



IE Business School (Madrid)

Exchange Report



Andrei Louis DE GUZMAN
Year 4, MARK & MGMT
Fall 2016

August 2016 – Settling Down

I arrived Madrid a week before the start of the semester to settle down and get to know the city and university that I would call home in the next 4 months.

I was lucky enough to get my housing sorted out before arriving Madrid. I settled for a semi-serviced apartment that I found through an agency called Campus Home (Smart Residences) that pairs students with others studying in the same university. While it is on the pricier side, the location was great as my flat was a 3 minute walk from campus. Also, it took care of all your basic needs, including utility bills, internet, and a helper who would come 5 times a week and clean the house and prepare 2 basic meals a day. Another plus was that my flat-mate was a full time student in IE University, who helped me adjust to a new environment and introduced me to a lot of his local friends. The overall experience was pleasant, where my only problems were that I had to stay in another apartment for a few days before September 1, my room not being cleaned on the first day I moved in, and it took me a LONG time to get the keys for the mailbox.

Of course, there are lots of other options like staying in a serviced student residence (e.g. RESA for a higher price but fully serviced and meals included), sharing a room with other IE students or renting a flat/room through sites like Idealista, Fotocasa and Spotahome. The price of renting a room or flat varies a lot and the most important thing is to **SORT OUT YOUR HOUSING BEFORE YOUR ARRIVAL!** I heard countless negative stories of how difficult it was for people who started looking for a room only when they arrived as the Spanish landlords and housing agencies take a long time before replying to emails or text messages.

One of the biggest cultural differences between Hong Kong and Spain is the pace of life. Spanish people are really lazy, or they really know how to enjoy life, depending on your point of view. First, they have this thing called “siestas”. Most businesses take a 3 hour lunch break (from 2-5 p.m.) where people take afternoon naps. Restaurants, shops and offices outside the main tourist spots would most likely be closed during this time, which really annoyed me at first.

Also, they’re nowhere as efficient as people in Hong Kong. They never reply to your emails on the same day. The postal service of the post office in Madrid is horrible and I recommend you to use postal services like DHL to receive packages from Hong Kong. I was supposed to get a package sent to me from Hong Kong in the first week of November through the post office and because of all the procedures and waiting, I was not able to get it before coming back to Hong Kong.

Another important thing to know is that most people in Madrid speak very limited English. I took a class over the summer to learn some basic Spanish before leaving Hong Kong, which helped me a lot and saved me from relying on Google Translate. It is recommended to learn some basic Spanish before coming to Madrid.

My parents came and visited me for a few days in the end of August. We took part in the annual Tomatina (Tomato festival) held in a town called Bunol on the 31st August, which was a 6 hour bus ride away from Madrid. Basically, it was a massive food fight. Before the fight, participants enjoyed unlimited sangria to

get the party atmosphere going. Then, we marched into the center of the town and engaged in a 1 hour long tomato fight. After the fight, the locals would use water hoses from their rooftops and rinse the participants on the street. It was the best festival that I've ever experienced! I highly recommend you to book your tickets and join the Tomatina if you're going to Spain during the Fall semester!

September 2016 – Start of the Semester

Before the beginning of the semester, IE University has some orientation activities exclusively for its incoming exchange students. A tapas night was held to let us meet other exchange students and try out different traditional tapas. You shouldn't miss this! To prepare us for the cultural differences and cultural shock we would experience in the next four months, they also organized a cultural workshop. After that, the university also organized a few more activities before most classes started, including city tours, paintball, pino a pino, trekking and kayaking. All these activities were free of charge and allowed us to meet new friends.

I also tried out for the University Men's Basketball Team, and was able to join their weekly practices and competitions. This was definitely the highlight of my semester abroad as playing with so many local students in the team helped me to get used to the local culture and language easier.

Most of my classes didn't start until the 3rd week of September but the Add-Drop system did cause some confusion and will make you appreciate the Add-Drop system in HKUST. After a few trips to the admissions office, I was able to sort them out and took 5 courses in the semester, namely 'Breakthrough Innovation', 'Strategic Interaction and Business', 'Generating Business Value From New Technologies', 'Retailing', 'Digital Business'. I also took a 1-credit seminar called 'Intercultural Management and Business Communication'.

