

SMEAL International Programs Newsletter

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How do you describe something that is truly indescribable? How do you describe an experience that changed you in ways you never imagined, that exposed you to countless things you didn't even know existed in the world, and ultimately made you a better person? To summarize an experience like the one I had in the spring semester of 2011 in Granada, Spain is nearly impossible, but I'll do my best.



IES sponsored trip to Las Alpujarras

Before my study abroad I had no idea all the benefits this experience would provide me. I grew as a person and became aware of cultures completely different from my own. I learned about the world outside the U.S. and how different people's opinions, values, and customs can be in other countries. I explored new, different types of food and drinks that expanded my horizons even further. I discovered my personal strength during the good and bad times. I also came to appreciate life in ways I never had before. My study abroad helped me make friends from all over the world who I keep in touch with to this day. It also helped me truly discover my passion for language and travel and because I discovered this new love in my life, during my career search I did everything I could to find a career that would allow me to use my Spanish language skills as well as travel. I

**International Study
Scholarship**

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am proud to say that I recently accepted a position with Kimberly Clark where I will be supporting their Latin American operations and using my Spanish every day. Later in my career (but not too far down the road) I will have ample opportunities to travel the world with this company. Without my study abroad not only would I have never had this opportunity, I wouldn't have even known it was something I had a passion for! So when I tell you study abroad changes you in ways you wouldn't even imagine, believe me that it is true. The only way to really understand what I am saying is to do it yourself!



My IES welcome week group

When I applied to my study abroad program, I experienced this flurry of excitement and anxiousness knowing that I would be living in a country that has a language different than my own. Having studied Spanish for ten years prior to my departure to Granada, I thought I would be fairly capable of maintaining conversations and explaining my ideas, but as I boarded the plane, I wondered "What if it won't be enough?" These feelings are totally natural because I knew I was not just taking a step out of my comfort zone, I was jumping out of it. I was packing everything I owned into a suitcase and a backpack, hugging my parents, and hopping on a plane. I had never been outside of the US prior to this and I was flying all the way across the Atlantic and landing in Andalusia, the southern region of Spain, in a magical little city known as Granada.

Originally I had thought that Sevilla would be the best fit possible for me. I couldn't have been more wrong. Granada turned out to be the best fit possible. It is an eclectic city composed of roughly 300,000 residents and a very large student population. The University of Granada is home to roughly 60,000 students and, like many college towns, everything in the city is geared towards students. Prices on virtually everything are lower than other major cities in Spain and Europe. There are thousands of students from all over the world to get to know! It was not unusual for me to meet people from five or six different countries in one night when going out in Granada. It is the perfect place for a study abroad student to improve their Spanish language skills dramatically, while having the time of his/her life.



The view from the Torre de la Vela of the Alhambra

Spain is well known for its tapas, small portions of delicious food that are meant to be shared with others. Why does Granada stand out in the tapas department? Because in Granada, tapas are FREE! For a poor college student, this is the place to be. You can buy two or three beverages (any type) and you get two or three different tapas that generally are very filling. We had our favorite places along Calle Elvira that we frequented and my favorite was Antigualla. When looking for something that is quick, easy, and EXTREMELY filling, I would have a shwarma. They have about ten different names in Granada (shwarma, kebab, kebab, etc.) and these had to be

one of my favorite new foods. They are like Greek gyros, but made by Moroccans from northern Africa. It is a pita wrap that is filled with all kinds of meats, sauces, and condiments. I would highly recommend trying one!

Not only does Granada have a bustling and lively night life to offer, but it also has some of the richest cultural history you will find anywhere in Spain. This is largely due to the breathtaking Alhambra, the second most visited tourist attraction in Spain. This ancient castle has existed for centuries and has witnessed some of the most important historical events in European history. The conquering of the Muslims by the Christians is reflected in the changing artistic styles, and this blend of styles is truly unique; not many structures have endured this much time and history and still remain standing today.

