

Intercalated Year Abroad Report (Madrid, 2023-2024)

Quick Disclaimer

I am an international student at Warwick from Greece, meaning I was able to avoid the bureaucracy UK students face with visas etc. Since I have no experience in that regard, I won't be including that in my report. However, [Smart Insiders](#) is a great resource to refer to for things such as the NIE or other legal information.

Table of Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- [Why Madrid? Why UAM?](#)
- [Preparing to Go](#)
 - [Accommodation](#)
 - [Language](#)
 - [Transportation](#)
- [University](#)
 - [What to Expect](#)
 - [Math Modules](#)
 - [Other Modules](#)
- [Outside of Class](#)
 - [Erasmus Student Network](#)
 - [Travel](#)
 - [Sports](#)
- [Conclusion](#)

Introduction - *If you don't read anything else, read this!*

I didn't always want to do a year abroad. In fact, I only considered the possibility towards November of 2nd Year, because I believed the additional time and perspective would be infinitely more valuable than graduating a year earlier and feeling lost and unsure of what the next step in life is. While I believe a Year Abroad would be beneficial for anybody, if you've already crystallized your immediate goals, it might feel *very* slow at times to the point where you start questioning if the extra year was worth it.

Why Madrid? Why UAM?

An important thing to consider when choosing a place for your Year Abroad is the language. Take the time to go through each university's website and note down what language the modules are taught in. While some universities offer Masters courses which are usually taught in English, there is a good chance you will take a lot of courses taught in the country's home language.

While you don't have to be fluent in the language by any means, it would be a good idea to go to a country where you at least have some familiarity with the language from which you can build off of. That being said, I had taken just two years of Spanish in high school before going to Spain so don't stress too much.

I chose Spain, partly because it was the only country in which I had some basic familiarity with the language (I took German in elementary but it's all a blur and I don't remember much) and partly because I have many Spanish friends and knew it would be a culture I'd enjoy exploring. Other universities required a B2 in Spanish upon applying and so UAM in Madrid it was.

Preparing to Go

Accommodation

Start Looking Early... I can't stress this enough! In a city like Madrid, accommodation at a decent price is not easy to find. Also, it is a *very* popular Erasmus destination for European students which only adds to the problem.

In general, you can go one of two ways in your housing search:

1. Live at the university residence and stomach the high prices in exchange for comfort and a stress-free room hunting experience. (~700€/month)
2. Spend your summer *endlessly* scrolling through websites to find a decent room, finally find something after two months, send the deposit, and hope you didn't get scammed. (~350-600€/month)

If you do have the budget flexibility, I would choose the former for the first semester and consider moving into the center of Madrid in the second. I went to the residence for the first time in my second semester to visit a friend and would say the rooms and overall facilities are quite nice and you have the option to pay for catering (two meals a day at the residence cafeteria) which surprisingly comes out cheaper than groceries.

Note: the university is outside the city, so if you're planning on going out a lot at night you might spend a considerable amount on Ubers.

Note: a lot of Erasmus student choose this option so if you start looking for a room in the residence in August, chances are you won't find anything.

I chose the latter. I started looking for accommodation in May and found that most of the resources provided by Warwick and UAM are outdated, and people often get scammed using those sites. The best resource to use in your search is [idealista](#). The safest option is to book through agencies, but they require an additional administration fee which is usually one month's rent and, contrary to the deposit, you will never see this again. There are freelancers on Idealista too, but they are harder to find. Another decent option is Facebook groups (that's how I found my flat). However, this is more luck-based and unreliable.

Language

Even if all your courses are in English, which probably won't be the case, learning Spanish is a must to connect with the culture. Many locals don't speak great English and Duolingo will only get you so far.

I would *highly* recommend taking the [Brush-Up on Your Spanish](#) summer course. It is a two-week course that starts at the end of August (you don't want to spend the summer in Madrid; it is **hot**) which helped me refresh my Spanish right before the year

started. In addition, it's a great place to make friends before university even begins; I met some of my closest friends there with which I still keep in touch with today. It may be a bit costly, but I think it is worth it.

UAM also offers semester long Spanish courses (for which you must pay extra). I attended these in my second semester, and, from my experience, it was a total waste of time. People mostly picked them for easy credit, and I don't recommend it if you're looking to improve your skills on a language.

Transportation

Upon arrival make it your number one priority to get the [Abono Metro card](#). It gives you access to all the buses and metro lines in Madrid as well as certain Cercanias trains **for just 8€/month**.

You can order the card online, but it may take a while to arrive. Your best bet is to book an appointment online and go in-person to receive it. Everyone will be trying to book appointments for it so make sure you book one early. You can find clear instructions on how to book your appointment [here](#) (look for option 3).

