

EXCHANGE BARCELONA

General

I studied the first semester of 2016/2017 in the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. The university is located in Cerdanyola del Vallès, a municipality close to the city Barcelona. In this report I share my exchange experiences and I hope to offer some valuable tips to the next students going here.

Preparations

The biggest thing exchange students have to arrange, is finding an accommodation. I decided to sleep at the university campus, Vila Universitària. The distance to the university is ten minutes walking, so you actually don't live in the city Barcelona. It is quite easy to get a room, since exchange students get priority. I would recommend though to arrange it as soon as possible, as the best rooms might be taken if you sign up too late. There are several different options, but all the houses are for one to five students. In almost all the flats, there are two persons sleeping per room and every flat has a living room, bathroom and kitchen. In the one, three and five person houses, it is also possible to get a single room. I had a four person house, so I slept with another guy in the same room. On beforehand, I wasn't excited about this, but it turned out to be not as bad as I thought. For me, the more flatmates the better, so if you decide to sleep at the campus and share the same opinion, book a five person single room as soon as possible. Later on more about life at the campus.

Other preparations are booking the flight and bringing the right papers, for example the Learning Agreement and the acceptance letter. After arriving at the airport, you have to get to your accommodation. I took a taxi, as I did not know how the public transport in Barcelona works. In the Netherlands there is 9292, so I didn't know at first that Google Maps works exactly the same. I would recommend to take public transport, it is actually quite easy and will save you fifty euros.

I also had to do some formal business, like arranging the Erasmus+ Grant, changing my study financing situation and ending some subscriptions in the Netherlands. What I did, this is not necessary though, is making a to-do list, including important deadlines. All the information you get is not really structured, as you get some by email, some on the website of the UAB and some on the Erasmus website (for example the tips from the exchange reports). The to-do list helped not having the feeling I was about to forget important preparations. Other unnecessary preparations can be knowing how to cook a few meals and learning Spanish. The last important preparation I should mention is signing up on time for the courses.

Arrival

There are quite a few things you have to do upon arrival. The first day is mostly arranging your arrival at the campus office, meeting your flatmates and other people at the campus, basic groceries, unpacking and exploring the neighbourhood. Later on, you have to sign up at the university's International Welcome Point, the office of your faculty and a Spanish bank. The Spanish Bank account is needed to be registered at the campus. If you want to use internet, the best thing to do is buying a Spanish prepaid SIM card. This might be helpful, for if you are lost or things like that. You also have to buy a public transport card. Here, the best

thing you can do is buying a 3 month card which gives you unlimited access to all types of public transport. It's called T-Jove and you should buy it for two zones, as the university is located outside Barcelona.

The first two weeks, it is important to ask the teachers of your courses about the exam possibilities. When the semester ends in Barcelona, school has already started in the Netherlands. This is why the Erasmus University wants you to finish the courses before Christmas or to take the exams in the Netherlands. You have to ask the teachers if one of these options is possible in their course, because if this is not the case, you have to switch to another course. For me, this was quite a hassle, since the UAB changed their policy at the beginning of the schoolyear. The direction of the school decided to not grant these options any more for exchange students. For future students it could be helpful to check on beforehand the possibilities, it might not be possible to finish the courses the way the EUR wants. I went back to Barcelona after the Christmas holidays to take my exams. Even though this was forced, I would maybe have come back anyway. As almost all your (international) friends probably are in Barcelona in January, it would feel weird to leave in December and never come back. After the exams, most of the people there have holidays, so there will be a lot of parties, trips and free time until February.

Daily life

The first thing I would like to mention about the culture, is the Spanish mentality. In general, they are slower and lazier in everything and don't know English well. Even most of the people who work at the campus can't speak proper English, except for the people at the office. If you have to arrange something, like visiting the bank or the faculty office, take into account that this might take more time than you are used to. For example, I missed a class one time because of the low tempo at the bank.

