

Grace Nguyen

Blog Post: S&P 2022 Travel Study Scholarship

### Postcards From Spain

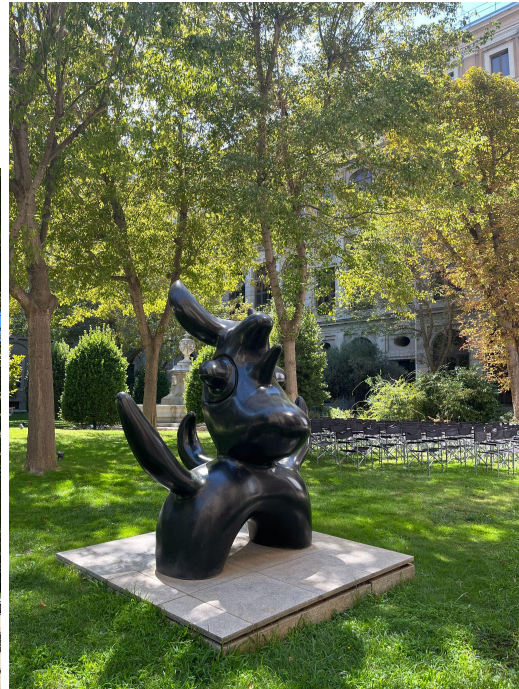
When I was ten years old, I received a white framed postcard with shining buildings and bridges in the center. On the back of the postcard was a note from my older sister that traveled 5,503 miles. It told me about her experience studying abroad in Brighton and encouraged me to do the same when I was in college. Ten years later, I enrolled in a UCLA Travel Study Spanish class and booked my flight to Barcelona.



Barcelona was my favorite city because of its rich culture and plethora of things to do. An integral part of my Spanish class were the cultural excursions the class would go on together. These excursions included tours that enriched our understanding of the sites we were visiting. In Barcelona, our class explored Antoni Gaudí's masterpieces: the Sagrada Família and La Pedrera - Casa Milà. We learned that Gaudí was inspired by designs found in nature, leaving elements of his architecture reminiscent of colors and shapes found in the natural environment. The rest of our trip consisted of exploring the Gothic Quarter and visiting the Picasso museum. One of the best ways to experience another city is through food! Our favorite tapa spot in Barcelona, *Tosca Tapas y Vino*, had the best patatas bravas (spicy potatoes).

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Our next major destination was the lively, beautiful city of Madrid. I loved Madrid because of the efficient metro system, grand central park, and colorful architecture. We saw the infamous Las Meninas by Diego Velasquez in the Prado Museum and stepped into the halls of royalty at the Royal Palace of Madrid. The rooftop restaurants in Madrid are an integral part of the city. My friends and I enjoyed dinner with a view.



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The majority of our program took place in Granada. Here we had class in the morning and free time in the late afternoon. After some time in Granada, I began to feel like I was living there, not just visiting. I knew my way to the major sites: The Alhambra, The Albaicín, and the best shopping areas. As more days of class passed, I began to apply what I learned by conversing in Spanish with locals in Granada. I practiced my Spanish while visiting historical sites, getting meals, or simply walking through the city. What I learned in class translated to my entire experience abroad, further enriching it. I noticed my Spanish improve almost immediately when I became able to navigate my way through Granada speaking entirely in Spanish.

During the program, I explored other cities and countries not part of our curriculum. It was important to me that I would be able to go to other countries to make use of my time in Europe, and the program allowed for that. My friends and I spent two weekends in the coastal city of Malaga, swimming in the Mediterranean Sea and tanning on the sand. I also went to Lisbon, Portugal for a few days of site-seeing. After the program, I visited Italy, Amsterdam, and Paris.



Traveling to another country for the first time can be an overwhelming experience, but with UCLA Travel Study, I was surrounded by like-minded students and supportive teachers that helped me feel at home in Spain. I recently sent a postcard decorated with The Alhambra to my older sister writing to her about the experience of a lifetime I had studying abroad.