

My Year in Sevilla

When I was deciding where I would study in my year abroad, I had a choice of 3 Spanish cities: Madrid, Barcelona and Seville. I had previously visited both Madrid and Barcelona on holiday and whilst they are both lovely cities, I felt that they would be slightly too touristy and international, so I chose Seville for a more authentic Spanish living experience. I am pleased to say I believe I made the right decision.

City

Whilst Seville is the 4th largest city in Spain by population, it really doesn't feel like it. From where I lived – a place called San Bernardo – most important places, from the university in the south to the Alameda de Hercules (a long street full of bars and restaurants) in the north, were all less than a 30-minute bike ride away. After living there for a month, it was rare to find myself lost anywhere, and if I did it never took long for me to get back to somewhere I recognised.



Regarding getting around, there's a wide variety of modes of transport in the city. There's a metro system as well as a tram that can take you from the east to the west of the city, and a larger train station and bus station that can both take you to other towns in Andalusia. There are also bus routes taking you all over the city, but I only ever took the one to and from the airport. The unfortunate thing is there aren't many options besides the bus for travelling from north to south, but again it's rare for anything to be too far away to walk or cycle. Seville have their own version of "Boris bikes" called Sevici which was great. You pay around €30 for the year, and this lets you use any bike for up to 30 minutes at a time. I used this most days to travel to the campus, although you usually have to get there 10 minutes before lectures start otherwise all the bike parking spots are taken and you have to cycle further away to find a free space.

Maths

Studying maths at the University of Sevilla varies in many ways to at Warwick. Whilst at Warwick I was used to 300 person lectures, in Seville most of my classes were limited to around 50 students. This does give more opportunity to ask questions, something which in hindsight I should have taken more advantage of. Lectures are two 2-hour sessions a week, generally split half-and-half between theory and problems. There are no seminars and instead if you have trouble understanding something you are encouraged to visit the lecturer during their office hours.

Another big difference is the method of assessment. Firstly, there are no assignments, so all assessment is 100% exam, however there are still problem sheets to attempt, and these are covered quite extensively in class. One sure-fire way of passing a module is to pass the end-of-term exam, in January/February for 1st semester modules and June/July for those in the 2nd semester. The alternative is to pass through “continuous evaluation”. This is essentially done by passing two smaller exams, called “parciales”, one in the middle of term and another at the end before the initial exam period starts. These cover smaller areas of the module but are often harder than the final exam. If you can I would definitely recommend trying to pass some of your modules this way as it can take a lot of pressure off during the exam period.

The exams themselves differ slightly to those at Warwick as well, with them being less theory-based and more computational. In some cases, I found this easier but in others it seemed that questions became unnecessarily complicated in a way that didn't justify the marks you were given for them.

One downside I experienced of the Spanish system was that not all students doing the same module have the same exam. The reason for the smaller classes is that all students are split into 4 or 5 different groups, and often these groups will have different lecturers to each other. It is then the individual lecturers who set the class exams, rather than there being a standard exam for all students taking the module. For one of my modules, this led to me sitting an exam that was significantly harder than any other groups', with only 2 people in my class being able to pass it, whilst the other classes had a relatively straightforward one.

As for modules themselves, the department is very flexible in allowing you to choose what to do. As an Erasmus student I was told that I could choose any module from any year in the maths/stats department, as well as up to three modules from outside these departments. I chose to take a mix of modules from 1st, 2nd and 3rd year with the idea being that this would be a mix of learning new stuff but also refreshing my memory of old content as well as perhaps looking at it in a different way. Modules I particularly enjoyed were “Informática”, a 1st year programming module, and “Series de Funciones e Integrales de Lebesgue”, the first because it is the only programming I have done besides Matlab and I found the weekly problems interesting, and the second because it was a nice mix between going over content I had previously covered and newer, higher-level content.

The only issue with this approach was that it meant I was with a different group of people for every module so it was harder to make good friends as I didn't see people as regularly as they saw each other.

Spanish

To study at the University of Sevilla you are required to have a B2 level of Spanish. You will have to prove this somehow before you can be accepted onto the course. I did this by getting 60+ in the module Spanish 5 (in both written and oral) and having the Language School write a letter verifying that this meant I was at a B2 level. Alternatively, you can pay to do an external test such as the DELE, but you will have to organise this early so that you can book a suitable period to do the exam and get the results in time.

Despite this, as far as the course goes, there isn't as big of a language barrier as you might expect in other subjects. Written maths is universal and most technical vocabulary is very similar to the English. I never found myself unable to follow a lecture although at times I may have missed some minor details or a joke that the lecturer had made. Occasionally there would be times where the maths itself was complicated and difficult to get your head around, and then you would have the added difficulty of having to translate the explanation of what was going on into English, and then figuring out what that actually means. However, generally after a bit of time going over it again, I would be able to understand.

