

# UNIVERSITY OF GRANADA

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## Learning Log 1 – Statement of Expectations

When applying to study in Granada, it was with the idea of studying in another language, under a system which was unlike the ones I've experienced before, with different ideologies on subjects I am currently undertaking at the university. This was also an opportunity to affirm and master the Spanish language I have been learning for a while. Being accepted has brought excitement, impatience, but also some apprehension, as well as questions.

Since the age of eleven, I have experienced the change in country and in educational system from Fr. Guiana to England. The change from Exeter to Granada will mean a whole new experience, more differences in culture, and require the capability to adapt to new surroundings. I am not even in Granada and I can already see that what was expected from Exeter and was taken for granted will probably hit me once in Spain: for example, one was able, before taking Exeter as your chosen university, to visit the place, speak to people about the course chosen and get an overview of the university, thing which was quasi impossible to do for Granada, apart from asking to those who have already been. Accommodation was also certain for first years and Erasmus students, which isn't the case for Granada, as many of us will have to be pretty much on the Spanish ground in order to find not only the accommodation, but also people to share with.

As much as I am excited to see Granada for the people, the architecture and their gastronomy, I am also impatient to get to Granada for its university, which is one of the oldest ones in Spain and thus brings a certain fame to the city. As situated in the south of Andalusia, its culture and ethnic must be rich, and I am sure to have much to say when studying the politics of Andalusia throughout the year. Hopefully, this will give me a greater understanding to the problems of immigration, and I am curious to see what Granada/Andalusia has come up concerning this issue. Spain has different regions and thus dialects, and their users are usually proud of this heritage. These regions can at times create considerable issues for the government, and how it manages the security should be an interesting subject to study. Although the objective is to learn the main Spanish language, I will be curious to see the difference in the dialects and hopefully acquire some basics in order to show them that foreigners are not narrow minded. I am also impatient to take this opportunity to visit the surrounding countries like Portugal and going to Gibraltar and looking at its politics, whether people feel they belong more to Spain or to the UK.

One of my biggest fears concerning this Erasmus year, would be to come back to Exeter with the same language level I had in Spanish before I left. It is true that I will be attending classes only in Spanish, but like former Erasmus students mentioned in my Spanish language class, they found it hard to speak the language much, besides when at university, as they lived with other English speaking people. This is why my aim will be to share an accommodation with either Spaniards or international students with no or little knowledge of English. This way, our only mean of communication will be in Spanish. Living with international students could also expand my view points on the world that surrounds us, and potentially open doors, such as learning new languages, or having friends from countries all over the world I could visit. Also, they will broaden my knowledge on international affairs and how they are perceived, which will bring a plus to my studies of politics in Spain.

## Learning Log 2 – Settling into new environment

Granada, Sierra Nevada, the Alhambra, its famous cathedral, its food, its people. These could potentially be the first six things that cross one's mind when they arrive in this beautiful city, with its small yet beautiful streets, full of life.

As soon as I arrived to the hotel, I left my luggage and went on the hunt for accommodation. I was lucky to have my mum with me, as she gave me strong advices that I would not have thought of, when looking for flats. Details to look for that makes a living, such as noise, distance from the university or the town, or even heating. At the thought of Spain, you often forget that in winter, it does get cold, and to ask if the flats had heating – as it is not a common characteristic of houses in Granada. My friend from Exeter, Ruth, ended up with a flat with no heating, and I can only begin to imagine how hard it gets at night or early in the morning. Also, before arriving to Granada, I had previously looked on the internet what were the recommendations from students that had lived there, and knew which part of the city were not recommended to live on, whether it be due to security or noise. As I had imagined and mentioned in my first learning log, finding a flat was not easy and quite stressing at first. What also didn't help is the Andalucían accent. I could easily compare it to a mixture of Irish and Welsh accent; for someone who is new to the language, it practically sounds like Chinese.

Accommodation, in Spain, is something you have to fight for. I got into a situation where the agency sold the flat I had reserved to a taker more opportunistic that paid on the spot. In return, I learnt from my mistake, and did the same thing when I found a reserved room which was to me *the* perfect room: I forced my way and agreed to pay on the spot. The owner had no choice but to agree.

Luckily enough, my other flatmates are all but French and English: one from the north of Spain, one from Austria and the other from Cyprus. This great mixture is forcing all four of us to speak in one common language: Spanish – although we are each on a different level.

Although I have been undertaking courses to improve my Spanish, it is true what they say: You have to be immersed by the language in order to learn it in record timing. There is nothing more enthusiastic than to learn expressions and cultural ideologies within the locals, and being encouraged by their good mood and openness of mind to keep talking Spanish, even when you make mistakes. The Spaniards are thus very welcoming and kind, and you are to expect them to offer you help for directions if caught with a map in your hands. I do sense however that some feel intimidated by the amount of foreign student there are. I was surprised, however, to see how easy it was to make friends with the people in Granada. Then again, Granada *is* a student city, with over 80,000 students every year, of which 2,000 are European Erasmus. Truthfully, it is easier to socialise with Erasmus students, as we are all in the same boat and have this tendency to stay together as a group – which keeps on growing.