In the month of September, I was able to travel with friends to Toledo, a very cultural old town an hour away from Madrid, and Munich to experience the Oktoberfest (Beer Festival). The Oktoberfest is basically a big party where people from around the world gather in Munich to drink beer, eat traditional Bavarian dishes, sing songs and hop on amusement park rides. I was also able to experience some must do things in Madrid, including watching a Real Madrid football game, a bullfight, and a traditional flamenco dance show. All these were definitely worth the money and time but bullfighting is definitely cruel and controversial, and not for the faint hearted.

October 2016 – More Travelling

I only felt like I was studying abroad, instead of taking a vacation, until October, where all my classes have begun and started to be slightly busier. The way classes are carried out in IE University is similar to that in HKUST, where each student is encouraged to participate and discuss the problems in class, except that class sizes are smaller in IE. In terms of academic workload, I would say that it is simply incomparable. I had no mid term exams and the busiest course I took only had a short exercise set and quiz on concepts every week, on top of the final exam. Most courses here also involve group project work, but the level of competition is definitely lower than what you would see in HKUST.

Since classes were less 'chur', I was able to do some more traveling. I traveled to Valencia on the first week of October to catch the end of Summer and enjoy the last bit of sunshine and beaches before

temperatures dropped. I also traveled to Lisbon, which had a unique vibe that I really enjoyed, and Segovia, a small town on the outskirts of Madrid, and home to IE University's other campus.

November 2016 - Schoolwork and Winter

My November was busy in terms of school work as it is the month where projects are due and when presentations take place. I also had a final exam during the last week of the month, and a few more in early December. So, I spent a lot of time this month working on group projects and studying for the exams. At the same time, the basketball team started to have competitions almost every week, so I did not have much time to travel.

November is also the time when temperatures drop in Spain and could drop to 2 or 3 °C at night and early morning. While it only snows in Madrid once every 10 years, Winter in Spain is very dry and takes some time to get used to.

I did manage to visit Barcelona with some friends and visited La Sagrada Familia cathedral (the best representation of Spanish efficiency ;). Barcelona has a more touristy feeling to it than Madrid, as most people there could speak some English. We also went to Girona, an ancient town near Barcelona where some Game of Thrones scenes were shot. Don't miss this place if you're a big GoT fan!

December 2016 - Final Exams and Farewell

I had 4 final exams during the first 2 weeks of December and had a few online aptitude tests to complete for my job applications, so my December was quite hectic. Luckily, exams here are generally easier compared to those in HKUST so I did pretty well.

After I was done with my semester, I had around a week to spare so I traveled to Amsterdam for a few days. I really enjoyed Amsterdam as it was a beautiful city with really easy going people. This was my first ever solo trip and I'm glad that I picked Amsterdam as my destination.

After returning to Madrid, I used the last few days to catch an Atletico Madrid football game and a Real Madrid basketball game with some friends. I left Madrid on 22nd December to spend Christmas in Hong Kong. While saying goodbye was painful, I was really happy that I was able to experience a lot of new things and made lasting friendships with people from different cultures during my exchange semester. More importantly, I have definitely grown as a person.

Part 2 - General Exchange Information

1. Visa Procedure

The process takes 2-4 weeks after submitting an application. Don't wait until the last minute and apply as soon as you get the admission letter from IE University. A list of the required documents:

- a. 2 visa application forms
- b. 2 recent color photos
- c. Passport
- d. HKID
- e. Letter explaining why you want to study in Spain
- f. Support letter from HKUST
- g. Admission letter from IE (together with Admission Packet)
- h. Proof of accommodation for whole duration of stay in Spain
- i. Financial proof such as last 3 months bank statements/bank deposits/bank book. The minimum amount needed is EUR 532.15 per month
 - If financial proof is under the name of your parents, you would need to submit documents to prove the relationship (e.g. Birth certificate)
- j. Issued return flight ticket
- k. Travel insurance policy, covering all of the Schengen countries and the whole duration of the stay. The minimum cover is HKD 300,000
 - HKUST provides a free insurance policy, do check with the exchange office and SFAO

2. Orientation Activities

The orientation activities for exchange students are held during the first two weeks of September, which includes a “Tapas Night”, a cultural workshop, city tours, paintball, pino a pino, trekking and kayaking. All these activities were free of charge and were a good opportunity to meet other exchange students. There was also a Buddy program similar to the one in HKUST. However, it was not as organised.

