

Exchange Report

IE Business School, Madrid



Gayatri Mathur
BBA Economics & Marketing, Year 3
2018 Fall Semester

Part I: Monthly Activity Log

September

I decided to arrive in Madrid a few days before the semester began so I could explore the city a little before classes started. All my classes started in September as I was taking five 6-ECTS courses. This was the month where I met a lot of other exchange students and almost every week we planned some different activities. I also visited almost all the tourist attractions of Madrid within the first few weeks.



I also travelled to the south of Spain to Granada and Seville. I really liked Granada, and it is in my opinion one of the most unique cities in Spain and the Alhambra is a must visit (buy your tickets in advance though as they sell out fast!). I also went to Toledo and Segovia which are two cities just 1 hour away from Madrid by bus. Segovia is also where IE has its second campus. Towards the end of the month I went to Lisbon, Portugal which I think was one of my favorite cities that I visited. The people, the food, the architecture, I loved all of it! The egg tarts at Pastéis de Belém are definitely worth the long queues.

October

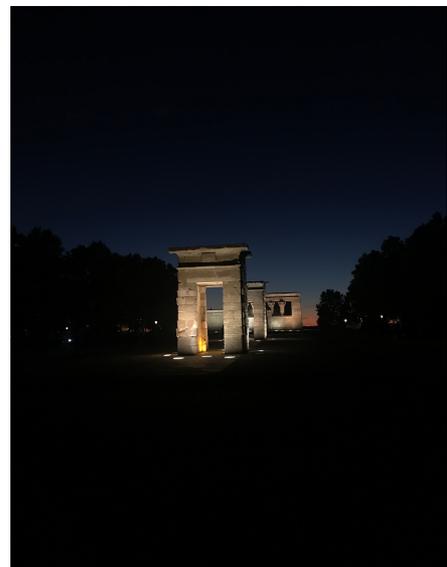


By October everything school-wise had settled into a kind of routine and some of my courses had midterms and presentations. But honestly the exams were not as difficult and stressful as they are in HKUST. This month I finally went to Barcelona for a long weekend. Unfortunately, almost all the days that I was there it rained and the weather was not the best but, on my last day the sun came out and made for a perfect beach day!

I also went to Brussels and Amsterdam towards the end of the month. It was cheaper to fly to Brussels and take a bus to Amsterdam than to directly fly to Amsterdam, so I took this opportunity to explore two cities instead of just one. I think almost all my meals in Brussels consisted of some form of waffles. Amsterdam was another one of my favorite cities. The Stroop waffles and the canals were just some of the highlights for me. Try to go to the Foodhallen which is located in De Hallen, a cultural complex in a converted industrial building. The food and atmosphere there was great.

November

In November I did not travel outside of Madrid as this was my most intense month at school. I had a lot of presentations, group projects and also one final. I dedicated a lot of my time getting school work done and genuinely enjoyed all my classes. Also by this time the weather in Madrid had cooled down considerably.



One of my friends that studies in the UK came to visit me this month so I spent a few days being a tourist again and got to know Madrid a lot better. Apart from that I spent a lot of time meeting up with all the other friends that I made in Madrid and we tried to explore more of what the city had to offer.

December

Unfortunately, I had classes till the last few days of the semester which is mid-December but that did not stop me from travelling. I had huge gaps between my classes in the last two weeks so, I was able to travel to Italy during the days in-between. I went to Rome, Venice and Milan. I really liked the ancient and old feeling of Rome, Venice was pretty in a postcard perfect kind of way and Milan was in my opinion pretty similar to Madrid. My entire trip to Italy was just filled with pizza, pasta, gelato and tiramisu.



After Italy I went back to Madrid for two days to finish my classes as I had two presentations and two finals left. And after the end of the semester I did my last trip to Prague, Vienna and Budapest. The three cities were so pretty and very different from the other European cities I'd been to, especially Budapest. They were really cold compared to Madrid and it even snowed in Prague while I was there. I went to a LOT of Christmas markets on this trip and spent Christmas in Budapest. The Christmas markets and mulled wine are probably the best part about being in Europe during Christmas time! Also in Budapest make sure to go to the thermal baths. It was an amazing experience, being in a 28 degree outdoor pool in 2 degree weather!

I returned to Madrid for one last day after this trip as my flight back home was from there. The end of exchange was bitter-sweet. And even though I loved all the traveling I did, what truly made my exchange semester special was the people I met.

Part II: General Exchange Information

1) Visa Procedures

I would suggest starting your visa application process as soon as you can. You need to make an appointment and the slots get filled very fast. The visa itself takes around 3-4 weeks to get processed. But make sure you have all the necessary documents. Don't forget to photocopy your entire passport (yes, they want a photocopy of each and every page in your passport). Also make sure the bank account statement you use shows at least a balance of 20,000HKD (that is basically €537.84 per month for 4 months). These are the documents you need for the visa:

- Filled visa form
- Two passport photos
- Photocopy of passport
- Photocopy of Hong Kong ID
- Letter explaining why you want to study in Spain
- Support letter (HKUST exchange office provides this)
- Admission letter (IE sends this to HKUST exchange office)
- Accommodation Proof
- Financial proof
- Roundtrip flight bookings
- Medical insurance

2) Orientation Activities

IE's orientation activities are not very extensive but you can join their "Amigo Network" which is essentially their Buddy Program. The International Mobility office also arranges a Tapas night at the beginning of the semester, which is good opportunity to meet your amigo and other exchange students.

