

The first few days in a new city can be daunting enough without all the paperwork that needs to be done. It can be a very frustrating time rushing from one office to another, especially when you have no idea where they are and they're only open for two hours a day. We registered in the following way:

- **Oficina de Movilidad** (Faculty of Medicine, Avenida de Madrid. Opening hours 12:30-2:30): here we met Sonia Chantal Gil-Gonzalez in her office on the 1st floor of the Faculty, where she took our learning agreements and signed our attendance certificates. She then directed us to another office on the same floor where we made appointments to matriculate into the Faculty.

- **Oficina Central de Relaciones Internacionales** (Complejo Administrativo Triunfo - Avenida del Hospicio): We went to this office to get our student cards but were told we couldn't and instead had to attend an Erasmus Welcome session to get more information, which told us to apply for our cards online. I didn't end up getting a student card and didn't feel like I ever needed one. Our matriculation certificates along with a valid form of ID could be used instead if we ever needed.

We were also told to go to the 'Registro Central de Extranjeros' to get our Residente cards, as we were in the country for just over 3 months. I didn't bother to get this card, as you only really need it if you're going to be working in Spain etc.

Getting around

As with any University City, Granada has a good bus system. I only used the buses a handful of times as I took the opportunity to walk everywhere as I hardly ever do in England. The LAC (*Linea de Alta Capacidad*) will take you in a loop around the city centre, and the SN1 and SN2 buses will take you to the bus station for 1.20€ for each journey.

Money

In addition to my Erasmus grant Mastercard, I also got a Travel Money Card from the Post Office, which I could top up with my own money and use as a debit card. I would recommend getting one as there was no charge for transactions and only a 2€ charge for withdrawing cash from an ATM. Get used to being asked for ID when paying for things with card in certain shops.

Phone

I took an old unlocked Blackberry phone with me and bought a PAYG Simcard from Orange on the 'Ballena' tariff, which gave me 1G of data per month for 10€. I would definitely recommend doing this, as everyone in Spain uses WhatsApp as their main way of contact. I knew people who didn't get a Spanish number and only used their phones when they had Wi-Fi, which tended to be quite a nuisance for them and others especially when trying to meet up.

Clothes

In Spain the doctors are very casual and just wear jeans and t-shirts under their white coats, so there is absolutely no need to take any smart clothes for hospital. A white coat can be bought from *Ortopedia* shops for around 15€. On arrival in February, the weather is similar to in England and you will need a full winter wardrobe until around mid-March. Towards April/May, the weather then improves dramatically with temperatures reaching around 35°C. Be warned that Spanish people carry on wearing their jeans and jumpers for some time despite the heat. It is

often said that you can tell who the *guiris* (foreigners) are, as they're the ones wearing shorts and dresses whilst the rest of the population are still in their coats and scarves!

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

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