

Our Journal

Day 1

The most unusual thing I packed for the trip was my stress ball and coloring books. Although these are unusual to pack, I'm glad I did because the first few days can be stressful. At first it can be difficult to speak in another language but the families are very understanding and that's something I appreciate a lot. The food is different here than anywhere else. Bread is served at every meal and all the meals are big. Lunch is the biggest but even a snack, which is supposed to be small, is like another meal. One thing I like is how much we walk because then I can see a lot of the city and the shops. I love that after the activities for the day, my host family and friends all hang out together. We go for walks, hang out in the shopping center, and eat dinner together too. I'm glad I've met so many new people and am making memories I won't forget.

Day 2

The two biggest reasons I decided to go on this program would be, I wanted to try something new and expand my horizons. I have always loved new situation and wanted to travel by myself for the first time. When I heard of this program I thought I might apply because it would be a great opportunity.

Day 3

One of the most interesting interactions I have had so far have occurred between my host mother and myself. It happened shortly after we had arrived in Spain, when I sat down with the family to give them the gifts that I had brought from the U.S. I had been aiming to represent both myself and the part of the country where I live (the northeast) by my selection of presents. After having given both my host sister and mother a package of dark roast coffee from the States, I pulled a heavy glass bottle out of my luggage. I handed it to my host mom, whose eyebrows were drawn in confusion. I had already translated the word, prepared to explain why I had brought it. "Es miel de maple-maple syrup." Even with the translation, she seemed to still be puzzled. I continued in my basic Spanish, "para los panqueques. Si?" Even this didn't clarify what I was trying to say. Finally, she said, "aay, es liquor!" As I understood what she was saying, I quickly tried to explain that I had not brought her a sixteen ounce bottle of alcohol in my luggage (although I don't know if this is even possible). With some help from my host sister, I was able to convey what I wanted to say. She thanked me many times over the next few minutes, with two kisses on each cheek. When I return home, this will be one of the many stories that I will be able to tell my friends and family.

Day 4

One word that was interesting more in its use than the word itself was "almuerzo". We are taught in Spanish classes in the US that almuerzo is lunch but in Spain they use it only when referring to the snack before lunch. It caused a lot of confusion when my host family would tell me they don't have "almuerzo" and they would say it during the middle of our lunch! Then my host brother clarified and it all made sense.

Day 5

One food we have had here many times is tortilla de patata. It is one of the most common Spanish dishes. It consists of eggs, potato, and sometimes onions or meat like chorizo. It is something that is served at almost any occasion. Sometimes it is given as a free tapa with coffee, it was served as an appetizer at our goodbye party, it can be on top of a sandwich (bocadillo in Spanish), or really for any meal! It is delicious and savory. We also had a chance to learn from a local chef how to make the dish by cutting and frying potatoes, adding egg, and flipping until it is all cooked! I will definitely share this recipe with my family. Easy and delicious.

A big difference between the United States and Spain is the food, especially dinner. Back in the United States, dinner is typically served at 6 pm, while the Spanish culture serves dinner at 10. Dinner usually consists of tapas, a common plate where all members of the family will pick at and eat from. Calamari and octopus are extremely common in the Spanish culture and can be found at almost every restaurant. They are prepared with either a light breading or with salt and other spices, and are always paired with a slice of bread. For Americans, once they move on from the fact that they are eating a slimy sea creature, they end up truly liking the food to

truly embrace the Spanish culture. They are also very casual and take time to eat and talk at all meals which I really appreciated.

Day 6

One thing I keep seeing is lots of hand gestures. People use hand gestures to describe everything and it is so interesting. It shows how expressive the Spanish culture is and how the people really want to feel and show more than just speak.

Day 7

Today we went to the awesome city of Salamanca. I woke up early around 7:30am to get ready. I ate breakfast which consisted of toast with jam, fruit, and coffee. Unlike in the U.S., it is common for teenagers to drink coffee in Spain. Then my host mom drove me and my host sister to the bus station where we planned to meet.

We all arrived and then took a bus about an hour to Salamanca. When we arrived I knew right away that I would love this place. It really is a quintessential Spanish town from the food to the architecture. We first went to a huge cathedral where we walked up hundreds of stairs it felt like. We wove in and out of the church and on balconies until we reached the terrace where you could see the view of Salamanca from above and it was incredible. We took some great photos there.

