

## GUIDE FOR STUDYING IN SPAIN



**Spain in General**  
**Before you go**  
**Getting to**  
**Once you get to**  
**University Life in**  
**Administrative Work in**  
**City Profiles**



This brochure has been compiled from the experiences and knowledge of several European Studies students who went on exchange to Spain. It is written from the students point of view and is updated yearly. We hope you find its numerous hints and practical tips useful during your stay overseas. May it help you get past the “survival” stage quickly and contribute to your enjoyment of the Spanish experience next year.

When you come back to Guelph, you will be expected to return this brochure (or a copy) to me, with appropriate corrections and additions, so that it can be updated for the benefit of the next group of outgoing students.

Bon voyage!

Margot Irvine

Coordinator, European Studies Program

(Responsible for ESP Students studying in France)

## **Documentation**

Assembling all of the necessary documentation for a year abroad takes a fair amount of time and money. Start collecting all of these documents *early*. It is not possible to get all this done in the last three weeks before you leave!!! Here is a rough idea of what you will need.

In order to live in Spain for the duration of the academic year you must have

- A passport; preferably valid for a few months after you expect to return from Europe
- Visa(add info)
- Birth certificate(check specifications)
- A letter of permission from the University of Guelph
- A letter of acceptance by the Spanish university of your choice (within the limits of ESP partnerships, of course)
- A statement of financial support from your parents
- Proof of health insurance, which can be obtained from OHIP (235 King St., Kitchener)

Just before you go make sure your credit card will be valid for your whole trip. Phone your credit card company so that they know that you are going abroad and won't think that your card has been stolen and cancel it on you! Take your wallet to a photocopier and make 3-4 copies of everything that will be going with you to Spain. Leave two copies at home with your family and take a couple with you. This way, if you happen to lose your wallet cancelling cards will be much easier.

## **Banking**

You might want to visit a lawyer and have power of attorney given to one of your parents so that they can access your financial matters. You could also consider opening a joint account with your parents. Make sure your visa/Master Card pin number is not longer than 4 digits, or it won't work internationally. It might be a good idea to set up Internet banking. This is the easiest way to keep track – not only of your home bank, but also your Spanish bank account. You can also use your debit card to withdraw money from European bank machines but your bank will charge you a fee. Get a bank authorized letter of support (for apartment and for opening an account in Spain). Having a debit card with a chip makes paying much easier, because automatic machines (when paying for train tickets and other things) only accept cards with chips. Also tell your bank that you will be overseas so that they don't freeze your account because of irregular activity (check each country specifications)

## **Things to take to Spain:**

### *School Things*

10-15 passport size photos (to give to professors and attach to documents)  
BIC pens (ridiculously expensive! Everyone uses fountain pens.)  
Spanish grammar reference  
Spanish/English dictionary  
Day-timer or calendar  
USB stick – many profs will gladly let exchange students copy the PPT slides onto their USB stick

### *Clothing*

Bathing suit  
Hiking boots and gear  
Light robe  
Sandals or slippers  
Winter gear if you plan to ski!!

### *Helpful Items*

Blank book to use as a journal  
Calculator and ruler  
Money belt (make sure to use it if you travel!)  
Digital camera (invest in rechargeable batteries, makes life a lot easier... make sure to have a Large SD card for the camera, you don't want to run out of space for photos)

### *Guidebooks*

ISIC card, available free from our Travel Cuts (this was pretty useless for the most part).  
Towels  
Travel alarm clock

### *Health and Toiletry Supplies*

Contact lens solution (\$10 in Guelph, \$20-25 in Spain) Although it might be more expensive in Spain liquids do factor into the strict weight restrictions for your baggage which could cost you more in the end!  
Convertor/adaptor for hairdryer etc. (Very important! These are hard to find in Spain. Get a good one!)  
Cough syrup, aspirin/Tylenol, Alka-Seltzer  
Prescription medicine, enough to last your stay. If your insurance doesn't cover this, take as much as possible, then have it sent as you can (birth control packs fit in Hallmark cards, from Mom...!)

