

I spent the summer of 2024 in Toledo Spain completing my Language and International Health study abroad. This particular study abroad program partnered with the University of Minnesota, and I was the only Clemson student who went over the summer. My study abroad time started off with a bang- I arrived a day after everyone else so that I could attend my best friend's wedding, so I had to navigate Madrid and the train ride to Toledo alone. Not only that, but my luggage got lost in transit and I started the first week of my study abroad experience with only the clothes on my back and things in my backpack.

However, my experience improved tremendously and I was so welcomed by people in the program, both the staff and the other students who were studying abroad and from all over the United States. I also met my host lady on the first day, and she took me back to the apartment where I'd live for the summer and made me dinner. Her name was Sayito, and she was an older lady in her 70's who was born and raised in Toledo. I learned so much from Sayito over the course of the summer. She was less than five feet tall but had a huge personality- she was funny and independent and kind. Every morning she'd bring me a breakfast tray of avocado toast, pastries in a bag, a little yogurt, and instant coffee. She'd then sit on my bed and we'd talk in Spanish until I'd walk up the hill into the old city to go to my classes or take the bus to my internship. I'd return to her apartment most days around 9 or 10 pm and she'd feed me dinner. Spanish food took some getting used to for me, and eating with Sayito was a cool challenge because I tried foods I never would in a normal context, such as tuna, octopus, salmorejo, and jamón. We usually ate dinner in front of the TV and watched a Spanish game show or the news. This was the time that I got to know Sayito the most, and I asked her questions about her childhood and about the country of Spain and the way that the government was structured. It was

interesting because she lived in Spain when it was ruled by Franco, the dictator who ruled for 36 years after World War 2.

My schedule was busy during the week this summer. I took two classes that met several times during the week in 2.5 hour chunks. I also worked about 20 hours a week at my internship. I enjoyed my classes tremendously, and my favorite part was how small they were. My medical Spanish class had one other student, and my job prep class had two. This allowed our professors to really get to know us and personally work with us. I learned a lot over the summer through these classes, and also got to know more about the culture of Spain and the healthcare system. My internship was at a clinic about a 45 minute bus ride away that worked with people who had Multiple Sclerosis and other neurological disorders. It took a multidisciplinary approach to helping people in their condition, so I shadowed physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, group therapy sessions, and counseling during my time at the clinic. I helped organize games and lead things during the group therapy sessions, and I got to know the patients by name and personality by the end of the summer. I loved working with these patients, as well as the doctors and therapists at the clinic, and I learned a lot.

When I wasn't in class or at my internship during the week, I spent time exploring Toledo. The old city is built on top of a hill and surrounded by old walls. It's beautiful, full of cobblestone streets, shops, fruit stands, old churches, monasteries, and a large fortress that acts as a public library today. There was also a trail that went outside of the city to another hill overlooking it, and I loved to walk out there and watch the sunset. One of the challenges of Toledo this summer was the heat. I love to be outside, and spent the majority of my time outside that I could, but the high temperature during the day often reached 107 or 108 degrees fahrenheit. If I had a lot of free time, sometimes I'd take the bus to Madrid and explore the capital of Spain.

The bus ride was about 45 minutes, and early into the summer, some of the other students and I figured out how to get our own transit pass for 10 euros that gave us unlimited access on the Madrid subway and the bus system, which got us to and from Madrid for free. This was a huge blessing, and probably saved us at least 100 euros. Little things like that gave me confidence in figuring out how to live in a foreign country.

I got most Fridays off from school and from my internship, so I went into the summer with no plans but a goal of exploring more of the country and surrounding areas. I did a few different trips with fellow students in the program that we'd plan together. We'd stay in airbnb's and split the cost. Some places we went were Madrid for the weekend, and Santandar, which was my personal favorite and is located in the north of Spain. The climate is much less hot and dry, and it's on the coast and so beautiful. I also traveled to Lisbon, Portugal one weekend and to Barcelona the last weekend.

I loved getting to know more about the culture of Spain as I lived there for the summer. The biggest thing I noticed was that the pace of life was just slower and more laid back in Spain, especially in Toledo, than it is in the States. People in Spain seem to work to live rather than living to work. I appreciate this, and it made me think about how busy I tend to be in the States, and how I don't always need to fill up my schedule or be working all the time. There are other differences in Spain. Mealtimes are different- people eat breakfast when they wake up and sometimes have coffee and a pastry mid morning, then lunch is around 3pm, followed by a siesta (nap). Dinner is much later than I am typically used to, occurring around 9 or 10 pm. Another big part of the culture of Spain is soccer. I was thankful to be in Spain during the time of the Euro Championship, which is like the World Cup for soccer, but only in Europe and a huge deal for everyone in the country. Each country followed their national team, and Spain has a very good

soccer team. When Spain made it to the Semifinals, there was a huge screen set up in a park in Toledo, and people flocked there to watch the game and eat and drink together. It was exciting to watch and Spain won that game! The finals were the next week, and the city of Toledo set up a huge screen in the bullfighting arena and invited the whole town. I went with other students in my program, and watching the whole city come together decked out in their Spain gear and cheering on their players was so cool. Spain won the game, and being a part of the celebration after was one of the coolest parts of my time in Spain.

My time in Toledo, Spain grew me in confidence, independence, and many other skills. I learned about the culture of Spain and grew to love the way people live life there. I'm forever thankful for my study abroad experience and hope to return one day.