Practical Advice

Visa

Getting the visa was very stressful and took about 2 months, maybe 3 given the waiting time to receive the Visa. As long as you stay on top of the paperwork and remain as organized as possible, the process goes smoothly and the CALS Exchange Staff are there to help you. I don’t remember how much it cost, but I do remember freaking out about getting it back in time for a family vacation to Mexico, which left on Christmas Day. My mom wound up picking up the visa for me in New York City, and everything went smoothly.

Packing

Bring small, travel sized containers because they are pretty hard to find here. It’s also a good idea to bring some DayQuil or NyQuil or Advil and such... these things are different in Europe. I wish I brought some sweatpants and a warmer jacket, Barcelona isn’t always as warm as I once thought it would be. It’s also a good idea to bring a blazer and nice shirt for any Skype interviews you may have.

That being said, if you go in the spring, you definitely don’t have to bring as many summer clothes as I brought. It’s May now and finally in the 70-80 degree range. You can leave most of your shorts and sundresses at home.

Arrival

Immigration went smoothly upon my entry in Spain. That was actually the only time all semester that anyone ever looked at my Visa, so it’s funny that we go through so much trouble to obtain something they never even give a second glance. I only got questioned a lot once, and it was oddly enough on a trip to Dublin.

But they were nice about it and I answered their questions honestly (where I was staying, for how long, with whom, etc) and they let me go forward.

I had a buddy assigned to me from ESADE, who I never even met or got to know. We emailed a few times, but she wasn’t particularly engaging and took forever to respond. Some of my other friends said their buddy experiences went very well (one guy managed to get rides to school from his buddy) so I do still recommend trying the Buddy system out.

Orientation at ESADE was a good way to meet all the other exchange students, most of whom are also enrolled in the 2 week Spanish program. I do wish we didn’t have Spanish that intensely/early, and rather, took a course that lasted throughout the entire semester (CALS Exchange Note: Taking a semester-long Spanish course is possible). But, orientation itself was a good opportunity for me to take a second course in the evenings, to help get more of my credits out of the way. The school organized a few events for students, such as a welcome dinner and guided tour around the city. A few of their scheduled events conflicted with my night course, but other students on the program had the same problem and that’s how we wound up becoming friends.

Academics

The University

ESADE is located in Sant Cugat, which is a 20-25 minute train ride away from Barcelona. There are two campuses. The one in the heart of Barcelona is not where you’ll take any of your classes (It’s the law school building). The Sant Cugat campus is centralized and very small compared to Cornell. There is a cafeteria that everyone hangs out in, and a library. WiFi is great, there’s also a library and a quiet area in the basement that people often study in. One of my favorite things about ESADE is the academic calendar. I planned my schedule so well that I had class 2 days a week by the middle of April, and finished all my courses by April 29th. Classes meet once a week, for 3 hours a session. Sitting for 3 hours is definitely an adjustment, and a hard one...
at that, but teachers give you a break in the middle, sometimes even two. There’s a group on campus called CIEE (which is not to be confused with the American study abroad program in Barcelona of the same acronym). CIEE organizes group outings for ESADE exchange students, like a ski trip or a trip to Ibiza. They are often a little last minute though, and I found myself booking other trips before I knew about CIEE’s. It’s still good to know that option is there.

Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class title</th>
<th># of credits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Espanol Intensivo</td>
<td>2 ECTS (1 US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIM: Effective Presentations</td>
<td>2 ECTS (1 US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI: Sales Management</td>
<td>4 ECTS (2 US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEO: Sustainability, Business &amp; Values</td>
<td>4 ECTS (2 US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCO: Self Management &amp; Awareness</td>
<td>4 ECTS (2 US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE: Public Sector, Business Regulations &amp; Lobbying</td>
<td>4 ECTS (2 US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Management</td>
<td>5 ECTS (2.5 US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain: Recent History &amp; Current Politics</td>
<td>5 ECTS (2.5 US)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I had to enroll myself in all my courses, but all of the information is readily available online and you can always email the exchange coordinators at ESADE if you have more questions. Final grades are all based on a lot of different criteria, which is also all listed on ESADE’s website. Some professors place a great emphasis on participation and others focus more on a final paper or exam. All professors do place a LOT of emphasis on attendance. You cannot miss more than 2, maybe 3, courses at ESADE because if you do, you immediately fail the course.

