

Barcelona, Te Quiero

General Information

From September to December 2016 I studied abroad at Universidad Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, Spain.

Preparation

The preparation of my exchange took relatively little time, as in comparison to preparations for destinations located outside of Europe. The main things that I had to arrange were applying for my Erasmus+ grant, finding accommodation, applying for UPF and choosing my courses.

Applying for the university was not that hard; after being accepted by Pompeu Fabra we received an email containing a step-by-step guide on how to complete your application. The main thing for me was to arrange a health insurance as mine did not cover my stay abroad, but the university offers packages for exchange students that are not too expensive. Furthermore, I had to choose my courses for the semester. The university advised you to do this on time, as they work with a first-come-first-serve system for the course subscriptions. However, this was no problem at all (except for the fact that UPF itself forgot to open the subscription at first - my first encounter with the typical Spanish way of life). I do advise you to select your courses beforehand and to make sure that you schedule your classes conveniently. If you want to leave Barcelona to travel during the weekends, it might be a good idea to make sure that you do not select seminars on Friday or Monday, as seminar attendance at Pompeu Fabra is mostly mandatory.

Applying for the Erasmus+ grant was easy. The international office of Pompeu Fabra functions really well and they reply to your emails within a day, so it did not take me a very long time to get my Learning Agreements signed and stamped.

I decided to book my room before coming to Barcelona and finding accommodation in Barcelona was easier than I expected. I found my room through a website Spotahome, but some other nice places to look for accommodation are easypiso.es, Uniplaces and Llogo. I can also recommend HousingAnywhere.

I would say that it is better to arrange your accommodation before you leave the Netherlands, because I encountered some people who came to Barcelona without having arranged a room and that had a hard time finding one (there are tons of international students coming to Barcelona in September). It is really recommendable to search for a room in one of the neighbourhoods in the city centre. The areas I can definitely recommend are El Born (lots of bars and restaurants) or Barrió Gotico (old gothic neighbourhood). Barceloneta (closest to the beach) and El Raval are also nice. These neighbourhoods are all at walking distance from one another, so it does not *really* matter in which one you end up.

Arrival

At my time of arrival, I did not have to arrange a lot. There is a bus connection between the city centre and the El Prat airport, but if you have all your luggage with you I would say that a cab is better to take. All in all, transportation from the airport to the city is not a problem.

The only things that I arranged right after arriving in Barcelona were getting a public transportation card and a sim card. For public transport, there is a special card (T-Jove) that gives you free access to all forms of transport in Barcelona (bus, tram, subway) for three months. The price of this card is about 100 euros and it is available at all subway stations. This card took me basically everywhere especially at the start of my exchange, and I would definitely advise you to get one. However, Barcelona is a walkable city and UPF is at walking distance from the city centre, so if you prefer to walk everywhere, you might be better off by getting a card for 10 trips at each time. Lastly, for I got a Lebara Sim card, which was rather cheap and worked well.

The ESN department of Universidad Pompeu Fabra organises quite an extensive introduction week for exchange students, which gives you a chance to meet a lot of people, discover the city and to party. During the semester, ESN organises a lot of other activities and events for exchange students, so I can recommend getting an ESN card and taking part in this introduction week.

Courses

Overall, the level of education at UPF is a bit lower than at the EUR; all my elected courses were rather doable. I can recommend following 2 language courses and 4 regular courses, instead of 5 regular courses or 5 regular courses and one language course.

These were my elected courses:

Spanish Landing Program A1 (Before the start of the semester) - Number of ECTS: 3

I took this course in the two weeks before the ESN Welcome Week started. It is an intensive Spanish course that consists of two weeks of morning classes followed by an exam. This course can be taken for the levels A2, B1 and B2, but I took the A1 course as I was completely new to the Spanish language.

The decision to follow this course was one of the best of my exchange. I immediately get to know a lot of other exchange students and made a lot of friends during this course which I continued to hang out with during the semester.

