Universidad Pontificia Comillas - Comillas, Spain: From a Student’s Perspective
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This booklet is designed by past Student Exchange participants in order to share their experience and knowledge with students participating in the Fisher International Student Exchange. Items in this booklet are not endorsed by the Office of Global Business at Fisher College and information contained in this booklet is subject to change.

A C C O M M O D A T I O N S

- The university does not provide dormitory living; however the university can arrange a home-stay through the university.

Home-Stays
- These home-stays are typically farther away from campus and usually prove to be a great way to closely connect with a family. The rooms tend to be smaller than dormitory arrangements at OSU but have not been a problem.
- Some students do not recommend home-stays arranged through the University. They are said to be over-priced and do not add any value to the cultural perspective. (2012)
- The pros of home-stays are that you will have to speak in Spanish all the time which will brush up language skills. You can cook at home to save cost, and fully experience a cultural immersion.
- The cons of homestays are that you will have less privacy, and can’t have many friends over. It can be frustrating to live essentially ‘with parents’ and have rules set by the host family.

Apartment Search
- Past students have had more success with apartments rather than home-stays.
- The school will provide a list of apartments and local landlords after completion of application forms. Some may be difficult to contact but not impossible, be adamant yet patient. Email several landlords to increase your chances of a response and availability.
- Students recommend living in the Chuence, Arguelles or Tribunal neighborhoods because they are the closest to school and the best neighborhoods in the city center. (2012)
- Apartments should not cost students any more than €500 a month, approximately $650.
- Past students have suggested to roommate with other exchange students if living in apartments, since it really helps to learn to interact with all different types of people and it was an easy way to meet friends. Although, you will also have to be prepared to be very independent by doing your own grocery shopping and cooking, etc. (2013)
- Typically students decide to make housing arrangements after they arrive. Hostels are a great convenience during this process. During the first couple of days, stay in a hostel and investigate nearby apartment vacancies. Look for signs that say, “acquilar.” This means “to rent,” in Spanish.
- Be advised of renting rules, it is not uncommon for a landlord to enter your apartment to make sure you are following these rules.
• Validating housing arrangements can be quite tricky. Asking university administrators about rental agreements can be beneficial. Sticking to an agency that has been used in the past may be a good bet.
• Facebook Marketplace can be a great way to find a sublease for the semester. Just as Fisher students are traveling abroad during the fall, so too are students from Comillas.
• Beware of Craigslist. There are a number of scams out there and it has happened to Fisher students in the past. If you are unsure, ask for help from the Fisher International Programs Office staff.
• If waiting to select apartments after arriving, it is suggested to arrive at least a week prior to the start of classes.
• The pros of having your own apartment, is that you will have independence. You can cook at home to save cost, and host friends at your home.
• The cons of having your own apartment, is that it is easy to get into the habit of only speaking English. There is less/no cultural immersion (if living with Americans). The apartment hunt can be daunting and time consuming.

DOCUMENTS

Passport
• Passports should be secured as soon as possible. They are required not only for travel overseas, but also for application to Comillas among other things.
• Check expiration date. In the past students have failed to realize that their passports expire during their trip which can cause serious issues with reentry to the United States.
• It is a good idea to keep several copies of all relevant documents on you at all times: licenses, residency cards, passports, visas, enrollment verifications, whatever has been issued to you. This is not required but you may find yourself in a situation in which these things would be extremely helpful to have and save time.

Student Visa
• Students must submit an application to the consulate in Chicago if from the Midwest. This has to be hand delivered by the student themselves, or by someone with a notarized document giving them permission to act as your legal representative. Make sure you have all necessary documents. After the office approves the application, (this can be up to three months so plan accordingly) an appointment must be made and you must go to pick up the visa. The consulate site is very helpful and outlines all details and necessary documents: www.consulate-spain-chicago.com
• Students say to budget two trips to Chicago to drop off and pick up your visa. If you have family or friends in Chicago, they can drop off the information for the visa, but they cannot retrieve it. (2012)
• It is possible to leave a self-addressed express mail envelope that can have your visa mailed back to you, instead of having to go back to Chicago to retrieve it. (2013)
• Past students strongly advise that you bring copies of everything for the visa application and extra documents even if you don’t think you need them. The last thing you want is to not have something you need and have to go all the way back. (2013)
• When traveling to the Embassy, most students find driving to be the easiest and cheapest method of transportation, but sometimes flights to Chicago can be inexpensive.
• If you are not an Ohio resident, please keep in mind that your designated Embassy may not be Chicago. You can find your designated Embassy/ Consular on the country’s Embassy website.
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• It is recommended that students give between three and four months for the entire process to be completed prior to departure.

