

AHASoc: Placement guides

Spain



Accommodation

I found a flat through the school- check in the office and it's likely there will be a list of local flats for new teachers/assistants to look at. My mentor even rang them for me and went with me to see a few. Be careful if it's an empty flat as the landlord may expect you to pay the rent for the entire flat until you find other people to share it. It's definitely better to live with Spanish people (even better if they don't speak much English!). I booked a hostel/cheap hotel for the first 10 days while I found a flat but it didn't take very long.

I went over at the beginning of September as I was worried about finding somewhere to live, opening a bank account, getting a NIE... and of course, not understanding any Spanish! I started as a beginner so I felt like I didn't know enough Spanish to survive. I would recommend going early if possible as you can do all the practical things before starting work and you'll find it easier and less stressful. However, the earlier you go the more money you need to take with you to keep you going - I didn't get paid until the end of November when I had almost run out! You will have to pay a deposit and usually a month's rent in advance, as well as money for food etc.

Opening a Bank account

I found it very straight-forward - just take a passport and your letter proving you have a job as a language assistant (nombramiento). When I opened mine I didn't even have my address yet, and gave my UK address (so they sent letters there all year even though I gave them my Spanish address). N.I.E. - this is basically a National Insurance Number that you need to get paid. I had to go to the Foreign Office in the nearest city (but I lived in a small town so it may be possible to get it in a larger town too). It was fairly simple - forms to fill in - again you need passport and nombramiento - I spoke to a woman who checked through my forms then sent me to the bank to make a £10 payment before returning for my certificate. It's best to go early in the day as all government buildings close around 2pm and if you're there when it opens you will avoid queues.

Living in Spain - Cultural Differences

Meal times - Spanish people eat their main meal between 2 and 3pm and a lighter "dinner" around 9-10pm. If you want to eat out don't try to order more than a sandwich at "British" dinner time.

Siesta - especially in small/medium towns - shops (including some supermarkets) close from 2-5pm (this varies according to shop). They then stay open until 9pm. No shops open on Sundays (only paper shop and cafes).

Spanish people in general are much more laid back in pretty much everything - "mañana" Perhaps this was just my town but be prepared for trips to the post office/ phone shop to take a lot longer than you would expect - people don't rush themselves to serve a long queue of customers who generally don't understand the idea of a queue, or pretend not to. I found myself asking my Spanish flatmate "¿por qué?" a lot until we came to the conclusion that "Spain is different" and works on its own "logic".

Classes

Only 12 hours per week so lots of free time. What you'll be expected to do varies depending on the school and even the teacher. I was working in a school with a bilingual programme which does not mean that all of the pupils in the "bilingual" classes are actually bilingual but that their English is much better than other groups and they are more enthusiastic about it. They have extra English classes and also study other subjects in English – I helped out in classes of Maths, Music, Geography, History, Ethics and Citizenship as well as just English classes. This was great for my Spanish as I picked up vocab from a wide range of subjects. It also gave me a lot of variety. In the non-English classes I generally just assisted the teacher reading things out, helping with pronunciation and any vocab problems but near the end of the year in Music I taught my pupils Ceilidh dancing and they loved it (so did the teachers!). In English classes I was free to take the class and do pretty much anything. I did games, songs, cultural activities. I tried a whole range of activities with some being more effective than others. Teachers appreciate anything that you prepare and generally are very enthusiastic about having a language assistant. They will also give you ideas if you aren't sure what to do – don't be afraid to ask for help! The internet is great for finding ideas to use in the classroom – with ready-made activities or ones that can be adapted to your class.

I didn't speak any Spanish in my classes and pretended that I didn't understand the pupils when they spoke to me in Spanish. I almost always had a teacher in the room with me so if the pupils really didn't understand something the teacher would translate. I worked with pupils in 1-4 of ESO (secondary school) aged 11-15. I found that the younger pupils respond much more positively to anything you want them to do, especially games and anything that can be made into a competition.

School starts around 8:45am and lasts until 2:45pm with a half hour break around 11:30. I also had "bilingual" classes of English 4:15-6pm on Mondays and Tuesdays. My mentor arranged my timetable so that I had Wednesday and Friday off. You should have at least one free day and if possible it will be Monday/Friday to allow you to travel at weekends.

