

Dateline Spain

Written by Abeni Hill, Insight Intern
Friday, 14 September 2012 17:35



SEVILLE, SPAIN - Hello Insight Readers!

This is Abeni Hill reporting from Spain. I have been in Seville, Spain, about a week and I am already learning so much about the culture and city of Seville and Spain as a whole. During my semester in Spain I hope to give you an inside look at all types of different aspects of Spanish culture such as art and dance to the daily ritual of the siesta, a nap period in the middle of the day.

My first journal entry is inspired by my many trials and errors during my first week in Europe; I call it Abeni's Top 5 rules for traveling and/or studying abroad in a different country.

1) Find a route that works for you

In my first two days in Seville, I managed to get lost twice; once at night and once in the morning. It was terrible. Even though my host mother did walk me to meet my orientation group on my first day, she took me through what I like to call the sevillano way, which translates to walking along multiple back streets and passing more landmarks than I care to remember. While walking home from orientation in the dark of night, I struggled for an hour and a half to remember what this place had looked like in the sunlight. The next morning was a disaster that I do not want to dwell on. I ended up being 30 minutes late to orientation while navigating my way through El Centro, the center of the city and the section of Seville in which I live in. Thankfully when I finally arrived at my destination, my group leader understood when I explained what happened. Once we were dismissed for lunch, I headed straight home and took out a map and drew the easiest, most memorable route possible. I am happy to report that I can now arrive at my destinations easily and on-time.

2) Have no fear

When I was lost that morning, I did stumble upon some really cool sights such as the Flamenco museum. As I walked inside to ask for directions, I saw gorgeous pictures of dancers in motion and I could hear the sounds of the dancers moving across the dance studio in the back. Unfortunately I couldn't stay because I needed to get to orientation, but it taught me that you can find the most amazing things when you are not looking for it.

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3) Learn some key phrases

Before I came to Spain, I borrowed travel guides and Spanish instruction books from my local library. While reviewing the basics such as the alphabet and grammar, I learned some general phrases such as "Can you tell me where this is?" and "I am allergic to..."

Back to that morning when I got lost, I felt that knowing the phrase "Puede usted decirme donde está este calle", which means "Can you tell me where this street is?" really helped me be more confident when asking locals for directions.

For me it was showing a sign of respect by speaking their language instead of asking do they speak English.

I think it is extremely important to let people know what allergies you have especially if you have potentially fatal allergies like I have. I am more secure with my health if I know the waiter in the restaurant or the server at the ice cream parlor completely understands my allergy to all types of nuts.

4) Stay connected to home

One of the reasons I came to Seville was to become more fluent in Spanish because although I have been taking Spanish in school for six years, my speaking ability is not at the level I would like it to be. My mother has always said for me to be fluent, I would have to live in a Spanish-speaking country and immerse myself in the culture.

While immersion is a very educational, you have to be careful of culture shock. Culture shock can be described as a type of anxiety that occurs when one is surrounded by unfamiliar things. Before I left the states, my study abroad program coordinator suggested that I bring mementos with me from home such as pictures and other things to remind me of home. I brought a small, purple plush elephant toy and a small ball that my father gave me. Whenever I am sitting in my room and missing my family, I just look at my mementos and remember how much love I have brought with me to Spain.

Another good way to stay connected to home is to communicate with your family often. While traveling to Spain, I communicated with my parents through email. After orientation, we had time to video chat. No matter how busy I get I always have to make time to communicate with family because they have no other way of knowing whether or not I am alright.

5) Be prepared

The summer and autumn weather can be notoriously hot in Seville. The weather has been in the upper 90s since my plane landed on September 4th. Based on last year's temperatures around this time, this type of weather plans to continue into late October.

During orientation we had two- or three-hour walking tours of some of the most notable sights in Seville. I suggest being equipped with a reusable water bottle (there are few water fountains), sunscreen (the sun has no mercy), and a fan.

While walking around Seville, I noticed people fanning themselves as they strolled down the cobblestone streets. The fans varied from plastic to wood, plain to designed. Fans are sold in multiple stores and it is very easy to pick up one before you start your adventure.

During this past summer in anticipation for my travel abroad, I watched a few travel videos about the city of Seville. One of them mentioned that some of the streets are called "kissing streets" because the buildings are so close together that if cars can drive on that road it is only a one way. The travel guide in the video also said the streets were built this way to block out the scorching sun and shield the people from its rays.

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Thank you for reading my first column. I look forward to writing many more.

Hasta Luego (See you later)