\* You might want to take your own music with you, given the price of CDs in Spain. You may also want to invest in Spanish music. That's the point! They are pretty much the same price anyway.

\*Cigarettes are much stronger than in Canada but somewhat cheaper too. Second-hand smoke will likely suffice and it's free!

\* Some popular imports (stuff we've had sent to us: Kool-Aid, peanut butter, Kraft Dinner, vitamins), although surviving on foreign food alone is quite possible and even highly recommended from a cultural point of view.

\* Memory cards for your camera. If possible invest in a laptop computer AND external hard drive. You will have wireless connections at school and in libraries. This way you have a CD and DVD player, word processor, dictionary, etc.

### **Suggested Reading**

*First Time Europe* (A Rough Guide Special), by Louis CasaBianca

This is a great guide for new travellers. I'd been to Europe many times before, but I still found tons of useful ideas here. At \$15, it's worth every penny. Routard Guides are good.

[www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com) is a great site to use when traveling.

You will need a good, thorough guide to Spain. Don't rely on the Spain section of a European guide; it will not be detailed enough for travel off the beaten path. All the travel guide companies will offer comprehensive guides; buy the one you like best. READ the introductory sections BEFORE you go. They are often full of good tips. The sections on history, art, and architecture will also give your trip more meaning. Michelin's Green Guides are excellent in this respect, but they usually cover a small region only.

If you plan on travelling outside of your exchange country, buy another guide for all of Europe.

### **Airline Tickets**

I did a fair amount of shopping around for the best deal on airfares and found Travel Cuts was the most reasonable. For other options, visit [www.airtransat.ca](http://www.airtransat.ca), [www.kayak.fr](http://www.kayak.fr), [www.redtag.ca](http://www.redtag.ca). It is best to book your flight as early as possible so you have the most choice of when to leave. Discuss options with your travel agent about changing return dates. If you plan on coming home for Christmas, book your flight as soon as you know when classes and exams will end.

Consider how you will manage your luggage - from airport to bus/train to taxi to residence desk, to room etc. If you are taking a lot of things, some airlines will give you permission to bring more than the normal weight, check it out before you get to the airport and are ordered to re-pack or stay home!

### **When to Arrive**

Do not on arrive on a Sunday or holiday because you could have difficulties getting into residence, negotiating bus schedules, etc. Find out when classes will start and plan to arrive a few days early. Taking an intensive language course for foreigners before regular university classes begin is a good way to ease into European life and to meet other foreign students. You will get to know your surroundings and improve your language skills before the real school year starts. In the past, Guelph students have received Foreign-language course credits for this work upon presentation of the appropriate transcripts. (The stage includes more than reading, writing, listening and speaking skills – you have tours of your town, the nearby towns/cities, and wine/cheese tasting outings, with 50 other exchange students in the same boat as you). This is available in some exchange countries and universities but not all of them.

You will be very sorry if you do not have at least \$200 (CDN) worth of Euros in small bills when you arrive. Order this from your bank or currency exchange a couple of weeks before leaving Canada. The best rates are at Global Currency (Gordon and Kortright; Home Hardware plaza). This money will pay for your bus, cab, phone card (to let Mom know that you arrived safely), and perhaps a meal or two. Do not take travellers' cheques. They are not accepted anywhere.

### **Culture Shock**

You may have done lots of travelling before but you will find that moving to a foreign country for a year is entirely different. You will feel tired and frustrated quite often during the first few weeks in your new environment. The mind tires quickly when trying to struggle with a new language and taking in a new environment. Things that are automatic for you in Canada, such as taking the bus to school or going grocery shopping, will be challenging at first in a new country. Relax. In time, everything will become more natural and you will begin to find some more energy as your language improves. Talking with other foreign students can be therapeutic, but be careful to keep an open mind and positive spirits. Things *will* improve by Christmas and the second half of the year will fly by.

