

¡Madrid 2015!



Universidad de Autnoma

Why I chose the European Studies programme?

As a St. Andrew's student, I was thrilled when I found out in my third year there, that the opportunity to study in Spain existed. I had studied the language throughout secondary school and went travelling around Spain for a month when I was 19 so I had a great affinity for Spanish. However, the only words I said during my time in St. Andrew's were *San Miguel* and Tequila and so it's fair to say I felt out of practice when I came to Manchester. However, having blagged my way through an interview, I persevered with the 2-hour classes every week and I'm very glad I did.

Another reason why I chose the European Studies programme was that I found the prospect of spending 4 months in one place more attractive than travelling around in herds to places where you can't help but look like a *guiri*. Okay it might look like all your friends are having an amazing time in the far-flung corners of the world like India, Vietnam or Bournemouth but selfies can often convey a false sense of seemingly eternal happiness. I've actually lived in Madrid for four months and I've really enjoyed it. Also, something that Manchester should get an enormous amount of credit for is allowing the EO students to go away in the first block of 5th year instead of doing the Christie block. This is an opportunity I am delighted I took because I went to Guatemala which really was an amazing experience and I encourage those who can do this to do it. If you've got your heart set on going somewhere specific you can use this block to do it and STILL go to Madrid or Granada for 4 months. Winner winner, paella dinner.

I also think the ability to speak a language to be an incredibly powerful thing. I saw the European Studies course as an opportunity to carry on speaking Spanish. It should be much more common that Brits speak another language. It's true that a large percentage of our European neighbours can speak English so why bother I hear you ask. Why? Because it opens up so many doors, it gives you experiences you would never have in this country and for these reasons it's actually a very humbling experience. It connects you to someone with a completely different culture and background which makes you appreciate the world that little bit more. Where are the tissues...

Coming to Madrid

I had no idea what to expect when I came to Madrid because I had done next to no preparation for the trip. This probably had something to do with the small matter of finals. I literally left the day of results and the midst of my euphoria I managed to lose and then relocate my passport in the airport. This is not advised! Thankfully someone more organised than me had sorted out some temporary accommodation on the website Airbnb. If you click the link below you and I will both get £17 off our next stays:

www.airbnb.co.uk/c/pbirch4?s=8

We initially stayed in the Embajadores/Delicias area of Madrid. It was a little bit out of the centre but was still very well connected with a metro stop two minutes away from the flat. It felt like an authentic Madrileño district.

Bank Account

It might be worth enquiring about one of these before you come out to Spain. I never actually got one but it is probably worth doing. If you bank with Santander, I think you can get one fairly easily in the UK.

Travel Card/BiciMad

It's worth sorting this out as soon as you get to Madrid. If you're an oldie like me you pay €56/month for travel around the centre. If you're fortunate enough to be 23 or under, it'll be €35/month. Visit the website to book an appointment here:

<https://www.tarjetatransportepublico.es/CRTM-ABONOS/entrada.aspx>

TIP: Appointment slots are hard to find in the places in the centre. If you go to a location a bit further out, you'll have more flexibility in terms of a time which will suit you.

If you're feeling adventurous, you can get a BICIMAD pass and take advantage of some serious electric power. They're distributed across the city and the card costs €20 then you'll just have to pay per trip which won't cost you more than a €0.60.

Cantoblanco

You'll need to sort out your admin in the University of Autonomia campus in the north of the city. Print out photocopies of the things you need to help speed up the process. Taking a *Cercanías* to the campus is your quickest option. You'll also have to visit the Oficina de Relaciones Internacionales which is located in Hospital La Paz.

Phone

If you've got a phone that isn't locked then you can do what I did and buy a cheap SIM. I paid €15/month for 1GB of data and loads of texts and calls. However, I think it's worth asking your provider in the UK what deal they can provide you.

More Permanent Accommodation

We wanted to find somewhere central and we really liked the *La Latina* barrio but to be honest, any of the central barrios are great to live in as you'll discover. We tried looking as a three but found this very difficult so in the end one of us decided to live somewhere else. Some good websites to use to search for flats are:

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

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

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

I paid €300 a month for a very small room in *La Latina*. I decided that location was more important to me than having a double bed but what I would say is that if you're patient, you will find something you really like. The €300 included bills as well.

