



Guide to Studying Abroad in Salamanca

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About Me

I am an Anthropology and Human Biology major planning on graduating in the spring of 2017. I am also premed and plan on going to medical school after a gap year. I studied abroad at the University of Salamanca in the Fall of 2015. I lived with a single woman and her son who was not always living at home. Their apartment was all the way up Paseo del Rollo, where it meets Calle de los Comuneros. During my time abroad I took salsa and bachata lessons and participated in a lot of language exchanges. I got the chance to travel to several places I had always wanted to go, as well as some I had not even thought to consider but turned out to be amazing. Studying abroad for me was a chance to learn to be more independent, as well as to follow my interest and pay attention to my needs. I loved my time abroad in Spain and decided to apply to work as a peer advisor for Emory College Study Abroad. I highly recommend applying for this job once you return to the US. I hope you have a wonderful time abroad, don't forget to take pictures and spend time in Salamanca. Spain is a beautiful country and Europe is an exciting region. It is easy to get caught up in trying to see as much as possible, but it is much more valuable to try to see a few places really well and get a sense of what life is actually like in another country.



Host Families

Living with another family can be challenging. Your family probably does a lot of the stuff that every family does, but every family does some things in their own way. Just remember that one way is not better than another and although some differences are cultural, not all of them are. Your host family isn't a representation of how everyone in Salamanca lives just like you are not a representation of all Americans. If something strikes you as really odd or makes you uncomfortable, talk to the program director about it because most likely a quick explanation will clear things up.

Many of the conflicts that can arise while living with a host family have to do with misunderstandings because of language or cultural barriers. Your host family in Salamanca has probably hosted several students before you so they know to expect these misunderstandings. Just because they expect them, however, does not mean they will always catch them when they happen. It is important for you as a student to get comfortable asking for clarification and making sure you understand what is going on. Ask questions, repeat details of plans you make back to them, and do not be afraid to admit you did not understand.

Living with a host family can be uncomfortable at first, but the discomfort will pass and the bonds you will form with your family can be really special. Students always walk the line between being family members and guests, and where you fall depends a lot on how you get along with your family. In some moments you may want space to process your new environment, while at others you will want to take advantage of this unique window into Spanish life. There is no perfect way to get to know your host family, so do not worry if some of your friends have different relationships with their families.

Your host family can be especially helpful if you do not know what kind of medicine to take for a headache or sore throat. However cultural differences in how disease is treated and dealt with can also make this awkward however. For instance while I was abroad I had several people insist that cold weather was making me sick rather than poor sleep and stress making me susceptible to a cold. These moments can be frustrating. You know what is making you sick, and your host family does too, but you are both blaming different things. In these moments I always find it helpful to remember that you do not have to be right or wrong, accept these things as a cultural difference and move on.

Classes

Classes in Spain are different than your classes at Emory. The grammar classes are usually two hours every weekday morning. It can feel like a long time to sit in one classroom but most professors will give you a 5-10 minute break about halfway through. After your grammar class you will have a special subject like literature or history. Many of these topics will draw a lot on history, even if they are more humanities based.

The etiquette of the classroom can be a bit different as well. Many professors go by their first name. They are used to having international students coming through all the time, but they still may ask you questions that make you uncomfortable. It can be a bit tense at times to have so many different cultures and opinions mixing at once. Classes at La Universidad de Salamanca are unique in this way because you will be exposed to so many new perspectives at once. Even though there are international students at Emory, this experience is different because it is putting everyone on equal ground in terms of their status as foreign or other.

As far as grading is concerned there are many similarities to how Emory grades. Most classes will have an attendance and participation component. For some you may have a group presentation or short homework assignments. After Emory excursions you will usually have a short reflection to write and the requirements will depend on your language level.

The last odd thing to note as far as class grades is the way that final exams are typically graded. The way it works is that as long as you get a 50% you pass the class. If you get between a 50-67 you get a C, a 68-83 is a B, and above an 84 is an A. The first time you take a test it may feel like you are missing way more questions than is logical for your grade, but that is okay. Usually the grading will work out in the end and most professors are willing to work with you to improve your grade.

While I was in Salamanca I took a literature course and Spanish history as my electives. I learned a lot in both but I definitely would recommend the literature course over history. The Literature professors are really fun, and they make the class more interesting. I also took medical Spanish which was a little too basic for my Spanish level at the time, though I still learned a lot about the Spanish healthcare system. I also took medical anthropology with Dr. Abbate. That was my favorite class and I would highly recommend it!