### **Meeting People**

- Socializing
- Men
- Getting involved

## Problems

If you lose documents, contact the police immediately and fill out the necessary forms. **Under Spanish law, all citizens AND tourists must carry some identification in case they are stopped and questioned by police.** Don't forget that you will be hanging around bus and train stations in a country where police searches are not uncommon. Bring photocopies.

## Banking

Opening a bank account is the most practical way to deal with daily life in Spain. You will need cheques to pay your rent and a European bank card (Carte Bleue(?)) is really convenient. **Get a bank-authorized letter of support for your apartment and for opening an account in Spain.** Choose a bank that is near your daily route to school so that you do not have to go out of your way. You will likely need your passport to open an account but the requirements will change with each different company. Some banks may offer you insurance on your bank card and cheque book or even money when you open an account. **This is done because the Spanish do not check for identification before cashing a cheque.** In other words, if you lose your cheque book someone could steal the balance of your account. You also need to show your banking information to get a cell phone

Etiquette in banks and other service areas is a little different in Spain than what we are used to at home. In spite of the fact that there is a privacy line painted on the floor of the post office, people seem to see nothing wrong with crowding you at the teller's counter. Just get used to having someone peering over your shoulder to see how broke you are. Do put away any large withdrawals in your money belt before leaving the bank, cash machine, or exchange booth. Thieves love to hang around waiting for tourists to fiddle with their money near a currency exchange. Expect business to take *longer*.

You can also have money sent from Canada but the service charge is expensive at both ends (a wire costs \$15.00, plus the exchange). Ask your home bank before you leave to find out how much this will cost. Your Canadian bank card *will not* work on all European machines (especially in England) in spite of what your bank will tell you, though it may work on most (with a charge each time). Bringing a cheque or cash will cost you the least. Global currency services, on Gordon south of campus, will help you out. If you plan on withdrawing from a Canadian account, take out a lump sum so that you get charged all at once.

## Telephones

Getting a cell phone with “pay as you go” credit is recommended. (Download SKYPE on your computer, one of the best ways to talk... once you have struggled through the internet issue)

The easiest and cheapest way to call home is Canada Direct. This service provides toll-free lines that give you direct access to a Canadian operator and then you are billed on your calling card at Canadian rates. A 'Call-Me' card is also a good idea. Call or write to Canada Direct for the listing of numbers or ask your travel agent (available at Travel Cuts). Keep this card with you when you are travelling to make phone calls easier.

### **Internet**

There are a handful of cafes/fast food places in town where you can use wireless on your own laptop/iPhone).

The best advice I can give is to wait until the other students move in and post an ad looking for someone to share with; however this may take a little while.

### **Electricity**

- What volt power the country uses

Buy a converter at home there are some that are available at Future Shop and Best Buy.

Have at least 2/3 adapters, since you will probably blow-out one for your hairdryer/straightener, and you can then use several electrical plugs at the same time. Make sure you also have an adapter for the UK if you plan on travelling, since it's different from continental Europe.

### **Libraries**

Libraries are generally difficult but different in each school and city. Worthwhile books are usually in storage; fill out a request card and wait half an hour to an hour to get them. University libraries look more like high school ones at home due to lack of funding. (Short hours, limited computers/seating, strict no-food/drink rules... plus checking out books corresponds with your university level... you will miss the UOG library! The best advice is to be patient and try using the Internet as an alternative. It's worth while to get a membership at municipal libraries as well, as they have a varied collection of local/national music etc. (and guide books, so that you don't have to bring them!)