If you can, take pictures, photos, maps, any kind of materials with you. Almost anything can be found online but it's nice to have some "real" materials with you. Be creative and you can make a class out of just about anything!

Spanish pupils call their teachers by their first name. Before realising this I was hesitating between "tú" and "usted". Anyone you work with you can call "tú". There tends to be less respect towards teachers in Spanish classrooms and pupils speak to each other normally without even whispering even while the teacher is speaking. This can be frustrating but also very rewarding when you manage to keep their attention!

Get involved in as many things as you can. If someone invites you to something – go!!!! It can seem hard to fit in but if you are friendly and make an effort/show interest you'll soon make friends. My local library had a lot of cultural events that I became involved in – we made a DVD of love poetry for Valentine's day and they asked me to read a Shakespearean sonnet for it, they also organised an "Irish" day for St Patrick's Day and gave out leaflets saying that I would be coming to tell everyone about life in Ireland (without actually asking me first!). I also went on a school trip to England "free" of charge – though the constant responsibility made me feel I earned the cost of the trip!

Other

At first speaking Spanish really scared me – everything I said was present tense and with very limited vocab. I noticed an incredible improvement in my language skills. Watch tv, films, listen to the radio, read papers, books – anything, and of course speak as much as you can. People tend to be very encouraging when you make the effort to speak Spanish. Something I found very difficult at first was reading a menu – you think you know food vocab until you sit down in a restaurant. Like anything else you pick it up as you go along, mainly in the supermarket! I would recommend shopping in Día (probably the cheapest) or Árbol, but it depends on the town which is better. I found Eroski to be more expensive.

It's pretty cheap to travel around. If you need to get a bus to school there are multi-tickets you can buy to save money. Booking trains in advance can save a lot of money. Flights can sometimes be cheaper than trains/buses, especially long distance as high speed AVE trains are expensive. Travel as much as your bank account allows. Spain is full of amazing places, all so different from each other. My personal favourites were Toledo, Santiago de Compostela, Sevilla, Granada, Valencia... the list goes on!!!

It's a good idea to get a Spanish sim card. I have Movistar which seems expensive to me but is the most popular in Spain. Internet is pretty expensive and sometimes terrible quality. I got a dongle/USB internet stick on a “contrato sin compromiso” – a contract you can break off whenever you want, without the minimum of a year. I went for the flat rate “tarifa plana” option which was a good idea as no matter how much I used it, it was always the same price. My flatmates went for a specific amount of internet/month and ended up being charged ridiculous amounts for going over the limit. BEWARE!!!!

I only went home at Christmas, using other holidays to see more of Spain. Semana Santa (Easter) is a great time to be in Spain, to see all the processions. Your time will fly by so make the most of it! I also stayed on after I had finished teaching for most of the summer. It was very hard to leave!

Spain is not all sunshine and flamenco. The outside view of Spain tends to be of Andalucía. Where I was, in Cantabria, it even snows! I had snow over my knees – I had never seen snow like it! I was near a ski resort although I didn't think it would be a good idea to try it after my mentor teacher, an experienced skier, broke her knee. Each region is different from the others and they all have their own food, customs and of course, fiestas. There are so many holidays in Spain – any excuse! Most of them fall on Mondays (which was the day I had half of my classes!). If you get the opportunity to go to festivals definitely do as they are quite an experience.

The Project!

Basically – don't worry, it's not as scary as it seems. Once I got started I really quite enjoyed mine. You're free to pick your own topic to explore. Don't leave it to the last minute and choose something you're interested in. The interviews and transcription were great to show how Spanish people actually speak – things you wouldn't notice normally. And when you listen to all the hesitations and even mistakes, you'll feel better about your own Spanish!

I wish I could have another year abroad!! Whatever doubts/worries you have it will sort itself out and it will be an amazing year. Make the most of it. I learnt so much not just in terms of Spanish, but I feel so much more confident and independent. If you can live in Spain for a year, what can't you do????!

Enjoy! ☺

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Spain



Spain is a beautiful and exciting country full of contrasting landscapes, vibrant people, delicious food and a pleasant climate. It is a great place to live and spend your year abroad, and here is some information which should help you make the most of your time there.

