

ESPAGNE – Universidad Rey Juan Carlos

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I. Your overall feeling after your semester abroad

Madrid was my first choice among the different exchange destinations as I always wanted to go to this capital city of Spain, due to various reasons I had.

Personally, I have really enjoyed this semester in Madrid and I would even qualify this period as one of my best semesters of my educational journey until now.

I don't regret at all to have chosen Madrid for my semester abroad and I would definitely do the same choice if I could go back in time.

If you are going to Madrid for your semester, I would like to congratulate you for this result, and tell you to be prepared because you are certainly about to live an amazing experience for the upcoming semester.

Madrid is an ideal city to do an Erasmus semester in my opinion. A young, dynamic, large, developed and safe city with a great cultural and historical richness. The facility to travel to another city or country nearby is also a plus.

The University of destination (Universidad Rey Juan Carlos aka URJC) is not considered as the best University of Madrid to be honest but it would be qualified enough to allow you to discover a new environment with probably new ways of teaching, to meet and build relationships with Spanish students and other exchange students coming from all around the world and finally to make you grow as a young adult.

I hope this document will be useful for you and that you will fully enjoy your semester. Last thing, don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions, I would be a pleasure to help you.

II. Before the travel

A. Preparation

1. Visa

You don't need a Visa for an exchange semester.

Check if you have a passport which enables you to travel to other countries if you are planning to visit other countries during your semester (a lot of friends went to Morocco, Portugal during their semester...).

2. The flight

First of all, I strongly recommend the Skyscanner website to look for the flights. (Flights from France to Madrid are generally cheaper than trains and more convenient than buses for sure)

To go to Madrid at the first time, I took a flight from Marseille (by car from Montpellier to Marseille, but you can easily find cheap buses as well of course) to Madrid with Iberia. I made the reservation one week before, it would be better to take it sooner of course.

After that, all my flights (I had to do 2 round-trip flights during the semester: 1 to take a Score IAE test and 1 to do a face-to-face interview for a Master program) including the final return flight to Marseille were with Ryanair and I bought them some weeks before to get the best price.

From the airport, you can take a taxi which costs 30€ and which brings you to the center of Madrid, which could be the best option at the first arrival in my opinion.

3. My luggage

For my first trip to Madrid, I had 1 checked baggage, 1 carry-on baggage and 1 personal item (backpack) and I could quite bring all the necessary things.

The ideal would be to make a list of things you have to take in the luggage some weeks before the flight of course, then to buy and prepare in order not to forget any necessary object at your departure.

Take some identity photos, you might need them (necessary to make the ESN card at the University for instance).

Some basic drugs are also recommended to take. I used some of them when I was sick once abroad.

Organize what you put in the luggage depending on your semester schedule.

If you are planning to come back to France in February or March to take an exam for an example, you won't need to take the clothing for the summer at your first departure obviously.

4. Bank account

I used my French bank account from Crédit Agricole Languedoc the most of the times, but it was sometimes impossible to make some operations on the Spanish websites (related to operations towards foreign bank accounts), and so I had to use my N26 bank account which I created before coming to Madrid.

Check the limits of cash withdrawals and uses abroad with your French bank.

I didn't make any Spanish bank account, but if you decide to make one, you could benefit from the "Bizum" function, which is very similar to the application "Lydia" but included in the Spanish bank features.

5. Insurance

My insurance in France was Pacifica (through Crédit Agricole Languedoc) and I didn't have to subscribe to any another insurance because my insurance covered everything ("la garantie responsabilité civile vie privée" and "la garantie scolaire") needed.

Make the European insurance card (la carte européenne d'assurance maladie) if you don't have a valid one, it could be useful if you have to go see the physicians.

B. Housing

1. Where to live

First of all, don't live in the student residence of Vicálvaro:

- 1) It is too far (40-45 minutes by metro) from the city center (where all the interesting things are).
- 2) The district (las Vallecas) is quite known for its insecurity
- 3) It's excessively expensive for what it is (compared to the rooms you can get in the city center)

A friend of mine had a room in the student residence of Vicálvaro at the beginning but moved to the center a bit later.



Basically, I think that most of the districts of center of Madrid are very safe and pleasant to live. On the map above, only Lavapiés is a bit insecure from what I have heard and felt. It is also often said that districts below Sol are not the most safest ones.