(If this information is right about your country just keep it. If not please make changes and any helpful suggestions)

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### **Restaurants**

- Cost (generally)
- Sample local food

### **Train Travel**

- Discounts
- Where to buy
- How to check in
- Penalties

### **Biking**

Helmets

Riding on sidewalks or streets

Bike rental

### **Staying in Touch**

School of Languages and Literatures main office at the U. of G. (519) 824-4120, ext 3883. Fax: (519) 763-9572 (Prof. Margot Irvine: ext 53182 E-mail: [mirvine@uoguelph.ca](mailto:mirvine@uoguelph.ca) )

Please send Dr. Dorothy Odartey-Wellington ([dodartey@uoguelph.ca](mailto:dodartey@uoguelph.ca)) a list of the courses you would like to take once you've chosen them, and let her know how you are doing! Your European Studies profs in Guelph love hear about your adventures in Europe and are always available for consultation.

Centre for International Programs: [goabroad@uoguelph.ca](mailto:goabroad@uoguelph.ca)

### **The Spanish University System**

- Ways that degrees and university programs are organized
- Any useful terms

### **A Few Words of Advice**

As appears to be characteristic of the Spanish university system, inefficiency and disorganization reign, despite the **valiant efforts** of the program coordinators. Don't expect things to work the way they do in Guelph. Try not to stress out over courses and don't take any of it too seriously. It is not unusual to find that a course you have been in for 6 weeks one day evaporates never to be seen again; to have room mix-ups; prof. mix-ups; class mix-ups.... CHECK BULLETIN BOARDS AS OFTEN AS POSSIBLE. The only notification you will ever get regarding exams, room changes etc. will be postings on the bulletin boards. Don't expect anyone to tell you anything! You will have to sign up for exams in October. Classes often have 100% finals, sometimes as orals. Ask what efforts are made for foreign students. Lectures are usu-

ally 2-3 hours long. Be prepared to stay awake and tuned in. Reading the material before the lecture will make your life easier! Be prepared to have notes with many words missing. Many profs dictate notes... although commerce classes tend to have slides. Good excuse to talk to other students and ask to borrow their notes!

(If this does not apply to Spain please just take it out or note what the system is like in Spain)

### **Marks**

-What the marking system is out of and what is a good or bad mark

Don't convert your marks into percentages, you'll just get depressed. Remember that everything is supposed to be different.

### **Class Etiquette**

Don't eat or drink in lectures, it's considered very rude. Although having an entire conversation about your ski weekend doesn't seem to be frowned upon at all!! Let the prof be your guide, if the prof has a coffee or water, it may be OK for you to have one too.

French students, especially girls, dress for class a little more than we do at home. Don't plan on wearing sweat pants, sweatshirts, shorts, etc unless you want to stand out. Don't wear baseball caps, or any hats at all, especially for girls – they'll think you're an American. In lectures, questions aren't asked. This is the prof's time.

(Again if the above does not apply to Spain either take it out or note the differences from Canada)

Books can often be borrowed second hand. Finding an advanced Spanish student to lend you notes is great! Some students bring laptops to lectures, but most hand write their notes. They are very particular about underlining!

-Are extra readings and book provided to you or do you have to purchase them

Beware! You will have to stand in line for hours on end only to find out you are in the wrong line! This is part of studying in Spain. There will be endless amounts of seemingly useless paperwork to fill out. Make 5 photocopies of every important piece of paper you own; everyone will want one! Another possibility would be to scan your documents and keep electronic copies. Do not *expect* anyone to know anything. Keep asking until you receive an answer that you are satisfied with. And last but not least...the rules can change! Bring *every* document you think you may possi-

bly need (you can easily find photocopiers there, and save carrying all that paper). Write down your questions so you don't get frazzled and forget!

-If the above is not true for the country of your exchange please just take it out^^

**-Residence permit?**

**-Medical exam required?**

This list should give you an idea what Spanish officials will require. (check if applies to all)

-Your passport and a photocopy of its main page, and the page with the student visa from Toronto

-Photobooth size identity photos or a smaller size (the same size you need for your visa).

-Photocopy of your Spanish student card, inscription receipt and/or letter of admission

-Certificate of residence

-A photocopy of your long form birth certificate

-Proof of financial means (bank balance in Spain, etc).