Health Insurance
• Ohio State requires that outgoing students purchase the HTH Supplemental Insurance, this will cover the student’s time while studying. However, if a student decided to travel before or after specific program dates, the HTH supplemental insurance will not cover any illness or injury. It is recommended that students contact their health insurance providers before traveling. In the case that a student requires medical attention out of the HTH time period, it is important to know how to deal with copayments, insurance, etc. Specific questions about health insurance can be directed to OIA (Office of International Affairs).

Proof of enrollment
• After arrival check in with the administrative office at the university to complete final paperwork. This should ensure your official enrollment. Double check to make sure that you are present on any class rosters and have access to the online system to ensure your enrollment.
• When traveling, some situations require a proof of enrollment from your host institution. Ask the exchange administration and they will point you in the right direction.

FOOD AND DRINK
Grocery Stores
• Grocery stores are readily available around the city. As with most shops they are closed for siestas (between 2 pm – 6 pm) and are closed on Sundays. Stores are smaller and have less of a selection but keep an open mind and try different dishes!
• “LIDL” and “Dia” are the cheapest grocery stores and they include many Spanish cultural specialties.

On Campus
• The university does not offer a formalized dining system but there are plenty of affordable options available for students.

Dining
• El Tigre- Unlimited traditional tapas included with one drink purchase. (2013)
• Plaza Mayor (2013)

Dining Norms
• Try not to hand money directly to a server, cashier, etc. This may be considered rude. Place the money that you owe on the table (sometimes there is a small saucer provided for this purpose) they will do the same when giving change back.
• Being waited on is a little different at a restaurant, they do not like to bother you so you may have to make an extra effort to get something that you need. Servers also consider it rude to ask if a table is ready for their check.
• Siestas are one of the norms most beloved by students. Spaniards take a break from the hours of 2 pm to 6 pm (times may vary) and usually relax at a nearby restaurant of shop.
MONEY
Using an ATM
- There are two common ATM machines, Telebanco and Servired. Be aware of any additional ATM fees that may be charged when using different cards. Banks close at 2 pm so if you prefer dealing directly with the bank, plan accordingly.
- Students have found that some banks charge a percentage of the amount that you withdraw internationally. Key Bank charges a flat fee when money is withdrawn and this usually proves to be a better option. Talk to your bank about the different options they offer.
- Capital One offers credit cards that do not charge international fees. This can save a significant amount over the duration of travel. Look into all options to see what will work best for your circumstance.
- 300 Euros is the maximum amount that can be drawn out daily.
- While cash is the only form of payment taken at many places, be smart about the amount that you carry at any given time. Carrying an excessive amount of money makes you more vulnerable in certain situations. The stores that have high price tags will most likely take credit cards.

Establishing a bank account in your host country
- The university may be able to help in this process. Some students have found that it may not be worth the time and effort to do; they would rather utilize their American cards despite the fees.

Credit and Bank Cards
- Students have not had trouble using their Visa or Discover credit option in most places across Europe when making transactions. They are generally accepted everywhere except local markets.
- Again, make sure you check bank fees. If students choose to use their card for minor purchases the fees can accrue quickly. It is a better idea to carry some cash around with you for this reason.
- Students are encouraged to write down the customer service numbers on all credit cards and keep the numbers with them in case cards are stolen and cancellation is necessary.

Travelers Checks
- Though travelers’ checks may have once been the safest way to manage money while traveling, they may not be the best option. Traveler’s checks are only good once converted. Therefore, if a student plans to use traveler’s checks, it is recommended that this be only part of the whole money management scheme.

Other
- Past students have recommended having backup solutions to problems you might face in advance. For example losing your credit card. Come up with a backup plan to what you would do if this were to happen because it takes...
a while to get a new credit card to be sent overseas. (i.e.: have a second credit card stored in a different place, pay for the entire group dinner when going out and then have everyone pay back in cash, etc.) (2013)

- Past students have recommended making a rough budget for your expenses abroad to avoid missing out in activities at the end of the semester. For example, one student limited her expenses to $2000 a month while abroad. (2013)

For more information about using credit cards and ATMs while abroad, visit: http://www.flyerguide.com/wiki/index.php/Credit/Debit/ATM_Cards_and_Foreign_Exchange

**PHONE AND INTERNET**

Using a phone from home

- If planning to use a phone from home, do homework with respect to the cost. In the past students have realized that using devices such as smartphones with international capabilities can be much more expensive than planned.
- An international SIM card will be necessary, and can be purchased at a phone outlet upon arriving.
- Some iPhones can be unlocked for use abroad, in which case an international SIM card may be inserted. Check with your mobile carrier before attempting this.