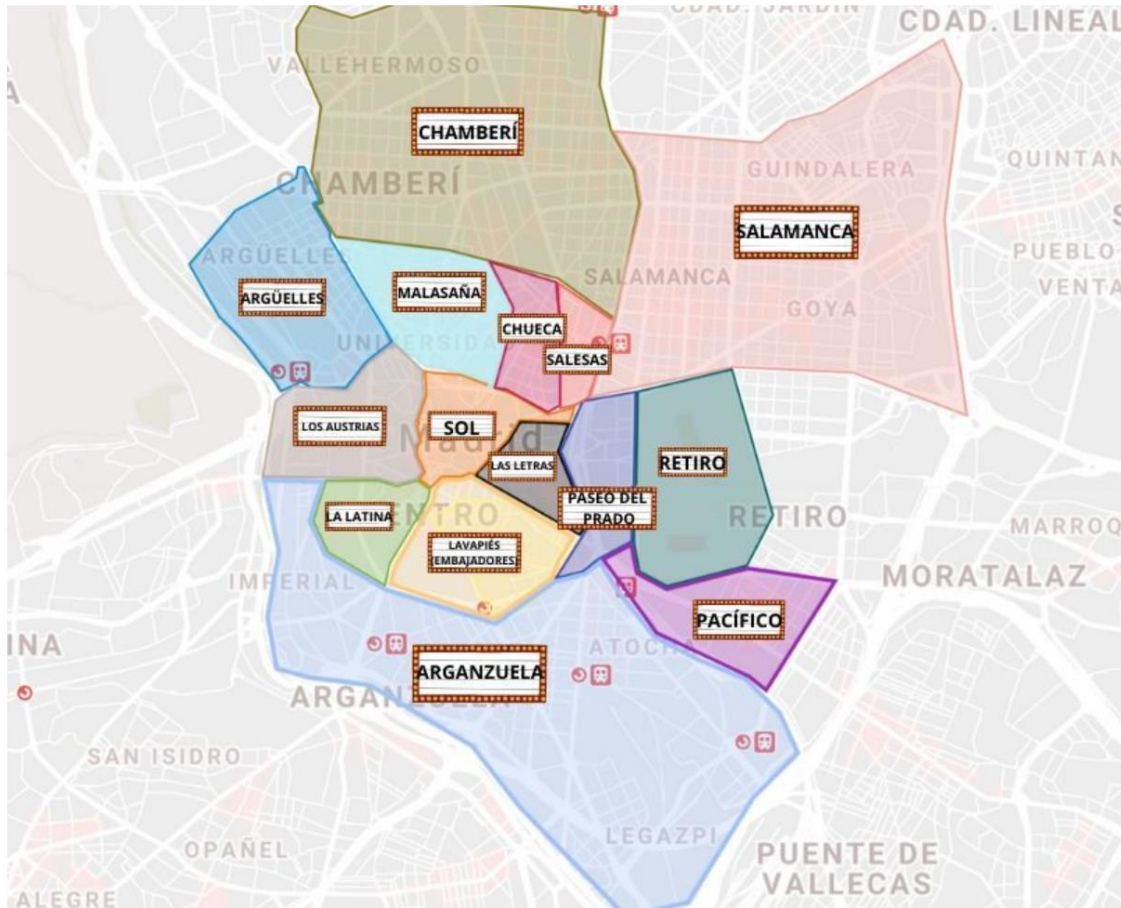
My top 3 districts of Madrid would be Malasaña, Sol and Salamanca.

Personally, I lived in the district of Malasaña, and I loved it. One of the most dynamic districts of Madrid with always a lot of young people. Even if it can be a bit noisy at night depending on the street, it is very well located, with many trendy shops, bars and supermarkets around. In my case, I could go to Gran Via by walking in 10 minutes, to Sol in 15-20 minutes for example. I strongly recommend. (and near metro station of "Tribunal" or "Bilbao" if you can)

Even if it would be harder to find a good one with a reasonable price, a flat near Sol or Gran Via would be really convenient, easy to move.

Salamanca is also a really nice district, calmer than Malasaña and Sol but with a lot of big stores, and quite close from the center and the Retiro Park at the same time.

Chueca, a district reputed for the LGBT+ community, is also known to have a dynamic environment.



Here's a different map with more districts, just think to avoid Arganzuela if possible because it can be less safer, and maybe Chamberí because it's quite far from the center and as well from the University.

2. Find a flat or a room

To begin with, in Madrid it is very common for exchange student to have a room (not a studio or a student residence because of their price) in a shared flat.

Start early enough to look for a flat.

Look on different sites:

Personally, I looked on these 4 websites:

Idealista, Badi, Spotahome, and Uniplaces.