Five ways to meet new people in Spain

During your first years at Emory your goal was probably to get involved and build relationships on campus. Most students fill their days by bouncing from class to meetings or other club activities and maybe to the gym if they are dedicated enough. When you go abroad this pattern is interrupted. All of a sudden you are stuck in a new place where your only relationships are the ones you have formed with other Emory students in the first couple days of orientation. Starting over and building new relationships is difficult no matter what, but when you are abroad you have the added difficulty of dealing with language and cultural barriers as well. Here are some ideas of activities that you can get involved with to help build new relationships and meet new people in Salamanca.



1. Sign up for dance classes

One of my goals during my time in Spain was to learn to dance both salsa and bachata. I found a great dance academy that had beginner level classes just down the street from my house. While the majority of the people in my classes were older it was still a great way to get out and practice my Spanish in a different context every week. There are also classes in a variety of bars around Salamanca that tend to attract a younger crowd. If you are interested in more traditional dance like flamenco there are plenty of classes around Salamanca as well.

2. Participate in language exchanges

Your program coordinators will have a session with University of Salamanca students interested in practicing English. This is a great opportunity to make Spanish friends. The University of Salamanca also has a website to find language exchange partners. There are also language exchange events in at least two bars in Salamanca: Erasmus and Super 8.



3. Play soccer or other sports

The University of Salamanca offers sports classes as well as hiking and biking excursions. During these programs you will get the chance to meet both Spanish students and students studying abroad from around the world. You can check the website below to see a list of their current offerings. Your program coordinators can also tell you where to find the office to sign up for these programs. There are also a lot of young people around Salamanca who enjoy playing soccer in their free time, which can be a great source of exercise and friends.

4. Volunteer in a school

Students in Spain are eager to learn English and get to know American culture. While you are abroad you can talk to your program director who will be able to help place you in a school. You will volunteer weekly in an elementary school which will give you a chance to build relationships with students and teachers while giving back.

5. Go to cultural events in Salamanca

Salamanca always has something going on whether it be concerts, lectures, or festivals. Attending these events while you are abroad can give you insights into local customs and culture. These events are also great ways to see how Spaniards hang out and enjoy their time.

Cell Phone; Abroad

As essential as your cell phone is in the US, I would argue that it is even more essential during your time abroad. Often you will be in unfamiliar places, and without access to a landline. It can be really useful to simply be able to make a call in an emergency or google a location if you are lost. There are several options for having a cell phone while you are abroad.

1. **Buy a cheap phone abroad.** Just like in the US you can find cheap flip phones that you can buy minutes for.
2. **Buy a SIM card.** There are many cell phone stores that will help you switch out the SIM card on your phone to one that will work in Europe. This can cause problems with your phone because of the data and contacts that may be linked to your SIM card. Check with your provider or the manufacturer of your phone to make sure that it will not cause permanent damage. In some cases you may need to pay a fee or unlock your phone in order to do this.
3. **Get an international plan.** Many US carriers offer international phone plans that will give some coverage abroad. Coverage is definitely not as good as in the US though. Depending on which plan you have, this may or may not be the cheapest option.

I chose to buy a SIM card abroad because an international plan would be too expensive. Don't worry about getting an international plan for your first few days abroad as there are plenty of cafes with WIFI that will be good enough to let your family know you have made it safely to your destination. This availability of WIFI also makes it pretty cheap to have a cell phone abroad. Use the free WIFI to save on data charges and use apps like Whatsapp instead of texting or calling your friends.



MUST SEE IN SALAMANCA

- Find La Rana (Try to do this early in your time in Salamanca because you will inevitably run into a tour guide pointing it out with a laser pointer)
- Go see El Cielo de Salamanca
- Go to a salsa class, there are classes in bars as well as formal dance studios.
- Walk across el puente romano and take a picture of the cathedrals
- Explore el barrio oeste (bring a camera)
- Eat chocolate con churros somewhere other than Valor, though you should go to Valor at some point.
- Find a cafe that you like to study in, if there are other international students there keep exploring.
- Go see the round church
- Go shopping on calle Toro
- Go eat tapas with your friends
- Walk around Parque de los Jesuitas
- Try castañas
- Try all of the turrón
- Go to language exchanges in Super8
- Try hornazo
- Visit Avila

Food Allergies and Dietary Restrictions

It can be challenging to deal with a dietary restriction in the US when speaking your native language. Abroad it can be even more frustrating. Sometimes it seems that you are relying on a waiter to understand your imperfect Spanish, or even your perfect English that they may not know so well. Here I will focus mostly on what to do in the case of dietary restrictions like my own which are not life threatening, however if you have an allergy that will trigger an anaphylactic reaction please talk to your doctor and make sure your study abroad advisor is aware of this before you go abroad.

