

MARCH 12, 2009

I have now attended my first Spanish festival! And it was absolute insanity. There is a festival in Cadiz, Spain every February called Carnaval. Basically, it's like Halloween on steroids. Everyone dresses up in the most ridiculous outfits and comes out with their bells and whistles on (literally) and their drums, and they party until the wee small hours of the morning. It is ridiculous! A lot of fun, but we basically had a bus take us there at 4:00 in the afternoon and it picked us up at 7 in the morning. And you just go home and sleep the whole next day. It's insane! But totally worth it :)

I met my roommate and her best friend from home in London the weekend after Carnaval. It was such a shocking experience to be in an English speaking country. Whenever I was approaching a counter to pay for something or asking someone for directions, I would be formulating the correct question in my head in Spanish and would completely freeze up with joy the second I heard, "May I help you?" I got over this quickly, however, and just enjoyed being surrounded by things more familiar. I also really enjoyed the food. This, also, is a lot more similar to American food. Don't get me wrong, I (for the most part) have no problem with Spanish food. But it



comes to a point where there is only so many carbohydrates one can handle! On an average day here, we will have, for lunch, soup or stew with potatoes, meat, and some vegetables, some sort of meat with rice or noodles, and bread. And we have a lot of it. It's delicious food! But very heavy and a lot of it.

Anyways, back to London, we got to go see Big Ben and Parliament, Buckingham Palace, the London Eye, a couple of parks, and the Ripley's Believe It or Not Museum. :) It was so much fun but we only had two nights and one full

day there so we were kind of rushed to see everything. Travel is so easy and cheap here, so I am excited to travel more.

Classes here are now in full swing, but I don't feel like it. I keep waiting for them to get harder but they are still very, very easy. Apparently, though, school in Spain is just like everything else – very laid back. We only have class Monday through Thursday (it's a beautiful thing) so we have every class twice a week for an hour and a half each day. I have Spanish Civilization and Culture, Written and Oral Production, Renaissance and Baroque Spanish Lit, Varieties of Spanish, and the Images of Women in Spanish Literature. They are all taught completely in Spanish but they are





very interesting so I am really enjoying them.

I am starting to learn my way around the city finally! It's a very small city but at first it's very overwhelming and confusing. Now that I have been here for a little over a month, I am finally settled in and secure enough in my Spanish to find my way pretty much anywhere I need to go. It is a good feeling! Today, my roommate and I went exploring and took a bunch of pictures of the places we hadn't seen yet. I love this city! I am excited, we're going to a beach nearby called Nerja this weekend and the weather is supposed to be amazing. I will have some beautiful pictures for the blog next time, I am sure!

FEBRUARY 26, 2009

This past weekend we went to Sevilla and Cordoba for one of our excursions with our program. Those cities are so pretty! There is so much rich history here in Europe, it is weird to see it. Growing up in the US, there isn't that much "historical" to see. We're a relatively young country and everything that could be historical usually gets torn down and built over as the population grows. Here, there are mosques and Arabic palaces from around the 8th century. There aren't many because, starting around the 12th century, the Spaniards reconquered the southern parts of Spain and destroyed most traces of the Muslim culture. In Sevilla, we saw an Arabic palace that had been taken over by the Spaniards called the Alcazar. It was really cool looking, it's very interesting to see the symmetry and geometry in Arabic architecture. There are such crazy intricate patterns and huge ceilings that fit together like a puzzle, measured perfectly because if one measurement were even a millimeter off, it wouldn't fit together in the middle and they would have to start all over again. Our tour guide was pretty boring, though, so it was kind of hard to pay attention.

Next we went to see the big Cathedral in Sevilla. It was so huge! There was an organ in there that was like two or three stories tall and all kinds of beautiful stained glass windows and paintings. We also got to see Christopher Columbus' burial place. Well, at least where most of him is buried. His remains are mainly in pieces, the largest of which are half of a jaw bone and a femur. But in the Dominican Republic, there was also a box of remains which they claimed to be the official remains of Columbus. Columbus' two sons are buried in the Cathedral in Sevilla as well, so a group of researchers spent a couple years extracting DNA from the three sets of remains and determined that the bones in Spain did in fact belong to Columbus. The people of the Dominican Republic refuse to send their remains to be tested, so no one knows where the rest of him is buried...kind of a weird situation.

Attached to the cathedral is a HUGE tower called La Giralda. We decided to climb to the top to see the view, because you can see all of Sevilla from the top. There are 34 ramps (steep ramps) up to the top, but the view is definitely worth it. There are huge bells up there in the tower and big windows where you can look out over Sevilla in all four directions. It was a really pretty view.