3. International Services & Activities

Some student clubs in IE University are quite active. You can check upcoming activities and sign up from the CampusGroups app.

4. Accommodations

Please check my August report. IE University does not offer any student dormitories so this should be your first priority when planning for your exchange semester. Living with locals or students from the same university is a great way to understand and experience the local culture.

5. Courses Registration

You will be thankful for the course registration and the Add Drop system of HKUST after dealing with IE's. Do visit the International Mobility office/email them if you encounter any problems as they proved to be very helpful.

Courses in IE don't have a fixed schedule throughout the semester. This means that some of your courses won't start until October or would end in November, and that they are not held at the exact same time each week. Some of your classes would inevitably clash but IE does allow a small portion of your classes to clash.

6. Teaching & Assessment Methods

Similar to HKUST, classes in IE involve a lot of in-class discussions while class sizes are smaller. Assignments, projects, presentations and exams would be found in most courses, and a minimum requirement of 70% attendance is required for each course. Fortunately, the workload of courses and the difficulty of exams/projects are less than those in HKUST.

7. Sports and Recreational Facilities

There are basically 0 sports facilities on campus except for the 2 table tennis tables outside the building. There are a few gyms a few minutes away from campus, including BasicFit and CR7 where IE students can obtain discounts. If you join a sports team, you can even enjoy free access to CR7. IE holds tryouts for different sports teams at the beginning of the semester. As IE is a small university, most teams lack players so go and try your luck if you are interested in a sport.

8. Costs/Expenses

I applied for a bank account in Banco Sabadell. They have a branch and a few ATM machines near the university.

Accommodation: ~3600 euros (I took the pricier semi-serviced option)

Living expenses: ~1400 euros

Transportation: ~25 euros/month (Applying for the student transportation card saves you a lot of money!)

Traveling: ~2000 euros

I spent around 60k HKD for the whole exchange semester.

9. Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities

Some student clubs in IE University are quite active and hold events that are open to all students. Depending on your interest, you can join different clubs at the beginning of the semester and keep yourself updated with events using the CampusGroups app. Also, Citylife Madrid is an organisation that holds different socialising and networking events through organised trips, clubbing nights, dance classes, etc. There are also quite a lot of club promoters in the university if you want to be active in the party scene.

10. Health and Safety

Fortunately, I never had to visit a doctor in Madrid. However, there are plenty of pharmacies in the city which should be able to take care of your basic needs.

While I was lucky enough to not lose any valuable stuff in Madrid, many of my friends were victims of pickpocketing. Always keep an eye on your valuables, especially in the tourist areas (Sol, Gran Via).

11. Food

Compared to other major European cities, eating out in Madrid is not as expensive. The Spanish have 5 meals a day and they have dinner at 10 p.m., which took me some time to get used to. Do try traditional Spanish dishes like Paella, Jamon(Spanish ham), Tapas, Tortilla de Patata, Churros, Bocado, Sangria... Spanish food is great and alcohol in Madrid is cheap!;))

12. Transportation

Students under 25 can apply for a student transportation card, which allows you to use all public transportation in Madrid for just 20 euros a month, saving you a lot of money. You can either do it online, or make an appointment in Sol/Avenida de America station. The metro system basically covers every part of the city. I also walked a lot as walking around Madrid is the best way to discover the city.

13. Climate

It got cold around November but the temperature difference between day and night is quite big at times. Bring a thick jacket and wear layers!

14. Communication

It is quite difficult to find someone who speaks good English outside the university. I highly encourage you to learn some basic Spanish before arriving Madrid. If you speak good English, Spanish is not a hard language to learn. Google Translate will also come in very handy but learning the language will make your exchange experience much more meaningful:)

15. Cautionary Measures

Make sure you settle your accommodation before arriving Madrid, and always beware of pickpocketing. Last but not least, have fun!

Part 3 - Items to bring

Essentials		Optional
Laptop	Cash	Suit (brought mine and never used it)
Mobile phone	Summer & winter clothes	Credit card
Passport & ID	Medicine	Camera
Adapters	Chargers	Souvenirs from HK