

European Studies Report

- Introduction and why the European Option

The European option was a big reason why I chose to apply to Manchester University in the first place. Having studied Spanish up to A-level, the opportunity to keep it up alongside the course was a huge selling point. I was a little sad to discover that instead of an elective language students were seemingly restricted to Europe in terms of where to spend their time, during the four months developing their language skills. The opportunity to visit Central or South America and spend time in a hospital in Argentina for example would have been amazing. However, there is the opportunity to go on an elective during block 1 of fifth year; and four months – rather than two, in the case of a normal elective – in one country is a very big positive. It really allowed you to get to know the area, and feel as though you were really living there, as opposed to just passing through. So really, it was the best of both worlds.

- Overview of living in Spain

Living in Madrid has been great. It is a really fun city, with so much to do! The lifestyle is a lovely one, with a very relaxed nature to absolutely everything. Even during the times where there was no particular plan for the afternoon or evening for example, it was just a really lovely place to be doing nothing special. Madrid is quite small as a city really, which makes getting around quite easy, as in the centre at least, nowhere is too far away.

One of my favourite things about Madrid was just how sociable everybody is – from young to old. Walking through La Latina on a Sunday for example was really lovely; the area was always really busy, full of people sat together outside eating and drinking, and generally catching up with friends and family. This seems to be such an integral part of Spanish culture, and it was really nice to be able to be a part of that for a period. Even the elderly seemed to appear less “elderly” than in the UK, with many actively refusing seats on the metro for example, and spending just as much time outside with family and friends, as their younger counterparts. I really think the benefits in this regard are massive, and I would be interested to compare the rates dementia and depression amongst this age group, with that in the UK.

Our time really gave me an appreciation of just how varied Spain actually is – from north to south, and east to west, there is so much to see in just the one country; it is really rich in that respect. We had the opportunity to visit a few places during our time there, and I would really recommend it. Andalucia during Semana Santa is quite an experience, and it was a real insight into a tradition very Spanish in its nature.

The time absolutely flies by, so make sure to make the most of it!

- Hospital and placements

Myself and two other University of Manchester students were placed at Universidad Complutense de Madrid; and were split between three of its hospitals. I was at Hospital Doce de Octubre, in the south of Madrid. It does look quite far away from the centre of Madrid on a map, but it is actually quite straightforward to get to. I lived in a really lovely area called Barrio de las Letras, which was just a five minute walk from the Sol metro stop, right in the city centre. From there one can take the yellow line (line 3) directly to the hospital – which has its own metro stop. On a good day i.e. arriving just in time to catch the metro, the journey door-to-door was about twenty minutes. Additionally, the metro runs so smoothly and frequently that there was never too long to wait. It is also possible to walk. It takes about an hour; and particularly from Legazpi (an area relatively near to the hospital, but on the way back towards the city centre) one can walk along the river, back to the city centre. This is really nice.

I did try to find out what happened on 12th October, to explain its name. The 12th October is a national holiday in Spain. It was first celebrated in 1918, with the government wanting to commemorate the day Christopher Columbus discovered America. Though Italian, Christopher Columbus' voyages played a big part in the beginning, in initiating Spain's later colonisation of the countries in the Americas. Christopher Columbus' tomb can actually be found in the main cathedral in Seville. The name of this day changed several times, but was always centred around commemorating Spain's history.

I had four placements over the four months: gastroenterology, infectious diseases, paediatric infectious diseases and obstetrics and gynaecology. Not really liking theatre, I purposefully chose all medical placements. However there are some things I have never seen during my time at university (open heart surgery, brain surgery etc.), and beyond that, it will of course become more difficult, with more responsibility and greater demands on our time; and so in retrospect this is actually quite a good time to have a think about whether there is anything you would like to see or experience before finishing university, and to pick placements accordingly.