Buying an international phone

- Students can go to phone providers and purchase a cheap phone along with prepaid minutes. Talk to university friends about the best place to buy a reliable phone. A cell phone is recommended for coordinating plans, handling business, and safety reasons.
- When calling Spaniards be advised that their phone tone and etiquette differs from the US. They often pick up the phone saying, “Digame.” With business type environments they want concise, straight to the point phone calls.
- Vodafone’s phones were the cheapest, costing 20 euros for the phone and 30 euros worth of minutes prepaid for free. Overall, the cost of using a cheap international phone won’t be too expensive of a burden and in the long run will save you money.

International Communication

- When calling home, Skype video use is free with wifi access! This is a great option for keeping in touch with friends and family from home as well as those met while traveling.
  - Help parents and friends set up and learn how to use Skype before traveling.
  - Purchasing Skype credit allows students to call a landline or a cell phone back home at lower rates, when Internet is available. Users can also pay $6-$10 for a month of unlimited calls to any landline or cell phone in the U.S. from their computers.
- G-chat is also a favorite channel of communication for students. It has a G-Video option as well. It can be more convenient than Skype because it is more user-friendly. Which mode of communication you choose ultimately depends on your preferences. It is recommended to explore both programs before departure so you can inform family members which you will be using.
- If you want friends to be able to call you, leave voicemails, or leave text messages like a regular cell phone, you can sign up for Google voice. You will need to use a VPN (virtual private network) but students have said that it is well worth it. With Google voice, you receive a US telephone number that works like a landline. If you have to
make business calls while abroad, this can be a great tool! For more information go to: http://www.google.com/googlevoice/about.html.

SAFETY TIPS
• Be aware of all surroundings and keep your personal items close at all times. If staying in hostels it is advised to bring a lock to protect your valuables. Avoid bringing anything of extreme sentimental value.
• Keep emergency numbers specific to your host country with you at all times.

TRANSPORTATION AND TRAVEL
Public Transportation
• Public transportation is easy and affordable. It is only 1 Euro a day to ride on the subway/metro. Students can purchase a monthly pass if they feel that it will be a worthy investment. Students that live further away from campus find that this is the case. The paperwork for the pass may take some time so you may want to make decisions quickly.
• If you live close enough to the university, buying a ten-ride ticket for 9.40 euros each time will be a cost effective method for transportation.

Mapping
• For iPhone users “there’s an app for that.” A Madrid Metro app is a simple and neat way to plan out your rides, transfers, and stops.

International Travel
• When traveling outside of Spain, a passport is necessary.
• When traveling between countries make sure to follow and complete all visa requirements for all countries you plan to visit.
• Students in the past have traveled a great deal more than originally expected. Keep this in mind when budgeting and packing. Many students over pack. Appliances such as straighteners, hair dryers, electric shavers, etc can be bought in country; as well as toiletries, bedding, and many other bulky items. This will save room in your bag as well as solve any wattage conversion problems you will encounter.
• For the flight over to your destination and back, utilize www.StudentUniverse.com. Students have had great luck with affordable prices.
• If possible print out any boarding passes prior to arriving at the airport or you may have to pay an additional fee. Also, double and triple check your bag measurements. These airlines are very adamant on their luggage regulations and will impose hefty fees for any passengers that bags do not apply.
• Buy plane tickets and make travel arrangements as least a week in advance if you want a cheaper price.
• Recommended airlines for travel around Europe are Ryanair.com, Easyjet.com, BMIBaby.com and transaria.com
• With affordability comes the possibility of delays and cancellations with these airlines. They will rebook you but it may just take time. Take situations in stride.
• Many cities offer free walking tours that often meet outside a given hostel. These are both great ways to learn about different cities and meet people from all over the world. Be warned that the guides for the free walking tours are paid by way of donations and a small tip may be encouraged at the end of the tour.
• For a great listing of hostels all over the world visit: www.hostelworld.com
PlACES TO VISIT

- Some recommended local places to visit:
  - Popular Tourist Locations: Sol, Plaza Mayor, El Prado, Museo de la Reina Sofia (modern art museum), Palacio Real, Mercado de San Miguel, El Corte Inglés, El Rastro, Kapital, Joy Esclava, Retiro Parque, and Crystal Palace, El Parque de Attraciones (amusement park), El Retiro (Main park in Madrid), Casa De Campo (beautiful park, has a zoo and amusement park), Royal Palace.
- Other recommendations:
  - Go see a bull fight.
  - Go see a Madrid soccer game.

