

European Option Placement Report – Granada

Why did I choose to study European Option?

When I was applying to Manchester University as an A-level pupil, the European option was something that I was vaguely aware of but didn't pay a huge amount of attention to. At that time I was not sure if I would secure a place to study medicine anywhere! It wasn't until I had received my letter of acceptance and the endless pages of welcome pack that I really looked into the programme. I had studied Spanish at A-level and thought that this would be an excellent opportunity to keep up my proficiency in the language. My main fear was that the hours of study from A-levels would be put to waste if I were to forget my Spanish (as I did with my GCSE French) so I applied to study European option (with very little thought towards the Erasmus placement in 5th year, which seemed too far into the future to worry about at this point). Throughout the 4 years of Spanish I classes I really enjoyed myself, but I had always said that at the moment the language study started to affect my medical studies, I would stop it. I managed to stay on track with both subjects and it wasn't until after the final exams in 4th year that I really began to think about the elective/Erasmus placement that was to come the following year.

I am interested in languages and I have always enjoyed being able to communicate with locals when travelling. I also feel slightly embarrassed of the stereotype that we, who speak English as a first language, have no need to learn another.

Life in Granada

My experience in Granada has been extremely positive. I have learnt so much about Spain, Spanish, medicine and life in the last 4 months. I have absolutely been encaptured by the city, its people and their traditions. The style of life is very different to what I was used to in the UK and the relaxed and friendly atmosphere of Andalucía, at times, makes the former seem overly hurried and stressful. Of course there are disadvantages to this laid-back take on life and one of the first that I came across was business opening hours. Banks open at 9.00 and close at 14.00. Most shops, including many supermarkets, close for 3 hours during the middle of the day. The siesta is religiously observed in Granada and when I first arrived

into town on a bus at 3pm on a Sunday to find deserted streets, I questioned what I had signed myself up to.

Meal times are a bit different in Spain; the main meal is between 12 and 3pm and is followed by a snooze. Then the evening meal, usually something light is had usually had any time between half 9 and 11pm and it may be drawn out especially if you are having tapas. Tapas are little dishes of food that traditionally come with a drink in Spain and in Granada they are free! This is not the case for most other cities in Spain. Depending on where you go, the tapa may be a tiny taste of chorizo sausage to nibble at or it may be virtually a full meal consisting of a pork sandwich and chips! It means that going out to eat is extremely cheap, but be careful, the tapas are usually cooked in bulk quite cheaply and therefore, at times, not the healthiest

Places for good student Tapas:

Plaza de Toros: 'Nido de Búho', 'La Maestranza', 'Aki t'espero'

Calle Gonzalo Gallas: 'El Garden' 2 Euros for a small beer and the biggest tapas I could find in Granada. The first comes with a 'pre-tapa' of chips and salad and the tapa comes with a side tapa, usually a small slice of pizza.

Centre: 'La Riviera', 'Bodegas Casteñadas'. The street Calle Navas is also full of tapas bars and restaurants.

The late meals mean that going out at night is also pushed back. Bars will be busy from about 10pm onwards but people do not usually go to nightclubs until about 3 or 4am. The street Calle Pedro Antonio is very popular with students as it is full of bars with cheap drinks that serve good tapas.

Granada's fortunate location means that, incredibly, you are less than an hour away from a fantastic ski resort in the Sierra and just over an hour away from the closest beach. There are a few companies in the city that regularly run budget trips and excursions for Erasmus students to these places, as well as city trips to other Spanish cities but also Lisbon, Marrakesh and Gibraltar. I managed to pay visits to Seville, Madrid, the beaches of Malaga, and the famous Cabo de Gata beaches of Almeria.