For those of you who are vegetarian and vegan it can be difficult to explain why you have made the choice to not eat meat or animal products. This is an aspect of American culture that often is difficult to translate. My best advice is to come up with a simple explanation in Spanish and use this when your beliefs are questioned (which they most likely will be). As a society that has many traditions related to pork and cheese, Spain can be a challenging place to not eat meat. As far as tapas options, most places have a lot of potato based dishes as well as the occasional veggie based dish. If you eat eggs you will not go hungry. There are also a number of cafes that serve vegetarian tapas, two that are especially good are Cafe Atelier, Cafe Don Quixote, and Cafe Mandala.

The most important thing to remember is to be flexible. Maybe you go to a restaurant and your friends all find food they love but they do not have an option that fits your dietary restriction. It can be really frustrating, but you can always find more options. Maybe your friends don't want to go somewhere else but they agree to sit with you while you eat. When traveling I always tried to keep some snacks on me in case I had this happen so I knew I could make it between meals. There are many good options for snack foods at local grocery stores which will be helpful. There are many specialized health food stores in Salamanca or small stores that sell gluten-free gummies or pastry as well as vegan, vegetarian, and nut free snacks.

Don't get discouraged or stop traveling just because of your diet. There are many locations in Europe that have a variety of foods. For example Italy due to an excessively high prevalence of celiac disease (about double the norm last time I checked) has an amazing availability of gluten-free food. There are entire restaurants dedicated to making gluten-free pasta and pizza. Morocco is just a short plane ride from Spain and has by far the most delicious vegetable dishes I have ever tasted. Portugal is famous for delicious seafood which is perfect for pescatarians. No matter where you go there will be food to eat, you just have to hunt it down.



Health Abroad

On campus at Emory there are endless events and fliers about staying healthy on campus. The hospitals are probably next door to where you lived your freshmen year, and student health is just down the street. It is different to live off campus, and even more different to live abroad. These resources are still around, but they are not as apparent or in your face as they are at Emory. The stress of being abroad and having your body adjust to a new life is an opportune time for viruses to get you. While I was abroad I felt like I almost constantly had a cough or cold. For most students these illnesses are not serious, however if they are your program director will help you get the care you need.

Taking care of the run of the mill cold can also be difficult if you are unfamiliar with the medications that are available to you. Two popular painkillers in Spain are Frenadol and Paracetamol both of which contain Acetaminophen, what we know as Tylenol in the United States. Ibuprofen is also available. The biggest difference in taking medications like these is that you will have to talk to a pharmacist in order to get them. They are very nice and understanding in general, especially because they have to deal with hundreds of sick international students every year. They are trained to recommend medications based on your symptoms so it is in your best interest to talk to them and figure out the best medications for you.

If you are having a medical problem that seems like more than a cold or something that you would like to see a doctor for, you do have health insurance provided through the University of Salamanca and the private hospital. Usually you can just go to a walk in appointment and wait a while to see a doctor. Make sure you know how to communicate your symptoms in Spanish, or have someone come with you to translate. Your program director is happy to do this.



Suggested Packing List

- A duffle bag for small trips
- Water bottle
- Umbrella (Salamanca can be really rainy and windy, make sure its sturdy)
- Raincoat
- Coat (It gets cold)
- Shoes that are good for walking (You will probably walk almost everywhere)
- Hat, gloves., and scarves for cold weather
- Something you feel safe carrying your passport in when you travel (purse, bag, whatever. Just make sure it zips closed and is hard to access for pick-pockets)
- Less clothing than you think you will need (Many students over pack and run out of room for things they want to bring home, pack lightly and shop there. H&M and Zara are always right around the corner)
- Camera (A lot of students take pictures on their phones too, but sometimes it is nice to have the higher quality pictures)
- Something that holds coins (wallet, coin-purse, etc. You will probably end up with way more coins than you expect)



TRAVEL TIPS

Traveling in Europe is a lot easier than traveling in the United States. There are buses that are relatively easy to use as well as trains and cheap flights to connect most major cities. Where you go really depends on your interests but my favorite places to visit were Morocco and Italy. I will include special advices for both of these locations as well as air fare and places to stay below.

