

### Preparation

- One of the first things that you will need to do is get your passport and visa. You can obtain your visa by going to the Spanish Consulate in Chicago. Before you go, however, make sure that you call them to make sure you know all of the documents that you will need to take. I went on their website and it said I only needed a few documents, but when I got there they weren't all that I needed. You don't have to worry about renewing your visa when you get to Spain because it should cover you the whole time you are there.
- I recommend opening a bank account at the UW Credit Union before going. They have NO ATM fees, even internationally, and it's a lot easier to pay with cash while you're over there. There are ATMs everywhere in Madrid and all over Europe.
- Print off the reports of past participants before you go! They are invaluable and are especially helpful when you first get to Madrid.
- I got about 50 euros before I went to Madrid, but found that it wasn't really necessary and cost me an extra \$10 to do the exchange in the States. I think it's best to just get euros from the ATM when you arrive at the airport. Unless you absolutely must, I wouldn't exchange money at the airport or any train stations there because they always charge a huge commission or don't have a good exchange rate.
- When packing, keep in mind that you will be coming back with A LOT more than what you come with, and also that it is not as cold as Madison, but you will still need plenty of winter clothes. The semester I was there, they had the coldest spring in like 20 years, so we were wearing winter clothes for a really long time. Definitely try to send stuff home with anyone that comes to visit. Otherwise, you may have to send a box home through the mail.

### Arrival

- It's best to set up a hostel before you get to Madrid so you know where you're going when you get there. I found a hostel at [www.studentuniverse.com](http://www.studentuniverse.com). I recommend the International Hostel – Posada de Huertas on the street Huertas. If you stay there, tell the "grandpa" named Arafat that works overnight that you know Rebekah and Sarah and you may get special treatment 😊
- Taking a taxi from the airport is a little expensive because it is far from the center of Madrid. There will be a baggage fee included. My friend and I had to pay 30 euros to get to the hostel. Make sure you get at least an estimate before getting into the taxi.
- Get euro at the airport for the taxi!!

### Shopping

- *Corte Ingles* is a chain store in Madrid that has anything and everything you could need from a supermarket, to clothing, to toiletries, to a salon. However, they don't have stores like Wal-mart or Target, so though it's very convenient, some things can get pretty expensive there.

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- *Lidl* is a chain grocery store kind of like our *Aldi* in the States. It has very cheap groceries but you have to either pay for your bags or bring your own. Other good grocery stores include Sabeco, Champion, etc., just depending on where you live.
- “China Stores” are all over Madrid. They are called this because the people that run them are usually Asian and you can usually find a huge assortment of cheap things there. Almost all of them have calling cards for the States. The best one that I found is called Euro Hours and it gives you (usually) 210 minutes for 6 Euro. You can sometimes get ripped off on minutes, but the most I got ripped off was having to pay like 6 cents a minute, which was still really good.

### Transportation

- Your main transportation will most likely be the metro. It's very efficient and you can buy a monthly pass called an Abono. To obtain one, take a passport size photo to any Tabaco stand (little brown kiosks that say Tabaco on them) and they can give you one. If you're under 21 you will have to fill something out there and wait for about 2 weeks in order to get it. Under 21 is about 22 euro and over is about 35 euro.
- Buses are also efficient, and you can use your Abono on these as well.
- Taxis are reliable and great for taking home at night after the metro closes at 1:45.

### Housing

- This will be your first priority when after arriving to Madrid. You can pick up a newspaper at almost any kiosk called *Segunda Mano* and find housing in there, but the easiest way to find a place seemed to just go around to any of the bus stops at Ciudad Universitaria, Moncloa, or Somosaguas campus and rip off phone numbers of ads that are posted.
- When calling people, try not to stress out! They will usually realize that you are a foreigner (because there are always a lot of foreigners looking for places to live), and they are usually patient if you don't understand something they say. Just be sure to ask if it's still available, the cost, location, etc. (especially ask which metro stop it's near!) Get a good map of Madrid before trying to go and find the places.

### Cell Phone

- Everyone there has cell phones (un movil) in Spain. This will be the easiest way to call places when you are looking for housing. You can go to the huge department store called Corte Ingles to get one, or any other little cell phone stores like Vodafon, Amena, etc. I found that Vodafon seemed to be one of the best companies to go with. All incoming calls are free (even from the U.S.). Instead of paying monthly, you just have to pay for a certain amount of minutes before you can use your phone, and recharge it every time you need more minutes. You can recharge your phone at many grocery stores or just buy a card from a kiosk.