Life Abroad

Living costs

- Estimated monthly budget whilst on exchange:
  - Housing ~465 euro a month (about $680). That’s relatively high, too, because I rented my apartment through a rental agency that comes to clean once a month and assists us with any issues.
  - Food ~85 Euro a month (that’s a guess for groceries). I typically would try not to eat out much during the week to save more money for trips
- Transportation: this will vary based on your class schedule, but I kept buying T-10 passes (10 ride) throughout the semester instead of the monthly pass “T-Joven”. My friends bought the monthly pass, and economically, their plan might have been smarter. I know that a lot of my friends’ passes have gotten lost or stolen, in which case, using T-10’s actually worked out in my favor.
- Books – no cost. Everything is online through ESADE’s version of Blackboard (they call it Moodle)
- Miscellaneous- factor in travel expenses, a huge part of the semester. Book as many trips early as possible

Language & Culture

The culture of Barcelona was actually quite different from what I’d expected. Catalunya (the region of Spain that Barcelona is the capital of) wants to separate from Spain, and so their ties to Spanish culture aren’t as strong as I once thought they’d be. Yes, there’s paella and sangria, and they do still speak Spanish, but Catalunya has its own culture too, entirely unique to the region. They speak Catalan, a language that some say is a cross between French and Spanish (it’s not, but I can see where the comparison comes from), and they associate with a strong push for independence. As far as language barriers are concerned, I actually did not improve on my Spanish much while I was in Barcelona at all. That’s something I’d wish were different. I think a combination of the Spanish course being over after 2 weeks, speaking English with all my friends (not enrolling in a Spanish-taught course. I wasn’t sure if I knew enough for that), and the international vibe of this city all contributed to mean I just spoke English this whole time. I would even try to speak Spanish at the grocery store, but once I messed up, the cashier would switch to English and so I managed to speak my native tongue a lot.

Banking

I’d recommend opening a local bank account, or doing some serious research before coming abroad about your bank account, because I cringe every time I got a foreign transaction fee. I got one every single time I buy something. Typically, I’d take out large sums of cash at once to avoid excess ATM fees (which are $5 from my own bank, and anywhere from another $5-$15 for the particular bank or ATM I used in Barcelona). I also
always say “Pay in Euros, please” when the cashier gives me the option to pay in Euros or Dollars. That saves the cost of a double conversion.

**Housing**

I had to figure out housing on my own, through research and a database of housing sites that ESADE recommended. Some of my friends actually did not secure housing before coming to Spain, so they all stayed in a hostel together and searched for apartments for the first few weeks. While this is certainly more stressful, it got them cheaper housing and a chance to bond at the beginning of the year. Utilities were not included in our 465 euro/month rent. They are extremely expensive in Spain, and Europe in general I believe. We paid about 50-60 Euros per person for utilities, in addition to our rent every month.

**Transportation**

Barcelona has a great public transportation system. Riding the subway, train to school (which I equate to the LIRR or NJ Transit for anyone from the tri-state area), and buses all cost the same amount. School itself is in a different town- Sant Cugat- which is technically considered Zone 2, so it costs double to get to school. ($2.30 per ride instead of $1.15.) But one of the coolest things about the transportation system is that it’s considered the equivalent of one subway ride in Zone 1 to get to the airport (which is just as far away as my school). So for $1.15 you can get to the airport to catch a flight to wherever you’re headed for the weekend. Tickets are easy/straightforward. The booths offer “English” as an option, so again, the language barrier is minimized.

**Health and Safety**

I felt safe here, even when walking around alone at night. Of course take precautions and use common sense...even in a safe neighborhood, bad things can happen if you’re not careful.

**Overall exchange experience**

**The best thing about my semester abroad was:**

Meeting so many different people from different parts of Europe, and the world. ESADE was an international program. While most of my friends were American, I did actually meet people from other countries, too, and in a few group projects, I wasn’t the only New Yorker, but the only American. I loved traveling, too, to see other countries and cultures. Trying different foods, seeing what nightlife was like in different places, meeting people with so many stories to share.