Getting There:

By Plane

There are so many discount airlines that are perfect for travel around Europe. RyanAir is probably the cheapest but EasyJet is also nice. When you are looking for flights make sure you look at both the airline's page as well as various booking sites because prices can vary between the two. I recommend watching a flight for a couple days before purchasing a ticket because prices can go down.

By Bus

No matter where you go outside of Spain, you will have to take a bus to the Madrid airport first. It is usually easiest to travel straight to the Madrid airport as there is a bus that will take you directly there that leaves from the bus terminal in Salamanca. If your flight is in the morning you can always get a bed in a hostel for the night before. Avanza is the bus company I almost always used. There are other options especially for traveling to smaller villages. You can go look around the bus terminal to see what company offers what routes. Some of their websites can be a little sketchy so just make sure you double check and get a copy of the schedule.

By Train

I never got a Eurail pass but that is an option. I took the train to and from Madrid as well as to Avila. There is also a high-speed rail option, but that tends to be more expensive. Once you are in another country, trains are a great way to get from place to place. The companies vary depending on where you are.

Where to Stay

Hostels

There are several sketchy hostels in Madrid but also a few really cheap ones as well that are pretty nice. There are plenty of hostel booking sites for you to search as well. I think I found the best deals on booking.com. These are ideal for nights before an early flight, or just spending a weekend away. I stayed in hostels twice on my own with no problems but I

recommend caution. Use the lockers provided and make sure you don't leave anything too valuable there for an extended period of time.

Hotels

Hotels are the most expensive option usually, I would not recommend staying in a hotel just because of the price.

Airbnb

This was the most popular option when I was abroad. Though the safety of staying in an Airbnb has been called into questions recently. It is often much cheaper than a hotel, and sometimes easier to find a bed than staying in a hostel. I only ever stayed in an Airbnb with other people from my program. I recommend using a lot of caution with Airbnb's and making sure you address any issues that arise immediately. If you feel unsafe, do not hesitate to contact someone and get yourself to a safer place. A cheap room is not worth putting yourself in harm's way.

Going to Morocco

Tangier is about a 45 minute flight from Madrid, making Morocco a favorite destination for students studying abroad in Spain. Visiting Morocco was definitely my favorite trip I took during my time abroad. I have put this in a special section because while I feel that for the most part tours and tour guides should be avoided in Europe because of the price, in Morocco I think this is the best option. Websites like Travelocity have lots of tour guides listed who will organize trips to take you all over Morocco. On my trip we visited Chefchaouen (the blue city), Fez, and Asilah. In Fez we slept in an old palace that had been converted into a hotel. I never would have gotten to stay in such gorgeous accommodations or see such amazing stuff had I organized the trip on my own. The only issue with this is the constant pressure to buy stuff from the various artisans you will visit. As long as you are wary and spend your money cautiously you will be fine. Morocco also has some of the cheapest food.

THE EXCURSIONS I WENT ON

The excursions you will go on vary based on the semester you are abroad (spring vs. fall). Maica also changes some aspects of the trips as well as locations based on prices. She has a limited budget to work with, if you do not get to go on a particular excursion please do not complain. Maica works very hard to ensure that all students have a good experience during their time abroad. Here are the trips I went on with Emory.

Pueblos of Salamanca

This visit is a great way to see what life was like in the countryside of Spain 100 years ago. During this excursion you will most likely get to try some traditional foods from the Salamanca region. During my semester we also visited a house that has been preserved the way it was 100 years ago so you can see how people slept, ate, and lived. You will hear lots of stories of folklore from these towns, some that seem like ghost stories or that will make you think of a Gabriel Garcia Marquez novel. The best part of this trip was definitely the delicious meal we had.



