

# Tamarra Thal – UF in Madrid

**Major:** Public Relations | **Minor:** Business Administration

## I studied abroad because...

I wanted to explore different cultures. I enjoy meeting new people and creating lasting memories, so I knew study abroad was the perfect way to do that.

## One of my biggest challenges before studying abroad was...

deciding where to study abroad. I had so many different interests and passions, so settling on just one was difficult for me. Luckily, money was never a problem because I was awarded a scholarship that would help cover my entire study abroad experience.

## A typical meal I had while studying abroad was...

*tapas*. Tapas are basically a small meal (sort of like an appetizer) that the Spanish eat in between meals. This could be *patatas bravas* (diced potatoes served with tomato sauce), *gazpacho* (a tomato-based drink), or my favorite, *paella*. *Paella* is a typical Spanish meal that contains yellow rice, shrimp, and other small vegetables.

## My favorite spot in my host city was...

definitely the *tapas* bars. Going out for *tapas*, which I learned fairly quickly, is an integral part of Spanish culture that not only brings people together but also serves as a social hub. My friends and I would often go out for *tapas* and just catch up on each other's days, make jokes, and create further plans for that night.

## One cool event I got to experience while abroad was...

El Rastro. El Rastro, which actually translates to "The Trail," is the largest and most popular open-air flea market in Madrid. You are almost guaranteed to find what you want at the Rastro and for a fairly good price.

## The most memorable experience for me while abroad...

happened on my second day in Madrid. When I first arrived to Madrid, my phone didn't have any service, and I wasn't too familiar with the streets. When I decided to go out and meet some friends that night, I realized very late that I didn't know exactly how to get there. Not even knowing the name of our meeting point, but only the area it was located in, I roamed around the area for more than three hours. I then met three girls who walked around with me for an additional two hours, trying to find the area with zero luck. I finally found my way by 11p.m., and I had also made three new friends. While I was very terrified, that is a moment that I will never forget.

## A habit I picked up while abroad:

The eating routine is very different in Madrid than in the States. They eat breakfast around noon, eat lunch around 2p.m., and eat dinner around 10p.m. It took a while, but I finally learned to switch my eating habits around. People in Madrid also tend to dress pretty nice, even if they aren't going anywhere too fancy.

Here in the States, we can attend class with basically pajamas on, and no one would care. In Madrid, it's more widely accepted that you dress up and look presentable, no matter the occasion.

## What I found most challenging while abroad was...

the eating habit. I'm so used to eating my meals very early and having several snacks in between. I got over that challenge by integrating myself into different friend groups, going out to eat with them. I found it easier to eat at different times and different styles of food when I had support from people who enjoyed doing it.

## What surprised me most about study abroad was...

that most people are typically willing to help you, and may in fact, go out of their way to do so. I recall my first day in Madrid, I had to carry three pieces of luggage up and down the metro stairs. Right when people noticed, they basically fought to help me get my luggage to my desired destination. One woman went as far as to walk me all the way to my street, carrying one of my luggage pieces in her hand.

## My last bit of advice:

This is your moment to be your true, authentic self. Go out and do things that you always wished you could do. Meet new people. Get into that new hobby you never have time for. Study abroad is the perfect time to explore your interests and dive into your passions, so do just that.