In Learning log1, I mentioned that I was curious about the ethnicity differences in Granada, seen its close distance with Africa. I was shocked to see that there hardly any ethnic mix. I have then realised that they were more attracted to bigger more famous cities such as Malaga or Sevilla.

The university. It is spread all over Granada, but fortunately my faculty isn't far from where I live. In the University of Granada, you are the one choosing and making your timetable. You are, in a way, left to yourself. And one should not be afraid to remind the secretary what is needed to be done urgently, especially with the commonly known problem of the siesta. Thankfully, it was an issue that lasted only at the beginning of the year, yet which asked a lot of adaptation: the idea of shops of every kind closing around 2.30 pm to open again at 5.30 was a shock. It has become a cultural trait that I have however learned to

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appreciate and possibly like – unlike having to wait five weeks in order to finally get internet installed. Then again, this is Spain.

## Learning Log 3 – Reflection about host University

The university of Granada: 80 000 students, of which 2 000 are European Erasmus. Its Centre of Modern Language receives a little over 10 000 international students a year, which gives us a pretty good idea of Granada's popularity amongst foreigners. Also, it has been shown that Granada is the fifth most popular higher education institution on the internet in Europe.<sup>1</sup> No wonder why they are overloaded with work.

For a few of us, the paperwork with our faculty has been more stressful than finding a flat. With the high number of Erasmus students that turn up each day at the International student office in order to clarify information or sign learning agreements – amongst other things – it has been a nightmare to matriculate oneself. Of course, this happened only at the beginning of each semester – when the big load of students were stressing – and calmed down bit by bit as the days were going passed. Friends from Belgium also mentioned the slow administrative work that would do his faculty, compared to his university in Liege.

What pleased me in the way the University of Granada works, is that as Erasmus students, we were granted a few weeks before handing in our learning agreement, in order to attend different classes and see for ourselves if we were sure about our choices. This, I remember, was also possible for students at Exeter University, and not only for Erasmus – whereas the actual students in Granada do not have this possibility (although it depends on some faculties).

One thing that I have noticed as totally different from my home university is that in Granada, not only do we choose the subject we want to study, but we also have a responsibility to decide in which group we want to attend classes. Allow me to explain this in more details: In Granada, one can choose to study Politics or Economics, for example, and decide whether they would attend group A – in the morning, or group B – in the afternoon. Each class lasts 2 hours, with 10 minutes break every hour. The morning group goes from 9am to 3pm and the afternoon groups from 4pm up to eventually 10pm. I am very keen on this system, as it allows us to learn how to organise ourselves depending on the availability of the course and our other choices, and in my case, it allowed me to include extracurricular activities in between classes such as Salsa dancing for example.

Another difference between the two universities is how they approach us with the compulsory reading; unlike Exeter, professors in Granada do not have books which are designed for the entire course, and they therefore select relevant chapters from different biographies, instead of making us pay a multitude of different books. We then use the photocopying office – which by the way is very popular in my university, if not in Spain altogether – and print out the chapters required. Obviously, I see remarks coming up about this technique not being environmental friendly, but they do aim to arrange this by creating big recycle services for the paper used.

One thing I admit having taken for granted when I was in Exeter, was not only the organisation of my faculty, but also the way we are graded. In Spain, it ranges from 0 to 10. I suppose that the equivalent of a 9/10 in Spain is a “first” in Exeter, but this is quasi impossible, unlike in Exeter, where having a 70% is doable. Also, 8/10 is the equivalent of a “2.1”, which leaves us little prospect to achieve a high grade in the UK's equivalent.

Another difference, yet expected from the Spanish culture, is the flexibility of some of the professors, and their tendency to arrive at classes late. It has been unanimous that this occurred in every faculty. What can I say? Welcome to Spain.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://secretariageneral.ugr.es/pages/tablon/\\*/noticias-canal-ugr/2011/02/16/la-ugr-se-posiciona-como-la-quinta-universidad-europea-mas-popular-en-internet?lang=en](http://secretariageneral.ugr.es/pages/tablon/*/noticias-canal-ugr/2011/02/16/la-ugr-se-posiciona-como-la-quinta-universidad-europea-mas-popular-en-internet?lang=en)

## Learning Log 4 – Treatment of British news in the local media

In the Spanish media, everyone has access to 40 channels, of which only two are officially news channels. Even so, they often sidetrack into other contents such as series or films offered elsewhere. Nonetheless, the other channels have regular news broadcast at different times of the day. It seems to me however that the local people prefer newspapers as their means of getting information than through television: at almost every “plaza”, I am in the position to buy newspapers and magazines at a kiosk, open very often in the early hours of the day. What is amazing is that people tend to be loyal to their favourite newspaper. Even our professor works with newspaper such as “El País” more than with what she hears on the television.