Andalucia also hosts a variety of cathedrals, Arab baths, Arab markets, dozens of beautiful plazas, and countless other sites. A favorite of many study abroad students is the Plaza del Toros, where annually they have the iconic bull fights for which Spain is known. The rest of the year the Plaza del Toros is home to a variety of shops and restaurants that, although pricy, are well worth the extra Euros. My friends and I were lucky enough to stumble upon one of the many events hosted in the Plaza del Toros, Oktoberfest in Spain. With bratwursts, beer steins, and lively German music and dancing. It was not the traditional Spanish experience but it was still amazing.

Living in a home stay was a genuine Spanish experience and I am very thankful that I made that choice. My host mother, Mavi, is one of the most genuine people I have ever met. She provided us with great food and was always there for us. She helped me improve my



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Spanish conversation skills more than many classes I have taken. In the first two weeks I never thought I would understand her due to her thick Andalusian accent, but through diligence and her patience I was able to reach fluency in Spanish within a few months. One of my favorite experiences was when my family came to visit and we took my host mother out to dinner. No one in my family speaks any Spanish and Mavi speaks no English so I spent the whole night translating. The experience validated how far I had come and it was nice for my family to meet the woman who had been helping to make this experience so special.



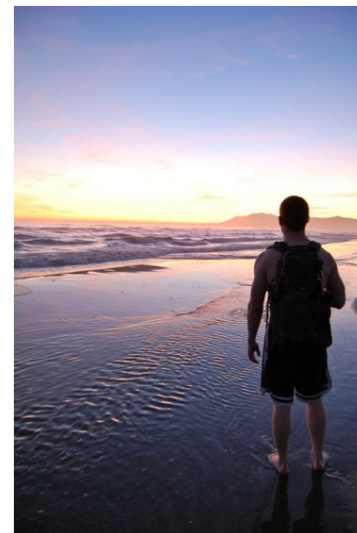
Snowboarding in the Sierra Nevadas

Study abroad in Granada has made me realize what a passion I have for traveling and learning about other cultures and languages. While in Granada I traveled to five different countries. The most amazing part about it was that at the end of every one of my trips all I wanted was to return to my new home in Granada.

When people ask what my favorite city in Europe was, I don't hesitate to tell them it was Granada. It had everything I wanted and more. Walking to class I would look up at the beautiful Sierra Nevada mountains which form a backdrop to Granada. The IES Abroad Center, where I had my classes, looked right onto the Alhambra and I appreciated the picturesque architecture. The staff at the IES Abroad center were exceptional. The director,

Javier Martinez de Velasco, is one of the most patient, knowledgeable and kindest people I have ever met. He worked so hard to make sure we got the most out of our study abroad. Since fewer tourists and study abroad students visit this city, I was able to have a much more genuine Spanish experience here. Granada is 30 minutes from one of the best snowboarding areas in Spain and it is an hour from the coast, where you will find some of the most beautiful beaches in the world. It has something for everyone and will change you in ways you would never even imagine.

The way I look at people from other countries and the world around me has forever been altered. My study abroad has showed me that you can never really know a group of people until you meet them for yourself. I know now that for the rest of my life I will be traveling to see new places and meet new people, to challenge my preconceived notions and to simply learn more about the world around me. The way I approach each and every day and my mentality about life has moved in such a positive direction as a result of my study abroad. In the words of the Granadinos, "No pasa nada" which basically translates to, "It's all good"!



Costa del Sol in Spain looking at the Strait of Gibraltar

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For those of you that do study abroad I recommend creating a blog or journal to record all the amazing experiences you have. For me it was therapeutic and it has been amazing for me looking back and remembering all the little things from my trips. For those of you considering Granada or study abroad please feel free to take a look at the blog I maintained while abroad to get an idea of everything a study abroad can offer you.

<http://briandruryinspain.blogspot.com/>

