

# Spring 2020

## Exchange Report

### ESADE Business School



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# Monthly Activity Log

## JANUARY

I arrived in Barcelona on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2 days before the first day of the semester. Just like in UST, January in ESADE is the winter semester in which students can take intensive courses (3-5 hours every day for 2 weeks). I took Español Intensivo and Implementing Strategy in the first and second half of January respectively. On January 8<sup>th</sup>, ESADE held an orientation programme for us, and it was the best opportunity to meet other exchange students. There were talks and a networking session, followed by the first Spanish class from 12-5pm. Although I have learnt Spanish before, I enrolled in the beginner level because I forgot most of what I learnt. My class consisted of Asians only, and it required a lot of interaction with the teacher and other classmates, so it was quite fun!



*Asian potluck lunch after Spanish class*

I had classes every day in January, and luckily my friends had a similar schedule, so we did sightseeing around Barcelona on weekends. We spent the first weekend walking around the iconic Plaça de Catalunya and La Rambla. We went on a day trip to Girona the following weekend. My parents came to visit me for Chinese New Year, and we visited many tourist attractions together with my friends including Casa Batlló, Casa Mila, La Sagrada Familia, Parc Güell etc.



*Day trip to Girona*



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*Dinner after visiting Casa Mila*



*Parc Güell*



*A close-up shot of the intricate details of La Sagrada Familia*



## FEBRUARY

Regular classes started in February and I only had classes from Wednesdays to Fridays. I took four courses, and I will elaborate on them later on. Each class was a minimum of three hours in ESADE, so if you have two or three consecutive classes in a day it would be a bit tiring. Yet, I think my schedule was quite enjoyable and relaxing. Each weekend, we went on day trips, and one of them was even an overseas trip.

On the first weekend, we went on a day trip to Tarragona to see its ancient Rome archaeological sites. Then, we joined a 3-day trip to go skiing in Andorra, which is a country between Spain and France, the following weekend. We had long bus rides and our data cards were not supported there so we could only rely on the Wifi in the hotel and ski resort. I didn't know how to ski so it was a scary but interesting experience overall. We joined another day trip the following Sunday to hike at a nature reserve called Congost de Mont-rebei. We also hosted a potluck dinner party at our apartment. Most of my friends live alone in shared apartments, but I rented an entire apartment with another friend so we could invite friends over. On the last week of February, we went to Switzerland for 5 days and it was so much fun. I was able to see the scenery of snowy mountains and experience the festivities of a carnival called Fasnacht2020.



*Congost de Mont-rebei*



*Tarragona Amphitheatre*



*Potluck dinner party*



*Grindelwald First in Switzerland*

## MARCH

In March, my good friend who studies in the UK came to Barcelona to visit me for a few days. I went on a day trip to a Costa Brava town called Lloret de Mar with her. We also visited the Bunkers del Carmel to admire the panoramic views of Barcelona. The following Sunday, we went on a day trip to Sitges and enjoyed the Mediterranean beach views. Sitges is also famous for its amazing annual carnival where people can

watch parades and party. Although we missed the Sitges Carnival 2020 because we were in Switzerland, I was glad that I got to witness the exciting atmosphere of another European carnival there.



*Lloret de Mar*



*Sitges*

From March 9<sup>th</sup> onwards, the Covid-19 situation worsened and we had to go back to Hong Kong. We had a Germany and Iceland trip planned for the long break in March, but we had to cancel it. We spent the last few days in Barcelona visiting incredible restaurants. We faced a lot of difficulties and uncertainties when purchasing flight tickets because of sudden flight cancellations and entry restrictions of different countries. We managed to arrive in Hong Kong on March 19<sup>th</sup> and spent two weeks in quarantine. It was a huge pity that the exchange had to be cut short, but I am relieved that everyone is safe and healthy.

## General Exchange Information

### **Visa Procedure**

The preparation for visa application is tedious, as you need to get hold of many supporting documents. You should apply for the short-term study visa. Make sure you have all your documents ready and have the appointment booked beforehand. You can check the status of your visa on a website after you submitted the application at the office and collect it when it is ready. I got my visa in around 2 to 3 weeks, but you should do it asap. I followed the advice in previous exchange reports to photocopy every page of the passport, including the blank pages. I was not sure if it was necessary, but you may want to do it just in case.

## **Orientation Activities**

There is a student organization called CIEE in ESADE. We were all invited to join a WhatsApp group in late November. CIEE members are the admins of the group and they welcome and answer our questions. They also organized activities for us to join, including welcome party, pub crawl, hike to Monsterrat, trip to Costa Brava etc. We were each assigned an ESADE buddy as well. ESADE also offered ice breaking sessions, introduction to ESADE and safety sessions in the first week.

## **International Services & Activities**

You could join activities organized by the International Students Association of ESADE. There is also a website called Erasmus Barcelona. They organize trips and parties for exchange students in Barcelona so it is quite trustworthy. I joined the Andorra ski trip through Erasmus and it was very well organized. If you don't know where to go for the weekend, you could always go on a day trip!

## **Accommodations**

The campus is located in Sant Cugat, which is a town in the outskirts of Barcelona. Although the travelling time from Barcelona to Sant Cugat generally takes 1 hour, I still strongly recommend you stay in Barcelona because all the famous tourist attractions and restaurants are in the city, and it is relatively cheaper. In the WhatsApp group I mentioned about earlier, I communicated with another Hong Kong girl who was also looking for flatmates, so we eventually rented an apartment in the Garcia neighborhood together. It is a comfortable and convenient residential area. We rented it on Uniplaces, but I found it more expensive than other agency websites. My other friends rented a single room in shared apartments, where they lived with other tenants. The disadvantage of this option is that you may feel more anxious on the first day when you arrive, but it is still a popular choice among exchange students.