It is therefore difficult to discuss the different treatment of the British news in the local media. However, one could say that Spain doesn't overcome much of the British news, apart from when it is related in one way or another with their foreign affairs. A good example of this would be the situation with Gibraltar. It is an ongoing subject which raises many different reactions from the public opinion here in Spain. Another point where the British news has been looked at intensively is with the ongoing situation in the Arabic world, and England's attitude towards Libya, Egypt etc, including the critics of the UK's relationship with Colonel Gaddafi<sup>2</sup>.

One could argue that the difference between the UK's sceptical attitude towards the European Union, and Spain's positivity concerning the EU, has not helped the ongoing relation between the two countries.

The common point of having each a royal family, in my opinion, helps however to maintain good relations between each other: The royal family's wedding has attracted a lot the attention from the local people, whether they approved the wedding or not. It appeared on the news very often, straight after the important topics of politics and economics.

This is also a point to mention; the Spanish news covers a lot of international information, and often links the ongoing affairs with its foreign policies. They privilege a lot of the international news before going onto their local news. Some friends studying in France mentioned that they noticed more or less the same approach.

One thing, however, that has shocked me with the Spanish media – and that I took for granted in the UK – is their tendency to show all videos with a slight sense of bluntness; many occasions did they broadcast rather brutal and shocking videos without previous words of warning, unlike what is done in the English or French news. For example, I was faced many a times with reports of lapidation, physical violence inflicted to minorities or just the mere sight of blood, without warning. I understand that this is for the Spaniard, freedom of information, freedom of speech etc, and maybe I am the one to blame for my sensibility. But in my opinion, the news is watched by everyone and to a certain extent, they should mention the content of their videos before putting them on show – or at least, open call lines for those who may have been affected by the news.

Overall, the treatment of the British news in the media is not one of Spain's priorities, although it is brought up when it has a certain consequence with Spain or its surroundings.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.elpais.com/articulo/opinion/Libia/intervencionismo/liberal/elpepiopi/20110306elpepiopi\\_11/Tes](http://www.elpais.com/articulo/opinion/Libia/intervencionismo/liberal/elpepiopi/20110306elpepiopi_11/Tes)

Quote in Spanish: “El hecho de que hasta hace muy poco varios países occidentales, como Reino Unido e Italia, estuvieran haciendo la pelota a Gaddafi de la manera más cobarde y vendiéndole armas que ahora puede utilizar contra su propia gente hace que sea todavía más importante plantearse esta pregunta.”

## Learning Log 5 – Reaction to the teaching at Host University

I have been studying in the University of Granada for over eight month now and needless to say that there are differences between the teaching of Spain and the one from Exeter.

The first and most different point that I have noticed with Granada in comparison to Exeter, is that the teachers have a lot more interactive lectures with their students. In one of my lecture in the first semester, “Spain’s foreign affairs”, the teacher had a very good relationship with all of us. It is true that three quarter of the class was Erasmus, which meant that the teacher took care in speaking clearly, and using a lot of synonyms to help our understanding of the lectures. Aware of the fact that Spanish wasn’t our native language, he nevertheless encouraged all of us to participate, even if that meant using words from other language to explain our point of view. Because he made it so interactive, people had to make research before coming to class, if they didn’t want to look ignorant in front of the other peers. I felt like this forced us to update our knowledge on a regular basis, which meant that a lot less work had to be done when the exams came.

What I have to explain beforehand, is that in order to obtain a 10, the highest possible grade, one has to undergo different skills within the semester:

First of all, the teachers take the level of attendance (which is also the case in Exeter, if not in the large lectures, at least in the tutorials). This forces students to attend, as a maximum of four absences for example, can lead to the impossibility to attend assessment examinations.

Secondly, they also take the level of participation in class. It is very important to participate, as a good participation level can give you 2 points, which help you therefore in achieving a higher grade.

I have noticed that these obligations have been imposed by the university especially in the second semester, as they have realised that high attendance and high participation in class led to higher chances to pass the modules.

However, in Granada, the exams are mostly based on the classes. It shouldn’t be a problem if one attends to all the classes, but it could be for a non native speaker, if the teacher is from Andalucía, with a strong accent, which leaves us with an incomprehensible lecture. This is why I like that Exeter, along with the classes, also offer extra readings to help the student’s understanding as well as expand their knowledge. In Granada, in some modules, unless it is part of the method, there are rarely lectures recommended. One has to search for himself.

There are no tutorials in Granada like there are in Exeter. The teachers offer their office hours. It is not an obligation, but merely a little help to clarify the lectures if needed. I do not recall of anyone who went to these office hours. It is a shame, because where Exeter has it right is that the students will not automatically go and ask for help, whether it be due to laziness or shame even though they need it. But if they are forced to by the university, they will attend it, and gain something at the end of it; if not a better understanding, then a clear idea that there are different aspects of the module. In Austria neither there isn’t compulsory tutorials. My Austrian flat mates explained to me that instead, they had to do a lot of research before the lectures, and it was only during the classes that the teacher would clarify any doubts they had.

