
How I Found Home Away From Home

Over the last four years, I have spent most of my summers traveling and studying abroad with Professor Bailly, participating in each of his European study abroad programs. They focused on learning about different topics, such as art, history, religion, and culture, to name a few, and how they have influenced the Americas. However, this final class in Spain has hit a more personal note for me, not only because it is my last one, but because it has been able to demonstrate a reflection of myself and the way I was raised as a Cuban-American in Miami, Florida.

Culture Shock

I arrived in Madrid on the morning of June 5th, 2018. I was excited to embark on what would be my final study abroad with Professor Bailly, completing his trifecta of France, Italy, and Spain. Already having experience traveling in a foreign country, I was confident in my ability to get myself from the airport to our class lodging without too much trouble. Being from Miami, there is little to no public transportation, and the little we do have is unreliable and inefficient. However, I knew public transportation would be the easiest way to go in Spain. I hopped onto the Renfe (local city train) for 2 Euros and was at the main Atocha station in 30 minutes which was just an 8 minute walk from our apartments.

I proceeded to walk to our housing. Arriving at a crosswalk, I was stopped by a Spaniard. "Do you know how to get to Calle Ancora?" In that moment, the crossing sign turned green and I responded apologetically to that man, "Lo siento. No se. No vivo aqui". I do not live here. It hit me then. It was a sort of culture shock, but quite the opposite. Not even two hours in this new city and I was already being approached as if I was a local.

The feeling of culture shock for me was non-existent. I was never once in a position that made me feel out of place or unsafe because of being in a new location. This is all due to the strong connection I personally have to Spain and the way I was brought up. The major differences in language, transportation, and culture that would unsettle any foreigner did not phase me. I already spoke the main language, therefore I had no issue figuring out how to get around in the bustling cities. Additionally, I already lived the majority of my life eating Spanish dishes. I was right at home to say the least.

Unlike my other American peers, I was fortunate to grow up in a culturally diverse home where I was able to enjoy the best of both worlds. I could have my Thanksgiving meals with a side of frijoles or a side of mac and cheese.

What I have learned the most from being abroad is knowing that the more things you get to experience and take in, the more new things you are willing to try and the more comfortable you are with being put out of your comfort zone

Finding a New Home

Just like any other country, Spain has had its darker days. Most notably the Inquisition, and

depending on which side of the fence you're on, the conquering and colonization of the Americas. Both have had lasting impacts on both Spain as the 'victors' and the world as the afflicted.

It seems that history has the tendency to repeat itself. People in power, whether it be the church, the government, or a certain part of the population, find a way to assert a point of view and condemn anyone or anything that goes against it. In the case of the infamous Inquisition, starting in the mid 15th Century with the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabel I of Castile, Jews and Muslims who have lived in Spain for centuries were persecuted, exiled and otherwise executed if they did not convert to Catholicism. For many Jewish and Muslim Spaniards, their decision to flee has not completely erased their mark on Spain. Examples of their ways of life are culture are still found and now protected in places like the Alhambra palace in Granada, the Jewish quarter in Toledo, and the Giralda bell tower in Sevilla.

Later on, with sentiments stemming from the Inquisition, came the age of exploration where conquistadors waded into the Americas with the intention of bringing Catholicism to the new world and amassing glory for the Spanish crown in the eyes of the papacy. Indigenous Americans were infected with foreign diseases, attacked, raped, and pillaged, and if they were lucky, converted to Catholicism to maintain a meager existence under Spanish colonial rule. It can be argued that the Spanish brought civilized culture and ways of life to the indigenous "savages" but history is always written by the victors, and considering that many of the native American peoples did not have a formal written language, and those who did either assimilated or perished, we can see where the bias falls.

These historical instances of intolerance, ignorance, and repression were reprised in the mid-20th century after the Cuban revolution during the rise of the Castro Regime. Again, we see people of Spanish descendants fleeing their homeland due to a dictatorial government where there was no freedom.

There is a round-about flair to this last bit of history because there are two worlds colliding. The Cubans who arrived in Miami were greeted by the "Freedom tower", basically the statue of liberty of Miami. The building was a processing center to document and transition Cuban exiles' arrival to the United States. However, its exterior architecture was largely inspired by La Giralda bell tower in Sevilla. So there are Spaniards who left Spain to live in Cuba who later on fled Cuba to be received in Miami by a building that resembles one in Spain.

Comfort Food

For most people, including myself, food is a big factor that determines their comfort in a particular location. I can be across the world, but if I can find food that I love and have often back home, I feel a bit more at ease and less homesick. This was not a problem of course due to my Cuban-American background. On one hand my grandparents are always making café and tostadas, while my friends and I go out for burgers and french fries- two different types of meals that are not very hard to come by in Spain.

When you think about Spanish food, you think about paellas, tortillas, patatas, and chorizo, to name a few. But what you don't think about is the amount of variety of food you can find there. Just like in America, you can find a Burger King or Starbucks, albeit not as frequently as in the

states. I personally was very surprised to find a Tim Hortons diner which is not as popular as some other fast food chains. Never the less, you can find a little bit of everything to eat in Spain but of all their foods, I found the potato the most interesting. It's served with practically every meal and it would not have come to be so popular if it was not brought back from the Americas in the 16th century.

Originally found predominantly the areas of present day Peru and Bolivia, the potato has singlehandedly helped boost the European population due to its highly nutritious makeup, and its ability to grow underground and remain protected.

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