

End of Year Report
Barcelona 2023-24
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Motivation:

I have always been fascinated by the idea of doing a year abroad. Ever since visiting my older sister in Amsterdam while she was on her Erasmus programme, I have been convinced that I too would like to try something similar. I believe the Study Abroad programme is one of the best ways to discover a new country and culture, as it allows you to do so in a safe and exciting way. Knowing that whatever may happen, you will always have your new university as a safety net, giving you regularity in your routine along with many opportunities to meet new people and to make new friends.

Why Universitat de Barcelona?

Funnily enough, my first choice was actually to study in Tokyo, however I did not get the spot and was assigned my second choice, Barcelona (and in hindsight, I am delighted that things worked out this way)

I chose to study in Barcelona as I had studied Spanish in school for 5 years, and still had a good enough level to not be starting from scratch upon arrival. I was keen to better my Spanish and to learn more about Spanish/Catalan culture. The beautiful weather, stunning scenery and amazing food were definitely added bonuses too, and were the deciding factors when it came to picking between Barcelona and Madrid (where I had also applied)

Universities in Barcelona:

There are surprisingly many different universities in Barcelona. Some public (UB), some private. I studied at the Universitat de Barcelona (otherwise known as UB). The University has many buildings scattered throughout the city. Luckily for me, as I studied Maths, I was in the “main” building for all my lectures and seminars, located just next to Plaça Catalunya (very central). The Maths department is in a massive and beautiful gothic building with stunning flower-filled gardens and courtyards where one can study or simply have a peaceful moment to themselves.

I would also like to mention for prospective students that UAB (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), unlike UB, is a campus uni located far north of the city. Most of my friends in Barcelona studied at UAB and all had the same dilemma when it came to accommodation. Students at UAB can either live on campus, in which case they must take a 45-60 minute train to get into Barcelona (trains which stop running relatively early), or choose to live in the city, in which case they must endure the long commute to uni every day. For that reason alone, I would strongly recommend applying to UB over UAB if possible, and if not possible, please choose carefully between living on or off campus, as this will impact your experience overall.

Accommodation:

Finding accommodation in Barcelona was surprisingly easy. After a lot of stress-induced procrastination, I found my accommodation under a month before moving in. I would recommend starting your search for accommodation right after exam results come out, confirming your position on the Study Abroad programme. There are many websites on which you can find student accommodation, however I was told that some of these are scams, so always check addresses and read reviews before paying for anything. I lived in Santa Eulalia, in a 3-bedroom flat. Santa Eulalia is a very quaint neighbourhood; with all the shops and amenities one could need very close-by. While this was nice and practical, I did find myself having to take the metro anytime I wanted to do anything social, as it is not common for students to live there and there wasn't much of interest to do, especially when it came to nightlife. However, as Santa Eulalia is a bit more out of the way, prices for accommodation were generally more affordable. For the average student, finding good accommodation will be a tug of war between location and quality. I prioritised the latter, and part of me wishes that I hadn't. Nice neighbourhoods I would recommend living it would be: L'Eixample, Gràcia, Urgell and their surrounding areas. Please note that the Raval is a buzzing and lively neighbourhood with a very unique feel, however it is apparently more dangerous than other neighbourhoods (Personally I have not had any issues in my many times there)

Academics:

At UB, I was (in theory) allowed to pick any course from the Maths department (from any year), as well as some from other departments such as Stats, Econ, Comp Sci etc. However, a large majority of modules are taught in Catalan (which I do not speak), so, in reality, I was limited to only the Spanish and English courses. Some modules are run in both semesters, with one semester being in Spanish and the other in Catalan. Furthermore, some modules may have lectures in Spanish but will have problem classes and exams in Catalan (I took some of these classes and the Catalan seminars/exams were not an issue for me). All the information can be found on the UB's "campus virtual"

The courses I took were Set Theory (Spanish), Graph Theory (English), Differential Geometry (Spanish+Catalan), Number Theory (Spanish+Catalan), Mathematical Modelling and Dynamical Systems (English) and Topology (Spanish+Catalan)

You can expect 4h per week of lectures per module, with 2h of problem classes, a midterm exam and a final exam. With assessed homework for some of the modules.