Before you go

Whether you are studying or working abroad, make sure you save some pennies over the summer and bring some savings with you. The first while in any new place can be expensive, since you'll have to pay the deposit on somewhere to live, rent, food and a few essentials to help you get settled in. If you are doing Erasmus you get only the Erasmus grant, which is a great help but usually only covers rent and not much else. If you're doing a work placement you'll need enough money to keep afloat until you get your first paycheck. Beware with the British Council in Spain: the Ministerio de Educación takes a while to get into a routine of paying you each month. You might not receive your first paycheck until December, so make sure you have enough money to survive in the worst case scenario of being paid late. Also, if you are an assistant, it's a good idea to bring resources from home for school – maps, photos, postcards, books, CDs, anything which will help portray your home country.

Arriving in Spain:

- The first hurdle when you arrive is finding somewhere to live. This may seem very daunting but once you are there in person, it usually turns out to be quite easy. Before you leave, you can browse for flats on the internet and set up appointments to view places during your first few days. Sites such as easypiso.com and loquo.com are good, and if there is a university in the area, check to see if it has an online noticeboard with announcements for rooms. Once in Spain, you can also go to an "inmobiliaria" and ask if they can help you find somewhere. Whilst it is a good idea to do some scouting on the internet beforehand, don't agree to take any accommodation until you have arrived in Spain and seen it. You can live by yourself, with other foreigners or with natives. The latter is by far the best option in terms of improving your Spanish, but it's not for everyone. Be aware that a large number of Spaniards smoke, and not just tobacco, so you may want to inquire about prospective flatmates' habits before agreeing to anything.

- One time-consuming process is getting the NIE, the Número de Identidad de Extranjeros. This allows you to legally live and work in Spain but it can be a very long and stressful process due to the inefficiency of Spanish bureaucracy. If you are living

in a small town it can be quite simple, but if you are living in a city, even a small city, be prepared for a very early start to join the queue outside the police station and several hours of waiting for your appointment. You will need to bring a copy of your passport, and some kind of document to explain why you are living in Spain, whether it is an Erasmus learning agreement or a copy of a work contract. You will eventually be seen by someone and will have to show your documents and fill out another form. Then you will need to go and pay a small fee, €10, to any bank and also sort out “empadronamiento”, official registration as a resident in your town or city. For this you will need to go to the town/city hall along with your passport and proof that you are living in that area, such as the contract for a flat. Once you have your empadronamiento documents and have paid the €10 to the bank, you can return to the police station to pick up the finished certificate with your NIE on it. This process can be long and frustrating but once completed, you won't have to worry about it again for the rest of the year.

- You will also need to open a bank account. You should talk to the locals to see which bank they recommend and also look for one with plenty of ATMs near where you live because some banks will charge for using other banks' ATMs. Santander is a popular choice, and is quite good because you can use any “Telebanco” ATM without being charged. Some smaller banks, such as NovaCaixaGalicia, may have young person accounts (up to 25years old) which will give you free withdrawals from any ATM. To open a bank account you will need your newly acquired NIE, proof that you are working or studying in the area, an address, and you're all set.

- It is also a good idea to buy a Spanish mobile phone. You can still use your British phone but for making internal calls and sending texts to Spanish numbers it is best to have a Spanish phone. You can buy a cheap “móvil” from any phone shop, and the cheapest network is probably Yoigo. Other networks are Movistar, Orange and Vodafone.

Adjusting to life in Spain

One of the biggest shocks to the system is often the huge difference in daily routine. Spanish shops open around 9:30/10am Monday to Saturday. On Sunday everything is closed, except for the supermarket OpenCor, which is considerably more expensive, so it's best to stock up in advance so you aren't stuck for food on a Sunday. Whilst city supermarkets and large shops may stay open all day until 8 or 9pm, most shops will close for siesta between 2:30pm and 4:30/5pm. This is to allow for the most important meal of the day: lunch. Spaniards eat lunch between 2:30pm and 3:30pm and it is the biggest meal of the day usually spent with the family. Dinner is a smaller, more informal affair which can take place anytime between 9pm and 11pm. Nightlife starts even later – if you want tapas, you need to go before 11:30pm as most kitchens close at that time and will stop serving food, but otherwise the night is young. Bars will stay open till about 3am and by that stage, the clubs are open. You can easily go out at night and not come back till breakfast time the next day –

sounds exhausting but it's an experience to say the least!

