



IE Business School, Madrid

Fall semester, 2015-16

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The Four Months Journey

My exchange location is the IE business school of Madrid, Spain, which lasts for four months from late August to late December. It is named as the best university in Madrid and come third in top business school in Europe ranked by Financial Times 13-14. It is located in central area of Madrid, where convenient facilities and transportation could be found around.

I have travelled a lot throughout the four months. With good planning, I have been able to travel in Spain, France, Switzerland, Germany, Copenhagen and Amsterdam.

September

Before I went to Spain, I had get my housing prepared. Many of the exchange students started to find a living when they arrived. For such case, they might need to pay a higher price or could not find a good location for living. I actually asked for the emails of other Asian people from the school and proposed them the plan of renting a flat together. It ends up to have one Hongkonger, one Spanish and two Singaporeans with me sharing an apartment. This also means I have known a few exchange companions before I went to Spain. For the first week in Spain (late August), the school was not started. Thus my flat mates and I have gone to eastern part of Spain by renting a car. (Renting a car could be really cheap comparing to the expensive transportations in Europe) We went for a road trip and already gave me some strong insight about the Spanish Culture.

For the following month, I have been staying in Madrid to buy all daily necessities like bed sheet and pillow, cooking utensils and food. I learn to cook myself in order to save more budget for future trips.

Besides, the highlight of this month is the series of orientation parties. There is only one official orientation, where I got to know lots of people from other European countries. If you could get along with other exchange students, they would start to invite you to different house parties. You could then know more European people to have fun with.

October and November

As school requires at least 70% of attendance, I have to manage my time properly to get myself more free time to explore the other places. What's more, mid term exams are coming and you certainly need some time to prepare for them. After that, I have

planned my trip to Germany where the October beer festival was held. I strongly suggest fall-semester-exchange students who are studying in EU should join this fun event to get in touch with the deutsche culture. As soon as I went back to Spain, I have to get my hand on with the homework and group projects. IE business school is abounded with international students, whereas we, Hong Kong students could have the chance to experience the cultural difference in terms of working. Frankly speaking, European students are sophisticated about the society, the actual economy movement that they could share us dozens of new stuff.

After the mid term period, I started to explore more about Madrid and went to different museums, for the reason that EU would give students discounts or even free entrance. I have adapted my life fully and get along with my new friends. We went party together and share life-long stories with each other.

December

December wasn't actually a happy month. Apart from my final exams, I have joined a lot of farewell parties to say good-bye to our new friends.

(*Please note that if you wanted to meet more new people and understand Europeans' culture, try not to stay too much with Asians on the first few days. It's simply my opinion and experience-say.)

General Exchange Information

1. Visa Procedure

- There is a need to apply for the visa if one would like to stay there for longer than three months. It costs a few hundred while you need to go to the Spanish Consulate General in Wan Chai, in person. It is not difficult to apply but it takes around 1-1.5 months for the application to get done. You also need to show certified documents to proof you reason to stay in Spain: Banking Statement to indicate you have enough money to support your stay, admission letter from the local school and student letter to explain the reason of staying for example. Be aware that most European school are really slow to provide your needed documents. There may also be problem happening with the consulate. One of my friends from HKU, who applied for the Spanish visa by two months in advance. But it turns out she only receive it in the early September and miss a lot of classes and orientation.

2. Orientation Activities

- Orientation Activities are arranged nicely. They divided the orientation activities into two on the first day of class. The first one is a meeting which delivers relevant information to the students, including academics, sports, entertainment and offer help to those who were not able to find a living place. The second one is actually a party held after classes, serving with open bar and “tapas” to students for free. It’s just a perfect chance for one to know each other. This is also where I found my studying and travelling companions. The party will be held till midnight. Please don’t be nervous or frightened to join these parties, as it would bring you lots of friends and fruitful enjoyment.

3. International Services and Activities

- To be honest, there are not much services provided by the school. But there are plenty of activities for student to enjoy the local culture. Apart from parties held occasionally by school and student, they offer Spanish cuisine workshop, site visiting to Spanish companies and trips to other Spanish cities. Moreover, they held regular sport trainings that exchange student could join the local team and play. I have joined their volleyball team and played some matches for them.

