

University of Granada, Granada, Spain, autumn 2016, Spanish philology.

Granada

Granada is a mid-sized city located in the southern Spanish region of Andalusia. It lies in the mountains approximately one hour from Malaga by car. Its location is ideal for anyone that would like to experience a little bit of everything while staying there. The coast isn't that far away so going to the beach during summertime is quite easy as is going skiing in the Sierra Nevada Mountains when winter sets in, not to mention its proximity to the city of Malaga. The city center is quite modern with its shopping malls and clothing stores while the historical district of the city – el Albayzín – is a quiet yet touristy part of Granada with the famous fortress of Alhambra being its main attraction. The Arabs that once ruled over this city have left their clearest mark on this particular part of Granada. Cozy Moroccan tea places and small art shops are spread all over this charming neighborhood that is situated up higher on a hill.

University of Granada UGR

The university of Granada has several campuses spread all over the city. It even has campuses situated in the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla in Northern Africa. Something worth mentioning is the high amount of Erasmus students each year that makes the University of Granada the most popular university in Europe for Erasmus students. Lund University also has its fair share of international students but at the university in Granada it seemed much more apparent. There were Erasmus students or international students enrolled in all my courses at my faculty. Difficulties comprehending everything in class at times, seemed acceptable and valid if not being a native Spanish speaker. This helped me a lot, especially at first when everything was quite new and overwhelming.

Arrival

I arrived in Granada approximately one week before the introduction week because I wanted to get to know the city and practice my Spanish a bit beforehand. I flew to Malaga and from there I took a bus to Granada, which takes about 1,5 hours. The bus station isn't that hard to find and the buses go to Granada every other hour. Granada also has a small airport but it is definitely both cheaper and nicer to go to Malaga first because you get to explore and experience more, even while on the bus. I was enrolled in a language course at a language school close to the city center during the first week.

It really helped me out staying there for a bit exploring the city and finding out where my faculty was located as well how to take the bus to and from the university. It's also quite easy to get around on foot but given that my faculty was located on a campus situated up on a high steep hill it could be challenging walking all the way up there. The introduction week was very exciting and overwhelming at the same time. Once I had settled in with my roommates in my apartment there was something to do all the time. On the university website there was a large list of activities planned for all the Erasmus students during the introduction week as well as introductory meetings at the faculty where we would be informed of the practical things to consider, for example how to register for courses and get our university card. Due to all the specific activities planned for Erasmus students I quickly realized just how used the university as well as the rest of the city were to the amount of Erasmus students coming to study here. There were games and trips around Granada planned during the first week as well as the numerous offers at the various bars and nightclubs directed against Erasmus and other students from around the world. The atmosphere during this introductory week was amazing meeting people constantly that had come to Spain just like you to study. Given the size of Granada it was almost inevitable not to run into someone when going out that were also Erasmus.

Courses

The study system in Spain contains three stages for students: the Grade degrees ("Grado"), the University Master degrees ("Posgrado") and the doctoral degrees ("Doctorado"). When I first applied for my courses on the university website from home I got an email from the university of Granada informing me that I would have to provide evidence that would prove that I had Spanish in my degree at my home university in order for me to be considered a Spanish philology candidate. Sending them some documentation that would prove this, such as a Transcript of Records signed from the home university is a good thing to keep in mind when applying for courses here. Another aspect worth mentioning is the grading system. There are no A, B, or C-levels or the letters used at Lund University for that matter. Instead the grades go from 1, being the lowest, to 10, being the highest. To pass you will have to obtain at least a 5. When it comes to the lectures and the exams there seems to be a much bigger focus on studying and memorizing as opposed to in Lund where it seems much more based on the principle of interaction between the teacher and the students in order to learn. The time of the exams is also different from back home. At the university in Spain everyone has to do all the exams during the last two weeks of the semester. This could imply that

one might have up to five exams in five different subjects over the course of two weeks. This is something to be aware of when applying for courses in Spain, especially if you're used to having one exam every month during the semester, like I do at my home university.