University in Spain

Academic life in Spain can be quite different from that of St Andrews. There is much less spoon feeding, meaning you are expected to do more independent study. The teachers may seem to set less work throughout the year, but this is because it is expected that you are doing your own private study and readings. In general, there is also less interaction between staff and students during class – whilst there are some interactive classes, most classes are in lecture form rather than seminar or tutorial style. Another factor which can take a while to get used to is the long time scale for giving grades. As the stereotype goes, Spaniards are all about “mañana, mañana” so you can expect to wait longer than you would in St Andrews before you find out your grades or get your marks back. One benefit of the Spanish system is the freedom of choice that students have – it is often the students and not the teacher who decide when and where exams will take place. Sounds impossible but it's true! There are also options for doing more coursework instead of exams and it is up to the student whether he or she wants to do partial exams throughout the year or just wait until the end of year exams in June. So if you are prepared for more independent study and like the idea of choosing how you study and how you are examined, you should enjoy academic life in Spain.

Schools in Spain

In general, Spanish schools are a lot more informal than schools in the UK. Only private schools have uniforms and there is often a closer relationship between pupils and teachers. If you are set to work in a primary school, don't be surprised if the kids hug and kiss you, this affection is totally normal here and not frowned upon in Spain. You may also find that due to this informality, the children have less boundaries with the teachers and that they are not as well behaved as children at school in the UK. Primary schools usually finish at around 2:30pm, as do secondary schools, the difference being that in secondary schools, there is usually one day a week that there are classes in the afternoon. You should brush up on English grammar before you start, of course you already know how to use it, but it's a different story when you have to explain it to a class full of students. It may be helpful to do a TEFL course before you go to work in a Spanish school, even if it is just a weekend course, it will give you ideas on lesson planning and discipline, making you feel more confident and will also look good on your CV.

Travel

Luckily for year abroad students, Spain has many, many holidays, which for us means only one thing: travel opportunities! Whilst it may not be everyone's favourite airline, Ryanair is by far the cheapest form of air travel. They have many destinations

throughout Spain and you can often find great bargains by checking the website every now and again. The airline Vueling is supposedly the Spanish version of Ryanair, but whilst it is a nicer service, it is not actually that cheap, but is worth a look anyway. Trains in Spain are modern and efficient with many regional services, and if you live in central, eastern or southern Spain, you can make use of the high speed train, the AVE. The north west of Spain doesn't have the AVE, so you have to rely on airplanes, normal trains or buses to get there, but it is a beautiful part of Spain and definitely worth the effort to get there. If you are in a city with a university, there may be an organisation which puts on trips, either regional or to other parts of Spain, and this is often a stress free way to travel and a good way to meet people, students of a similar age to you. Spain has every kind of landscape you could imagine, from beaches to mountains, forests to desert, and you should make the most of every opportunity and see as much as you can. Believe it or not, only certain parts of Spain display the Spanish stereotypes of flamenco, bullfighting and paella – go to Galicia and listen to the bagpipes whilst eating octopus, go to Catalunya and see Sardanas dancing, or eat pintxos and eavesdrop on the mysterious language that is Euskara in the Basque Country. Spain is a land of contrasts and it won't leave you disappointed.

A few last words of advice....

Get involved in local activities, meet as many people as possible, travel everywhere that you can and don't waste a moment – do this and your year abroad will be an unforgettable experience that will leave you longing to return as soon as you have finished your degree!

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Getting ready to go

No matter how much you try to deny it absolutely everyone feels at least a little nervous before starting their year abroad – it's natural! Nevertheless you can make things easier for yourself by being properly prepared before you go.

Luckily for students going to Spain travelling out there is really easy. Loads of different airlines fly there and there are a variety of airports around the country. Try to book your travel as far in advance as possible so that you can save money. I booked my flight out about 10 days before I was due to travel and I paid dearly for it. Make sure you know exactly how you are going to get to your town/city and have checked out all the buses and trains you may need to take once you arrive in Spain. Everyone's first thought for a cheap flight is Ryanair but it's best to shop around a bit and look for good deals that include a bigger luggage allowance – if you're flying from the UK check out Jet2 or Monarch. If you're worried about how to get all your luggage out (which I definitely was, 8 months is a long time!) then I have one word for you – visitors! I flew out with a large duffel bag and then when my family came to visit me 4 weeks later they brought out another 2 cases of winter clothes and household things.