Some touristy things I would recommend to do during a stay here would be;

- El Mirador de San Nicolas in the Albayzín, which has an incredible view of landscape of Granada and the Alhambra. This is one of my favourite spots in Granada with an addictive view.
- The Alhambra – People come from all over the world to see this wonderful palace on a hill and it is not difficult to see why. Tickets cost roughly 20 euros, however residents of Granada are able to go free on Sundays if they present proof of residence the Monday before they intend to go.
- The Cathedral- Located in the city centre this huge cathedral is almost hidden by surrounding buildings. It is well worth it to go and see.



While I was in Granada I was lucky enough to see a few cultural festivals. Semana Santa, the week leading up to Easter is extremely important in Andalucía and all life in Granada pauses to watch the many processions every day of this week. The main focus of the processions are the wonderfully decorated floats that each church parades. These are extremely heavy and usually bear a holy saint decorated with precious metals and ornaments. It is carried for miles through the streets of the city where they pass by the cathedral. Carrying teams consist of around 20 people, men and women and is done as a penance. Every 20 metres the float is set down so they can catch their breath and when they move off it is heroically pushed back up and usually met with applause from the admiring crowds. Some even do this in bare feet! The processions are followed by lots of members in the church dressed in quite spooky pointed hoods – very similar to those that the Klu Klux Klan adopted. The

processions are also followed by large bands playing powerful marching music. The part about these processions that really struck me was the involvement of the younger generation. In the UK it would be difficult to imagine as many young people going out year after year to make a sacrifice to their religion.

Another important festival we were lucky enough to see was día de las cruces. During this weekend at the start of May, lots of decorative crosses appeared outside churches, businesses, town halls and all over town there were stages with flamenco music and sevillana dancing.

Living in Granada

Granada is a major student city and the university is one of the most prestigious in Spain. Hence there is plenty of cheap accommodation and a buzzing student night life. Some people decide to sort out accommodation in advance online, hoping to avoid stress on arriving in a new city. I decided to book a room through the website Airbnb for a few weeks while I tried to look for a flat. Airbnb is a website that anybody can use to offer a room or a flat to travellers to stay in. It is usually better value for money than hostels but probably not advisable to use for more than a few weeks.

When I was looking for my room, I chose to only consider flats with Spanish flatmates. This took longer and involved an extremely difficult period at the start with a lot of uncertainty. I found this time very lonely, as I missed my family and friends, and had not yet made friends in the city. When I finally moved into my permanent room, things got much easier and I became really close with my flatmates who welcomed me so well and brought me with them to their social outings. This decision made a huge difference for me in terms of my language improvement.

I decided to live in the Plaza de Toros area, slightly to the north of the city. About a 20 minute walk from the centre or 5 minute bus, this little district own compares to the northern quarter of Manchester with a great range of students' tapas bars as well as a few nightclubs that are part of the actual bullring building. It is also where both of the hospitals that I attended were situated. This meant that my morning commute to placement was about 1 minute and I did not need to buy a bus pass. The one drawback of living here was having to walk further home from nights out in the centre, however Granada is a very safe

city and even at antisocial hours, the main roads are rarely empty. If in doubt taxi ranks are scattered throughout the city and cost about the same as they would in Manchester. My monthly rent was 180 euros for a 5th floor double room with a decent sized living room and a nice view of the bullring and the beautiful Sierra Nevada Mountains.



I would strongly recommend living with actual Spaniards rather than other International students. Most will speak English to a high standard and the path of least resistance will inevitably lead conversation to a descent into English.

On Placement

My four placements were cardiology, A&E, internal medicine and ENT. Over the four months I was warmly welcomed and accepted to each of the placements and was really made to feel one of the team. Depending on the speciality the daily routine varies slightly but the working day is from 9 until 3 although usually medical students are not expected to attend during the writing up of notes. I found that there were plenty of opportunities to get involved in history and examination. The nurses carry out the vast majority of practical procedures but nevertheless they were very willing to help and let me take part when I explained that these procedures would be part of my job back at home. I was also able to complete a few UPSAs there and the process was only as complicated as it is in Manchester. I enjoyed taking histories in Spanish, even if it was quite difficult to understand the elderly patients at times.