Day Trips

The beauty of Madrid is its centrality in relation to everywhere else in Spain. However, that can also be a bit of a pain as you can't really hop on a train to go to the beach for the day. But there are a load of nice places to visit close by. Salamanca, Toledo and Segovia were all very beautiful and I've heard a lot of good things about El Escorial.

Blablacar is a great, cheap alternative to public transport and we found it a really useful way to practice our Spanish.

Las Fallas in Valencia, where they burn down beautiful papier-mâché sculpted figures, was absolutely incredible and well worth a visit. There are a few companies that operate tours to all the places listed above. I used *Smart Insiders* for the majority but there are others.

You'll find you have around 10 free days over *Semana Santa* (the Holy week). We ventured south to Andalusia to soak up some sun and watch some processions. The holy processions certainly are fascinating to watch but beware the cities will be mobbed and don't be surprised if you get stuck waiting for an hour for one to pass.

Hospital Life

Now to the bit you really want to know; what is life like in hospital? Well, I can only really speak for my placements and my hospital. I was fortunate enough to be allocated *Hospital Fundacion Jimenez Diaz* which is situated in Moncloa. I had friends in hospitals a lot further out so I was very happy that I'd managed to get something relatively close to home. I can't really remember picking any of the specialities that I was given which were *Urgencias* (A&E), Plastic Surgery, Ophthalmology and finally, Orthopaedics and Trauma. I'll now go through each placement now and detail what I liked and what I didn't.

Urgencias

As Fundacion is a fairly large hospital, I was expecting its Urgencias department to be a bit manic but as so often is the case in Spain, it was far more relaxed. Doctors work in pairs to see a set number of patients and there was a ward and a number of side-rooms. I met my supervisor early on but it quickly became apparent that he was a busy, busy señor so I made friends with another doctor and she took me under her wing. The key to enjoying your placement and developing a good rapport is to stick to one doctor like glue. Sometimes you're assigned to one but if not then just find one that seems nice and explain the situation and nine times out of ten they'll be more than happy to supervise you.

I didn't get as much out of the placement as I could have done and this was due to a number of factors. From a practical point of view, the doctors in Spain don't do a lot of clinical skills. All the bloods and cannulations are the responsibility of the patient's nurse and whilst I could have volunteered to do some I decided against it. I also didn't interview a lot of patients by myself (except for the few English-speaking ones where I was deemed to be useful!). I preferred to watch how the doctors interacted with the patients and felt a bit out of my comfort zone in terms of the language. But if you feel comfortable enough by all means take the opportunity.

Spanish students generally came onto the ward around 9 and left at 12 and so it's entirely possible to do that. What I came to realise is that the doctors generally appreciate that you're on your ERASMUS programme and as long as you show face for the majority of the placement, you won't have a problem getting signed off. I liked to stay in until around 1 o'clock before declaring that I was hungry at which point the doctors would laugh and say "Britanicos" and wave me goodbye.

I found the style of medicine practiced to be pretty passive. Even in cardiac arrest calls there did seem to be less coherence about what was happening. I didn't see a team leader, just a room with a lot of doctors but it's hard to say whether or not this affected patient

outcomes. For more mundane things, there didn't seem to be any clear protocol followed but more of a try-and-see approach. I'm sure this was based on prior knowledge but I would say that I found everything just a little disjointed. However, based on the variability of cases I saw and the people I met I would give this placement a **7/10**.

Plastic Surgery

Again I was quickly allocated to someone other than the main consultant and I spent the four weeks with Dr. Romeo, who really did look out for me. Every Monday I sat in on the clinics whilst the rest of the week were the operating days, either in Fundacion or in a hospital further afield which you didn't have to travel to. I really felt like part of the team on this placement and I was allowed to scrub-in and assist. I wasn't particularly excited about the speciality before I went but due to the huge variety of operations and the undoubtable emotions benefit it gave to patients which I witnessed, I really would recommend picking this placement.