Speaking of winter clothes – I would definitely suggest that you research the weather in your area before you leave. I was lucky as Autumn and Spring in Andalucía were relatively warm, but it's not like that all year round. Winter in Granada was by far colder than any Scottish Winter I've experienced and I was glad that someone warned me of this before I went out. Not all of Spain is warm either. A friend was working in Asturias where the weather was extremely similar that of the UK.

When I went out to Spain I had about 1000 euro in my British bank account and I definitely needed it. Assistants, as you've probably been told, it's likely you'll have to wait at least two months before you are paid by the *Ministerio* or the *Comunidad* you are working for. Even after that there is no guarantee you will be paid at the same point each month. The Erasmus grant is helpful for both assistants and students but again shouldn't be relied on in the first few months. There are a lot of expenses which crop up in your first few weeks of living abroad. Many landlords request two months rent as a deposit and you will also need money to set up internet, to buy a Spanish sim card etc. Make sure you have access to enough money to see you through this settling in period.

Getting settled in

Obviously the big worry on everybody's mind before they move abroad is "Where am I going to live!" – again, totally normal. The first thing I would say is please do not tie yourself into any accommodation contracts before you arrive in Spain. It's really important that you get to know your town/city before you pick where you're going to live as there are so many important factors which cannot be judged online. However I would definitely recommend researching as many accommodation options as possible before you leave. Assistants it's a good idea to contact your schools to find out if they can give you any advice but as I'm sure you've all been told they are not obliged to provide you with accommodation. The British Council send out lists of previous assistants in each country and I contacted a few who had lived in Granada to ask for advice. They gave me information about the good (and the bad!) areas to look at for flats and contact details for a few people with spare rooms. I actually ended up living with one of the people a former assistant from Scotland put me in touch with. Estate agency websites and student accommodation sites are also a good way to go. The other thing I would suggest, especially if you are going to a city with a big university, is to wait until you arrive as there are always notices for spare rooms dotted about the city centre and the university buildings. I booked myself into a hostel for 10 nights and this gave me time to visit the flats I already had listed and to look around the city for alternatives. I then cancelled my booking after four nights once I had found the flat I wished to live in. The advantage of waiting until you arrive to commit yourself to a contract is that you are able to see what the flat looks like, the area you will be living in, what your *compañeros* are like and also, very importantly, you can judge if it is a suitable distance from where you need to travel to work or study. At the moment rent and *gastos* (expenses) in Spain are quite high but nevertheless take the time to compare a few

different options to decide if you will be paying a fair price. About halfway through my year abroad I realised I was paying a huge amount for water and electricity compared to my friends as a result of Spain's unusual way of calculating bills. I could have moved but I stayed in my flat as I could still afford the payments and I really liked my flatmates and its location.

Charges for using UK mobiles abroad are astronomical so I would absolutely recommend switching to a Spanish provider. I had lots of friends that bought a cheap mobile phone and carried both phones with them but I just put a Spanish sim card into my UK phone and contacted people from home via Skype and Facebook. *Prepago* (pay as you go) is the best idea for year abroad students as you don't want to tie yourself into a contract that you will still be paying for when you move back to the UK. Instead of visiting the different providers separately you should go to a shop like *The Phone House* where they can advise you on the best option for you, there is a huge variety of price plans suitable for calling and texting both nationally and internationally.

OK Assistants, this next bit is really important for you. Shortly after arriving in Spain you will need to obtain your *NIE* (Numero de Identificación de Extranjeros). This document confirms you can live and work for more than 6 months in Spain and basically ensures you can receive your *beca* from the *Ministerio*. There are different ways to apply for the NIE depending on the size of the place where you are living. As Granada is quite a large city I had to go to the *Oficina de Extranjeros*, take a number and wait to be seen. If you are living in a smaller town you may need to go to the police station. If you are in doubt of the procedures in your area the best idea would be to talk with your mentor teacher, the person in charge of all the assistants in the area or even just to go along to the local police station and ask. Before I flew out to Granada the *Ministerio* sent me the relevant forms I would supposedly need to apply for my NIE. However, when I got to the *Oficina* I was told these were incorrect and was given a different one to fill out while I waited. Take all information and documentation you receive regarding the NIE but be prepared for this eventuality. You will also need proof of your employment as an assistant (you should be able to get this from your school or local education authority), proof of your identity and a passport photo. Someone will process your application with you on a computer and then you will be given a form to take to a bank so that you can pay the administration fees. Be aware that banks in Spain have specific times when you can pay fees such as this by cash, otherwise you will need to pay from a bank account. The whole process of applying for the NIE can be time-consuming with a lot of waiting so I would recommend allocating yourself a good amount of time to get it all done, a few hours just to be safe.

