

## **Erasmus Report: Universidad Complutense de Madrid**

Spending a year abroad taught me a lot about myself and introduced me to many new experiences. It wasn't always fun, and there were times when I questioned why I had decided to go. Looking back, I can say that I benefited from the experience, but with hindsight, I'm not sure I would have made the same decision.

### My Motivation

My decision to go was influenced by my family background. My mother is from Madrid; she grew up there but moved to the UK after graduating from university to find work and has lived here ever since. Consequently, I have spent my entire life in the UK. However, there has always been a strong Spanish influence in my upbringing. We visited Spain at least twice a year to see family, so I experienced a lot of the culture, which became a part of my identity. I felt that I owed it to myself to explore that side of me, and spending a year abroad seemed like a great option. It would allow me to improve my Spanish, get to know my family better, and immerse myself in a completely new experience.

### The city

Having visited Madrid many times throughout my childhood, I was somewhat familiar with the city. However, living there for a year allowed me to truly experience everything it had to offer. The public transport, for example, is amazing. If you're under 25, you pay just 8 euros a month for unlimited access to the metro, bus services, and trains in the city as well as in the outskirts of Madrid.

### The people

Madrid is a melting pot of cultures, with people from all around the world. It's common for recent graduates to spend a year teaching English in Spanish schools, so there's a large population of people from North America and the UK. Additionally, there's a significant number of people from Latin America, particularly from Colombia and Venezuela, as well as individuals from other European countries, Asia, and Africa. This diverse population gives you the opportunity to meet and speak with people from vastly different backgrounds, which, for me, was one of the most amazing aspects of living in Madrid.

### The language

Before moving to Madrid, my Spanish was quite good, especially in terms of speaking and listening, as that's what I grew up with. However, I found it challenging to socialize with native speakers because they spoke very quickly and often used slang that I wasn't familiar with. When I found myself in a group of only native speakers, I often lost track of the conversation and couldn't contribute much. As a result, I tended to socialize more with non-natives, as they used English as their main language, making it easier to communicate, especially in group settings. This wasn't ideal, as one of my main goals

was to improve my Spanish. To address this, I frequently attended language exchange nights, which I highly recommend. These events are usually held in bars, where you can find someone who wants to learn your language while you learn theirs, and then just talk. It's a great way to practice Spanish because people are eager to practice as well. Additionally, it's a fantastic way to make friends. I found these events by searching "Language exchange" on the Meetup app.

### The university

While I couldn't recommend Madrid as a city enough, the university experience was the most challenging part of my year abroad. I struggled with the way things were done there. The structure felt more like secondary school, with more classes than at Warwick and smaller classrooms instead of large lecture halls. For most modules, you could choose between morning or afternoon classes, which were taught by different teachers.

One of the most frustrating aspects was the heavy reliance on your own note-taking ability. Unlike Warwick, where most modules provide lecture notes, the classes at Universidad Complutense were not recorded, making it impossible to catch up if you missed a class. This was particularly difficult for me, as I already understood less due to the language barrier. The lack of lecture notes made it harder to grasp the material, and if you missed a class, you had to rely on getting notes from someone else.

As for the professors, it was a mixed experience. Some were excellent and took advantage of the smaller class sizes to create a more interactive environment, while others seemed less enthusiastic about teaching. My favourite modules were Algebraic Equations and Differential Geometry.

Exams were not standardized at all; each professor decided how to run and grade their exams, which was quite different from the system at Warwick. Additionally, there are two exam periods for each exam, so if you fail the first time, you get a chance to retake it. Unlike Warwick, the resit is not capped. In fact, it is quite common for people to fail an exam.

Overall, I found it tough to adjust to the academic system at Universidad Complutense. This made the experience less enjoyable for me, and the fact that the results didn't count towards my degree made it difficult to stay motivated. At times, I felt like I was wasting my time. However, Madrid is an amazing city, and you'll meet some incredible people. My honest recommendation, if you want to spend a year in Madrid, is to wait until you graduate and then spend a year teaching. You only work 20 hours a week, and the pay is decent.