It takes 35 minutes to go by train to Plaça de Catalunya, the main public transport place of Barcelona in the city centre. So to get somewhere in Barcelona, you might spend on average one hour all together to get there. Because of this long duration, your life can be pretty limited to the campus and probably most of your friends are also living here. However, this doesn't have to be a bad thing, because you will sort of live in a community with all the other international students. There is this adult guy who organises trips, parties and other activities for students at the campus. His name is Angel Gonzalez and I would recommend joining his Facebook group. If there is an activity, trip or party you are interested in, he will post all the information and you will meet a lot of other students here. Eventually, everybody attending his events probably knows almost all of the other students, which makes the dorm life a social community. For me, this was one of the main advantages of living at the campus, since you probably won't have this living in the city. Another advantage of following him, is that he can get you in nightclubs for free and you don't have to wait in the queue. The trips and nightlife will be discussed later on.

In and around the campus, there is actually everything you need for facilities. There is a small shop, a bar which also sells food, a restaurant, a swimming pool, a football pitch with fake grass, table tennis tables, a basketball field, a library, a laundry place, a shop where you can print and more. The bar is especially the first weeks the place to be in the evenings. When you arrive in September, the swimming pool is because of the weather of course the best place in the afternoons. If you like to play football, you should join another Facebook

group, regarding the football organisation. The field is not always open, because at least five people need to make a reservation at the office for it, so in this group the playing hours will be discussed. I played in a league, six against six, once or twice a week and if you are interested in this, you should check early for the possibilities of joining a team. If you would like to go to the gym and you live at the campus, the university gym (called the SAF) is probably the best option. The gym itself has older materials than what is common in the Netherlands, but by signing up, you have access to the full sport centre with an indoor swimming pool, jacuzzi, sauna and other sport facilities.

I was happy about the rooms in the campus, despite that the furniture and everything looks ugly. Ugly and old doesn't mean however that the functionality is not good. For example the showers are very good and everything just works how it's supposed to be. I had by chance problems with the living room heater, but I almost never heard anybody complain about the rooms. My flat was on the ground floor, which had as big advantage a small garden. Because of the really good weather all the time in Barcelona, it was possible to put the couches outside and hang out in the sun. If it is possible for you to arrange an apartment on the ground floor, you should do it for sure.

The organised events are definitely another advantage of living at the campus. For example, on Thursdays the "campus community" goes first to bar Summum in the city and after to a club. In the weekends, the organising guy takes the group directly to a club, while there are activities before at the campus. Especially the Thursday is something you should attend in the first weeks, as you will meet a lot of people here. Next to the nightlife, there are a lot of organised trips. There were for example a trip to Montserrat, a mountain in Spain, a trip to an amusement park with the highest rollercoaster of Europe and trips to Morocco and Andorra. The trip to Morocco is definitely something I recommend, since this is not the usual tourist trip. You will ride camels in the Sahara and will even spend a night in the desert. Also the different culture and people are really nice to experience.

Practical tips

Kitchen equipment (plates, pans etc.) and sheets (including towels, pillow etc.) can be rent from the office. If there is extra space in your (second) suitcase, it might be better though to take the sheets etc. from home and buy the kitchen equipment at a big supermarket. You also need to buy cleaning stuff, since the apartment doesn't have this itself. For groceries, there are actually three options. The first one is the shop at the campus, this is the closest one with the least offer. I came here the most to buy baguettes, as this product needs to be fresh. The second option is the shop in Bellaterra, a small city nearby the campus. If you want to do a lot of groceries, go to Alcampo or Mercadona, as they have the lowest prices. These two big supermarkets are two and three train stations away.

Facebook and Google Maps can be really helpful. Facebook for activities and events not only from the campus organiser, but also from the Erasmus Student Network and other promoters. For finding an accommodation in the city, Facebook is a common used format as well. Next to this, it is more used as a social network than you are used to in the Netherlands. Where I was used to WhatsApp being the most used format to chat, Facebook Messenger is easier to use for international students. And as said before, Google Maps works good for the public transport schedule and finding your way walking.

Taking Spanish classes could be worth it. I didn't take it, so I can't really say, but at least knowing how to order something or telling the taxi driver how to drive is worth knowing. The English can be bad in Spain, so learning the basic words is something you should do. Going to Spanish classes at the university is maybe taking too much time, but there are other ways to learn the basics.

