

Spanish Style

Students abroad discover there is not just one Spain but many

From large modern cities such as Madrid and Barcelona to small historical ones surrounded by medieval walls, Spain is a country rich in culture and history, scenic landscapes and enchanting people.

Texas A&M students interested in studying in Spain have many choices: international communication in Madrid, agricultural economics, architecture and business in Barcelona and a language program in Salamanca.

Robert Wegener, Student Media general manager, has led the international communication program in Madrid for the past two summers.

"Markets have become truly global," he said. "So I believe it is important that students add an international dimension to their degrees. For students, a transformation occurs not through just teaching itself, but through the experience of living in a different country. They have the chance to learn about another country from the best source — its people."

Senior speech communication major Laura Hopkins said she thinks studying abroad is one of the most amazing things someone in college can do. She recommends a foreign experience for all students.

"I hear a lot of my friends say that money is an issue, as it was for me too," Hopkins said. "But what a lot of people don't realize is the financial aid office has loans and scholarships that can help you. I took out about \$3,000 to go on the trip, and it was worth every penny."

While students study and take classes during the week, plenty of time remains to explore all Spain has to offer during the rest of the day and on weekends.

Madrid is a buzzing business hub full of beautiful parks, buildings and museums. Madrileños are just as beautiful, and the nightlife is just as exciting, students report.

"The people of Madrid welcomed us with open arms and were eager to influence us into falling as madly in love with their city as they were," said senior international studies

Pictured below: Study abroad students gather outside a bullfighting ring in Madrid during the summer of 2003.



Pictured left: Madrid's Plaza Mayor is a center for trade, conversation and community celebration.

major Jenna Jones.

The Mediterranean trading and manufacturing center of Barcelona is also the capital of the proud region of Catalunya. Although Spanish is understood, Barcelona speaks Catalan.

"My favorite city that we visited was definitely Barcelona," said Kelly Alfaro, a senior marketing major who traveled to Spain in the summer of 2003 as part of the international communication program. "It is one of the most beautiful cities I have ever been to. It's not only cosmopolitan, but it's right on the sea."

Barcelona's answer to art nouveau was modernism, and its genius was Antonio Gaudí. His most famous work is the unfinished Sagrada Familia (Holy Family) cathedral. From 1883 until his death in 1926, he worked on this monumental church.

Mark Szafran was part of the summer 2002 international communication group.

"My group made a promise that we would all go back to see the Sagrada Familia when it is finished in 40 years," he said.

The sunny sandstone city of Salamanca boasts Spain's grandest plaza, its oldest university and a college-town ambience.

The entrance portal of the university is a great example of Spain's Plateresque style, Spain's version of Flamboyant Gothic. Visitors take a moment to find a tiny frog on a skull that students looked to for good luck before exams.

"It is unthinkable that I walked around in, touched and saw buildings and monuments that were thousands of years old," Szafran said. "The United States is only 327 years old, but I saw a bridge in Salamanca that was built by the Romans to cross the Tormes River."

The Andalusian city of Sevilla boasts culture in its buildings and rich folkloric traditions, including Flamenco music and dance.

Sevilla's cathedral is the third largest in the Christian world, after St. Peter's in Vatican City and St. Paul's in London. Visitors climb a 34-flight spiralling ramp to the bell chamber of the Giralda Tower for a panoramic view of the city. Across the square from Sevilla's cathedral is the Alcazar — a palace built in the Moorish style, topped only by Granada's Alhambra.

A bright spot for Texans lies in the Texas Lone Star Saloon. The restaurant is a friendly reminder of home, decorated in Texas memorabilia — including T-shirts from Texas universities. So Aggies should bring something they don't mind leaving behind.

"Granada and Sevilla were enchanting cities. I felt like I was living in a movie as we walked down the narrow golden-lit streets at night," said Ashley Ingels, a senior journalism major.

Each region of Spain has its own dialect and traditions, offering students many arenas through which to experience the country's rich culture and history.

"A&M students and Spanish students and faculty talk families together, talk values together, talk history together, talk politics together, talk business together, talk sports together," Wegener said, "and talk and talk together."

Holly Murdoch, class of 2002, advises others to stay extra weeks to see the things you didn't get to.

"Eat the food even if you don't like it, just to say you've tried it. It makes for good conversations later," Murdoch said. "Take lots of pictures — who cares if you look like a tourist? You are."