Then we went to see a school building where a lot of university students go for good luck before exams. There is a frog hidden in the complex architecture and if you find it you will pass your exams, so the legend goes.

Lastly we headed to the city central, Plaza Mayor, to eat lunch and do some shopping. We split up in groups of Americans and Spaniards so we could do some independent exploring around the plaza. I ate a delicious chorizo bocadillo (sandwich) that my host mother prepared for me. We also went to buy souvenirs and get ice cream.

I really loved Salamanca.

Day 8

This place makes me feel extremely happy! I've always wanted to go to a foreign country and it's honestly the best experience I've ever had. It feels a little bit daunting as well because they have so many things that we don't in the United States. The landscape makes me feel excited because it doesn't look anything like at home. I look outside and expect to see a forest, but instead I see this beautiful, new landscape that doesn't compare to anything I've seen thus far in my life!

Day 9

My dad told me many times that I must keep a very close watch on all my possessions because Spain is a very poor country and my stuff will get stolen. However, what I have found is that everybody whom I have met is nice in Spain. I'm not really sure why, but they are. My host mother actually grabbed me and pushed me out of an arts and crafts store I had gone to in order to get gifts for my siblings. I have made many friends, and hope to visit Spain again someday.

Day 10

Siesta is great
It makes me feel so refreshed
I love siesta

The best food in Spain
It might surprise you a bit
Bocadillo good

Day 11

Dear mom,

We are having a really awesome time. I am living with a Spanish host family and even though I don't speak much Spanish, we are having fun in the crazy attempts at communicating. Sharing our meals together is nice because I have a whole other family welcoming me here. Also, my host sister and all the host siblings join us during our classes and for the afternoon activities so we can continue practicing Spanish and integrate with the local teens.

We have done lots of fun things including a trip to Penafiel, Salamanca, and a community service day with kids at the local pool, and worked with refugee kids from the Sahara at the science museum. Tomorrow we leave for Madrid and I am so excited to visit the Prado, take the metro, and do an evening tapa tour. I hear we will also take a cable car over the whole city!

Thanks for giving me this opportunity and see you next week!

Day 12

One buddy I've made on this trip is a kid named Diego Aguilar. Diego is a great Flamenco dancer a few months younger than me, and seems to be in to a lot of the same things, like language, traveling, and video games, among others. We met on the Sunday of the trip at 5:00 in the morning to head over to Madrid by bus, and I've have to admit that I thought he seemed like kind of a jerk at first. We hopped on the bus and said hi and got right down to sleeping. Once in Madrid, we got off and took the metro to a McDonalds, and ate with other friends. Honestly, even though they were laughing a whole bunch, I had no idea what they were talking about. Diego actually walked me through their dumb jokes because he is learning English, and we talked with a mix of Spanish and English together the whole day until we got home at 11:30 at night. Fun day!

Day 13

Something I will miss the most when I get home is my host family. Because at first I thought I wouldn't survive in Spain for more than one day because of my Spanish level, but my host family welcomed me like a family member. My host family is very understandable and very loving I appreciate that a lot. They are taking their time to teach me Spanish, which I think is very kind of them. Even though I don't speak Spanish at all I'm still proud of myself for meeting new friends who are from Spain and also American friends.

Day 14

This trip has taught me a lot about the importance of traveling and exploring other cultures. All the TV, movies and stories in the world will never give you a true idea of a country's culture. And even deeper, within that culture are distinct families, people and personalities. Learning a language and challenging your comfort zone is so fun and really teaches you a lot about yourself and your own life. I am definitely more confident and excited to explore the rest of the world!

My advice for someone who is considering going abroad is to pack lightly but effectively so you don't have to lug around a huge suitcase.

I also think that it would be beneficial to have some background (even if it's just basic phrases) in the language of the host country. Also don't be scared to ask locals or your hosts to repeat things you can't understand. Overall just try your best, making mistakes won't affect the quality of your trip it will improve it. In the end this experience has been incredible and forced me to try tons of amazing new things. I find myself acclimating to the new culture better than I imagined and I'm extremely grateful I've gotten the chance to broaden my horizons