Note: You don't need a Spanish phone number to book an appointment. You can just input 604 131 677 when asked, which is the Smart Insiders phone number.

University

What to Expect

The teaching system in Spain resembles a secondary school classroom, with classes between twenty and no more than eighty students. Teaching takes place in classrooms with rows of desks and a blackboard. Depending on your learning style this may be refreshing. You will find this creates a friendly environment in which teachers are addressed in *tú* and not *usted* and an overall welcoming atmosphere. In most departments (but *not* in Maths), attendance is mandatory.

Something to keep in mind is there are strict deadlines for submitting your Matricula for the semester and you cannot change your modules past this point. Changes need to be signed by Warwick as well which may cause delays so try and plan

ahead. If you need help, the people in the student help office in the Science Department (Math is in this department) are remarkably helpful and understanding.

Math Modules

While it is an Intercalated Year Abroad, and it doesn't count towards your university degree, you must still take at least half your credits from Math modules. There is little information about module content etc. online but at the undergraduate level, module names are universal so you could look up the content at the corresponding Warwick modules.

Note that all undergraduate Math modules in UAM are taught in Spanish and, contrary to Economics, there won't be many exchange students studying Maths. You will have to go out of your way to connect with the Spanish students in your classes who have been together since 1st year and have formed tight groups. This can seem intimidating, but once you do talk to them, they are welcoming and very understanding and helpful with notes, advice and stuff.

You **will** need to get to know them at least a bit. In most Math modules there are *no notes or helpful resources on Moodle*, meaning if you miss class your classmates are your only hope. [Wuolah](#) is an amazing resource for finding notes and other resources from previous years, but while early year courses have extensive material on there, there are few resources for 3rd and 4th year courses so you can't rely only on Wuolah to get you through the year.

Other Modules

UAM gives you the flexibility to pick up to half of your credits from other departments. Still, there are few [courses in UAM taught in English](#) and while studying Math in Spanish is one thing, doing Philosophy or Physics is a totally different monster.

The only course I chose to take from outside the department was Mobile App Development which was an incredible experience. It has no real prerequisites (although having done some programming before is for sure *very* helpful) and the teacher is incredibly sympathetic and understanding. I would highly recommend giving this a try.

Note: there is no guarantee you will be accepted in courses from other departments and by the time you get a response, the deadline for changing modules is over so you can't replace them with other courses.

Note: while language courses are only available through an extra fee, they still count towards your year's total credits and therefore contribute to the maximum of 50% of credits you can have from outside the department.

Outside of Classes

Erasmus Student Network (ESN)

There are no societies in Spain, but ESN is the next best thing. I only started going to ESN events in my second semester, because all my friends were doing Erasmus which typically only lasts one semester, and all I can say is I wish I'd started going sooner.

While partying is nice and all, Tandem is, in my opinion, the best place to meet people. It is a relaxed event which runs on Wednesday evenings by ESN volunteers, and it is a great place to really get to know people and to speak Spanish. The ESN volunteers became some of my closest friends and it helped with my Spanish tremendously.

Do take advantage of all the Erasmus events, but don't go to everything. Madrid is a city that never sleeps and there is always something going on so don't feel bad for staying in every now and then. To learn more about ESN at UAM, your best bet is to follow them on Instagram.

Note: I didn't go to the Welcome Weekend, but my friends that did said it lived up to the hype. However, I would still rather save my money for travelling.

Travel

You should *definitely* take the opportunity to travel during your Year Abroad. In Madrid you are in the center of Spain and, especially during low season, you can find cheap domestic flights to most places. Spain also has an incredible train network but note that tickets vary **A LOT** depending on the season. From my experience, check both flights and trains and get the best of both.

[Smart Insiders](#) has lots of group trips in through which you can explore Spain and make friends in the process. Most trips would be cheaper if you planned them yourselves, but there are some, such as the trip to the North (Santiago-San Sebastian, Bilbao and Dragonstone) which I think are great value for money.

Sports

While Spanish universities do have sports teams, from my experience playing basketball, they're a bit of a joke. Most people play on local sports teams and so the university team practices are often unorganized with large parts of the team missing. I still enjoyed playing and had some more exchange students in the team who were some of the first friends I made but the commitment of having games during weekends doesn't allow you to travel.

Note: most sports teams have trials very early into the year so do your homework to make sure you don't miss them.

Conclusion

I don't like cliches, but it is a *once in a lifetime* experience. You will grow as a person and make friends and memories which you will treasure for years to come.