Darya Molibog – UF in Madrid

Major: Marketing | Minors: Spanish & Digital Arts and Sciences

I studied abroad because...
I am someone who absolutely adores travel and seeing the world, so there was no doubt in my mind when I started my time at UF that I would study abroad at one point or another.

One of my biggest challenges before studying abroad was...
the nerves that came with the language barrier, choosing to stay in a homestay, and not knowing anyone on the program with me before I even arrived in Madrid. However, when I did arrive, all of these things ended up not being an issue, and if anything, were a learning and growing experience as an individual.

A typical meal I had while studying abroad:
Breakfast was pretty small with a yogurt and some fruit. As for lunch, I’d eat at home, which usually consisted of some kind of Spanish dish (lots of rice, and I definitely ate paella more than anything), veggies, and lots of fresh fruit again. For dinner, I would go out to eat and try somewhere new every night, which typically ended up being some kind of tapas bar.

My favorite spot in my host city:
Every spot that I went to and discovered was my favorite, as I most definitely fell in love with Madrid. However, during my last week, I went to a park on the outskirts of the center of Madrid called Parque del Cerro del Tío Pío. Sitting on top of a hill, being able to see the entire city of Madrid, the mountains in the background, and watching the beautiful colors of the sunset was absolutely breathtaking.

One cool event I got to experience while abroad:
I went to Pride in Madrid for the main celebration with a few friends. It was my first Pride festival I’ve ever been to, and it was one of the most welcoming and beautiful experiences to see everyone come together and celebrate.

The most memorable experience for me while abroad:
The most memorable thing that happened to me during my stay in Madrid was adjusting to the new schedule of doing things in Spain. Everything there was pushed later by a few hours compared to how we live in the U.S. For example, lunch would be at around 2-4 PM and dinner would be around 9-10 PM. They call it “living with the sun” since the sun rises earlier and sets so much later there, and it was definitely different and made it feel like there were more hours in the day.

A habit I picked up while abroad was...
not necessarily a habit or a hobby, but something I learned. As someone who’s super organized and lives a very scheduled life, I learned to live more free-flowing and in-the-moment, and the joy that comes with spontaneity.

What I found most challenging while abroad:
I actually didn’t find anything that difficult to deal with when I was abroad. I knew whatever happened, I’d be able to manage one way or another, and this mindset really helped me. However, the first few days staying in my homestay, I was learning the rules of the house, meal times, etc., day-by-day instead of all right from the start, so you could say not knowing everything concerned me a little.

What surprised me most about study abroad was...
the confidence I gained due to being thrown into speaking Spanish. I have been learning Spanish for years before I studied abroad and knew I was capable and had the knowledge to speak. However, I was always too intimidated or lacked the confidence to speak conversationally on the spot. Now, after studying abroad, I voluntarily want to speak it all the time to not lose it and keep improving.

My last bit of advice:
Living abroad and experiencing a new culture is an opportunity that you may never get again – so take this chance! Embrace all of the challenges and obstacles that you believe you may face abroad. Trust that you will overcome all of them, and learn and grow from the experience.