UNIVERSITY TIPS

Courses

- Exchange students have the choice to take classes in English or in Spanish.
  - Exchange students that have taken Spanish classes have said that the coursework is minimal with a cumulative final exam at the end consisting of short answer/essay based questions. Nonnative speakers have said that the coursework combined with the foreign language can be tricky but doable and definitely worth the extra effort!
  - If students opt to take classes offered in English, they are not alone. The classes are typically full of other exchange students from around the world which make the classes a great way to meet others.
  - A Spanish proficiency test is offered for those who would like to take Spanish language courses and want to assess which level is suitable.
- A schedule of about three to four classes is normal. Each class has its own webpage. Click around for course syllabuses. These will be necessary for OSU course equivalency purposes.
- Attendance is very important in classes, classes are around 40 students or less and professors take attendance every class. (2012)
- There is much less emphasis on homework and usually the course grade is largely based on partition and one or two exam/ project grades. (2013)
- OSU language courses are typically post-evaluated for equivalency. If you are planning to take language courses abroad, keep that in mind. If you are in a language minor, talk with your academic advisor regarding taking language courses abroad.
- Class sizes are about 30 people.
- Most classes have a final or final presentation that composes much of the overall grade.
- Many books do not need to be purchased for classes. If they do, the school bookstore sells them.
- If possible students have advised not scheduling classes on Thursday and Friday (which is possible) for travel purposes. While most classes do not have attendance policies, it is important to make sure that attendance is not a factor in the grade prior to missing a repeated number of classes.
- The O and E on class assignments stand for “Este” and “Oeste.” This indicates what wing of the school (East or West) your classes are located. It can be confusing at first but you will get used to it. The classes are said to be the same just translated into English. However, with different professors usually the curriculum, assignments, and exams may differ.
o There is also a Spanish foreign language class offered for foreigners. Many exchangers take it and even if they feel proficient in Spanish it may be a fun opportunity to brush up, meet people, and learn some Comillas lingo.

Facilities
- The business school was two blocks away from the main building so unless you take Spanish classes most of them will be in the business building. (2013)
- The business building has a computer lab with printers that require you to bring your own paper. (or you can buy paper there for 1 cent a page or something cheap). (2013)

Other
- The student body at Comillas has a lot of international students, many from France.
- Professors are very laid back and most are understanding of your exchange student lifestyle. Past students have made sure that their professor knows that they are an exchange student prior to grading any assignments. This is especially true when an exchange student is taking classes in Spanish, a professor usually will be more lenient on any grammatical issues.
- The students were all super friendly and helpful. The faculty was amazing as well. They were very understanding and helpful. If you ever had conflict or trouble with anything they would always assist you in any way they could. That goes for not only the teachers but the administration as well. They will help you if you have trouble with your classes as well as housing. (2013)

Miscellaneous
Shopping
- El Rastro is one of the largest outdoor markets in Europe. It happens every Sunday in Madrid and is a must see! They have vendors of every sort.
- Gran Via- Some of the best and affordable shopping. (2013)
- If you are looking for clothes you will have no problem finding them around campus and in the city. Many of the streets are lined with a mix of fashion forward shops and affordable, more practical stores.

Nightlife
- The Spanish nightlife is “unreal.” Dance clubs are open until morning, every night of the week. The music is very upbeat and different from here. The DJ’s are great at what they do and amazing to witness in action!
- Most nightclubs are welcome to all. However, some are only open to ‘non-foreigners’ and others specifically cater to foreigners. If you become a frequent night owl you will quickly find the best clubs.
  - Kapital-12 story club (2013)
  - Pacha (2013)

Language
- Most Spanish taught in the states is closer to Mexican Spanish. Throughout all different Spanish speaking countries different words have different meanings. Spaniards also have a distinct accent that can make understanding hard at first.
- People usually understand if you need them to speak slower, or explain something in different words; they will appreciate you taking the time to learn and understand their language and culture.
- By the end of your stay you will grow accustomed to their lingo and their accent, just be patient for the first couple of weeks. You will get better!
- Out of the university, English resources such as menus, maps, etc. can be difficult to be find. This has not been a
problem for non-Spanish speaking students in the past. The other foreign exchange and Comillas students can help out, and you can survive just fine with little to no Spanish.

- As with all countries, do not expect people to know English, most don't.

Tidbits

- Spain is extremely laid back compared to the US. Systems and processes may be slower than expected. Do not take this as laziness or ineptitude, things will get done… eventually.
- The weather is absolutely beautiful in Spain, when traveling to other European countries make sure to bring slightly warmer clothes!
- Try to look for small, worthwhile souvenirs during the duration of your stay instead of buying everything at the last minute.
- Start saving up for exchange now. The dollar is weaker than the euro and some clothing stores like “Zara” are cheaper in Spain than other countries.
- Practice putting a value on the coins. It is easy to spend a two euro coin which adds up, but a two euro coin is almost equal to three dollars. (Exchange rates may change.)
- It is advised that you be very open minded and patient when you are on exchange. Not everything is going to go your away while abroad and you will hit major road blocks that you've never encountered before, but its best to just keep an opened mind and don't let things get you down. The times that don't go exactly as planned are going to be the biggest learning experiences. (2013)

If there are further questions or concerns, different resources are available that students can utilize. The Office of Global Business will be a resource throughout the entire trip. Past students have also volunteered to be a contact if additional questions would arise.
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