White coats are worn by all of the medical doctors, and students in the hospital. It may be an idea to bring one if you have one spare, or alternatively, I was able to borrow one for the four months, from the Pabellon (the undergraduate department). I am quite glad that white coats were phased out in the UK, as I think they can be a little intimidating for patients – particularly children, and they are just another item of clothing taken from patient-to-patient. Smart clothes are nowhere near as essential as they are in the UK, with many of the students and 'residentes' (junior doctors and those on the way to, but not yet at the equivalent of consultant level) dressing in jeans and trainers/boots etc. This was quite different, and did take a little getting used to, and in the main, I did tend to dress on the smarter side of casual.

The typical hospital day begins at 8am and finishes at 3pm; although this varies from placement to placement; and often things started later than that. The pace of the

day was definitely much slower than in the UK, with the doctors at least outwardly appearing less busy, and much less rushed. My infectious diseases placement in particular was a good example of this. Each day would begin at 8.30am. There would be a “reunión” or meeting in the morning, where patients and interesting cases were discussed, or presentations would be given on topics of interest. This would last for hours. Following, or sometimes during this, the doctors would have breakfast, and there would be a break for coffee and pastries. Then finally, at near enough midday the ward round would begin. Infectious diseases is something I am quite interested in, and doing this placement in Spain, particularly with the immigration Spain has seen from Central and South America, was a good opportunity to learn about some conditions that I had only previously heard of, but never actually encountered.

- Differences between Spain and the UK – Hospital

The hospital experience in Madrid is quite different; and has definitely made me more appreciative of the way our course is structured, here in the UK. Comparatively, the Spanish medical students – though they also begin clinical years from third year onwards – have much less responsibility, much less is expected of them, and they are generally much less involved. Though the amount of ward-based teaching received by students will no doubt vary from placement to placement – as it does here; on the whole, it felt as though there was much less effort made by doctors on the wards to engage with and teach students. The primary role of the medical student was to observe (quite different to that of one in Manchester); with often, minimal effort made to acknowledge the presence of students, let alone to involve them, and ask them questions. Having reached the end of our course, and arriving in Madrid off the back of having sat and passed finals, this new role did initially take a little getting used to; and is definitely something to be aware of beforehand. §

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Patient confidentiality was often lacking, and I found this quite difficult, particularly initially. Whereas in the UK, we always have to ask whether patients would like their families present, or for the families to be informed of what is going on, as we don’t know what people’s family dynamics are like, and it is not for us to assume. This wasn’t the case in Spain. Families would be asked to wait outside, whilst the patient was seen on the ward round, but they would then be promptly informed of what was going on as the doctors left the patient and saw the family in the corridor outside. It didn’t ever seem as though the patient was given a choice in this. Secondly the patients on the wards are kept in two-bed bays. From an infection control point of view, this is probably much better than having 10-12 patients in a bay, separated at most by a set of curtains, as occurs in the UK. However, particularly in the context of Spanish culture, this didn’t really allow for much in the way of patient confidentiality. When patients were seen on the ward round, both patients in the bay would often be present; there was no privacy. Whether the diagnosis was sensitive, intimate, or one with a particularly poor prognosis, this didn’t change.

Despite the likely positive influence on infection control of the two-bed bays present throughout the hospital; ANTT on the whole, did not seem to be viewed with the same importance as back in Manchester; far removed the efforts made in the UK, and the constant presence of infection control nurses throughout the wards. Hands were not regularly washed, hair was not tied back, and nail varnish/rings/watches/bracelets etc. were regularly worn.

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There were parts of my time in the hospital that I did really enjoy; and I think they may also – at least to an extent – stem from what life is like in Madrid, and Spanish culture in general.

During my paediatric rotation in block 7, I noticed a poster up in the baby part of the paediatric department. I also saw this poster many times later in the obstetrics and gynaecology department too. Featuring guidance from the WHO and UNICEF, it provided mums with "10 steps to happy breastfeeding". There was also additional information from the hospital on the poster explaining that they protect and promote breastfeeding; and prohibit: cards and advertisements for formula replacement milk, gifts and donations such as pens etc. advertising formula milk companies, non-scientific information promoting artificial means of feeding, and images that idealise it. I was really impressed by this. Breastfeeding has a number of benefits for both and mum and baby, and really is something that should at the very least be offered as an option, if not actively encouraged. From time-to-time there are stories about breastfeeding in the UK that grab media attention, with one of the most recent being a woman being told to cover up whilst breastfeeding her baby in a London hotel. The more open and expressive nature of Spanish culture is a potential reason why it may be seen as more socially acceptable. I have also noticed more breastfeeding rooms during my time in Madrid, than I have ever seen in the UK.

