



4 [OPEN MINDEDNESS]
**CATHERINE
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College Degree Program: International Business and Accounting
Study Abroad Program: Spain

"I decided to study abroad so that I could make lifelong friends, develop my language skills, and explore a new culture."

Before leaving the United States I had many different expectations about Spain, which contrasted with the reality that I encountered. I envisioned Valencia to be old fashioned and vastly different from my life in the United States, and was surprised to find myself in a lively and urban city with rich history and culture. While I enjoyed my experiences abroad and came to love Spanish culture, I had to work at being open minded about my surroundings while I was there. Certain elements of the Spanish culture were fascinating and exciting, such as local markets, beautiful historical sites, and amazing food. However, other things were at first very frustrating, such as stores and schools being closed during the afternoons for siestas, relying on public transportation to get everywhere, and having to wait 45 minutes for your check after dinner.

BY STAYING OPEN MINDED... I LEARNED NOT ONLY ABOUT MYSELF BUT ALSO THE WORLD AROUND ME IN A SHORT SIX MONTHS.

At the beginning of my journey in Spain, I was overwhelmed by my surroundings. Countless things about the Spanish culture seemed peculiar, such as kissing strangers on the cheeks, eating dinner at 10 p.m. and not putting eggs in the refrigerator. During my first visit to my professor's office hours, I became uneasy when he greeted me by kissing me on the cheeks, something that

I was completely unprepared to experience. This was followed by a thirty-minute conversation in Spanish, where I stumbled my way through a discussion about different elements of architecture in churches throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. I had many other awkward encounters with Spaniards as I continued learning the cultural norms over the first month, and as a result of all of these encounters, I became uncomfortable with the Spanish culture. At first, I was not confident that I had made the right decision moving to Spain. However, instead of becoming discouraged, I decided to try my best to be non-judgmental about the differences and to fully immerse myself in the Spanish culture.

By staying open minded, surrounding myself with new people and stepping out of my comfort zone, I learned not only about myself, but also the world around me in a short six months. Over time the strangeness of the country became more familiar, and the abnormalities seemed fewer and farther between as I grew more accustomed to my new home. As a result, I began to admire the beauty in the differences between the Spanish lifestyle and those of the United States. I grew to appreciate siestas for a few hours in the afternoon each day. They allowed me to be more focused in my late afternoon and evening classes as well as gave me the opportunity to relax during the day. I developed a taste for the local food and enjoyed spending long dinners with my friends because we were able to connect and spend quality time together. The nuisance of not having a car ended up being a nice change, because I was able to enjoy my surroundings, watch the local people and have some physical activity at the same time. I even found myself being late to class and meeting times, because nothing ever started on time anyways, so what was the point of rushing around everywhere?

At the end of my six months abroad, I fell in love with Spain and all of the things I first found overwhelmingly different, which would not have been possible had I remained narrow-minded while living there. I learned that just because things are different does not mean they are inferior or wrong. If I would have remained closed-minded while I was there, I would have never learned all of the great things that Spain had to offer and I would never have fallen in love with my second home.