Liz Cantú, a class of 2003 political science graduate who headed to Spain in 2002, agreed.

"Going abroad was probably one of the best things that I could have ever done because it forced me to step out of my comfort zone," she said. "In my experience, the world turned into a giant textbook."

— Story by Amy Rodgers

More Than a Safari

Studying abroad in South Africa provides students with an adventure

How do adventures such as canyon tours, visiting White Rhino conservation and a five-million acre national park and earning six credit hours in three weeks sound?

Urs Kreuter, an assistant professor in the Department of Rangeland Ecology and Management at Texas A&M, sponsors a Study Abroad program to inform students about biodiversity in South Africa and involve them in the learning process about the effects of nature-based tourism on South Africa.

A graduate of the University of Natal in South Africa, Kreuter relies heavily on his contacts through the University of Natal to plan and organize speakers and events for the students.

Kreuter's main objective for the South Africa study abroad trip is to "provide an opportunity for junior- and senior-level undergraduate students' first-hand experience of some factors that affect nature-based tourism."

The trip to South Africa is not unlike other study abroad trips. Students are immersed into different cultures and, because of this, there are inevitable culture shock issues to address.

Kreuter said students on the South Africa study abroad trip could have a different experience in terms of culture shock because the adjustment time is shorter compared to other study abroad trips.

"I believe three weeks is an optimal time period for this trip," Kreuter said. "It is interesting to see how different people relate to the experience."

Last summer Kreuter took 12 students on the

South Africa study abroad trip. Three students also attended from the University of Natal.

"This is one of the first inter-university initiatives taken by study abroad," Kreuter said.

The first half of the trip is spent in the Mpumalanga province of South Africa, where Kruger National Park is located. During this time, students travel through Kruger National Park to learn how South African communities are being integrated with tourism.

The second half is spent in KwaZulu-Natal, one of the 11 provinces in South Africa. During this time, students visit public parks, the Hluhluwe Game Reserve, private land holdings, Lake St. Lucia and Sodwana Bay and other communities in the area.

"Of my 18 students from last (2002) summer, two have returned to South Africa to study, and one plans to return in December," Kreuter said.

The South Africa study abroad trip costs about \$4,500, but this price includes airfare, which is not included in some other study abroad program fees.

Kreuter highly recommends students study abroad before graduating. He wants students to experience cultural diversity and at the same time come to understand that "there are people out there that live completely different lives."

Experiencing a different culture can be beneficial to anyone willing to embrace the experience.

Geoff Keogh, a senior management major, studied abroad last summer in Spain and met his family in South Africa on his way back to the United States. Keogh's family is originally from

Pictured below: Students pet an African elephant during a 2002 study abroad tour.



Pictured above: 2002 study abroad student Sandy Wiggins pets a tame leopard in South Africa.

South Africa, and he said a study abroad trip to South Africa would be educational and exciting.

"South Africa's wildlife splendors and diverse cultures are definitely worth experiencing," Keogh said.

Keogh had many interesting experiences during his time in South Africa. He went on a wildlife retreat for six days and saw many of the same animals that the South Africa study abroad students did.

Along with adventures such as visiting the Greater St. Lucia Wetland Park, going on a Game drive and walking around various markets, the South Africa study abroad trip is filled with educational speakers who expand students' knowledge of South African culture.

"On the day of our arrival, we saw the big five animals of South Africa," Kreuter said, "the African elephant, buffalo, lion, leopard and rhinoceros."

Culture Shock

Texas A&M's Study Abroad Web site suggests four stages that describe culture shock: the honeymoon stage, the hostility stage, the humor stage and the home stage.

Each stage is categorized by how the student may feel.

1. The honeymoon stage is full of excitement and anticipation about what is to come before the student has experienced much time away from their home.

2. The hostility stage begins at the beginning of the trip when the student realizes he or she does not fit in with the culture as well as expected.

3. The humor stage is categorized by feelings of relaxation in the new environment, usually occurring later as the student feels more comfortable in the surroundings.

4. The home stage is determined when the student feels that he or she is comfortable in both the foreign and home environment.

Keogh remembers one of the reasons he chose to study abroad.

"Twenty years from now, I knew I wouldn't have remembered an extra semester I graduated early," he said. "But I would remember a semester that I studied abroad."

— Story by Sarah Sarkees