Kaitlyn Comes – Exchange at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid (Madrid, Spain)

Major: Business Administration | Minor: Spanish

I studied abroad because...

I wanted to experience a new culture and language for a longer period of time. I wanted to go for a whole semester so that I could have time to completely immerse myself in the country, to make friends with local students, to travel to other countries, and to have a new experience for myself.

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

the idea of being in a foreign country alone for four months. The exchange program is an immersive experience but also a very independent one that I needed to prepare myself for. The idea of going on exchange was scary at times, but I knew that the experience I was going to have over there would be worth it.

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

tapas. Tapas are a traditional Spanish dinner that included smaller serving sizes of multiple entrees that you share with friends.

My favorite spot in my host city was...

Retiro Park. The park was located close to the center of the city, and it had a huge expanse of greenery and gardens that were beautiful. It was enjoyable to just sit on a park bench and talk with my friends or go grab a coffee at the cafes located throughout the park. There was plenty to see and do in Retiro, but it still had a relaxing atmosphere to it.

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

Spain's Constitution Day in the beginning of December. By this time of the year, Madrid was completely decorated with Christmas lights and decorations so it was really beautiful. On Constitution Day, residents from all over the country travel to the capital to celebrate the new constitution that was created after the end of the dictatorship. There were a lot of people celebrating in the streets and enjoying the company of family and friends, all while surrounded by the beautiful Christmas decorations.

The strangest/most memorable experience for me while abroad was...

when I traveled to Tangier, Morocco, with a few friends one weekend. I was the only person with blonde hair in the group, and whenever I was walking around the city with my friends, the Moroccan locals kept looking at my hair - the men, women, and children. I ended up putting a scarf over my head to try to cover it up for the rest of the trip. It was pretty strange and made me a little uncomfortable, but I really enjoyed the trip overall.

A habit I picked up while abroad was...

eating my meals later. The Spanish eat their meals around 9:30p.m., which was very hard for me to adjust to when I used to eat around 6:00. But I now eat my meals around 8:00p.m., much later than what I used to do before studying abroad.

What I found most challenging while abroad was...

homesickness. It was definitely hard not see nor talk to my friends and family every day like I was used to; however, I managed it by making plans with the friends I had made while over there and by making myself busy with activities. This helped me to better enjoy my time in Spain because I only had a few months, and I wanted to make the most of it.

What surprised me most about study abroad was...

the friends that I made. I had 12 roommates, all of us from different countries throughout Europe and the Americas, and I also made some really great friendships with local Spanish students. I still reach out to and hear from some of my roommates and Spanish friends, even a year later.

My last bit of advice:

Studying abroad is an amazing experience that I highly recommend to anyone that asks. However, I also advise that prospective students do a lot of research about their country of choice and that they fully understand that going abroad means differences. There will be differences in who you talk to every day, who you see, what you experience, the language you speak, etc. Study abroad is a great opportunity, but it should not be taken lightly.