In cardiology I spent most of time in the clinic, seeing patients that had been referred as well as regulars, and once every two weeks a very interesting clinic about cardio

myopathies. It was here that we saw a very rare case and I had the opportunity to write up the case with the consultant and resident in an attempt to get it published. I also spent time in the arrhythmias labs, where complicated electrical mapping and ablation procedures. Once a week I would go with the residents to do the elective DC cardioversions and they even let me carry out the procedure under close supervision. They still use the big paddles to deliver the shocks and this was a brilliant opportunity for me.

In A&E I spent some time in the clinic, and other times tending to the more serious presentations that came in. I saw a very wide range of acute interesting cases and was able to carry out many UPSAs here.

Internal medicine consisted of the daily ward round and then completing any jobs that had been created. I felt that I was able to get to know the team on this ward really well as it was consistent each day and most of the patients were admitted for more than a week.

In ENT I had the chance to see classic presentations and observe interesting operations in theatre, such as cochlear implants.

In terms of dress code, it is much more casual than in the UK. Most of the male residents and medical students wear jeans and a t-shirt with casual shoes/ trainers and always a white coat. For the first day of each new placement I dressed up slightly just to be on the safe side. Most of the more senior doctors wore jeans, shirt and brown shoes. I would not recommend bringing smart, UK hospital clothes as they are simply not necessary.

Contrasts between medicine in Spain and the UK

Medicine in Spain has many contrasts to medicine in the UK. Probably most obvious in Spanish hospitals is the presence of family on the ward. It was common to see corridors and wards full of people with 3-4 relatives per patient. It is a normal part of the ward round, after visiting the patient, to step away from them and talk to the family about their progress. There is less emphasis on confidentiality in this particular instance. It is simply implied that, unless otherwise stated, it is in the patient's best interest for the family members to know what's going on. Although this is much different to practice in the UK, in

my opinion it is not a neglect of the patient's confidentiality but simply a sign of a different culture.

The doctors tend to have a different manner with the patients. This reflects the social customs in Spain outside of the hospital. They are much more tactile than in we are in the UK. This applies to interactions between members of staff also. I was frequently taken by surprise when doctors and nurses would openly place arms around one another, stroke one another's hair and once, even affectionately lick a colleague's arm! Although this level of contact would not be socially acceptable at work in the UK, here it was perceived as friendly and normal, not sexual.

It was also pretty normal for doctor's to treat family members, mothers, in-laws, nephews, cousins and friends. Whereas this would not be acceptable at home, not a second thought was given to this. Self-prescribing used to be commonly done in the UK but recently it has received a lot of attention and is now, in certain circumstances, a strike-off-able offense. When I explained this to the doctors in Spain they were surprised, but suggested they would simply ask a mate to prescribe for them.

In Spain, the patients carry their own medical records to clinic. There is no request made nor a review by a medical professional. The patients simply get a copy of everything there and then. This also means that clinic letters need to be typed up while the patient is in the room. The efficient doctors will use this time to let medical students examine and speak to patients.

I also found that people tended to be very cheerful here at work, much more so than I have experienced at home. At times they complained about the system, as most do, but I found the working environment friendlier and less daunting, as it sometimes can be back in the UK. Maybe we should blame the weather.

What have I gained

The most rewarding things that I will take away from my time here will be the friendships that I have made. Before arriving we were warned about the Erasmus habit of going to another country and inevitably speaking English. I believe this happens because it is easier to meet people who are in a similar position to yourself i.e. other students from abroad. The difficult thing to do is to make strong bonds with local students, who usually have their own