I was enrolled in five courses at the university in Granada, all part of the degree of Spanish philology. The courses were a mix of grammar, literature and linguistics. In Spanish they were called "Español actual: norma y uso", "Fonética y fonología del español", "Lingüística general", "Introducción a la literatura española" and "Cervantes". The idea that I had before going into this was a lot different to what it was actually like when I started the lectures. The course of "Español actual" for example I was expecting to be a course about the language spoken today and the history of it but instead it turned out to be much more of a grammar course learning less about the history and more about linguistic terms such as morphology as well as punctuation and rules on how to use comma. It didn't seem very useful to me given that a lot of the stuff I either already knew or was already studying for my linguistics course. Also, the teacher seemed very old-fashioned and so the only material available for studying at home were the PowerPoints he presented in class. He never put any notes or material up on the university platform so that each student could log in and go through what had just been shown in class. He also never spoke of the exam, which made it hard to have an idea about what was more important to focus on when studying. Therefore people would have to ask him personally about that if wanting to know. Some of my other courses were quite different in this aspect. I had a very nice teacher called Elena that was a substitute for another teacher on my phonetics course. She was very pedagogic when teaching making sure that everyone understood the assignments before moving on to new things. She also seemed very helpful during the "tutorías", which is like a one-on-one student counseling session between the teacher and the student. For example if there was something that I didn't understand and I wanted a more detailed explanation or just discuss certain grades that we got throughout the course she always seemed very understanding and open to that. As opposed to my other teacher mentioned Elena was very diligent when it came to uploading all her PowerPoints on the university platform as well as the assignments that we had to do. This way everyone, including the ones that weren't able to attend a class, could still be up to date on how far ahead the class was and be able to study it at home. Another thing that I really appreciated about her classes were that we got to do an "exam" the last week of the semester just so that we could see what the structure of the actual exam would be like. It was also a way to test just how prepared we were in reality and what we needed to study for more, in order to

pass the real exam. In general the workload compared to my studies at Lund University was much greater. It was a very intensive process because all that we had to study wouldn't even come close to what I'm used to at my home university. For example for the course I had on the Spanish writer Cervantes my teacher expected us to read up to 1000 pages of some of his biggest works which seemed like a real challenge when also dealing with the amount of things I had to read for my other four courses. Besides, the language of some of the texts primarily on my literature courses could seem incomprehensible at times given how old they were. My literature exam was very hard because I didn't understand a lot of words and expressions and so for as much as I had been studying our main book on the history and the genres of Spanish medieval literature I still wasn't able to understand the text handed out during the exam that we had to analyze. The instructions given during this exam were quite unclear and even the native students weren't exactly aware of what exactly they had to write about the text. Compared to what I'm used to at Lund University this was a chaotic and frustrating experience.

Therefore, all in all, I felt that the workload and the amount of courses were too much to handle, especially given the fact that you would have to study five different subjects at the same time and do all the exams in the end. Because I wasn't used to this from back home it meant a radical change in my study process and also the way that I study. At Lund University I can focus on one or two courses at a time and have more time to dwell on the details whereas in Spain I really had to change my study habits and try to study a bit of everything every day to be able to keep up, even though I would always feel behind. But the good thing was that my ability to read in Spanish improved immensely during the months that I studied at the university.

Accommodation

I was lucky enough to find a very nice apartment, living with three other students in one of the best neighborhoods in Granada very close to the city center. I was willing to pay a bit more for an apartment like mine that was renovated and very clean. One of the reasons why I chose Granada was because of the accommodation possibilities. It is very easy to find a place to stay and the prices are affordable. The rent I paid for my room didn't even seem that high when comparing it to what I'm used to from back home. This makes Granada the perfect student city. When I first applied to the University of Granada I found out that they had a lot of options listed on their website regarding student housing. I myself used the website www.aluni.net to find an apartment which has a wide

variety of rooms available in Granada as well as in other Spanish cities. Other websites include housinganywhere.com and www.beroomers.com.

Leisure

Granada wasn't a very big city but there was always something to do. Practically every weekend there were events or offers available for students in Granada. During the day we went for tapas or enjoyed a coffee at the various cafés and restaurants available around the city. For Erasmus students there were trips planned all around Spain and even Morocco when joining the Erasmus student organizations almost every weekend. I would even go watch a flamenco show or two in some of the bars or flamenco houses situated in Granada. There was a great mix of both cultural experiences as well as parties during the whole semester.

Costs

The costs of living in Spain were very low compared to what I'm used to in Sweden. As a student I lived very well and did all the things that I wanted to do as an Erasmus student without spending all that much. It is definitely very easy to live comfortably in Spain at an affordable price.

Other

When going to Spain it is important to know that if you plan to stay for more than three months in the country you will have to obtain a so called residence permit at the foreigner's office once you have arrived to Spain. Further details as to how and exactly when you should do this will be mentioned during the introductory week. That's how it was for me.