I understand this technique, but I do not believe that it is always possible to prepare before every lecture all the time (unexpected hitch happen sometimes). Also, for those who are not native speaker, tutorials give them another opportunity to clear any doubts. All in all, it seems to me that universities use different methods according to what is required from them, and adapt to their surroundings (like a high level of Erasmus students, for example).

## Learning Log 6 – Year experience in the University of Granada



Granada, the city of the Alhambra, is situated in the southern autonomous region of Andalucía in Spain, three hours' drive south of Madrid and one hour north east from Malaga. The city of Granada thus benefits from the distinctive beauty of its environment and a privileged geographical location due to its proximity to the Sierra Nevada – an excellent ski resort – and the Mediterranean coast, with several major tourist sites such as Almuñécar and Salobreña.

The University of Granada (UGR), founded in 1531, has four University Campuses, as well as the “Campus Centro”, in which all the centres spread throughout the historic part of the city are brought together. The UGR’s policy of using buildings of historical and cultural value has enriched its heritage, as well as promoting the restoration and maintenance of these buildings.



Over 80 000 undergraduate and postgraduate students study at the UGR per year, of which over 2,000 European students enrol in the UGR through the Erasmus program, making it the most popular destination: ; the UGR is the leading European university in terms of receiving students and the second Spanish university in terms of the mobility of its own students.<sup>3</sup> The University is also involved in major exchange programmes with universities in the United States, Canada, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Mediterranean countries, Australia, Oceania and Asia. Also, it has been shown that Granada is the fifth most popular higher education institution on the internet in Europe.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, when I had the opportunity to choose between Madrid and Granada as my year abroad experience, it was clear straight away that Granada was the place to go. Back at the time, I remember the impatience of studying in a foreign country, using their national language, having to understand and adapt to the different culture and everything that it would

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.infinitecourses.com/SADetails.aspx?University=University-of-Granada&UniversityID=11904>

<sup>4</sup> [http://secretariageneral.ugr.es/pages/tablon/\\*/noticias-canal-ugr/2011/02/16/la-ugr-se-posiciona-como-la-quinta-universidad-europea-mas-popular-en-internet?lang=en](http://secretariageneral.ugr.es/pages/tablon/*/noticias-canal-ugr/2011/02/16/la-ugr-se-posiciona-como-la-quinta-universidad-europea-mas-popular-en-internet?lang=en)



bring. I also remember having some apprehension of what I was going to find out, the fear that it was not going to be as I imagined, and that I had made the wrong choice.

But now that I have finished this year abroad (which flew by) I can safely say that going to Erasmus in Granada was one of the best decision in my life. Or I should count this as two decisions: The first one was to decide to do an Erasmus year abroad and thus making my course a four year course instead of a three year one. If I could, I would advise anyone to do an Erasmus year.

Why?

Not only does Erasmus allows one person to learn different culture and languages from their host country, but this latter also teaches us, the Erasmus students, a whole lot of skills that we main not have had yet; Granada has taught me patience, empathy, an understanding of its history and it has taught me how to adapt myself to the people's way of life. It teaches you independence; although by going to university in the first place one does their first step of independence, living in another country for a year and only seeing members of your family during the vacations is different, and asks a certain level of maturity.

Then, choosing the University of Granada was the second best decision made. As mentioned above, this university receives per year over 2,000 Erasmus students, not to mention the 11,000 international students it welcomes in its Modern Language Centre. It is amazing to think that Granada has relations not only in Europe but also with Latin America and the above mentioned. This has created an international atmosphere that I felt nowhere else but in London before. Well the University of Granada taught me a higher sense of responsibility, tolerance and somehow, maturity – I will expand of this at a later point.



The University of Granada has nothing to envy to other universities. Not only does it have an incredibly high amount of students applying there each year, it also enjoys the possibility to teach in what are some of the oldest and most picturesque buildings in Granada, creating jealousy amongst its other competitors. Nevertheless, what stroke me most after the beauty of this city and my host university, was the warm welcome they offered to every single one of us. Even to those who

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spoke little or no Spanish, they made the effort to find someone capable to translate and help the students. Straight away we felt at home.

As Erasmus students, the University of Granada offered and encouraged us to undertake the intensive language courses in order to attend our normal classes without too much difficulty in understanding the lectures. We were advantaged with price reduction, making it interesting and worth taking, as well as 6ECT credits added to our studies. None the less, I would not recommend anyone to study abroad in a country which teaches in their own language if they do not have a minimum understanding of that language. As an advanced Spanish student, it was difficult at times for me to keep up with the level at which some classes were taught, so I can only imagine the hard work it could be for a strict beginner. On that point, I thank the University of Exeter for making this clear to everyone from the start. In all honesty, these intensive language courses helped a lot as they not only reaffirmed what we studied before, but they also helped us improve our Spanish when we were already immersed in the language. This meant that whatever we had learned in the day, we were able to put it to practise as soon as we left the class, which is impossible to do when learning Spanish in another non-spanish speaking country. Also, not only did they make sure that we learnt the correct academic Spanish, but they also taught us the street Spanish, which *was* useful, regardless of what adults may say. Why? Simply because this year abroad was not only about studying our subject, but also to get a sense of what is Spain, and absorb its culture. In the streets, not everyone speaks the perfect Spanish. They use an unbelievable amount of expressions, which often cannot be understood by translating in English. This allowed us to integrate more with the locals, making this year an exceptional one.