I will not go into detail about the contents of these courses; however, I will say that I most enjoyed differential geometry and graph theory, and I confirmed my suspicions that Set Theory was not for me.

Other than my English modules, I often found myself being the only non-Spanish person in the room in my other courses. This made making friends quite difficult due to the language barrier and since most people already had their friends and were not looking to make new ones. This led to university occasionally feeling a little lonely, especially since I was so used to studying in groups at Warwick, it was however a good opportunity to practise self-studying and not relying on others to push me to work.

Social Life:

Barcelona is undoubtedly one of the most vibrant and social cities in Europe. As an “Erasmus” student, opportunities to meet new people aren’t exactly difficult to come by. Many Erasmus student networks such as ESN will host a wide range of activities and trips in whichever city you find yourself, especially in the first month of arrival. While these are notorious for getting extremely repetitive, I would definitely recommend going to a few at the start, until you meet a few people who you could see yourself becoming truly close to. Remember, you don’t have to be everyone’s best friend, and it’s okay to not instantly click with people, just try to stay open to new people and experiences until you find your crowd.

Most of my closest friends in Barcelona were people I had met while doing the sports I love most, or were friends of friends/flatmates.

Other than ESN activities, universities tend to host a plethora of events for both their exchange students and local students. These are also a great way to meet new people, especially at the start of your year abroad.

Barcelona is an amazing city for sports lovers, whether it’s football, tennis, padel, you name it, there will be a community for you to discover new and existing passions.

Personally, I got quite addicted to padel during my year, which, as mentioned above, allowed me to make most of my closest friends. For any lovers of racket sports, I recommend getting the app “Playtomic” to find new people to play with.

Also, all Erasmus networks operate on many many WhatsApp groups, they usually break them down by university, country or activity (for example, I was in a French Erasmus groupchat and a tennis groupchat). While these groupchats can be a bit overwhelming and excessively active, they are also a great way to meet new people.

Finally, here is a list of places that I recommend to all future students staying in Barcelona:

Beaches: Castelldefels, Gavà, Sitges, Sant Pol de Mar, Blanes. (Avoid Barceloneta, it is WAY too crowded)

Food: Macchina Pasta Bar, Quimet&Quimet (incredible seafood tapas), Soana (affordable mediterranean food), Sartoria Panatieri (BEST pizza in town), Xurreria Trebol (favourite churros spot), Compà (Gracia) (amazing ciabatta sandwiches), Bar la Principal (cheap and delicious tapas)

Nightlife: Velvet Room (intimate jazz bar), Makinavaja (lively bar with good jazz on certain nights), Dow Jones (Stock market themed bar), Ovella Negra (THE Erasmus student bar, very busy, cheap drinks), D9 (best pre spot before Razzmatazz)

Razzmatazz (fun commercial club with some good techno events), Apollo (another good commercial club with great techno events), The Garage Club (Best techno club around)

Daytrips: Sitges (cute seaside town, hosts carnival), Blanes (stunning botanical gardens), Montserrat (Beautiful monastery in the mountains, scenic hikes)

Sports: Tennis/Padel at “CN Montjuïc” and “Eurofitness Vall d’Hebron”. Padel at “Club Nick Padel” and at “Go go Padel indoor”. Bouldering at “Indoorwall Hospitalet” or “Bloc District”. Beach Volleyball and Spikeball in front of the beach clubs every Friday afternoon (for free!)

Conclusion:

It would not be an exaggeration to say that my year in Barcelona was my favourite year ever. I truly cherished every moment there and I am so grateful to have been able to experience such a wonderful year. I am proud of myself for having gone out of my comfort zone so many times to allow myself to discover new places, a new culture and a new home, as well as making great improvements with my Spanish speaking. I will always look back on this year with the fondest of memories, and I cannot wait to be back in (hopefully) no time. I could not recommend Barcelona any more strongly, it is such a spectacular city with so much to offer for everyone.