One thing to be aware of is the Andalusian accent. It may sound different to Spanish you've been used to, and it can take a while to adjust. It's quite quick because a lot of sounds/syllables are skipped. For example, they often miss off the "-s" at the end (or middle) of words, so instead of saying "algo más" it would sound like "algo má", or they might miss out the "-d" in "-ado" or "-ido" so "he comprado" becomes "he compra". Also, some words may be shortened such as "para" becoming "pa" or "nada" changing to "na". This can make it difficult to understand things at first, but it's not too hard to pick up and now I actually think I prefer speaking Spanish this way.

Culture/activities



Seville is also home to two of the biggest football clubs in Spain: Sevilla Fútbol Club and Real Betis Balompie. Many people, including myself, don't realise that Betis are based in Seville but once there the club, and their fans, will be hard to miss. I was lucky enough to be in Seville during a great year for football in the city. I experienced Betis lift the Copa del Rey; Sevilla finishing in 4th to secure Champions League football; both teams playing

European football, despite sadly having quite short runs; and even a Europa League final between Rangers and Eintracht Frankfurt. Football is a huge part of the culture in Seville, and you will be expected to choose between the two teams – "Sevilla o Betis" was a common question to receive when I mentioned to someone that I was new to the city. If you are into football though it can be a really great way of making friends – discussing last night's match, meeting up at a bar to watch the game, or even attending one together. If you can, I would highly recommend going to a game (or more), the atmosphere at both stadiums is incredible. Sevilla tickets tended to be cheaper, around €30 for a league game compared to maybe €50 for a seat at a Betis game. Cup matches and European matches can sometimes be cheaper but bigger games against Real Madrid and Barcelona for example, as well as the Derby, can be upwards of €100.



One of my favourite weeks in Seville was the “Feria de Abril”. This takes place during one of the University holiday periods and is a tradition dating back over 100 years. The week is spent eating, drinking and dancing in “casetas”, literally translated as mini houses, which come in a variety of sizes and styles. Most are privately owned, perhaps by a family, a club, an old group of friends or whatever

else, but there are also larger ones open to everyone, often run by political parties (not that they get very political). Almost all will sell food and drink, and some might have live music whilst others will just play it over speakers. People will dress in traditional Spanish clothes, with the women in long, flowy dresses and the men in suits and waistcoats. The public casetas don’t really have a dress code, but private ones usually prefer you to dress smartly. I didn’t bring many smart clothes but, in most places, I got away with a shirt and tie, black jeans and black trainers. If you can, try and make some local friends so that you can get invites to private casetas as these are often more enjoyable (and less crowded) than public ones. People are usually very open with invites, most places I went I had never met the person who let us in, they were friends of friends of friends.



As for general social life/activities, there is so much to do in and around Seville. The city itself is beautiful with a lot of picturesque sites such as the Real Alcázar and the Plaza de España, and a bar every 100 metres to try some tapas and cervezas (both very cheap!). For nightlife there are a wide range of bars/clubs to visit, both indoors and outdoors, with the terrazas in the summer definitely my favourite. Whilst it is a good idea to make friends with Spanish people so that you can improve your language skills and emerge yourself in the culture, it was also nice to meet people from all over Europe and beyond through Erasmus events. The two main groups were Erasmus Club Sevilla (ECS) and Erasmus Student Network (ESN). Both require you to buy a membership, I think around €20 for the year, which will be worth it after only 3 or 4 events with the amount you save. These will get you cheaper and faster entrance into clubs, and both groups also organise trips to other parts of Andalusia as well as the rest of Spain and even Portugal and Morocco. These are good ways to meet people in the same situation as you and it’s also fun to get to know people from different cultures/backgrounds.

Advice

My year was the first year to study abroad post-Brexit, so we were the first year that required a visa to study in Spain. As much as I love Spain and Spanish culture, their visa system was a bit of a nightmare so I would recommend looking into what you need and trying to book an appointment as soon as possible. Hopefully by now they will have put

more measures in place so that it doesn't take as long as it did for me, but never a bad idea to be prepared. Keep in mind that it will cost around £500 to gather all the required documents and apply for the visa when deciding to study in Spain.

Generally, I think I was a bit rushed when sorting out the year abroad and didn't start thinking about preparing until around the start of summer, so I would definitely try and get out ahead of it to avoid too much stress.

Overall though I would hugely recommend doing Study Abroad, particularly in Sevilla, as it truly is a once-in-a-lifetime experience as everyone says. I enjoyed myself throughout, made a lot of good friends and learnt so much. It was an amazing year.

If you have any questions feel free to email me at Paolo.Bianco@warwick.ac.uk and I would be happy to help!