The hospital also had a prisoner section called the 'Custodia'. This was interesting as I had never seen this before, and wonder whether prisoners in the UK would prefer this, to being handcuffed, and accompanied by a police officer, on an ordinary ward.

- Language

My Spanish has certainly improved during my time in Spain. Hospital was definitely helpful in terms of improving listening and understanding, particularly as there were patients and doctors from all over, exposing you to different accents and vocabulary. It has been nice to learn more of the 'filler' type words, that don't necessarily mean an awful lot, but do help to add some fluidity, and make the Spanish sound a little more natural, and less stilted – 'hombre', 'o sea' and 'pues nada' being personal favourites.

"Intercambios" (language exchanges) are a really good way to meet people and practice speaking Spanish, whilst also helping your partner with their English. If I had my time over again, I would definitely make more effort to do more of these – as it's just really good practice. There is a popular website (see below) that's commonly

used to organise them. There are also lots of bars/groups that organise their own ones, which means that rather than going on your own, you can share the initial awkwardness together.

- Accommodation

We did not make any plans before leaving in terms of longer-term accommodation for the four months that we were in Madrid. Instead, we found a flat on AirBnB, booked this before we flew, and stayed there for the first two weeks. This gave us some time to settle in a little, have a look at flats while we were there and could see them in person, and to find a home without too much pressure. We got very lucky with this initial AirBnB flat; it was newly renovated, and we were the first people to live in it. The lady that owned it, lived in her own flat round the corner, and was so welcoming; providing tea and coffee, and milk in the fridge – which after the stress of the finals, results, packing up, and moving, was ideal. It will also, definitely still be listed on AirBnB.

As I mentioned above, I later lived in a part of Madrid called Barrio de Las Letras. It is an absolutely lovely area to live in, named as such due to the famous Spanish writers that lived and wrote there in the past; and the streets are named after them (Cervantes etc.). It is in a great location, with so many of its own independent little shops, bars and restaurants. It is additionally walking distance from Sol (the very city centre, and from there it is a short walk to Malasaña, Chueca and other areas), Retiro (the lovely park, very nice to go and sit in, and has a lake with rowing boats), La Latina (great for tapas), and Lavapiés. Myself and another University of Manchester student lived together in flat with six other people; this is a large number, but we again were lucky and had a big flat, with brilliant housemates. Two of them were Spanish, and so there was the opportunity to practice at home, as well as outside. Living with Spanish people is something to bear in mind in terms of improving your Spanish, and having opportunities to practice.

It is also having a good luck on the websites (see below) for flats. There are some absolute bargains with big flats, with big bedrooms, in nice areas, but they are unsurprisingly snapped up quite quickly. The turnover is quite high though; with many Erasmus students coming and going and different points, new rooms pop up just as quickly as others go.

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13 things I learnt being in Madrid

1. The pic ‘n’ mix is still very much alive and well.

The number of grown men I’ve seen sat on a busy metro, reaching into there bag, not for a book, but for a bag of sweets, continues to entertain me. Being the owner of my own very sweet tooth, this fact is one I had a lot of time for. In fact, there is quite a good sweet shop on the corner (possibly on Calle Fuencarral) in Malasaña, not far from the Tribunal, metro stop. I recommend it.

2. So is C&A.

3. The zebra crossings are sometimes of questionable significance.

There were many instances where cars would not stop unless I actively made an effort to cross the road, rather than (safely) standing on the pavement at the crossing instead.