One of the most interesting cases I saw was a breast reconstruction using layers of the abdominal wall where a large proportion of the surgery was performed under microscopy. Although it was a long, long day, it was worth it to see the end results. It was also really nice to follow the patient up in clinic afterwards and see how she was progressing.

I got on really well with the team and generally found this a very interesting speciality so my score for this placement would be **8/10**.

Ophthalmology

I was assigned to work with a *Residente* on this placement who again was a really nice guy and gave me loads of hints and tips about Madrid. I found this placement to be really fast-paced on the clinic days as they have got a mountain of patients to see and if you're interested in this speciality it's a great opportunity to be able to see some of the technology used and also practice using it yourself.

I would say that I didn't particularly understand everything that was going on. It was difficult for the doctors to explain what they were doing as there was always another patient to assess.

I rotated around a number of sub-specialities during this placement. For example, I was placed in Cornea for a week, Retina for a week and another for the rest.

Each speciality has its own operating day and they again were happy for me to scrub in and assist.

I didn't particularly enjoy the speed at which we saw all the patient and didn't feel I gained a lot from this placement in terms of my knowledge but again, the team were really nice and I enjoyed assisting in theatre so I would give this placement a **6/10**.

Orthopaedics and Traumatology

This was my final placement and the one I least enjoyed. I've never been overly keen on orthopaedics as a speciality and unfortunately due the number of foreign doctors present who were acting as "observers" like me, it made it very difficult to contribute in any meaningful way. I was never asked to scrub in however I didn't ask about this either and I get the impression that had I, they probably would have allowed it. Like Ophthalmology, I was assigned different weeks to different sub-specialities but I tended to drift to the most interesting of cases. I think the potential to get a lot out of it existed but I probably didn't push it enough. From a personal point of view, I would give this placement a **5/10** but I suspect if you're more proactive and enjoy orthopaedics then you would get a lot more from it.

Differences between Spain and UK

Medical students

Final-year medical students in Spain generally have it quite tough as they combine hospital placements with daily classes and I reckon an average day probably finishes around 6/7 o'clock. The ones I met were a little preoccupied and I got on better with the doctors to be honest. I think that the University could have quite easily arranged a meet-and-greet session for us with some of their students but we were very much left to get on with it. Having finished their six years in medical school, the students then prepare for their final exam, the MIR which they sit around January time. This determines their application score from which they then receive a list of jobs available for that score. The MIR seemed to weigh heavily on the minds of the students I met much like our finals do for us.

Doctors

Doctors in Spain are for the most-part hardworking. I think it really does depend on what speciality you're in. Generally, if you're working a morning it will start at 8 o'clock and finish by 3 o'clock. I would prefer to work like this as it gives them time to socialise in the evenings if they want to. I did feel that doctors tended to be a bit more passive and reactive to certain situations as opposed to being proactive. They also don't seem to follow guidelines like we do. I didn't really see any evidence of any central body of evidence like NICE guidelines which the doctors consulted when faced with a clinical scenario. This confused me a bit but it's hard to say whether or not this was impacting on patients' care.

What I would say is that the vast majority are very friendly and happy to teach. Generally, they're warm and supportive and they afforded me the time if I needed it to ask them questions in Spanish and they would always explain what they were doing and try to include you. Finding a good doctor early on in the placements is essential if you want to enjoy it and more importantly, get signed off!

The job system is a little different in Spain in comparison to that of the UK. After they've picked their jobs following their MIR results, the doctors spend four *residente* years where they learn the basics of their speciality before going on to *Adjunto* level (if there is a job available) which is the equivalent of Registrar/Consultant level. The big honcho is called the *Jefe del Servicio* and there is generally one for every speciality. They are very involved on a day-to-day level with the patients which I felt was quite different from the UK. No playing golf for these consultants!

How my understanding of Spanish and Spain changed

In my third and four years during the Spanish classes, I always just did enough to scrape by. I was never particularly confident speaking Spanish but I decided that if I was going to keep going with European Option, I owed it to myself to practice more. Therefore, I decided to venture out to Jerez for an SSC at the end of my fourth year. Being in Spain then was a fantastic experience and spurred me on to continue using the language. It was a big factor in me choosing to spend my first block in 5th year in Guatemala.