Portugal

The trip to Portugal is interesting because it takes you out of the bubble of Spanish history. While this makes it harder to remember some of the details Maica would like you to learn, it is also refreshing after what can feel like endless lectures on the Spanish monarchs. During my semester we visited Lisbon. We learned a lot about the earthquake that effectively destroyed huge areas of the city. The result of this is that the entire city seems much more modern than many other European cities. There is also an extensive arts scene so you are likely to see lots of street performers of all varieties, random art installations, and many visual artists out on the streets as well. Be careful where you go as always, but the metro system works pretty well and is reliable to get you where you need to go. If you have a free afternoon I suggest investigating a trip to Sintra and specifically a visit to Palacio de Pena. It is located about an hour outside of Lisbon and the train fare to get there is relatively cheap. The palace is gorgeous, definitely one of the more unique buildings.





Galicia

On the Galicia trip we spent a lot of time walking around small towns and visiting churches and other religious sites. Usually Galicia is very rainy so plan ahead. The most exciting parts of this trip during my semester were a visit to a vineyard and a boat ride to see how they grow and harvest muscels. We also got to visit Santiago de Compostela, and the famous cathedral that this town is home to. During our visit we talked to several people who had done the pilgrimage often called El Camino de Santiago. You will learn more about this when you visit, or you can ask any Spaniard. People from all over the world and from all religious backgrounds travel to Spain to complete this journey every year.



Sevilla, Granada, Cordoba

This was my favorite Emory excursion. We stopped in Cordoba to spend a couple of hours and visit La Mesquita de Cordoba before moving on to spend the night in Granada. The next morning we visited La Alhambra and then drove on to Sevilla. In Sevilla I believe we spent three nights. The two full days we spent there we had a lot of free time, but we also got to visit a lot of attractions. My favorite attraction in Sevilla is one that we did not visit with Emory called Reales Alcazares. Maica will tell you it is very similar to La Alhambra, and while this is partly true, to me it was even more beautiful. Sevilla is just such a lively city and it is so beautiful and sunny most of the time, it was just the perfect place to spend a vacation.



Reverse Culture Shock and Coming Home

As the semester ends you very well may be missing your family and longing to come home. Though you spend all of your time making the most of your last few weeks in Salamanca and enjoying all of the tapas, jamón, and cafe con leche that you can some small part of you is missing home. Enjoy those last few weeks and make sure you have hit all the highlights in Salamanca (see list above). Buy your mandatory USAL sweatshirt (don't pay more than 10 euros). Make sure you have gone to see the Cielo de Salamanca. Say thank you to your host family and to Maica maybe with a small gift or some other gesture. Start packing early because it is much harder coming home, all of those clothes you picked up at Zara and H&M have to fit in your bag too along with the 10,000 souvenirs.

Once you have done all of that you will find yourself on a plane wondering how the semester went by so fast. If you are like me you will also be wondering how you will be happy back home away from a life of constant travel and afternoons eating tapas in cafes. It can be hard to imagine such a big change, especially to all of the friendships you formed abroad. For me I was sad to know that I was no longer going to be hanging out with my close knit group of friends from Spain, but I was also happy to return home and see my best friends again.

It can be especially hard to come home because of all of these mixed emotions but once you are home you will also have reverse culture shock to deal with. This phenomena is very similar to what you felt when you first got to Spain but possibly even more alienating. Instead of just feeling like you do not fit in anymore, you will also feel like you absolutely should fit in but do not. You will feel like you missed out on all of the major events in your social group, and all of the memories your friends made without you. This can be really hard and even result in feelings of depression or social anxiety for some people. It is okay to feel this way.

If these feelings last Emory has resources to help you. No matter what it can help to reach out and talk to your friends from abroad who are going through the same thing. Getting involved back home can also help. Just like focussing on building your life abroad helped you adjust to life in Salamanca, rebuilding your life and routine back home will help you readjust. Resist the urge to withdraw from activities you used to be involved in on campus and reach out to the people you may have lost touch with.

There are also a lot of ways to get involved via the study abroad office at Emory. You can apply to become a peer advisor and put your experience to use to help other students. There is a photo contest every year for returnees to submit their pictures and win prizes. There are also networking opportunities and language partner opportunities on campus. Check the link below for more information. It can be hard coming home, but you will readjust and life will continue!

Here are some additional resources:

<http://www.state.gov/m/fsi/tc/c56075.htm>

<http://studenthealth.emory.edu/cs/>

<http://studyabroad.emory.edu/experience/return/index.html>