On our first week of arrival, our enrolment week, the University of Granada tried its best to guide us in our module choices. When I say tried its best, I mean it: with 11,000 international panicking students all rushing to their office at the same time, it was a miracle that I got seen to. But they knew what they were doing, and all credit goes to them. Also, we were granted a few weeks to try out on all of our modules and decide whether we wanted to change or not. However, I do feel they could improve their service by giving us more details from the start, with “frequently asked questions” and answers, and potentially more people to help us, even if they were to be 3<sup>rd</sup> year or postgraduate students. At least they could advise us on our module selections, informing us which teacher is better with Erasmus students, which one speaks with an acceptable accent and what group they were in.

Talking about groups, this is when I realised that this university encouraged us to be responsible, independent and organised; usually, each module has two groups, Group A and Group B. Group A is usually in the first half of the day – which means from 9am to 3pm – and group B is in the afternoon, from 4pm to eventually 10pm – in my case. One student can choose to do one module with one teacher in group B in the first semester, for example, and choose another module group A for the second semester. In other words, it is a little like pick and mix. The only rule set by the university was that we didn't exceed 30 ECT credit per semester. At first I was a little confused, but soon got to like this idea, as it allowed us to organise our study time along with other extracurricular activities like salsa dancing for example. I could therefore decide to have all my lectures in the morning – providing there were no clashes – and leave the afternoons free. Others, aware that they were not able to get up early for classes in the morning did just the opposite and often ended up studying up to 8pm.

Studying until 10pm... This reflects the adaptation skill I mentioned earlier, taught by Granada and Spain in general. Never in my life had I thought that I would be attending a lecture up to 10pm. Yet here I was, going to lectures at 8pm to finish at 10pm – as lectures in Granada generally lasts for two hours –, when most of my friends were either getting to bed or getting ready to go out for their night life – which by the way was amazing!

I blame the famous “siesta” to be the cause of such a different lifestyle. It took a few of us a little time to get used to the city being asleep between 2pm and 5.30pm. No shops were open, and it was impossible to do anything but sleep or study. At least one of the stereotypes about Spain is true (although it doesn't affect the whole of Spain and it is only obvious during the summer). Granada was very affected by the siesta for the most obvious reason: the heat. I have experienced Granada under the heat and it was not very pleasant. One therefore understood why the Spaniards shut themselves in, away from the sun. Adding to that, Granada is 738 metres above the sea level, and not near to the sea, making us closer and more affected by the sun.

Going back to the University, it felt like sometimes, the professors were also affected by the sun; arriving on time was not their best quality. A friend at Nantes University which studied law in Granada also mentioned that her teachers were often late and had a casual relaxed attitude to the students who did the same. This is when I realised that I took Exeter's good timing for granted; when a lecture starts at 9, it starts at nine, and the students have a 10 or 15 minutes wait before they can leave the room. I am afraid that in Granada it wasn't

exactly this straight forward, as waiting time could go up for twenty minutes before the teachers turned up.

The lecture classes were generally small, apart from a few exceptions, making some of the lectures more interactive than those in Exeter; the professors are a lot more communicative and interact significantly more with us students. They often tried to know and understand us, whether it was through a “ficha” – a piece of paper that we had to give to every professor with our photo, explaining what course we were doing and what language we spoke – or through our oral participation in class. They were very strict on class participation. We could earn or lose points depending on our class participation. As Spanish was not our native language, it was a little daunting for us, but the lecturers encouraged us a lot, and admittedly, the Spanish students were considerably patient with us. They were even more understanding when we had a teacher with a strong Andalucían accent. As I mentioned in a previous Learning Log, a strong Andalucian accent is the equivalent of a very strong Irish accent. For us Erasmus, it made the comprehension of the classes a lot more difficult. This was a down side to studying in Granada: our final marks were mostly based on our class participation, class attendance and notes taken in class. Thus when we hardly understood what the professor said (although he tried his best to speak slowly for us) and managed to take very little notes, it made it harder for us to use them back into our exams.