I had given myself as much preparation as I could have for Madrid but I still felt out of my depth for the first couple of weeks there. I think this is natural and I assure you, it doesn't last! Undoubtedly, my Spanish improved over the course of the four months. I had expectations of being fluent by the end of it and although I know I wasn't particularly close to this, I could comfortably have a conversation with a Spaniard and my responses weren't limited to "Si" and "Claro".

Generally, doctors will be patient with you and will encourage you to practice your Spanish. In order to really improve my language, I wanted to live with Spanish speaking people. In the end, I shared a flat with five others which including a Venezuelan guy and a Spanish guy. This was really helpful, however, as the Spanish guy was from Sevilla I wouldn't say I understand what he was saying 100% of the time!

One thing that I would really recommend you do is an "Intercambio" with a Spanish speaker. It seems like every man, woman and his/her dog want to practice English and so I put an announcement on the website www.tusclasesparticulares.com. Within three days, I had received 30 requests to practice English with the condition of also speaking Spanish for half the time. I regularly met up with one Spanish girl and it gave me the confidence with my language as well as being introduced to some typical Madrileño places.

Now on to my opinion of Spain and Madrid in general. I would say my time in the capital definitely reinforced some of the stereotypes about Spain but not necessarily in a bad way. The idea that the Spanish can be very “relaxed” is very true. They live for their life after work and generally as a nation are very social within their own groups. I actually found it quite hard to get to know them and I don’t think they’re necessarily the most engaging people to begin with but once you’ve got a Spanish friend, they’re a lot of fun. I love the culture of tapas and I absolutely love that you can go into a bar and see people of all ages there. There are so many Spanish traditions that are engrained into their personalities and this whole relaxed approach to life is infectious. I rarely saw people having fights in Spain and generally people are too busy having fun to worry about anyone else.

I generally felt very safe in Madrid. You’ve obviously got to be very street-smart and beware of pickpockets but for example, when walking home after a night out I never thought I’d turn a corner and run into any trouble because there are just so many people out and about enjoying life.

Bureaucratically-speaking, Spain can be a bit of a nightmare and there does seem to be a lot of unnecessarily red-tape but if you can get used to that and go with the flow you’ll have a wonderful time – I certainly did!

Must-dos

- *El Retiro* Park – I recommend doing the boating!
- A rooftop bar – Bellas Artes had an incredible view
- *Tapear*- La Latina is probably the best known area to have tapas but El Tigre in Chueca gives you a free plate per drink! What’s not to love about that?
- *San Isidro* festivities – This is the local holiday in Madrid and there’s plenty to see and do around the city
- The museums - I saw *El Prado* in one-hour – it can be done! But you could quite easily spend a whole day there. Go to *Reina Sofia* to see Picasso’s *Guernica*
- *Casa de Campo* – Great for walks and picnics. Taking the Teleférico cable car gives you good views across the city and at €6.50 return, it doesn’t break the bank.
- Watch some sport – I never went to *Santiago Bernabeu* to watch *Real Madrid* as I developed a love of their rivals *Atletico* and also of *Rayo Vallecano*, a very small team to the south but if you want to be a glory-hunter and see *Real* play, it’s possible to pick up tickets for €30. If you like tennis and have a little money

definitely go to the Madrid Masters. I saw Andy Murray play for a little over €20 and he went on to win the tournament! C'MON MUZZA.

- See a *Flamenco* show
- *Chomp on some Churros* – *San Gines* is the place everyone recommends.
- Try local cuisine and drinks - Vermouth was very popular in Madrid when I was there. Wonder down to *El Mercado de San Miguel* and I would recommend a visit to *Ochenta Grados* in Malasaña.
- Get out of Madrid! – Go to *Las Fallas* in Valencia if you can, they were really special and as I've mentioned before there are so many day-trips accessible from Madrid. It made me appreciate the capital more having left for a day or two.

Enjoy it!