We spent that night in Sevilla and we to Cordoba for a day trip the next day. Apparently, there isn't too much historical to see there apart from their mezquita (mosque). That mosque was so cool, though! We walked in and it looked like we were in a candy cane forest, ha ha. There were arches between every pillar



that were made with red bricks that looked like red stripes. We were walking through those and looking at arabic art and then we all the sudden rounded a corner and we were in a very obviously Catholic church. It felt so weird! I wasn't extremely interested in the cathedral/mosque and hearing about it for the next couple hours, but it was nice to see it and I got some good pictures out of it. After that, we just drove back to Granada and came home.

I am really enjoying my time here so far. I have almost been here for a month, and it feels so weird! Time flies, but it lags like crazy at the same time. I can't tell if I feel like I have lived here for years or if I still feel like I just arrived yesterday. Things are getting more comfortable and routine with our senora, although there never were any problems with her in the first place. Well . . . I guess my only complaints would still be cold water and oversized portions of food...but there are worse problems to have in life! Overall, I love it here! I lucked out with our group, they are an amazing group of people, and with my roommate, with whom I get along great. We're going to London this coming weekend (my roommate and I) so I am sure I will have plenty to write about next time!

Outdoor patio in the Alcazar.



FEBRUARY 12

Holy cow, two weeks has never gone more quickly and also more slowly in my entire life. I feel like I have been here for at least a month, but I also feel like I just got here and know nothing about the city. I left Colorado almost 2 weeks ago, on Thursday,

January 29th and landed in Madrid in the morning on the 30th. We spent the first two days in Madrid touring the city and getting lost a lot. We went to two museums, a monastery, and the Royal Palace and just walked around exploring the city. It was

definitely quite a culture shock walking around there! It felt like being in New York City, but with everything in Spanish. We went to go and try to find food, and we had no idea what anything was on the menu. I ended up getting a spinach empanada for my first meal and it was not very good.

There was just so much to see and do on so little sleep for those first two days that they still kind of feel like a dream. We were all running completely on coffee and adrenaline, trying to appreciate all the amazing things that we were seeing but having

a really hard time wrapping our heads around the fact that we were in another country, seeing famous buildings and works of art. I took as many pictures as possible as a way to prove to my brain that it was real and also as a way to be able to tell

people about it, because I knew that I would never remember everything. After seeing the Royal Palace (which was amazing, by the way), we got on the bus and drove an hour and a half to Toledo, the coolest and cutest little town in Spain.

When we arrived there, we went to the main plaza in town and ate dinner and went to bed. The next day, we went on a tour of the town. It was so cute! Madrid is very big and impressive, but not really what I think of when I envision Europe.

Toledo has the shingled roofs and the cobblestone streets and beautiful cathedrals that make up the Europe in my mind. Toledo is set more remotely in the mountains along a river and is just amazingly beautiful. I was a lot more awake and ready for this day of tours and, although my camera unfortunately ran out of storage space, I feel like I can remember more of that trip.

Tuesday morning, we left to drive to Granada, where we will be spending the rest of the trip, minus excursions and traveling. Everyone was really nervous to meet our host families but we were all really tired so most everyone slept the whole way. We all felt kind of sad getting off the bus. We had only known each other for less than a week but it felt like we'd known everyone for months and had spent so much time together. So the prospect of not seeing each other until 9:00 the next morning seemed ridiculously far away. Our senora is named Carmen and she is 73 years old. She is just the cutest lady ever!! The only difficulty we have had with her so far is her desire for us to eat copious amounts of food. We have all adapted to each other in the past week of living together, but for the first couple days, she would make enough food for at least of family of four, just for Kayley and I, and she would get slightly insulted when we wouldn't eat all of it. We told her that we don't eat very much but she didn't believe us at first. Since then, though, she seems to have realized that she can make half the food and freeze the rest to make it another time and everyone is a lot more happy at meal times.

Carmen has had ISA students for the past ten years so she knows a lot about helping students adapt to living here and communicating only in Spanish. She is very good about helping us figure out the right words and speaking slowly enough that we can understand her, even though she doesn't speak a word of English. Our program put us in touch with some Spanish students here who want to work on their English so we can spend time speaking in Spanish and English and also get to hang out with people who know the town we're in and can take us out. Kayley and I have been pretty sick since we got here so we haven't gotten to go out and explore the town much but everyone here is so nice. Whenever we have needed to ask for directions, people are nice and accommodating, willing to slow their speech down enough so we can understand them. Plus, Spaniards gesticulate a lot when they talk so it makes it a little easier to understand. :)

I haven't really had time to get homesick yet, there is just too much new and too much going on to think about it. Being sick, I have slightly just wanted my mom, but it's not any worse than it would be up at school. We'll see how things go once I start getting settled in, it hasn't really set in yet how long I'm going to be here. So we'll see!! I have seen and done so much in these past two weeks that it is so hard to fit it into just one blog, but that's what pictures are for! We're starting classes tomorrow so I am sure I will have plenty of interesting experiences to write about next time.