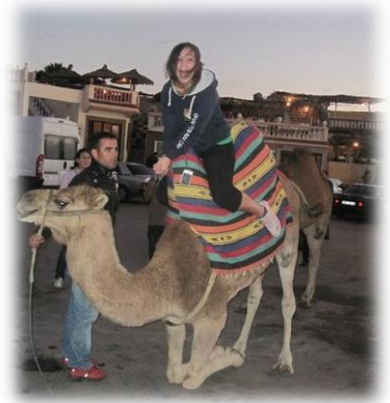
The strong accent could be a easily solved issue if our modules included a lot of extra compulsory reading. However, my faculty didn't offer much books. As a matter of fact, we do not buy books in the University of Granada, but we photocopy a lot instead; unlike Exeter, professors in Granada do not have books which are designed for the entire course, and they therefore select relevant chapters from different biographies, instead of making us pay a multitude of different books. The photocopying office was more popular than the bookshop. For those who environmental lovers, it didn't go too well.

None the less, my only regret was that again, compared to Exeter, Granada had no tutorials. Not even compulsory ones. It wasn't until I realised they were no tutorials in my faculty that I understood the importance of it and why Exeter made it look so imperative. I am certain that if we had had tutorials, it would have helped our grasp of the subject taught. Thankfully, we did get used to the accent a little more every day.

Living with a Spanish flat mate helped. I was lucky to have been living with one Austrian, one Cypriot and a Spaniard. As we each had a different language as our mother tongue, speaking Spanish was the only solution we had in order to communicate. I was therefore glad to not have shared a house with friends from Exeter, as I know as a fact that we would have spoken in English instead of Spanish, and thus not improved our level in the language. This also meant that I got an opportunity to meet people from all over the world, and travel to their country to visit them.

Travelling was very big in Granada. Maybe was it due to the high level of international students present, but the university had created three travelling groups over the years, which allowed us to travel around.<sup>5</sup> It was amazing to be able to travel to many parts of Spain or other countries for very reasonable amount of money. I do not know if it was because I was in Spain, but I just couldn't get enough of travelling; south of Granada, east, west... I even went on a trip to Morocco and Portugal with one of the travelling group on a very affordable price! I had one in a lifetime experience such as getting on a Camel's back or visiting Hercules's cave (as shown in the photos on the right).

We also visited small towns, such as Guadix and learnt about the caves, built a long time ago but still used as houses in many places in the South of Spain still.<sup>6</sup> For some unknown reason, I had never expressed such a need to travel before, even in England, but now I have started, I am not prepared to stop.



One thing I have realised during my stay is that the students in Granada participate in Granada's economy just as much (if not more) than the touristic sector: The students boost the economy around by the simple act of looking for a flat.<sup>7</sup> This creates employment within the housing sector, as it benefits those with little or no education – or immigrants – by providing them cleaning jobs among others. The students in Granada have such an impact on the city that during the summer holidays, the city is quiet and empty. Some locals mentioned

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.erasmus-valencia.com/gb-viajes-programme.htm>: Our AEG Granada group was linked with Valencia, making the experience a lot more international.

<sup>6</sup> <http://granadainfo.com/canastera/cdesacroen.htm>

<sup>7</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province\\_of\\_Granada#Economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Granada#Economy)

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that summer was the only time merchants and little businesses could rest and prepare themselves for the following academic year.

Finding a flat was not the easiest thing to do, but I feel it was easier than finding a place to live in Exeter: to get a room, it wasn't necessary to be in a group and to turn up altogether. One just needed to look at the posters put around on the notice boards or walls in the street and call up. I was lucky to have found a flat rented by the owners, and not the property agencies. Our landowner was a very charming girl that tried her best to make our stay comfortable.

Culturally speaking, Granada has been very intense, very interesting and very rewarding. It was above my expectation. Yes, admittedly when I saw the low population level and how small this city was, I was far from expecting to see such a high level of night life and entertainment offered throughout the year. With Spain's very rich culture, every month offered different festivals, celebrations and religious festivities.

Academically speaking, Granada has also offered me many opportunities that I may not have received elsewhere. The possibility to learn politics from a different point of view, and understanding the reasons why they may have thoughts that differ from ours, understanding their relationship with another country due to cultural or ideological reasoning was worthwhile.

As much as I have found this year overall productive, many of my French acquaintance felt like the University of Granada was lacking in some areas; besides from the late arrival, they expressed their disappointment on the exam system and the teaching process: a friend from Bordeaux University doing a master was shocked to see how, for her final exam, she had to do a multiple answer exam paper. I myself must agree that I had to do a "true or false" exam paper, and I disliked it very much. The way the questions were put, it was difficult for a non-Spanish speaker to be certain of what to answer. Also I felt like it was very subjective and would have rather questions where I could write, explain my ideas and justify them as best as I could instead of losing points every times I answered a question incorrectly. To me it felt like in order to get a good grade, one had to learn the subject material off by heart in order to pass this exam.

Another French friend, studying at Nantes University mentioned the low control the professor had over the class. She happened to be in a class where people would talk non-stop and thus disturb her learning, and the lecturer, although aware of it, did nothing to stop it. She was not the only one to have seen this. She also emphasized how deadlines were not kept. In France

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and in England, when a lecturer gives a date limit to hand in the work, apart from exceptions, he will not change it or accept any work given in at a later time without a penalty. It did not quite happen as such in some faculties. It felt unjust for those of us who handed in our work on time, completed or not.

