

Granada, Barcelona, Madrid
Emily Engelkemier

Barcelona, Zaragoza, Madrid, Toledo, Granada, Málaga, Córdoba, Sevilla, Nerja

5 weeks. 9 cities. Layers and layers of history and culture to experience. On the Granada, Barcelona, and Madrid Travel Study program, I was able to experience these cities and many more while I spent five weeks in Spain. This program was a combination of taking Spanish classes, going on cultural excursions to see the main sights of each city, and living and experiencing the Spanish lifestyle. A typical day consisted of classes in the morning, and then time to explore each city or go on tours in the afternoons.

Barcelona, August 1-4

We arrived in Barcelona on August 1 and spent three days in the city taking classes and touring the main sights. We visited the Picasso Museum, Gothic Quarter, La Pedrera, and La Sagrada Familia. The Picasso Museum was our first official “cultural excursion” of the program. Each class had a tour guide, and we enjoyed practicing our Spanish comprehension as the tours were conducted in Spanish. Highlights of the Picasso Museum included seeing many of Picasso’s earlier works, including his renditions of *Las Meninas*, originally painted by Diego Velázquez. The Picasso Museum was located in the Gothic Quarter, or Barrio Gótico, which we explored next. We learned about trends in Gothic architecture, including pointed arches and tall, narrow windows, both of which were prevalent in this area of Barcelona.



Walking through the Barrio Gótico in Barcelona

The next day, following classes in the morning, we went to La Pedrera and La Sagrada Familia, two buildings featuring the unique architecture of Antoni Gaudí. La Pedrera, also known as Casa Milá, is a house originally built for the Milá family with multiple levels of apartments. The roof featured 360° views of the city of Barcelona. Next, we went to La Sagrada Familia, one of the most well-known attractions in Barcelona. I was amazed by the intricate detail of the cathedral, from the outer facades to the stained glass windows on the interior.



La Pedrera



La Sagrada Familia

Zaragoza, August 4

We departed from Barcelona and stopped for a few hours in Zaragoza on the way to Madrid. Zaragoza was a beautiful city with the Ebro river going through the center. I enjoyed lunch at a local cafe and then explored the city.



Basílica de Nuestra Señora del Pilar

Madrid, August 4-7

After our stop in Zaragoza, we got back on the bus and drove to Madrid. Madrid was the biggest city we visited on the program, and it had many different types of food from all over the world. We visited the Museo Nacional del Prado (featuring art up to the 19th century) and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (featuring art from the 20th century and later). I enjoyed seeing many famous paintings in these two museums, such as Picasso's *Guernica*, Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, and Goya's *Black Paintings*.

In Madrid, we had more time on our own to explore the city. Our hotel was located near a large park called Parque del Retiro, which was a beautiful place to walk around in the shade. I also walked throughout the city to stop at the Plaza del Toros (bull fighting arena), the Mercado San Miguel (a well-known market for many types of Spanish foods), the Royal Palace of Madrid (where the royal family used to live), the Plaza Mayor (a large public square), and the Puerta del Sol (another large plaza area). Overall, I loved the many different attractions of Madrid and the ease of navigating the city by foot.

Toledo, August 7

On the way from Madrid to Granada, we stopped in Toledo for a few hours and toured the Church of Santo Tomás, Sinagoga del Tránsito, the Jewish Quarter, and the Toledo Cathedral. I especially enjoyed stopping at a lookout point and seeing the whole city, which is built on a hill and partially surrounded by a river.



Granada, August 7-September 3

We arrived in Granada the evening of August 7th and stayed there for the majority of the next month. In Granada, we settled into our usual rhythm of classes from 9:30 am - 2 pm, followed by lunch, time for siesta and homework, then dinner and exploring the city. Some highlights of Granada were the Alhambra, a Flamenco dance performance, a Flamenco lesson, and the lookout points around the city.

Our class visited the Alhambra for a tour of this fortified palace and surrounding gardens. I was amazed by the beautiful and intricate details in each area of the Alhambra. It features Islamic art and architecture and is built on a hill with views of the entire city of Granada. Each room we entered was more stunning than the last! The Alhambra also had multiple courtyards with pools of water that reflected the building. We also got a tour of the grounds, called the Generalife. There were many fountains, plants, and flowers surrounding this beautiful area.



The Alhambra

Another highlight of the program was experiencing a traditional Flamenco performance, a type of music and dance known to Spain. The performance took place inside a long, cave-like building with chairs lining the walls. A live band performed music and the dancers took turns showcasing their talent. The dancing was amazing, and we all appreciated the performance even more after taking a Flamenco lesson the next week. We learned a few basic aspects of Flamenco, which includes arm movements, hip movements, and what is essentially tap dancing. It was so fascinating to go to the performance and then get to experience the dancing for ourselves as well.



The location of our traditional Flamenco performance

Granada also has three main lookout points, or miradores, each with a distinct view of parts of the city. My favorite was the Mirador San Nicolas, which featured great views of the Alhambra, especially at night.



Throughout the month in Granada, I learned so much about the city, which has so many layers of history and culture. I loved walking around the city in the evenings, trying different tapas, getting gelato, and practicing my Spanish.

We also took a few weekend trips to other nearby cities. We had two free three-day weekends on the program, where everyone was free to choose their own activities. I visited the coastal towns of Málaga and Nerja. We took a bus from Granada to Málaga, about a two hour ride. Málaga had a cute historic center, with classic looking buildings and many shops. We also explored the waterfront area and went to a beach called Malagueta. The Mediterranean water was very refreshing, surprisingly warm, and calm. I also visited Nerja, another smaller coastal town. Again, it was a fun day of exploring the city, swimming in the Mediterranean, and getting good food and gelato.



Malagueta beach in Málaga, Spain



Nerja, Spain

Córdoba and Seville, August 20-21

Our program also traveled together to Córdoba and Seville for a weekend. These were two of my favorite cities that we visited. In Córdoba, we toured the Mezquita de Córdoba, an incredibly fascinating building that has been a mosque, synagogue, and cathedral at various points in its history. The architecture was beautiful and unique: hundreds of red and white striped arches supported the large building, and a central dome made up the cathedral part of it.



In Seville, I loved walking around the city and visiting a lookout point called the Setas de Sevilla. I arrived in time to watch the sun set over the city and see the lights of the city come to life.



Setas de Sevilla at night, with the monuments lit up

We also toured Seville's Plaza de España, Alcázar (Moorish fortified palace), and Cathedral. Each of these places were beautiful with distinct architectural elements. The Plaza de España had artwork representing each province of Spain. The Alcázar was reminiscent of the Alhambra, with intricate lacework designs on the walls. The Cathedral of Seville is the largest Gothic cathedral in the world, and we enjoyed climbing to the top of the bell tower for panoramic views of the city.



Plaza de España

Overall, this Spain Travel Study program was an amazing experience where I learned so much about the Spanish language and culture. I loved visiting so many different cities and exploring each one. The food in Spain was also a highlight, including lots of tapas and gelato. I would definitely recommend this program to anyone interested in studying Spanish abroad in Spain!