Something assistants will also need to do is open a Spanish bank account so that you can receive your *beca*. Unfortunately Spain is suffering considerably in the economic downturn so it is difficult to suggest which bank you should go to. Ask members of staff in your school for advice about which banks are most reliable. I chose to open my account with Santander as it is an international company and my parents would also be able to access it if need be. However there were two downsides to this – 1) If I wished to withdraw money from a non-Santander ATM I had to pay a transaction fee of 3 euros. 2) There were a limited number of Santander ATMs in Granada. Before deciding which bank you are going to use, look around your local area to see which banks have the most ATMS and make sure to ask about withdrawal charges when you are opening your account. Some banks have agreements so that their customers can withdraw for free from different companies' ATMS. Again, take all the paperwork you have when opening your bank account. You will need your passport, proof of your address and proof of your job.

Getting down to business

Working as a language assistant was one of the best experiences of my life. I worked in a small school with only 150 pupils and 15 teachers and was warmly welcomed into the community. How much enjoyment you get from your assistantship is totally dependent on your input. Making the effort to get to know the staff, pupils and their parents will help you settle in very quickly and develop good working relationships. Try to contact your school before the end of June if possible to speak to the English department and find out what to expect of the school, the pupils and also your role. After contacting my school I was put in touch with their previous assistant and he was able to give me really useful advice about what I would be asked to do and what it was like working in the school.

The responsibilities of assistants vary according to the age group you are teaching and how your school chooses to use you. My school was bilingual so with the primary children I spent a lot of time delivering parts of their Science, P.E. and Art lessons in English while I taught the infants English based around the topics they were learning with their class teacher. At the

beginning of the week I would normally ask each teacher what topics we would be covering and I would then prepare a few activities. These activities would be used to introduce and practise the related vocabulary but also to encourage the children to actually talk about the topic in English as the aim of the Bilingual programme is make the second language a natural form of communication for students. Many of my assistant friends were also asked to prepare activities however other schools preferred for their assistants to deliver pre-planned lessons.

A good way to prepare for your assistantship is to think about what kind of materials you may wish to use to teach the children about your country. I used lots of pictures of my family and Scotland in lessons and it may have been useful if I'd taken more with me beforehand, but nowadays the internet is a wonderful thing. However don't overload yourself with materials as you do not know exactly what will be required of you.

Another thing I would recommend is to visit your school before you officially begin your job. This will just help you be a little bit more prepared for your first day and will give you a chance to meet the staff. It is also really important to participate in school life outwith your 12 hours of teaching each week. Obviously you shouldn't take on lots of extra responsibilities but volunteering at a few events and putting in a little extra effort here and there shows staff that you are interested in more than just meeting your university requirements and want to learn, experience and contribute as much as possible.

You should make the most of your free time while on your year abroad as can find yourself doing and seeing things you never dreamed of. Look for ways to continue hobbies while you are away or try out something completely new! One thing everybody should do is take the opportunity to travel. Most schools schedule your 12 hours of work over 4 days and will happily keep your Fridays or Mondays free so that you can see as much of their country as possible. Different regions and areas in Spain are really well connected by *ALSA*, the national coach service, and it is a cheap, quick and comfortable way to travel medium distances of up to 5 hours. The train is another option but is not as reliable as the bus system and can be very expensive. For travelling larger distances you can fly with airlines like *Iberia* or *Vueling* or you can check out price comparison websites like *Rumbo* for cheap flights.

For more specific advice or if you have any other queries please don't hesitate to email me at slq2@st-andrews.ac.uk.

Good luck!

Sarah Quinn, Spanish Rep