friendship groups consisting of other Spaniards. When I came, I was aware of the risks of this so I did a number of things to avoid English as much as possible. I was able to compare my experience to the time when I stayed for a month in Seville to do an SSC, I lived with other English speakers and we spoke English from the flat. When I came home from hospital there, I was exhausted from speaking, listening and thinking in Spanish. Here in Granada, when I came home, it was more Spanish in the evenings and funnily enough it became natural and effortless. Although I did not attend paid classes, I studied online at home most days using my own resources as well as the online course offered by Erasmus, and was able to speak a lot of Spanish in hospital and improve from that perspective. I also changed my phone settings to Spanish and started to watch Spanish TV programmes and films in order to completely immerse myself. When I arrived I had not spoken Spanish since the previous Easter and I struggled at the start. The Andaluz accent did make things more difficult at the start but it is important to remember that even native Spanish speakers sometimes struggle to understand the Andalusians. However I quickly got used to it and by the end of the trip I felt that my Spanish had improved a significant amount! They told me that if I could understand Andaluz then any other accent could only be easier in comparison. Even by the last week I was still having to ask my Andaluz flatmates to speak slowly and clearly. Everyone was always very willing to help me understand and this was never an issue. My plan for the future now is to keep up the Spanish and to retain as much as possible of what I have learnt during my stay in Granada. I will be doing this by searching for a language tandem in Manchester and maybe even a flat-share with Spaniards. The trip has really inspired me to keep up the Spanish and I know for certain that I will be back to Granada many times in the future.

I also decided that I would try to play rugby, to make new friends and attempt to stay in shape to counter the influx of tapas that my body was having to cope with. As I would expect from any rugby team, they welcomed me with open arms. I found it very interesting and very challenging to attempt to play a sport with only a basic grasp of the local language, and have a new found sympathy for sportsmen and women who choose to pursue their careers in foreign countries.

Practical Issues

Many of the older flats in Granada do not have a piped gas supply and instead use canisters which can be bought from petrol stations or delivered by a man in a van. Our water boiler needed to be manually connected to the gas canister and ignited each time we needed the hot water and switched off afterwards.

I bought a Spanish pay and go SIM as soon as I could. The most important mobile service is data as everyone tends to use WhatsApp to communicate (which now even offers internet calling). I bought a SIM card from orange which I topped up 10 euros per month and got 1 gigabyte of 3G internet (4G internet was offered for the same price if only my phone had been capable). We had a few friends who managed to survive a full year without buying a Spanish SIM and just relying on Wi-Fi from local cafes and bars, however, I would not recommend this as they frequently disappeared into black spots and were uncontactable, usually at really inconvenient times.

Registering as a student in Granada was ever so slightly tricky. You are advised to arrive in Granada *at least* one week before your placement starts. But we were only informed of this 2 weeks before our placement started. This is to give you enough time to carry out the paper work which needs to be done before starting in hospital. Owing to the fact that my flights had been booked long before I came across this information and that I felt that I would rather be at home during the worrying week between finishing exempting exams and receiving my results, I arrived the weekend before the first day of placement. From reading previous reports it sounds like we got off quite lightly but we did most of the racing about on the Monday and were registered by Tuesday ready to start on Wednesday. The process is limited by the fact the Mobility office in the faculty of medicine is only open between 12.30 and 2.30 and we also had to visit the international office which is a slight walk away. To speed up the process make sure you have all the documents that are specified in the paperwork. I would recommend bringing 2 or 3 photocopies of your passport.

If you stay in Spain for longer than 3 months, it is a requirement by the government that you notify them and apply for a NIE number. This also allows you to open a bank account in Spain. This involved paying a tax bill in a bank which needs to be done before 11 am. There are detailed instructions on how to do this on the Granada Erasmus website.

Useful Contacts

Our own European option coordinator, Mirka, worked tirelessly to make sure our applications all ran smoothly. She is the expert on all things Erasmus and has always been brilliant at answer my many queries and questions.

Mirosława Tandyrak: medicine.europeanstudies@manchester.ac.uk

Sonia, the Erasmus coordinator in Granada was very friendly, able to answer all of our questions and made registering a little bit easier for us. If in any doubt about applying or if you have any questions about Granada, I'm sure she would be delighted to help.

Sonia-Chantal Gil González: medori@ugr.es