

Mayhem in Madrid!

Whilst it goes without saying that my experience was unforgettable, it was not without its challenges, and tears at times! I spent a year in Madrid, as a biology student at UCM.

One of the biggest difficulties I faced was actually making it to Spain in the first place. With the VISA process a shambles and Spanish consulate in disarray, the summer prior to my trip was a flurry to gather documents to make what seemed like a far fantasy a reality. I have no one to thank more than my mother, who whizzed me to appointments and helped make sense of endless lists of requirements. My biggest advice would be to begin the VISA process as early as possible as I had certainly underestimated it, and to remain patient. Once completed I could finally make living arrangements with the help of websites such as 'Spotahome' and many scrolls on forums/Facebook groups for advice. With the first challenge completed I was ready to go!

Once in Madrid the next challenge presented itself- the language barrier. I found myself underprepared for the sense of isolation that comes with the inability to easily join a conversation or share a witty story. I have always been very chatty so to suddenly be searching for every word and unable to express my personality fueled a sense of personal loss. Of course, as weeks passed, and my Spanish improved with practice, communication became easier. The fear I initially had to speak incorrectly slowly dissipated in the presence of newfound friends. It became easier to laugh at my mistakes- and I made many! The worst was certainly trying to conversationally tell a shopkeeper that I was hot (due to the weather) which had an entirely less PG meaning than I had intended! My top tip- never tell anyone 'estoy caliente' as it may raise a few eyebrows! Spanish Dict was my best friend those first few months, as was the OLS language app in helping to avoid further embarrassing mistakes.

Another major challenge was the intensity of my university course. I was naïve, and in my excitement to experience Spain overlooked the fact I would be studying entirely in Spanish. Not only was the curriculum 30 hours a week at times but I also had to overcome a very culturally different learning style. I remember entering a lab to see cages of rats as part of an experiment and nearly quitting there and then when told to pick them up by the tail! I had clearly been coddled at my English university and shocking my friends and family at home with stories of the days was all that kept me sane. Overcoming this challenge took a focused, determined mindset and many iced coffees during long study sessions with course mates, but I did it!