4. There's nothing a bocadillo de tortilla can't solve.

5. Instead of 'woof' Spanish dogs say "guau guau", and cats "ronronear".

6. Spice isn't really a feature of typically Spanish food; don't be fooled by any mention of the word "picante".

7. The bin men for some inexplicable reason, wear cycle helmets

8. The cyclists? Don't.

9. The menú del día is an excellent invention!

Originally designed to provide an affordable meal for all, by law many restaurants provide a set lunch menu. Which for us, as Erasmus students, was a great thing to be able to advantage of. There was often a lot of nice food, for really, not a lot of money.

10. In little bars, coffee shops etc. everything is paid for at the end, rather than at the start. Don't forget to pay!

11. Putting the kettle on, is more likely to involve boiling a pan of water on the hob

12. There are dogs everywhere!

13. The weather wasn't quite as amazing as one would have imagined

This was a really big surprise, though it maybe shouldn't have been. It all just took a little longer that I would have imagined, with the weather in Madrid becoming more consistently warm, and that that you would expect of 'Spain', as we were coming to the end of the four months and starting to prepare to leave! Having said that though, we definitely did get an early summer weather-wise being in Spain, compared to spending amount of time in Manchester.

- Future plans

I was in Madrid three years ago to do an SSC, and in that month - by force - I felt my Spanish improved. There is a lot to be said for the confidence that you can gain from being put in a situation that challenges you a little bit. Having four months away has really made me want to continue trying to improve my Spanish, with complete fluency being the dream. I would quite like to sit the DELE exam, and with my Spanish likely being the best it ever has been having just come back, it is something I would like to work towards.

I would also love to travel more, in particular around Central and South America. These four months have shown me that I would not like to work in Spain, at all; the system is a little too different, and I think I would worry that I would forget a lot of what we have been taught, not having to apply that knowledge in the same way as is done here. I do like the idea of working abroad for a period though, potentially with MSF or another organisation, or potentially as doctor in Central or South America.

Advice and Practical Issues

- ❖ If you need forms signing off, start preparing things early.

Begin reminding the doctors early, that there are forms that need to be completed to sign off each placement, U-CEX's, UPSA's etc.; and that not only do they need to be signed, they also need to be validated. I was surprised just how much the "mañana mañana" attitude did apply in this respect; and so to save any undue worry and stress, this is quite important.

- ❖ Metro pass – go to an estanco to get one!

The centre of Madrid is small enough to be able to walk from place to place; and as the weather gets consistently warmer, that's lovely. However, in the meantime, for getting to and from hospital etc., or to places further away, the metro is really efficient. The abono mensual, is the monthly travel card, and is a really cost effective way of getting about on the metro. You need to first pay for the card (which costs about six euros), and then you can top it up at any of the metro ticket machines when it runs out at the end of each month. It is possible to book an appointment to get the pass from the offices in the metro station, but it is so much faster to go to an estanco (a tobacconist) and get one there. There is a list online of the estancos where it is possible to get one, in order to find the one most conveniently placed (there is one in the centre, in Malasaña, not far from the Tribunal metro stop).

- ❖ Addresses, phone numbers, and useful contacts for future students:

Hospital Universitario 12 de Octubre

Address: Avda de Córdoba, s/n, 28041 Madrid

Phone number: (+34) 913 90 80 00

Metro stop: Hospital Doce de Octubre, yellow line (line 3)

Accommodation

There are several quite useful websites available to help find accommodation. AirBnB we used to find our initial temporary flat, and the others to look for somewhere more long-term.

<https://www.airbnb.co.uk/>

<http://www.idealista.com/>

<http://www.easypiso.com/>

Intercambios

<http://www.tusclasesparticulares.com/>

Travel

Blabla car was really handy. We used it to go to Seville, Granada and Valencia. I had never used it before, but it was really cheap, and the drivers we had for each journey were really interesting. Including one who was a saxophone player in a reasonably well-known Spanish ska-reggae band! I'm not sure it is something I would use travelling as a girl on my own; but in groups, it is definitely a really fun and cheap way to get around.

ALSA is a coach company; and they were also quite good for finding cheap journeys.

<https://www.blablacar.es/>

<https://www.alsa.es/>