If I had to mention anything about Granada's teaching system that I disliked, it would be the inconsistency within their faculty. What I mean by this is the fact that from one teacher to another, the marking system would be totally different. On one hand, I can accept this, but what one would have liked, is a guideline, explaining exactly *what* this particular professor expects from us, and how he intends on marking our work/exams.

None the less, every single one of us was pleased by the university's welcome, and their encouraging attitude towards us.

Granada is a beautiful city, with a lot to offer to whom spends time to find out more. I spent an amazing year, one that I would exchange for no other place even if I had the chance. It felt like home right from the start and invades your heart. I know that many of us Erasmus found it hard to live (many have already booked tickets to return during October and/or Easter) but it was worth it. Without any doubt, what I have learned there will guide me throughout my life.

Thank you, the University of Exeter, for having given me such an opportunity.

## Guide for the future Granada students

**Welcome to Granada!** ... Well, nearly.

I have been in Granada during the academic year of 2010-2011, and it was the best time of my life. Before I went to Granada, I didn't know what was awaiting me, and I know how daunting it may be to go to a new country without some preparation.

So this guide is aimed to give you some advice before your big trip to the most beautiful city in Spain (in my opinion of course.)



### Before you get to Granada:

- It is a good idea to check and **book on the internet** a room at a hostel or hotel place, so you will not panic searching for a place to stay when you arrive in Granada.
- Print a map - find link to print out a map in page 7
- If your parents kindly offer to come with you, do not refuse straight away: my overprotective mother imposed her presence, and I ended up being grateful for this. I know this is an opportunity for you to show how grown up and independent you are, but it does make things less stressful when a grownup is with you, whether it be for moral or financial support.
- If you are going without your parents, then I would advise you to sit down with them, and **make a list** of what you want to be in your future flat. Put down as many criteria as you may think, regardless of whether you will get them all. At least you will be able to make a better judgement.

Below are some of the things that seem pretty sensible to you, but that I would advise you to ask when visiting:

- **Central heating!!!** – Granada gets very cold during winter (we are 738 metres above sea level and we have Sierra Nevada near) not all flats have central heating, and I insist that it is important



- **A good insulation system:** if you do not have a central heating, then check that you have at least something to fight off the cold.
- **The toilet:** make sure (and don't feel embarrassed) to ask whether it can flush the toilet paper. A friend of mine ended up in a flat where they were not allowed to **flush the toilet paper** as it would block the pipe. Charming
- **Natural light:** many flats in Granada have little, if any, natural lights. Believe me when I say that it can change the atmosphere and your time in the country, especially during winter.
- **Locks:** you never know what type of flat mates you will get.

## **How to get to Granada?**

There are many ways in which you can get to Granada, but here are the three most common ways:

- 1) Get a plane ticket to **Granada's airport**, Federico Garcia Lorca. This airport is about 45 minutes coach time to the city. As soon as you step out the airport terminal, you will find this famous coach which is only €3 for a single. It will take you to different stops within the centre of Granada. If unsure, ask the driver about it, they are very friendly.
- 2) For those tight on money, you can get an "easyjet" **flight to Malaga**, and take a train ticket to Granada's train station which is relatively near the city centre.
- 3) For those of you who might drive down, aim for **Madrid** first, and as soon as you passed that point, you will see "**Granada**" signs all the way until your arrival.

\* However, the streets in Granada are relatively small, and parking it can be expensive

## **Once I have arrived, then what?**

Leave your luggage at your hostel, and:

- Go and get a **Spanish sim card**, as it will help you sooner than you think
- Go on a hunt for a flat

## **Finding a flat**

This should be the last of your worries:

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In Granada, people put up notes and posters whenever there is a wall or a lamp post, and it is easy for anyone to call in and arrange to meet somewhere to visit.

- \* Dear boys and girls; when you read that people are looking for a “chic@” flatmate, it doesn’t mean they are searching for a cool girl. The “@” is a short way to say “chica or chico” therefore they accept either boys or girls.

## **Where is best to live in Granada?**

It depends where you will be studying.

For those of you going to Granada during the 2011-2013 academic years, I can already mention which area should be avoided:

- **Camino de Ronda**: They are building a rail line for future trams along that street, and the noise is very unbearable. Plus the amount of dust it creates would kill an asthmatic person.

*Then*, depending of what you are searching for in Granada, you could live near:

- **Plaza Gracia** (south) → a relatively nice spot with not too much noise, yet surrounded by everything; supermarket, club, pharmacy etc. Usually where the local people hang around
- **Plaza Nueva** (north) → the touristic place, with the view on the Alhambra and all the cultural shops and restaurants available.

Never the less, it is a better idea to check which university campus you will be attending to before making your ultimate choice. On a good side, it is very quick and easy to walk from one end of Granada to the other.

- \* I will however advise you to **not** to live with the habitant. Friends of mine which did this often regretted it, as they imposed **rules and obligations** which made their year miserable.