3) International Services & Activities

IE's International Mobility office is great and the people are extremely helpful. Don't hesitate to ask them any questions you may have. They're the people to go to with questions about courses or even housing problems.

4) Accommodations

I rented an apartment with two other HKUST students that also went to IE. We got the apartment through the website Spotahome. There are also student residences that you can opt for that are super convenient but the spots fill in very quickly so act fast.

5) Courses Registration

IE's course registration is a little more complicated than HKUST's but they send you detailed instructions about how to go about it before the enrolment starts. You're allowed to make 6 changes to your courses in total, 3 during the enrolment period and 3 once the semester starts.

I took 5 courses: Product and Brand Management, Consumer Insights and Marketing Strategy, Business Intelligence for Start-ups, Entrepreneurial Mind Set and Español 0.1.

6) Teaching & Assessment Methods

The teaching at IE is a little different from HKUST, the class sizes are smaller and most classes are a lot more interactive. Professors focus more on class discussions, presentations and group work than exams. They do have a 70% attendance policy, but you will realise that it isn't as bad as it sounds and if you plan your schedule well it is not a problem.

7) Sports & Recreation Facilities

IE has no sports facilities but you can buy a gym membership at any gym or even use some of the public pools. There is a gym right next to the undergraduate building so it's super convenient but it is not the cheapest option. Apart from that, if you play any sport try joining the IE Sports clubs or teams as most of them are happy to take in exchange students.

8) Finance & Banking (including currency / expenses)

Opening a bank account at Sabadell Bank is pretty easy as they do it for you without a NIE Card (Spanish identification card which we exchange students don't get/need). But I think there have been some changes in policies that pose some complications for Hong Kong passport holders to open an account, so probably do some research about that first. Or if you have a card that you can use internationally, you don't even need a bank account.

9) Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities

There are a lot of clubs in IE and you can join as many as you want. They have a website where you can see a list of clubs, join them and also keep up with all the events that they organise.

10) Health & Safety

Even though Madrid is not as bad as some other European countries, do be careful with your belongings. I unfortunately had a friend who got pickpocketed and lost her wallet with all her cards and keys. The police weren't very helpful and she had to pay a huge amount of money to get a new set of house keys.

11) Food

The Spanish cuisine is one of my favourite cuisines and even though eating out can be a bit expensive, it is totally worth it. Do eat a lot of Tapas! Two places with very cheap Tapas are 100 Montaditos, that has branches all over Madrid, and El Tigre, where for €5 you get a huge drink and a plate full of various tapas.

IE only has one cafeteria in its main undergraduate building but there are a lot of restaurants in the surrounding area. One of the places my friends and I frequented is called La Maragata, a really small place where you can get a whole baguette with tomato, jamon and cheese for just €2. It's a great quick lunch, do try it!

12) Transportation

Madrid's public transportation system is pretty efficient and reliable. You can get the Youth Transportation card which for €20 a month gives you unlimited use of both metro and buses. You need to make an appointment for that so do it as soon as you can. Ubers are also quite reasonably priced.

13) Climate

September was probably the hottest month in the semester with temperatures in the late afternoons hovering around 35 degrees, so beware! But Madrid does get pretty cold in November and December, staying below 10 degrees, so do bring your winter clothes too.

14) Communication

Knowing some basic Spanish will definitely go a long way. Very few people in Spain speak English so I would suggest that you either learn a bit of Spanish by yourself or take a Spanish course at IE.

15) Cautionary measures

Be careful with your housing decision as in my experience Spanish landlords can be quite notorious. We had quite a lot of problems with our landlord and even Spotahome the company we rented from was not able to help us too much. And beware of all the pickpockets and other scams that European countries are known for, especially when you're in the more touristy areas.

Part III: Items to Bring

- Passport & IDs
- Money/ Credit Cards
- Phone and Laptop
- Chargers
- Adapters
- Power bank
- Passport & IDs
- Smaller Luggage/ Bag for Travelling
- Camera
- Spanish apps
- Toiletries
- Winter and summer clothes

Part IV: Useful Links and Contacts

Spanish Visa:

<http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Consulados/HONGKONG/en/InformacionParaExtranjeros/Documents/Visa%20PDF/Student%20Visa.pdf>

IE Housing:

<https://www.ie.edu/university/resources/student-services/living-in-madrid/>

Youth Transportation Card (the site is only available in Spanish so either use google translate or ask some for help):

<https://tarjetatransportepublico.crtm.es/CRTM-ABONOS/entrada.aspx>

CityLife Madrid (Arrange a lot of activities and trips and can help you with a lot of things): <https://www.citylifemadrid.com>

BeMadrid (An “exchange student community”, like CityLife):

<https://bemadrid.com>