At the International Welcome Point they will tell you that it is obligatory to sign up at the police station as a Spanish citizen. Don't stress about this in the first weeks, since there is a big possibility that it won't matter at all. I didn't do it my full stay in Barcelona, so you should just decide for yourself if you expect getting in touch with the Spanish government.

A lot of nightclubs in Barcelona have a fancy atmosphere, especially the clubs next to each other at the beach. Bring a shirt (in Dutch: overhemd) or something else that looks smart, because the people going out are dressed quite fancy. There even is a possibility they won't let you in if you are dressed too sloppy. Going out on sneakers, especially for girls, is not seen as much as in the Netherlands. It also depends a bit on where you're going of course.

There is a bar branch in Europe that is famous for international students. It's called Espit Chupitos and there are three different locations in Barcelona. The types of shots you can buy are quite crazy and the bartenders are experienced with flaming the shots and stuff like that. Everybody is an international here, which makes it easy to talk to the other people at the bar. I found this bar out a bit late, but this is something you should definitely visit if you are a nightlife person.

If you are not sure yet if you want to live at the campus or in the city, you should know that there are night buses going every hour, every day. So living at the campus doesn't mean that a nightlife in the city is impossible, it is only a bit exhausting to go back and forth all the time.

Finances

Per month:

Rent, including kitchen equipment and sheets etc.,	305
Gym subscription	25
Groceries	240-300
Nightlife	150-280
Mobile internet	10-20
Eating outside the door	70-120
Shopping	0-110
TOTAL	800-1.160

One-off costs:

Plane retour ticket first period, including two suitcases	210
Plane retour ticket second period, including one suitcase	170
Taxi from the airport to the campus	55
Morocco trip, six days, including everything. I bought many extras though, you can do this trip with only 400 euros	500
F.C. Barcelona Champions League ticket	105
3 month transport ticket (T-Jove)	140
1 month transport ticket (T-Mes)	70
Registration at the football league	20
Other trips (with the campus organiser)	100
Touristic trips & souvenirs	80
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TOTAL	1.450

The Erasmus+ Grant for students in Spain is €210 per month and compensation for not using public transport in the Netherlands is €100 per month (this is only relevant of course when you get this for free). These extra revenues can be deducted from the total costs. There are also a lot of costs you would have in the Netherlands anyway. Take also in account that everything can be cheaper if you decide to focus on cost saving, which turned out to be quite hard for me. My average costs per month were €1.270, including the one-off costs.

Courses

All courses were 6 credits, bringing the total to the minimum required 24 credits. In general, the education level in Spain is lower than in Rotterdam. The material is discussed slower and the questions are easier, while getting a 5 already means passing. I did not incorporate my courses. Class attendance is probably not mandatory for you, so with taking into account the lower level, there is the possibility to skip unnecessary classes and still be able to pass your courses.

Microeconomics I

This is a really easy course, since you already had two microeconomics courses in the Netherlands. The content is quite the same, with intertemporal choices and such. After getting a 7 for the midterm I accidentally didn't study for, I didn't attend classes any more. I finished the course with a 7, with just studying three days before the final exam. I would really recommend this course if you are looking for a simple course, so you have more time for other things.

Financial Statement Analysis

This course had two midterm exams and a final exam. The content is actually a lot like the accounting courses you had in the EUR, but more about analysing balance sheets, income statements and so on than building them yourself.

Information Economics

This course was a bit like Applied Microeconomics in the EUR, since it had mathematical adverse selection and moral hazard problems. The math is not too hard, but in this course it is really important to follow classes, since there are not really slides about the math parts. The teacher explains the material well, so if you take notes in class there is nothing to worry about for this course.

Operation Management II

In this course, you work together with three people (so a total of four) on seven assignments, there is no final exam. Nobody in my class had a grade below 6.3, so passing might not be hard. However, for some assignments you need to work with programs on your laptop which will probably be unknown for you. This causes the course to take more time than the other courses.