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My study abroad experience in Alcala de Henares, Spain

For my study abroad trip I had the opportunity to visit and stay in Alcala de Henares, Spain, a beautiful city located just about 30 minutes from the center of Madrid. Alcala de Henares has a beautiful plaza named Plaza Cervantes where there are plenty of stores and restaurants to visit. The life there is peaceful and relaxing during the day, and fun and exciting at night, with whole families walking in the streets surrounding the plaza and eating at restaurants outside. I was able to hang out at Plaza Cervantes very frequently because it was located right by the University that I attended, Instituto Franklin UAH. The university members and staff at the Instituto Franklin were super helpful and great to be around. As part of the program, we were able to take three trips with the university to visit different locations within Spain. The first place we went to was a city named Toledo. Toledo is by far the most beautiful and breathtaking place I have ever seen. It is located atop a gorge overlooking the Río Tajo, it was known as the “city of three cultures,” a place where it is said that Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities peacefully coexisted. Going to Toledo was like going back in time, as we walked through narrowed streets, each seemed to take us to different cathedrals, synagogues, and just layers and layers of history. Segovia was another place we visited, filled with its own unique history and culture. It is not a place filled with many tourists because there aren't as many main attractions, but it is worth a trip! It has a huge aqueduct that is a sight to see. The aqueduct is made out of solid blocks of stone and at its highest point stands tall at 28.5 meters, it is historically important to the city because it supplied its people with water. The last place we visited with the institute was Madrid, and course seeing that I was a short train ride away from Madrid, I was able to spend a majority of my weekends there. At first glance Madrid seems and feels like being in Chicago. It is filled with a variety of people, tall buildings, stores, restaurants, and street performers. However, as soon as we walked by the streets and passed the main sights, we begin to see old structured buildings, cathedrals, Palacio Real, big beautiful parks, statues, and symbolic locations that reminds us that we are still in Spain. History is imbedded in their daily lives and in building structures, which is why it makes it so beautiful and unique.

Another aspect that marked and made my study abroad experience memorable were my various school visits in Alcala de Henares. As an education mayor, this was a great experience because I was able to collect observation hours while observing two different schools and a school system that is different from our own. It was amazing and eye opening to see how distinct their bilingual education curriculum is, as well as see their student teacher interaction. The two schools that I visited ranged from preschool to high school, one being a private school and the other one a public school. Working with the kids was amazing, and having to see them interact more in Spanish rather than English was a good difference to see too.

Studying abroad to Spain is definitely an experience that I recommend. The places to visit are endless and the cities are beautiful. The people that I encountered in Spain were also very friendly and eager to help if we seemed confused. The train takes you everywhere and the destinations are not too far. I recommend to not be afraid of trying new foods, and exploring new places. Don't be afraid to practice your Spanish either, it the perfect place to do so!!