-Always bring some cash in case there are taxes for fees you have to pay on the spot

**Even if you don't need a visa for staying in Spain, you might want to consider getting a NIE (Número de Identificación de Extranjero - Foreigner Identification Number) and a Tarjeta de Residencia. These make you a legal resident in Spain and are useful more many transactions, for instance a NIE is required to work by the social security administration.**

### **Aide Personnalisée au Logement**

The French government will give all students a partial reimbursement of rent money, generally 40%, which is retroactive to your first payment (or sometimes limited to three months before the application). For example, one student in 2007 in Lyon was reimbursed 150 euros on 345 euros rent as of the second month in her apartment. The amount you are reimbursed depends on marital status, dependent children, number of residents, number of square meters, fiscal earnings in the last year. The application process is relatively complex but definitely worth the effort. Pick up the application forms and list of required documents at the *Caisse d'allocations familiales* (CAFL) office or your landlord may provide them for you and you can do the application process through him/her. You must wait until you have the *carte de séjour* to apply but do all the other things while you are waiting. To apply for APL you will need:

- Attestation d'hébergement* (a form from your landlord or the residence's *accueil* that proves you live there and states the cost of the rent)
- A *fiche d'état civil* from your local *mairie* (We didn't have to get this in Chambéry in 2007).
- Your official *carte de séjour* (you can't have the "in progress" sheet)
- Relevé d'identité bancaire* (R.I.B). from the bank, which proves you have an account and provides the number for direct deposit
- A student card

It may take months to process, but then the retroactive pay will be deposited directly into your account and you will receive the subsidy each month after that. If you go to the CAF office, they'll guide you through the application and print out all the forms you'll need signed.

- If there is something similar that your host country provides feel free to add it.^^^

### **Region: La Rioja**

**Location:** 42°15'N 2°30'W Northern Spain, About 5 hours Northwest of Barcelona

### **What the guide books say:**

### **STUDYING IN...**

- General information about each host university
- Library information and information about campus

### **Courses**

- What courses the university focuses on
- Suggested and not suggested professors and other university staff
- Choosing courses

### **Marks**

- What marks are graded out of
- Required to pass and/ or options to redo exams

**Arrival in .....**

- Arrival where to fly in and what trains/buses to get to the location
- Suggested companies

**Living in .....**

- General info about the town or city
- How it compares to Guelph if applicable
- Good shops and places to go

**Accommodation**

- Residence information
- Living off campus information
- General cost of flats and what to look for.

In Private Lodgings

- Some info about finding a place and what to look for.

Boarding with a family can be an amazing opportunity to improve your language skills and become familiar with the Spanish culture, but it also has its risks (namely that it cuts down on your freedom and independence significantly).

Some useful accommodation addresses:**Transportation**

- Buses and trains,
- Other types of commuting

**Shopping**Groceries-

- Suggested shops and hours

Markets-

1. When they are open
2. Is trying to bargain okay or not

For clothes shopping:

**Food and Drink**

- Local specialties and suggested places
- Costs

Restaurants-Alcohol-**Entertainment**Night LifeCultural Life

- Art
- Music and theatre
- Historical sites

**Additional remarks:**

Useful contacts:

(if you would like to add your name and email it will be placed on the document and future students may contact you)

**Region: Andalusia**

**Location: Southern Spain, about 5 hours South of Madrid**

**What the guide books say:****STUDYING IN**

- General information about each host university
- Library information and information about campus

**Courses**

- What courses the university focuses on
- Suggested and not suggested professor and other university staff
- Choosing courses

**Marks**

- What marks are graded out of
- Required to pass and/ or options to redo exams

**Arrival in .....**

- Arrival where to fly in and what trains/buses to get to the location
- Suggested companies

**Living in ...**

- General info about the town or city
- How it compares to Guelph if applicable
- Good shops and places to go

**Accommodation**

- Residence information
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