

Universidad de Complutense de Madrid

2015 Semester 1

BA (Art History)

I'm into the last four hours of my flight to Auckland now – glad because it's taken me about 20 hours to get to this point from Paris – but otherwise I can't say I really want to come back yet. My time at Complutense and the time I've spent travelling before, during and after the exchange have without a doubt been the most fun I've ever had.

But anyway I'll try to be vaguely useful.

Madrid

A truly amazing city, if you gave me an EU passport I'd be headed straight back with no real intention of returning. Talking with lots of Spanish people was interesting as lots seem to agree: Barcelona is an amazing, beautiful city well worth its reputation, but if you want to actually live in Spain, Madrid's the place to be.

They actually really only speak Spanish for the most part which is truly great because it actually forces you to use it the entire time, unlike a lot of the rest of Europe where any trace of an accent often results in people immediately switching to English which can be a little frustrating at times.

I was ignoring my law degree and just doing art history and the art collection was hard to beat. As a student you get free access to the Prado, Reina Sofia and Thyssen's free on Monday so that's the entire golden triangle done without costing you a cent. Matadero usually has something interesting/free on plus there's a ton of other museums, big and small and always lots going on.

It was nice to be able to eat and drink out without constantly being preoccupied with the cost, many places to get a beer for a little over a euro and when they give you free tapas along with that you know living in this town isn't exactly going to be overtly stressful... Spanish food was great, (although fair warning if you're vegetarian, I had a friend who was and it really did limit your options – especially in the more traditional side of Spanish cuisine.

Accommodation

I never met anyone who was actually staying in the residence type accommodation provided by Complutense so can't really say anything as to what that's like but flatting in Madrid was amazing. Really quite easy to set up, I used a website called idealista to find mine – did it within a week and a half of having arrived in Madrid with no real idea and that was both very normal and very doable. As long as you have a phone and whatsapp you can immediately set up viewings within no time at all. It's actually not that expensive to live

there considering how big the city is, obviously varies a fair bit with suburbs but you can definitely get a lot of options very centrally between 300/400 euros a month (often including the gastos etc) I was in Malasaña the relentlessly cool young neighbourhood, right in the middle of everything which I absolutely loved. Chueca right next door would also be a great place to live, with a very similar vibe. I'd potentially recommend Lavapiés as a cheaper option if you need it though – a really cool diverse neighbourhood with beautiful streets.

LIVE WITH SPANISH PEOPLE – they know where everything cool is already, they are genuinely lovely people and your Spanish will be so much the better for it with the real deal for you to mimic and learn from!

Academics

Complutense is relatively easy to figure out what is going on, although nothing works as simply or efficiently as Otago. The most curious thing was how discretionary much of it is – seriously lecturer's whims can change your exam without any notice, the good thing is that the entire class will be in the same boat so that genuinely doesn't matter too much. I had a huge variation in how hard courses were though because of it: some where the entire class is struggling to pass to classes where on the first day the professor just said don't worry about the exam you'll all pass.

Travelling

I travelled a lot, basically dragged the entire thing out as long as I possibly could. Spent just shy of four weeks in Vietnam on the way and would thoroughly recommend (you can work it in as a stop over to Europe for not much more money and once you're there it's so ridiculously cheap. Spain itself is great, Barcelona is very much worth a visit, so is the Basque Country – even if the language is utterly bewildering but my favourite was Andalucía.

Go to Granada it is stunning; Cordoba is likewise a truly unique instance of Hispanic and Arabic culture in collision. See if you can get to some of the festivals around the place – I was in Valencia for Las Fallas and it was truly amazing, and if you're there for first semester like I was definitely try to make sure you see an Easter procession even if you're planning on heading somewhere else for mid-semester! Granada Toledo Blabla car is a decent way to get around Spain easily, ALSA's the major bus company which also has a decent service has everything online which makes it very easy.

Once you're there, realise how close you are to everything – Ryanair is your friend. There's a brilliant website called skyscanner if you don't already know it. Absolute best function is that it lets you search all flights departing any place and ranks them by price. I went to Belgium, Italy and Morocco all on sets of flights that each cost me 50 euros or less return. So just keep an eye out – I guarantee several saints will have died or done something dramatic and there's always a long weekend to be had so make the most of it!