### Academics

- Complutense is a huge university with over 130,000 students. There is a main campus and a smaller campus (Somosaguas) where you will be taking business classes. Most classes are lecture format. Teachers will often show up 10 to 30 minutes late for classes, some will cancel classes for dumb reasons, and every once in awhile they will have a strike and cancel all classes for the day. Everything there is VERY laid back. They even drink in the cafeteria in between classes.
- I totally recommend getting an electronic dictionary before going there. I bought one at Best Buy before I left for \$50 and it was definitely the best investment that I made for my trip. It is very small which makes it easy to use during class when the teacher says words that you don't understand.
- Don't be scared to meet people. Most Spaniards are used to there being many foreigners and therefore you are nothing special to them. Most won't make an effort to talk to you, however most are willing to help you or talk to you if you approach them first. Another great way to meet Spaniards is by taking a class that has group projects.
- Scheduling your classes can get stressful, but don't worry about it because it all works out in the end. You have the first few weeks to decide exactly which classes you want to take, so if you go to one and decide that it's not good or the professor is a jerk, don't take it! Here's my opinion on some of the classes:
  - Publicidad y Promoción** – great class, easy and fun
  - Etorno Economía de la Empresa** (prof Velásquez) – awesome profesor and interesting class. The prof talks really fast, but he speaks clear and is totally willing to help and really funny. He's one of the professors that really wants you to do well.
  - Antropología de Europa** (prof González) – by far my favorite class there. It counts as an area studies, the profesor is really nice, and I learned more in that class than any other. It's seminar style, so there's a lot of discussing and you have to write a paper for the final.
  - Recursos Humanos** – I DON'T recommend this class. The professor was really rude, especially towards foreigners.
  - Economía Internacional II** – I don't recommend this class either. The professor could be nice and was willing to help, but he was also condescending and had no sympathy if you didn't understand something because you were a foreigner. The content, however, was interesting and I learned a lot from the class.
- Grades are a lot different, and most are all based on a final, or a final and a project or a few homework assignments. I recommend taking classes where there is a project or other assignment so your whole grade doesn't depend on a final with 5 questions.

### Resources

- *Let's Go Spain* (and Europe) is a very helpful book and very useful when traveling.
- There are many internet cafes in Madrid ranging around 1 euro to 3 euros an hour. However, the best place to use the internet is on the Somosaguas campus at the Ciencias Políticas y Sociología building. When you walk into the building, walk down the hall on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and it will be on your right. You have to sign up to use them, but you can use them for up to 2 hours. There is a computer lab at the business building, but it is usually being used for classes.

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- The Erasmus office is very helpful if you have any questions and there are many different trips throughout the semester that they plan specifically for Erasmus (foreign) students.

### Travel

- Compared to the States, it's relatively cheap to travel in Europe. My friend Sarah and I got a Eurorail pass before we left. It was super convenient and we were able to travel all over Europe whenever and almost wherever we wanted. Otherwise, there are two airlines – Easyjet and Ryan Air – where you can find really cheap flights all over Europe.

### Costs

- The estimated costs that you find online seem to be really conservative. When I was there, the dollar was very weak compared to the Euro which made things a lot more expensive. I hardly ate out while I was there and was pretty conservative with my money and I spent about \$6500 (including the \$650 for the Eurorail pass that I bought before I left). Traveling adds up fast though, and is something that I did a lot of. You could probably spend less if you didn't want to travel that much.

### Safety

- I always felt safe when I was in Madrid, though there are a few bad neighborhoods. You don't have to worry about murder, rape, etc. over there nearly as much as getting your purse or possessions stolen. There are many pick pocketers, and they are often very sneaky and try to steal your stuff without you realizing they are doing it. I never carried my passport and always kept credit cards and money in my front pocket or held my purse really close to me if I actually took it out with me. Keep phone #s for credit card companies, etc. apart from everything else just in case something does happen, so you can call right away.

### Miscellaneous

- Having a laptop there was extremely nice, especially if you have a digital camera and need to download your pictures. It's not necessary, but it's great to have for pictures, writing papers, and working on group projects.
- Postcards and letters both cost 77 euro cents to send. You can mail stuff out of Correos in Corte Ingles.
- Spaniards give "2 kisses" to each other ALL the time – when you first meet someone, saying hello and saying goodbye.
- I never saw a Spanish girl there wearing shorts. There are foreigners that will wear them, but Spaniards usually wear skirts or pants, even when it's 90 degrees out. You will see guys wearing them sometimes.
- Spaniards almost always pay with cash. You can pay with your credit/debit card, but you will always need ID, and they will sometimes ask to see your passport. I just found that it was easier to withdraw money and always have cash with me. This was a lot easier to do with a UW Credit Union account because they don't have charges for withdrawing money.

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- There is siesta from about 2-5 when most stores close. It can be annoying, but especially in Madrid you will find that there are many larger chain stores that are open during siesta. Most restaurants close from 5-8 because people don't eat until really late. Almost all stores are closed on Sundays, with the exception of Corte Ingles which is open the first Sunday of every month.

### **Summary**

Madrid is an awesome city with many things to do. I guarantee that you will learn a lot while being there (probably more outside of class than inside!). There will be frustrating times, but try not to let it ruin your experience. If you stay open minded and don't let the little things get to you, you will have a much better experience. I hope your experience is just as great (if not better!) than mine.