- **Idealista:** The website with the biggest number of offers. There are always new ads and they are gone very quickly. However, the owners don't really answer to the messages you send through the site. The best is to register their phone number and send a message on Whatsapp. I had prepared a short text of presentation and questions in Spanish about the accommodation that I adapted according to the advertisements (and this on other sites than Idealista as well).
- **Badi:** The best thing is to create an account and put what kind of person you are and what you are looking for on your profile to increase the chances of a (positive) response from the owners. I found my apartment on Badi personally.
- **Spotahome and Uniplaces:** What is good with these websites, it's the fact there are accommodations that are verified, with videos or reviews etc. but there are additional fees for the site instead, and less ads compared to Idealista and Badi I think.

(URJC also offers discounts for its students with a promo code or a link, check below: <https://www.urjc.es/estudiar-en-la-urjc/oficina-del-estudiante/262-alojamiento-accomodation>)

If possible, the best thing is to visit the apartments before booking, by taking an Airbnb or a youth hostel in Madrid. Personally, I took a big risk to book before going there: I made a video call with the owner who showed me the apartment, I looked at the reviews on this agency (Roomrent), and looked at the videos of presentation of the apartment made by the Spotahome website and I booked because it was one of the only apartments for which all my criteria corresponded and time was ticking. Even though I was very satisfied with my choice of apartment, I advise you to visit the apartment and not to book it before.

I know that you can't really choose your roommates, but if possible, choose a flat where there are no French people, so that you can fully practice your Spanish and/or English.

Make sure that there is a common space such as a living room where you can spend time and talk with the other roommates, and that there are enough bathrooms considering the number of people.

In Madrid it is quite common to have more than 6 students in the apartment (even 10 or 12). Personally, I didn't want to have more than 4 students, and we were 4 (for only one bathroom, but it was ok because we had quite different life rhythms)

3. Cost

It depends on the area but most of my friends paid between 500€ and 700€ in the center. You should know that Madrid is one of the Spanish cities where rents are the highest, even if they are quite reasonable compared to other European capitals (Paris, London...)

For my part, I think I am very lucky, I paid 525€ in Malasaña, including charges, with a personal balcony in my room, dishwasher, washing machine and a large living room.

III. When I arrive at the university

A. Inscription at the university

Everything is done by online, you have to follow the steps on the PDF and the emails from the University. Remember to get started early because there are many steps to do.

B. Information on the university

1. Courses

I have taken 5 different subjects (6 ECTS each) and I was satisfied for each of them. They were all manageable and not very complex in general if you study regularly.

- **Hospitality Industry:**

Interesting course with lots of group activities in class. Hospitality was a fairly new field for me, but I didn't really have a hard time following the course. During the semester, there were 2 interventions from professionals working in the industry. The activities in class were often graded and the final exam was a MCQ (Multiple Choice Questions, QCM in French) with some calculations.

- **Introduction to Corporations:**

Course on the different aspects of management in a company. All the lessons were held remotely and although they were officially 2-hour courses, the professor finished after 1 hour in almost every session. The final grade consisted of the online activities + 2 in-person exams (2 MCQs).

- **Computer Science applied to Corporations:**

The courses and activities in Word and Excel. You could also do them at home and send the activity you did before each deadline. Each activity was taken into account for the grade. For Word, the final exam was a long activity to be done and sent before a deadline and for Excel a questionnaire that had to be answered by doing the final activity in class on D-day.

- **Responsibility and Corporate Social Marketing:**

Pretty interesting course on the CSR aspect which is of topical interest, with a lot of group presentations + Kahoot at the end of each chapter. The final project was the elaboration of a fictitious partnership between a company and an association for a chosen cause, on all aspects. There is also a final written exam which was a MCQ.

- **Business Organization and Planning of Events and Ceremonies:**

Classes in the Quintana campus (located near the Argüelles or Ventura Rodriguez metro station and not Quintana). Two teachers who alternate and one of them was a current professional who often talked about his experiences, which I liked. Presentations to be done in groups and a final exam (MCQ) quite difficult with a lot of details.

2. Advice on “contrat d'étude”

Before you pick your courses, look carefully at the course content and the exam modalities of course, but also at the class hours, the date and time of the exams (so that they do not overlap).

If you are going to take courses on two different campuses (which is very tiring), it would be safe to foresee a 1 hour commute between the two campuses (Vicálvaro and Quintana).

IV. When I live there

A. Safety

In the center, it's very safe. I've never felt danger while walking at night, contrary to France nowadays unfortunately. Yet, under Sol, you should be more careful (near las Vallecas, Lavapiés, Usera...) and not only at night.