Furthermore, as the course only consists of morning classes, it leaves you a lot of time to explore the city and spend numerous afternoons on the Barceloneta beach. The course does not have a really big workload.

Spanish Landing Program A2 (During the semester) - Number of ECTS: 3

During the semester, I took another Spanish course at Idiomes UPF to continue learning Spanish. The setup of the program is the same as the Landing Program, only the classes for this course are twice a week and last throughout the semester. I took the evening classes that finish at 20.30 p.m. However, as the evening only starts at this time in Barcelona I could still hang out with friends and go out after the evening classes. Again, the course is not very complex. There are some assignments, but they will not take too long, and as long as you participate well during the classes you will be fine.

Financial Management I - Number of ECTS: 5

This course is really comparable to Finance I in Rotterdam. In hindsight, it was rather easy, considering that everything has already been covered at Erasmus University. Hence, I did not find the course really interesting or challenging. It consisted of two lectures and one seminar each week, for which there were some assignments. In addition to this there was a bigger group assignment. The exam for Financial Management is taken in December.

Marketing - Number of ECTS: 5

This course covers the basics of marketing from different points of view – important concepts, the product lifetime cycle and the like. The classes of this course are rather nice; they are quite interactive and the professor is really enthusiastic and passionate about the course. It consists of two lectures and a seminar for which you have to hand in a small report each week. The material covered during the course is not complicated, just bear in mind that you have to spend a bit more time on this subject due to the weekly reports that you have to turn in.

Networks, Crowds & Markets - Number of ECTS: 5

Of all my courses, this one was most comparable to the courses I take at the EUR, as it covered some econometrics-related subjects. The course descriptions states that students need to be more comfortable with algorithms and mathematics to take this course and if you do not like this, I indeed would not recommend you to choose this course. The course consists of two lectures and a weekly seminar. Besides this you have to read and present a paper.

Social Psychology of Organisations - Number of ECTS: 5

This is a really interesting course. It teaches you about the concepts in *Thinking Fast and Slow*. A big part of the course is the self-reflective assignments, in which you have to find a link between the concepts that were explained during the lectures and your professional life. The professor

is very enthusiastic and inspiring, which in turn motivates you to work hard as well. The course consists of two lectures and a seminar each week. I can definitely recommend taking this course.

Finances

The prices for food and the like in Barcelona are comparable to those in the Netherlands. However, housing and going out might be a bit more expensive. This is a rough estimate of my monthly costs in Barcelona:

- Rent:	500
- Transportation:	30
- Mobile Phone:	20
- Social Life:	400
- Groceries:	80
- Travel Costs:	100

Daily Life

Barcelona is a truly precious, vibrant and amazing city. It is astonishingly beautiful, so even walking around there will make you feel inspired. The city is lively, there is always something to do and, last but not least - the beach is at walking distance.

First of all, what I want to emphasise, is that the Spanish way of life is great. The Spanish people are very open-minded, friendly and mostly live their life outside on the streets and terraces. Due to this, the streets of Barcelona are never empty and the city is buzzing with liveliness and entertainment. During weekends, in the morning, it is great to chill on the balcony with your roommates and watch the city go by.

Barcelona is not merely known for its beauty and culture, but for its nightlife as well. This is for a reason - the nightlife of Barcelona is amazing. There are countless clubs, bars, rooftops and parties to keep you occupied every single night of the week.

International students are sprawled all over the city, so when going out, it is easy to meet new people and you will mostly likely always bump into someone you know. This definitely helps make you feel at home and integrate very quickly during your exchange.

The public transport in Barcelona is arranged very well. After going out, you can choose to go home by (night)bus, but cabs are rather cheap in Barcelona and they are always around. Taking a cab home is an excellent way to practice your Spanish skills with the driver after a night out as well (;

In hindsight, the months I spent in Barcelona were amongst the best ones of my life. I have come to really love the city, made friends from all over the world there and experienced some of the best moments of my life. You will not regret choosing Barcelona as your exchange destination!

If you have any questions; do not hesitate to contact me at aagje.franse@gmail.com (: