

EXCHANGE REPORT

ESADE Business School (Barcelona, Spain)



Monthly Activity Log

August 2018

I arrived at Barcelona on the morning of August 23rd alone and spent the first few days exploring the city a bit to get used to the city of Gaudi since the school orientation program started on August 28th and there is time available for me to try traveling alone in the city center of Barcelona with new friends met at Airbnb and hostels. This is the time when Barcelona citizens are still enjoying its warm sun and good weather and it will be a very good idea to go to the beach and enjoy life in late August. There is also a festival during which each district will set up and decorate their streets with handmade dolls that stand at one floor high to demonstrate their pride and sense of belonging to the neighborhood. It was one day late when I found out about the festival so I only saw some remaining dolls ready to be removed. If you want to come early and travel a bit before school officially starts, it's recommended to research more about the local culture and festivals so that when you join them you will understand more about the history behind.

September 2018

The school orientation program officially started from August 28th and would last 2 weeks long. During these two week, I attended the Elementary Level Spanish course with other exchange students. Since I have learned some Spanish before so I wanted to challenge myself, thus joining the harder level. This is the time when you can meet some new friends from other countries by attending classes for two weeks with them, so if you want to meet more friends then definitely join the language courses. The easiest level are mostly made up of Asians, and generally other exchange students from other parts of Europe had more or less known a bit about Spanish and thus tended to join higher level classes. There isn't much workload so after the class I liked to Barcelona and try some good tapas around the city. There is plenty of activities at night in Barcelona so you will never get bored. During one weekend in September, I went to watch Armin Van Buuren's show and for another weekend, I went to Madrid with my roommates for a little break. By the way, since we started finding the apartment after we arrived at Barcelona, it took us around two weeks to finally move in the apartment we liked and settled down. September 11th is also the National Day of Catalonia, so thousands and thousands of citizens would go on the street with their classical yellow red flag while

singing in Catalan, this is the first time I witnessed how much love Barcelona people have towards their land.

October 2018

After the orientation program the school started and I really felt the difference in teaching style between that I experienced in UST and here. Classes here are all three hours long with a small break in between and there is only one class per week and ten classes per semester, which means if you failed to come to class once, then you will miss out a great amount of content. Although you can always study by yourself but there is attendance rule that requires minimum attendance of 80%, so it is better to pay more attention when planning your traveling. Also classes here are more focused on in-class discussion and students are very welcomed to express their opinions in class. This is a good way to verify what you have learned and learn from others' point of view for a clearer understanding. Therefore, don't fear to speak up. In "Never too many movies" class, the professor suggested us to go to Sitges to join the movie festival, although it was in Spanish but there were many other activities like Zombie run and wine tasting, so it's pretty recommended. During mid-Oct, we exchange had a one week midterm break since we didn't need to take midterm exams so I planned my travel and went to Italy, Croatia, Montenegro and Germany and Switzerland . It is my first long travel and I also went to find my friends to see how they were doing. I was planning to do scuba diving in Malta but the flight ticket wasn't too affordable and I missed the chance. For those who want to dive, October might be the last month to do it since the water will start to get cold in November so plan your dive ahead.

November 2018

This is the month when school would come to the end so I spent plenty of time preparing presentations, quizzes and the final exams. But every weekend I still found time to travel in Barcelona and to Southern France and Switzerland. I went to CERN in Geneva to visit normally what physics major students will go to, but I was very intrigued by the facilities built by those genius and found out about what it was really like. During my spare time I also spent time planning my next big travel in December and did some job search which is very important. At the end of the month, I took 4 finals and did a couple of presentations which were not too hard to prepare compared to the ones in UST. Afterwards, It was time to officially travel around Europe.

December 2018

I finished all my exams on November 30th and stayed for another week in Barcelona since I had friends coming to visit me and showed them around this lovely city. December is also the beginning of Christmas celebration and many decorations started to pop up around the district and fill up the street. There was also a big Christmas market downtown that would last till the end of the year. I left Barcelona on Dec 8th and went to London to visit my friends. Afterwards, I travelled to Iceland, Sweden, Berlin, Turkey, Budapest, Paris, Belgium and finally Amsterdam. I did a short solo trip in Amsterdam and really didn't want to say goodbye to my travel. But on New Year Eve, I flew back to Barcelona to celebrate New Year with my friends and it was also time to clean our stuff and move out from the apartment. I stayed in Barcelona until January 4th and went back to Hong Kong.

General Exchange Information

Visa Procedures

I am a Taiwan passport holder. To apply for a visa, I simply went to the Spain Embassy in Hong Kong and applied like other Hong Kong friends. Pay attention to the required documents list sent out by the embassy since you don't want to go the office multiple times.

Orientation Activities

The University doesn't have too many orientation activities, yet the most notable one might be the Spanish Intensive courses during the first two weeks. So if you want to meet more new friends, just be proactive and approach them during and after the class.

International Services & Activities

ESADE business school is a pretty small and compact campus, and it doesn't have too much societies like those of UST. Most students come to school and leave right after they are done with their classes since there wasn't much to do on campus. Yet ESADE does have a pretty new and clean gym with resourceful facilities. (The membership fee is around 25 Euro per month)

Courses

I am a RMBI major student and most the courses offered at ESADE were not too relevant to my course curriculum. However, I did take some interesting common course and learned a lot from them. The courses I took are:

- Applied Portfolio Management,
- Anthropology – In search if Principal for a Life Philosophy Lesson: From Art, History and Economics,
- Never too Many Movies,
- CMP: Strategy and Indicators
- Spanish: Elementary

The courses I enjoyed the most is “Never too many movies” as the professor Alex knows a lot about Spanish movies and its history behind, I learned a lot about Spanish movies culture by attending his lecture. He also teaches 2 other courses for exchange students, if you have time I really recommend you to take his classes. Applied Portfolio Management is transferrable which is comparable to FINA 3103 in HKUST but the one in ESADE feels more like an introductory course to finance as it also touches on general concepts of bonds, stocks and financial analysis. I took another Spanish course during the semester to continue to practice my Spanish otherwise I am sure I will forget all the materials I learned during the orientation week.

Accommodations

I started finding accommodation online before landing in Barcelona, but didn't end up finding the right one we like. So me and roommates stayed in Airbnb for the first two weeks until we finally settled down after visiting 4 to 5 properties. The apartment we lived in at the end was referred by other exchange students who rented other apartment from the same landlord, and luckily it seemed to be the perfect fit for 5 people to stay in. There are a bunch of websites to look for rentals but the one I recommended is called Uniplaces. (<https://www.uniplaces.com/>) The user interface is clean and easy to understand while the room and facilities seem to be more decent. But do mind that there is a commission that you need to pay to the website when you make your decision to book the apartment.

Finance & Banking

I didn't open a local bank account in Spain due to its complicated requirement. Many other exchange student from Asia that stay here only for half a year didn't open a bank account neither. Therefore, I made sure I brought enough cash to at least make me live for a month without trouble and afterwards I mostly used credit card and Overseas ATM withdraw to cover my daily needs in Barcelona.

Climate

The weather in Barcelona is one of the best in Europe since everyday is mostly a sunny day with blue sky above. In September and October there are still plenty of people going to the beach and enjoy the sunshine. From November temperature will start to drop to 15 to 20 degree but it is still very warm compared to other parts of Europe.

Health & Safety

Be aware to watch out for pickpocket. Barcelona is rife with theft especially in the downtown area like El Raval and Placa Catalunya. A lot of my friends nearby got stolen of their phones, wallet and even passports so please always be alert to the surroundings. Thieves can also be those seemingly harmless girls, so be careful!

Food

We basically cook by ourselves everyday for dinner since we want some Asian food and it also saves us money. In the city you can find many decent restaurants for a good price as Spain is not too expensive in terms of dining compared to France, UK and northern Europe. Some typical Spanish food that you must try are tapas, paella, churros, sangria. During the weekend, I like trying out different tapas restaurant around the city, it was one of the best time you can have.

Sports & Recreation Facilities

I signed up for the gym membership on campus, which requires you to pay up front for a whole semester (four month) with a student discount. Since this is a gym run by outside company, it is very well maintained with free courses to attend at specific time laid out by the gym center. I remembered the fee for one semester was around 130 Euros including the locker key rental. Highly recommended for gym enthusiasts since it was very newly built and extremely clean with showering facilities. There is no basketball court or any other sport facilities on campus which is pretty sad.

Communication

I used Vodafone SIM card for the whole exchange that I bought in the airport when first landing in Barcelona. It is fast and very easily to use. After signing up on their website (which is in Spanish so it's quite troublesome at first), I can go to Vodafone website and check my data usage and consumption. It is also available to top up using credit card on the website while I was traveling or you can also go to those convenience store to add value.

Teaching & Assessment Methods

Most professors would like to engage students in discussion and encourage them to speak up, to which Asian students might find quite uncomfortable. However, as time goes by, I started to appreciate this kind of teaching style as I found that learning from my classmates is just as important as learning from professors. Sometimes, the opinions from my classmates really made think more deeply about the course content.

Transportation

Barcelona is a travelers friendly city. It is easily accessible by its convenient public transport, including metro, renfe and buses. Since I live in downtown Barcelona and ESADE campus is in suburb area called Sant Cugat, every day I needed to take metro for 3 stations, changed for train for another 20 mins, and finally walk for another 20 mins to school. The whole journey takes about 1 hour and 10 minutes. While the first class starts at 8 am and it's advisable to wake up early enough to not to be late.

Items to Bring

1. Passport and Visa
2. Bank card/ Debit Card/ Credit Card
3. ESADE required documents
4. Handbag or a hand carry suitcase for short travel
5. Camera
6. Chargers/Extension cord
7. Medicine

Useful Links and Contacts

<https://erasmusbarcelona.com/> Find out more about the local trips and activities organized for exchange students!

<https://www.omio.com/> Great searching website for trains, flights and buses

<https://www.skyscanner.net/> Ultimate trip planning tool