## **Course Registration**

Course registration was simple. An excel spreadsheet containing the information of all the available courses was sent to us some time prior to the actual registration date. Then we filled in a survey to add and rank 10 courses we wanted to take, and any other additional notes we wanted ESADE to know. For example, you could specify which courses are a must for you, or how many credits you wish to take. After some time, you can check which courses you have got into, and there will be another chance for you to add and drop courses. You could also ask the exchange coordinators to help you after you arrive at ESADE if you have any problems with the courses.

I took a total of 6 courses: Español Intensivo, Implementing Strategy, Art & Culture in Spain & Catalonia, Never Too Many Movies, Communication & Leadership and Project Management. Actually I didn't need two humanities courses and I wanted to do more business courses such as Entrepreneurship, but there was a time clash with another business course. But I am glad I still took the extra humanities art & culture course because I really enjoyed it.

### **Teaching & Assessment Methods**

80% attendance is required for most courses in ESADE, which means you could only skip 2 classes. Assessment methods are similar to those of UST, including projects, assignment, class participation, exam etc. I really enjoyed Professor Alex Fernández de Castro's art and movie classes. He has an extensive knowledge of art, culture and history and I really learnt a lot of interesting information about Spain and Catalonia from his courses.

### **Sports & Recreational Facilities**

ESADE has a gym with a membership fee of 19 euros per month (a discounted price only for ESADE students). You could also join sports teams.

### **Finance and Banking**

The apartment costed 1600 euros per month, so I paid 800 euros per month. As I mentioned before, this price is quite expensive as the average rent is around 400-500 euros per month. I did not open a bank account, as I didn't think it was necessary to go through all the trouble, especially when I am a non-EU citizen. I activated overseas withdrawal for my HSBC account and brought a large amount of cash. I did not have to withdraw money from the ATMs and I occasionally used credit card for larger payment amounts.

### **Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities**

ESADE has a small campus so there were not booths set up to promote their social clubs. You could receive news about club activities and networking opportunities through CIEE and ESADE emails.

### **Health & Safety**

I bought travel insurance that covers health-related issues and the cost of lost items. I did not visit a doctor or a hospital. As for safety, pickpocketing is a serious issue in Barcelona. It is important to stay alert at all times. One of the orientation talks was about how to prevent pickpocketing and I recommend you to attend it. Be aware of



your belongings at all times and at any place. It is not even safe to put your bag on the chair next to you in a fast food restaurant. However, as long as you are careful, you do not need to worry too much.

### **Food**

There is a huge variety of affordable food in Barcelona. I recommend you to try all the classic Spanish food, such as tapas, paella, sangria and churros. If you are enrolled in Professor Alex's art and culture course, he will give you his personal recommendations of restaurants and bars and it is a good guide to follow. There is also a great deal of Asian food if you are tired of Spanish cuisine. You could also buy groceries from supermarkets such as Mercadona, Dia, Bonpreu etc. to cook for yourself. Apart from supermarket chains, there are also small grocery stores around the neighbourhood. They are more like convenience stores and the products are relatively more expensive than that in supermarket chains.

### **Transportation**

I purchased a T-Jove ticket for 3 months of unlimited rides for 80 euros. It was very useful and economical as we needed to commute to school frequently. The metro system in Barcelona may seem complicated, but it is quite similar to any train system in a metropolitan city. You could also get around Barcelona by bus, which is just as convenient as taking metro. Google Maps is very useful in determining the best routes. To travel to ESADE from Barcelona, you would need to take the FGC to the Sant Cugat station. Then you could either walk 20 minutes or take a bus to the campus. The entire journey takes around 1 hour so plan your time wisely. To get to the airport, the easiest option is to take the blue Aerobus at Plaça de Catalunya. You could pay the driver cash or purchase the ticket with credit card at the ticket machines. For longer distance travelling, such as to other towns in Catalonia like Girona or Tarragona, you would take the Renfe.

### **Climate**

I personally prefer winter so I enjoyed the cold weather in January in Barcelona. It could get quite dry, so you may want to use more lotion. In February and March, it is chilly rather than cold.

### **Communication**

I purchased a few WeChat SIM cards in Hong Kong for around 100 HKD each. Each card offers local calls and 3 GB of data for 28 days for 33 European countries. You could also go to local telecommunication providers such as Orange and Vodafone to purchase their data plans and top up every month.



## **Cautionary Measures**

Pay attention to your surroundings and always be alert. Store your passport, money and credit cards safely in your apartment or bring them with you everywhere if you live in shared apartments.

## **Items to bring**

- ☒ Identity card/Passport
- ☒ Credit card/Cash
- ☒ Clothes
- ☒ Laptop
- ☒ Charger/Adaptor
- ☒ Medicine

## **Useful Links and Contacts**

- Visa application:  
<http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Consulados/HONGKONG/en/InformacionParaExtranjeros/Documents/Visa%20PDF/Student%20Visa.pdf>
- Renting an entire apartment:
  - <https://www.uniplaces.com>
  - <http://www.barcelona-student-housing.com/>
- Shared apartments: <https://www.spotahome.com>
- Aerobus: <https://www.aerobusbcn.com/>
- Renfe: <https://www.renfe.com/>
- Erasmus: <https://erasmusbarcelona.com/trips/>