

Students' experiences

The real life of an exchange student in Madrid (Spain)

For students describe their experiences of studying Psychology in different countries. Erasmus scholarships, or sojourns in other universities or research centers



Sabrina van Dijk
Student of the Amsterdam 'Vrije universiteit'

The past couple of months I've been living the beautiful life of an exchange-student, getting to know a new country, meeting new people, even learning a new language! I am a dutch student and now for exchange in Madrid, a pretty big culture difference from Holland going to Spain. Even more than I expected but I love it, until 2 o'clock you are allowed to say good morning and the evening doesn't start until 9 o'clock. Twice a day a hot meal and the discotheques are usually open until 6 o'clock in the morning! To not even begin about the weather, sunny! And of course there is also the Complutense University, which is, besides the fact that there's never toilet paper, also pretty nice! As an enthusiast student I signed up for 6 courses, of which I dropped one right away when I realized that studying in Spanish (6 months after you've had your first Spanish lessons) isn't as easy as it seems. And now the exams are getting closer and closer I figured that it would be best dropping another course because the Spanish really does slow you down! But even now, before knowing if I will pass any of my exams or not, I can say that I would do it all over again! It has been such a great experience, you get to know people from all over the world because you really can't escape all the other Exchange students that are all around. To really live and study in another country gives you the chance to really get to know another culture, and the weird thing is that it really does feel like home here! I love my Spanish roommates, there's always something to do or

somewhere to go and I really feel like this is also my city. And I have to admit that, although I love my friends and family at home I cannot say that I'm looking forward to going home again. I fell in love with the Spanish people, the weather, the food and their way of enjoying life! Being an exchange student really enriches you as a person, it really is an unforgettable experience.



Oukje Verkerk
Student of the Amsterdam 'Vrije universiteit'

Here you are, the airport of your home country. Just said goodbye to your friends and family and excited to start a new adventure. You have just one suitcase and tried to fit everything in that you'll need for the next 5 months. Of course this didn't work. A mixture of feelings pass by in the plane: fresh courage and excitement, but at the same time sadness of leaving everything behind. Probably the most Exchange students recognize this situation. For me it was no different. The first week is always hard. For me it was staying in a hostel where I could barely get sleep, trying to find a room using a language I definitely was not yet well versed in, and at the same time attending Spanish classes. I didn't really knew anyone yet so I was left to my own devices. It's only the first part, but for me that is the essence of the Exchange experience: to encounter that you can do it on your own. It is amazing how you can built up a life in a few weeks. A complete new social life, learning a new language, and of course get used to a new university. It was really surprising how different the university in Madrid is form my university in Amsterdam: the building, the students, the classes. In Amsterdam my classes are in big lecture-halls, here in Madrid they are more like class rooms. Furthermore the lessons are more personal with a lot more practical assignments than I'm used to, and the subjects are approached in a different way. The students here wear different style of clothes, and seem a lot more politically involved: everywhere around the university you can find banners and graffiti with political slogans. I can tell a lot more differences I encountered since I arrived here: the days schedule, family culture, food. But I think the most important is that in spite of all the differences, it takes only a few weeks to start to feel at home. And that's the moment you know you are extending your horizon.



Federico Taretto

Estudiante de Psicología de la Universitá degli Studi di Milano Bicocca

The one who told me that I wouldn't regret doing an exchange program was right, I don't regret it, and if I could I would do it all over again and again. It's true that for me, being an Italian, going to Spain has been like visiting your cousins who you haven't seen for a long time and you have a lot of things in common. I came to Madrid the first of June, 2011, three months before the official start of the Exchange period. I went here to enjoy the heat of Madrid in summertime. Besides that it was for learning the language, because I never studied or talked Spanish before. And I can honestly say that still today, I never opened (and never had) a single book about Spanish, but being almost exclusively around Spanish people has helped me a lot with the language.

Exchange, for someone who doesn't know, it also means attending classes! And I have to say that also the universal ambiance I liked a lot. One of the differences with Italy are the papers that you have to turn in with every course. Another difference is the amount of exam periods that you have in which they can give an exam: in Italy you have 6 possibilities for every course while here... Well, you know that! And always talking about the exams while here they have a 'tipo-test' or 'multiple choice', in Italy they are almost all oral exams and/or written exams. The first day of class here at the UCM I discovered that there are some teachers who do not appreciate if a student enters or leaves the classroom while he is explaining something... Well, I had a fought the first day!

My only advice to the boys and girls who decide to do an exchange program, wherever you decide to go, is to live these months being around the people from this country, although it might seem difficult in the beginning, it will definitely be worth it!



Karla Nahuat Herrera

Estudiante de Psicología de la Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, México.

At the goodbye at the airport there were no tears, just good wishes and encouragement. For me the adventure started at the boarding gate, in this moment I realized that it was going to be a big challenge and that I would have to face it alone. There were a lot of emotions, I was excited and scared at the same time but I had hope that everything would be fine. The first days weren't that easy, I think that things like this happen to everyone who decides to live this experience; I needed to find a room soon and because of the stress and the time difference, I found it impossible to sleep well. Individual differences make that some are able to adjust easier than others, and in my case it turned out to be quite difficult. I had hoped that it was a little easier to make friends at the university, fortunately I managed to find the right people, who helped me a lot, and everything turned out great. So I understood that all of this was a part of the exchange program, you have to develop greater confidence in yourself and in what you can do. But there will come a moment in which you start to enjoy, to accept the new culture, yes! The party begins, you will make great friends and in my case, there will be a lot of journeys, that allow you to expand your knowledge about other lifestyles. Also (even though some don't believe it) there is time for study and schoolwork. My courses I've liked from the beginning and luckily I didn't have any problems with the language, because my mother tongue is also Spanish. That made it a lot easier to keep up with all the classes. Now there are just a couple of weeks left before this adventure is over and in the meantime... I continue enjoying it!