

Universidad Complutense de Madrid
S1 2014
LLB/BA Spanish and Geography

After taking two years of Spanish classes at Otago, doing a semester abroad in Madrid was the perfect opportunity to finally cement and put to practice what I had studied. I was lucky enough to already have a friend living in Madrid to show me the ropes, but that didn't always help the process of enrolling and finding a place to live.

Madrid is a huge city and was everything I had imagined it would be. From the magnificent old buildings to the forever busy streets and plazas of the centre city, you can find yourself wandering for hours experiencing all that Madrid has to offer. Thus, if you want to really put your Spanish to use and experience the lifestyle of a vastly different culture, Madrid is the place to go.

Accommodation

For the first two weeks I stayed in a hostel in Sol so I could find my bearings and start to scout out a place to live. I had decided that I didn't want to use the University accommodation on offer and I was glad I didn't. From what I had heard from other students, the best thing to do is find your own room. This may seem daunting but it can be relatively easy through websites such as easypiso.com and idealista.com.

A few tips:

Be confident and call or message the person advertising the room. They most likely won't speak English so this is a good chance to practice.

Organise to see a few rooms, but don't feel pressured into taking the first one you see. It may take you a while but it is worth finding one you are happy with.

Make sure that the price in the advertisement is what you will be paying. Most rooms will have a price for the room and then a set price for "gastos" which will include gas and heating but not electricity, so just be sure. They will also most likely ask for a bond which you will get back at the end.

Just to give some perspective, I was paying 440 euros (gastos included) per month for a room with a balcony in "Opera", a very central neighbourhood close to everything. I would recommend staying in this area or others close by such as Puerto del Sol, Malasaña or La Latina. These are great neighbourhoods, all safe and so close to everything exciting you will hardly need to leave. To get to the University is only a short ride by metro, or even a nice walk if you're up to it.

Travel

From where I lived in Opera it was only a 25-minute journey to Complutense. Because I was taking the metro most of the time, I got a monthly pass that gives

you unlimited access to the metro and the bus system for only 35 euros if you are under 23, over 23 is more expensive.

Because Madrid is so central in Spain, this also made it very easy to dart around the country on the train, bus, or by car. A great system that is going strong in Spain is the use of Blabla cars. Essentially this is virtual hitch hiking and a great, cheap and also safe method to travel. I used this a lot and would recommend it highly.

University Courses

At the University I was taking only three papers, a much lighter workload compared to Otago. I could have taken more, but in the first few weeks, with the difficulty of finding a timetable that worked and the stress of not understanding what the Professor is saying, this was probably the best thing. This all worked out to be about 13 hours of class a week.

One thing to note is that unless your Spanish is really good, which mine wasn't, you're probably not going to understand much of what the lecturer is saying. But, with that in mind, you will get better, and if you persist it will start to get a lot easier. Just make sure you communicate with the lecturer and make them aware that you are an exchange student and they are usually happy to give you a run down when you need it.

It may not be easy to find papers you like or that you can cross credit, but in the first few weeks there is a lot of flexibility for exchange students to try different classes and make changes etc.

I took one geography paper and two Spanish courses. The first Spanish course was in Hispano-American literature that cross-credited for a Spanish culture paper, and a night course that taught Spanish language. This language course is outside of the university curriculum but is a Complutense run programme of which I had to pay extra for (about 200 euros). It will be hard to find a paper to cross-credit as a language paper other than this course.

The process for examinations is different to New Zealand but the principle is the same. There is no need to bring your "papeles" anymore also as they have updated the system so it is all-online.

Summary

Madrid is one of those cities you really need to live in to understand how great it is, so I highly recommend it as a place to do an exchange. I met fantastic people and had an amazing time furthering my studies and cultural experiences! Sometimes you have to wonder why more people don't do exchanges!!!!