## **Useful things:**

Kettle

Plug transformer

Warm clothing for cold winter (as silly as it sounds)

## **The University of Granada:**

There are **four** campuses in the city, but do not panic, you will often stick to just one of them.

When arriving, try to have the office sign your arrival papers as soon as possible. The sooner the better, as they will be overloaded with work at a later time.

- Respect their office hours: they will not miss out on their lunch hours for you, so be there a good 15 minutes before they close if you want to get anything done
  
- Again, they have so much to do that you shouldn't be afraid to remind them to do something if you feel like it is taking too long... But be patient, it is not an excuse to stress them either.

## **Classes:**

Do attend **as many classes** as you can before choosing. Why?

Because as much as you may think you love a subject, you may be up for a surprise:

- The professor may have a very **strong accent**
- The course may not be exactly like the title
- You may find out that this other subject you never heard of actually interest you more than others

Talk to the professors about their module, and see what they say about it

Besides, it isn't unusual that a same module may be taught in both semester, but just with a different lecturer.

→ Your Erasmus card counts as your library card

→ Aim to undertake the intensive language course they offer you. Take it from my experience, it is worth it.

→ Do keep looking at your myexeter email, as both universities may be sending you important piece of information.

## How to adapt yourself in Granada?

- Respect their ways of living; during summer, when everyone is having a siesta, **do not** put your music very loud, even though it isn't past 9pm. For the Spaniards, the siesta is as sacred as their night sleep, if not more.
- As much as possible, avoid living with friends from your home university. You are in Spain to learn Spanish, and hopefully make new friends. Plus, you will get an opportunity to see each other, and it is a lot more fun to mix around with other students who are looking for just the thing as you.
- ***Speak Spanish!!!!*** They will accept you making mistakes a lot more than if you speak English
- Always smile, and respect the elders. Do not be too shy to speak to the locals. Some of them love to speak to new people.
- Do add the [trip organising groups](#) on facebook: they offer you a wide variety of trips to other parts of Spain and abroad for very affordable prices. You get an opportunity to get to know more about the Spanish life style, their culture and habits, as well as other country such as Morocco, Portugal, and much more. While you are in Spain, make the most of it.

## Great Tapas areas:

- Plaza Gracia
- Plaza Nueva (although very touristic)
- Calle de Elvira

Also do not miss out on Granada's big teterías where you can meet with friends and taste some of the greatest teas of the world

## My final advices to you are simple:

**Make the most of this year!** Do not postpone to later what you can do at that moment, for the days fly by at an accelerated pace.

Do not give up! At times, you may feel like you are not improving your Spanish. But you are, and you will realise it more near the end, so persevere!

**Last but not least:**

Ten things you need to do in Granada:



1. Visit the Alhambra and the Generalife

2. Visit the Park of Sciences of Granada



3. Visit the Albaicin and the Sacromonte neighbourhoods

4. Ski in Sierra Nevada



5. Swim in the beaches of the Tropical Coast

6. Know the Architecture of the Alpujarra



7. Sleep in House-Cave

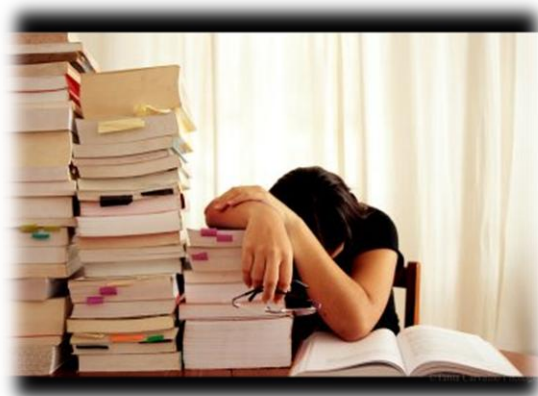
8. Go Shopping



9. Enjoy the Tapas and the Teterías from Granada

10.

That's what you



**STUDY!!!!**

are here for, after all.

## Any more questions?

Here are some links that may be useful to you:

- Map of Granada: (still ask for one when you get to your hotel)

[http://www.gradahomestay.com/imagenes/mapa\\_centro.jpg](http://www.gradahomestay.com/imagenes/mapa_centro.jpg)

- Travel information:

<http://granadainfo.com/granadatravel.htm>

- Night life:

<http://www.whatgranada.com/granada-night.html>

- [Language courses at the University of Granada – including Intensive Spanish:](http://www.unispain.com/Granada_University.htm)

[http://www.unispain.com/Granada\\_University.htm](http://www.unispain.com/Granada_University.htm)

- Hostels/hotels I would recommend

<http://www.hostelsoasis.com/>

<http://funkygranada.weebly.com/>

<http://www.makutoguesthouse.com/>

<http://www.room-matehotels.com/eng/granadahotel/leohotel/leohotel.php>

- More general information about Granada

<http://www.turismogranada.info/tapas.htm>



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