

### Spain Study Abroad Experience

For one month this summer, I was able to participate in the College of Education study abroad program in Alcala de Henares, Spain. We arrived the morning of May 9<sup>th</sup> after a very tiring overnight flight into Madrid, but I was very excited to explore the city I would be calling home for the next month. One of my favorite things about this entire trip was living with my host family and becoming a part of their lives. Because of them, I never felt like an outsider and I never felt overly homesick. My host mother made me practice using my Spanish whenever I was in the house, and even though I am not a perfect Spanish-speaker (and made a lot of mistakes) the family was always very encouraging and did their best to help me speak more fluently. My host family also played a big part in me learning about Spanish culture. One of the strangest things to adjust to was eating dinner at eight or nine o'clock at night, and that all of our meals were served family-style. My host mom would put all of the food in the middle of the table, and most of the time we all just ate off of the plates the food was served on.

The other biggest benefit I received from this trip was being able to spend so much time in the classrooms in Spain. As part of our program, we visited both a public school and a private school in order to observe and assist the teachers and learn new practices to bring back into our own classrooms in the U.S. In total, we spent most of the day for three weeks of our trip within the schools, so we were able to observe quite a lot. We were treated just like their own teachers, and they even asked us to prepare and present a lesson about American culture to the students during our time there. Even though I am an Elementary Education major, they had us all observing all different levels of students from kindergarten through the final years of high

school. The most noticeable difference between our school system and theirs was that they have their students start kindergarten at 3 years old, and within the bilingual schools they start learning English that young as well. It really benefitted the students because by the time they were in middle school they were almost completely fluent English speakers.

Lastly, of course being in Spain allowed me to visit some really cool places. I was able to see Madrid, Toledo, Segovia, Barcelona, and Seville during my time there. Every place we went to had several historical buildings like castles or cathedrals, and it was very special to be able to dive into and experience so much Spanish history. One of my favorite places to visit was the Cathedral of Seville, because we were able to climb 35 flights of stairs to the top of the La Giralda tower and view the entire city. Plus, this cathedral also housed the actual tomb of Christopher Columbus, which was super awesome! Another favorite place of mine was visiting La Sagrada Familia, the unfinished cathedral in Barcelona designed by Antoni Gaudi over 100 years ago. This cathedral has been under construction for almost 135 years and is still not completed! I really loved it there because of the stained glass windows coloring the entire inside, the architectural detail on the outside, and knowing I got to witness history in the making. I learned about this cathedral from my Spanish classes in high school, so I was absolutely blown away to see it in person.

Overall, I am so grateful I was able to take this trip to learn and experience all that Spain had to offer. This country, my host family, and these memories will forever hold a special place in my heart, and I cannot wait until the day I am able to return again. Going abroad was one of the best decisions I have made since starting my journey at ISU, and I strongly encourage everyone who gets this opportunity to take it!