B. Phone and Internet

I kept my Red by SFR subscription for internet (with an international option and travel option), SMS and calls. Moreover, I had the Wifi in my flat.

I had taken a Lyca Mobile subscription during the first month in Madrid but the international option of SFR was enough for internet and I didn't really need the Spanish number so I stopped using it after the first month (I didn't renew).

Be careful if you are keeping your French operator abroad because after 4 months, you can receive a message "unreasonable use" from the French operator and be charged according to the use afterwards (per Mb of Internet, minute of call or SMS).

C. Events

There are many events, parties and trips organized by associations for students such as ESN or Citylife. Subscribe to their social networks or check their websites regularly in order not to miss them. There are plenty of activities to do in Madrid.

D. Sports

Madrid being a very big city, you will be able to do the sport you want without any big trouble. You can go to the gym choosing one of many (you can even find Basic Fit in Madrid), play basketball (a friend of mine managed to get into a basketball club in Madrid during his Erasmus), play soccer (there is a chat about sports in one of the group chats of Citylife, where they regularly propose a 7-a-side soccer for example), swim... Jogging in Retiro can also be a good idea.

E. Eating

Try the typical dishes of Spain or Madrid: Tortilla de patatas, Croquetas, Bocadillo de calamares, Patatas bravas, Paella, Cocido madrileño, Callos a la madrileña...

In Madrid, you can really find good restaurants from all over the world: Brazilian, Colombian, Korean, Italian, Mexican, Peruvian...

+ Fastfoods that may not exist in your city in France which are worth a try: Taco Bell, Jollybie, Five Guys...

To make a good choice, look at the ratings on Google (and Trip Advisor too for the less lazy).

F. Go to the university : bus, car, bike

If you live in the center, wherever you are, the best way to go to the University is surely by metro. Even if you want to move within the city, you will soon notice that the metro is very convenient because the network is very complete.

Public transport in Madrid is one of the big advantages for young students coming to Madrid. The "Abono Joven" pass for those under 26 years old, which includes metro, bus and cercanías (equivalent to the RER), costs only 20€ per month, which is really cheap.

For the creation of the personal transport card, you can do it through the link below, putting the address in Madrid if you already have someone in Madrid who could receive the card: <https://tarjetatransportepublico.crtm.es/CRTM-ABONOS/entrada.aspx?s=individual>

If you don't have an address in Madrid yet, the association Citylife (which offers a lot of help for foreign students) also allows you to order the metro card in advance before your arrival in Madrid at their office (located in Gran Via), which you can pick up when you arrive. <https://www.citylifemadrid.com/getting-around-madrid-public-transport/#2-how-to-get-your-personal-public-transport-card>

Otherwise, you can create it on the spot in "Oficinas de gestión de la Tarjeta Transporte Público" as in the Sol or Atocha metro stop, among others, and with an appointment preferably (called "cita" in Spanish). When arriving in Madrid, you can take a 10-trip ticket, especially if the personal card has not been created or arrived yet.

G. Travels

I recommend traveling in Spain as much as possible during the exchange semester in Madrid.

There are many small cities around Madrid that are very interesting to see (Toledo, Salamanca, Cuenca...) but also others further away (Valencia, North of Spain, Andalucía).

If you are going to Andalucía (which I strongly recommend) don't plan to go there after May because it will be too hot.

There are a lot of travels organized by ESN and other associations. Look at their schedule regularly and organize your planning.

H. Any other information you would have liked to know about

At the university, it is quite easy and natural to meet other French people, especially since it is reassuring at the beginning when you don't know anyone. Of course, it is also beneficial to get to know each other, knowing that they probably come from other cities in France, from other establishments (business school, IAE, university...) to be able to exchange and feel at ease.

But also force yourself to go towards the Erasmus people, by addressing them, and towards the Spanish people who are also quite open but who sometimes just don't dare to make the first step. I've seen quite a lot of French people who stayed and hung out only with French people for the whole semester and regretted not trying to reach out more to other Erasmus or Spanish people.

Making a notepad on the phone is also a nice idea I think. As soon as you learn a new expression, write it down with the translation. Write down even the words you don't know its meaning, you can look it up once you are alone on dictionaries to learn (+ there are Instagram accounts that teach you the everyday expressions)

+ Make a TO-DO list in Madrid

+ Diary is also a good way to leave a written record of what you did each day, so you can read them again later in detail.

V. Photos

