

My experience during my Erasmus mobility

I chose Granada as the destination for my semester abroad. I wanted to go in the winter semester to escape Berlin's dreadful winter. Since I have been living and studying in Berlin for eight years, the criteria for the city, I wanted to spend my semester abroad in, laid mainly in the climate, the size of the city and the language spoken. As you might know, Berlin is quite dark and grey during the winter, not to mention it is very cold. As I looked at my options of places where it was possible for me to do Erasmus in, I came across Granada. Situated in southern Europe, I knew the climate would differ to the one in Berlin. I had the expectation of living in a smaller city, learning a different language, enjoying a different culture and meeting new people.

Besides trying to escape the winter in Berlin, I also saw a golden opportunity to not only live but also study in a different country. Since I have been living in Berlin for a while, I was curious about other cultures in Europe, especially southern Europe. The Erasmus program gave me the opportunities to not only travel around in a different country but also gave me the opportunity to study in a different language. Having practiced Spanish in high school and freshening my language skills at my home university over two semesters, I felt confident enough to take that step. So I gathered all the required files and signed up for the Erasmus exchange program.

When I found out that I got accepted, I was excited and happy that I was going to experience something new, which would broaden my horizon in many different ways. When it was finally time to catch that plane I also felt nervous about the whole thing. I kept on telling myself, that even if the experience wouldn't be fun, it would still be an additional gift for the experiences of my life. I knew that I would be grateful of this time, once I look back at it in the future.

Since I did not manage to find a place to stay in Granada before my mobility, I decided to spend my first nights in a hostel. The first week I was in the city, its different neighbourhoods and the fact that it felt like I was very close to nature, amazed me. Mountains and hills surround Granada; these are visible from the city. The size of the city felt perfect to how I would have imagined it. The small streets and the short distances to walk was something of a luxury, coming from Berlin.

It was never hard for me to make friends anywhere, but I was always sceptical about calling them my real friends. The Erasmus coordinators in the University of Granada organized activities for students to meet each other, at first I thought this was very tacky, but when the activities were finished I had made a couple of friends which I then spent time with exploring and enjoying the city, I would call home for the next five months. Exploring a new city while making new friends was exactly the change I needed.

After a week of staying at a hostel, I finally found an apartment. The apartment had seven rooms and I was lucky enough to get the first pick. Since I was the first one to rent a room in the apartment, I quickly told my friends that there were still some rooms free. Two of my friends moved in and by the next day, other Erasmus students moved in. At first, my plan was to live with local Spanish people, so

that I would adapt to the lifestyle and improve and use my Spanish on the regular. In my new apartment we did speak a lot of English, which made it harder for me to express myself in Spanish. I was lucky enough to have two fluent Spanish speakers living in the apartment, this was good because I would try to improve my Spanish while talking to them and they could explain the things I wouldn't understand in English.

As the courses at the University started, I was amazed by the amount of Erasmus students in Granada, having been told that it is the city with the most incoming students in the Erasmus program. I was lucky enough that my classes were all held in the mornings, so I had the whole day to conduct different activities, to travel around the city and to experience the richness of cultures that Granada has to offer. I loved the fact that the city was so small, everything was so familiar and it was so easy to go from one place to another. My group of friends grew and we did many things together. A very positive aspect of Erasmus is that all Erasmus students are in the same situation. The fact that Granada is a smaller city, allowed us to easily meet up and do different activities together. All Erasmus students were on the same boat. Everyone wanted to explore, go outside, enjoy and suck in the culture. As I am also a very active person I found this aspect of it very positive and I miss that atmosphere till this day. It was very easy to communicate with other Erasmus students; everyone was open to new experiences and open into meeting new people and sharing their time together.

The courses I had chosen were all very interesting. I also had no problems mixing in with the regular students of my university. I even managed to make some friends; they were equally interested in my culture as I was in theirs. I found this very positive because it gave me the confidence in speaking Spanish to locals, without the fear of making mistakes. It was also refreshing being able to spend time with locals instead of always spending time with Erasmus students. The Spanish friends that I made were all very friendly and very inviting. I was invited to a different party or event every weekend.

Being in Andalusia, I thought it was very important to also have a look at some of the cities that were close by. I visited Cordoba, Nerja, Ronda and even Madrid. I was amazed by the beautiful scenery and rich culture that these cities had to offer. While it was still warm we also went to the beach that was only an hour away from Granada. I remember being amazed by the fact that I was in the ocean in Europe on the third of November, thinking of my friends in Germany wearing 3 layers of clothes already. I was really happy about sharing all these experiences with my new friends.

My family came to visit me at the beginning of November. This is when I realized I had to prepare a great program for them to enjoy. I wanted them to experience what I have been experiencing in this beautiful city. So I planned out some activities for us to do, of course the Alhambra was at the top of the list. I had never been before so I was also excited. The Alhambra amazed us all, the detail and history to this site was a pleasure to see. Granada was a very beautiful and pleasant place to show my family around in. They had great five days in the city and I was happy to show them how I have been experiencing my time in Granada.

I have to admit I also went through some unpleasant times in Granada. I wasn't used to living with seven people in one apartment, this was sometimes very frustrating because we did not clean the place enough. Though in all my complaining towards my roommates, there were many ways in which I found it great living with them. I had never lived with that many people in my life and it was refreshing to always have someone to talk to when I got home. I also developed a strong friendship with 5 of my roommates. The apartment was filled with laughter and smiles; we played board games and cards together. We celebrated birthday parties together; we cooked or went out to get food together. I noticed that this was one of the main benefits that I was given by the Erasmus program. I had the opportunity to live with students of different ethnic backgrounds and countries. In my eyes it was not only living with them but it was the friendship that we developed between each other.

As my time in Granada came to an end, I had exams to look forward to. This was annoying to me because I would have loved to use the time to explore and travel a little more. As I studied for my exams I found it interesting to think about the differences in ways of education, comparing my university to the one I was visiting in Granada. As in my home university I didn't have so many exams I had a certain feeling of nervousness. I spent my time in the library with other students of my course and we tested each other on things that were going to come up in the exam. Once I finished writing all my exams I felt free. I had a week left in Granada and I wanted to enjoy every bit of it before heading back to Berlin.

As my return date to moving back to Berlin came closer, it was time to have a goodbye party. All my new Erasmus friends and my local friends gathered at my apartment and we had a beautiful send off for all of us. As the first couple of friends departed from Granada, tears were shed. I remember being sad about it and not wanting the time in Granada to end. I then realized how grateful I should be, to have been given the chance to take part in such a productive and mind opening experience. I had forgotten about being sad and had focused on being thankful.

The life in Granada opened my eyes to something I had never experienced in my life and something that I will probably only experience once in my life. Being able to study in a different country while speaking a different language will open up academic doors, it will make different connections and create many friendships. I valued this and could not have been more thankful that I decided to commit to the Erasmus program. An intense but joyful time came to an end and I said goodbye to all of it with a smile on my face.

To this day I still have contact with all the friends that I made in Granada. I still look back at the time and miss it. I know I will sometime reunite with my friends in Granada again and I hope nothing will have changed by then because Granada is truly a gem in the continent of Europe.