4. Accommodation

- Since they do not have any hall or dormitory, exchange students would need to find a place on their own. The only way to find a housing before reaching Madrid is through the internet. Most of the people, including me, get the living place from Spotahome. My place is 25 min walking distance from the school and located in a safe region, which costs 380 euro per month. I am able to rent a flat with four people from Singapore, China and Spain. (I got the emails from the IE business school in advance to get someone renting a flat with me.) Please do some research about the location before choosing the flat

5. Courses Registration

- Course Registration is lenient that almost all students could register for their desired courses. All available information and procedure are provide and done on the internet. IE business school is very famous for their business courses, as well as international relations courses. Besides, the professor are all from famous companies that are equipped with strong, valuable experiences, which is also a plus if you would like to take course like Finance.

6. Teaching and Assessment Methods

- The professors in IE are mostly working in big companies with years of experiences. I have taken a few courses in finance, information system and management. All of the professor are actually teaching MBA, who owns superior experiences in business working field, for example, partner of Mckinsey, top analyst of Goldman Sachs & Lehman Brothers and engineer of Google.
- Generally speaking, they provide a lot of real life cases that students could learn a lot from. There materials are really up-to-date so that student are able to understand the course better. Last but not least, participation are extremely important to the course. Their assessment methods are mainly exams and presentations. Class participation would actually mean a lot to the grade. The same is normally true for most European school.

7. Sports & Recreation Facilities

- As aforementioned, exchange students can join the local school's team training. However, such training is held in public stadium as IE does not have much recreation facilities. They have three buildings for academic but recreation facilities are limited to only library, canteen and a lawn. It is the biggest disappointment of all for my exchange. (Not even a gym)

8. Cost/ Expenses

- My total expenses on everything is around HKD90000. (I have travelled quite a lot). Without travelling or shopping, the spending is around 12000 HKD for each month. I have cooked a lot myself for not overspending too much. Spain has a lower pricing level among all western European countries. For instance, the products in supermarket and transportation are way cheaper than France, Switzerland and England.

9. Social Clubs and Networking Opportunities

- There are not much clubs in the school and exchange students don't really join them as most activities are held in Spanish. However, there are dozens of networking opportunities like they will held parties at home or night clubs among the students. You will be able to meet a lot of friends if you were not shy. Sometimes the school also hold some career talks or career fairs, where you could get advice from the local professionals.
- If one would really want to meet more friends, you will need to be active in knowing each other in class and the first orientation day (strongly suggest everyone to go).

10. Safety and Health

- People always claim it is so dangerous in places like Madrid, Barcelona and Paris. It also worried me when people told me there had been a lot of theft in these places. However, I found it pretty safe to go out at night or go to crowded place, as long as one pay attention to the surroundings and take good care of own property. For the week of Paris attack in November, the Spanish government has been enforcing their police security in crowded place.
- There are not much clinics or hospitals around the neighborhood. So exchange students are advised to locate the hospital first when they moved into a particular area. However, there are a lot of pharmacies where you could buy medicine. But after all, I strongly advise student to get some medicine from Hong Kong doctors before they head for exchange. As the communication barrier may affect your recovery.

13. Climate

- Madrid has the best weather for all the places I have been to. From August to December, the temperature ranges from 0 degree celcius to 28 celcius. Throughout my exchange, it seldom had cloudy or rainy days, not to mention about the good air quality comparing to Hong Kong's
But the temperature could get quite low during winter. Warm clothing is definitely needed from late November.

14. Communication

- Their main language is Spanish. Except for college students or professionals, people barely speak English. But it wasn't really a barrier when you started to learn some basic Spanish and equip yourself with google translator.

15. Cautionary Measures

- The emergency numbers are different for different incidents, unlike Hong Kong. This is a useful website where I could find most important numbers
<http://www.ailmadrid.com/en/6/564/Emergency-Numbers>

16. Other notes

- a. You can register phone cards in Spain, which would need your passport and credit card for phone contracts. It is also available in buying phone cards in advance in Hong Kong.
- b. Spanish Visa allows people to travel to other places in Europe.

c. be aware of the news of Europe and cancel trip if there were any safety concerns
 Items to bring

Debit card	Credit card (strongly advised)	Hygienic products *
Clothing for win/sum*	Phone	Blanket and bed sheet *
Notebook (MUST)	Pencil Case *	Pillow *
Sunglasses*	Hair dryer *	*can actually buy in
Charger and Adaptor *	Swimsuit *	Spain if you don't mind. Some said Europe expenses are high. But I am pretty sure that you can get better deals in Spain

If more information is needed, get my contact from SBM Exchange Team by emailing at bmugexch@ust.hk. I will be very willing to answer all your considerations.