

Spain Spring Arts Tour

After returning from the 2009 Spain Spring Arts Tour, I have gained an appreciation for the Spanish culture and art. Being a finance major in the College of Business, this wasn't a typical choice for a business student as it was focused on art and culture. However, a combination of cultural and business knowledge is necessary to productively and successfully do business in other areas of the world as you might have learned in your classes; but in the classroom setting of Lindner Hall, only the business aspects of other countries are often focused on, rather than the country as a whole.

After doing a business-focused spring tour to Belgium and France last spring, I learned through the university in Belgium and company visits, such as P&G, and my own exploration of these two countries, that there is so much more than different business etiquette for each country, but there are also things such as how people interact, what kind of music do they listen to, what do they eat, their pastimes, etc. All these being apart of the culture, which is best acknowledged when you experience it first hand through a study abroad.

If you're a business student, studying abroad fits very well into the business curriculum because of the requirement to take 18 credit hours dealing with foreign affairs. This trip to Spain fits well into my academic plan in the sense that I learned more about the Spanish culture and businesses and more importantly, Europe as a whole. The Spanish economy has been very dynamic the past couple of years. There are retailers such as El corte Ingles, a 22 billion dollar privately owned department store chain, or Inditex, the world's largest clothing retailer, to companies such as Abertis, that run infrastructures in the US, and Zeltia, a biotechnology pioneer in discovering cancer-fighting compounds found in algae and other sea species. Such companies are unique to Spain, but knowledge of them is very important, as being globally focused these days is a must for most careers.

From the first day I arrived, I visited the Picasso Museum in Malaga, which is right in the heart of the Historic Centre of the city, with the dramatic backdrop of the Alcazaba Fortress and Gibralfaro Castle close by. Within minutes walking distance is the Malaga Cathedral; this magnificent old building has been painstakingly restored to befit the importance of the works of the great artist. Throughout the trip I gained these invaluable experiences of arts and culture not only in Malaga, but also the lush and flourishing Gardens of Generalife and lauded Arabic remains of Granada, both found in Seville, which is the artistic, cultural, and financial capital of southern Spain. Next I traveled to Cordoba, with up to 500,000 inhabitants in the tenth century, was perhaps the largest city in the world at the time and also home to more Moorish building styles. And finally ending in Madrid, the capital of Spain, a major center for international business and commerce, and one of Europe's largest financial centers. The economy of Madrid being especially interesting, with rapid growth for the past 15 years, mainly in the service sector, it has increased its cost of

living to the 22nd most expensive city in the world. Madrid also serves as one of the top European destinations for art museums and is known as the “Golden Triangle of Art”. Artists such as Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, and Joan Miro can all be found in the various art galleries including the Prado, Reina Sofia, and Thyssen Bornemisza. Through these experiences I grew both my cultural and financial insight of Spain and Europe.

Spain’s once thriving economy, similar to the U.S., has also been hit hard with the global recession with an unemployment rate at an all time high, the highest of the European Union. Although two of these banks have weathered the financial crisis quite well. The two credit-crunch survivors are known as BBVA and Santander. The banks created a combined €14.3 billion (\$20.2 billion) in net profit in a year when many of their banking peers around the world were crumbling. Although, this was not a coincidence; both banks focus mostly on retail banking, and avoided investments in toxic off-balance-sheet exposures at the mandate of the Bank of Spain. Though both banks know 2009 is going to be difficult, they insist that profits and the dividends will stay steady, as both have a thick layer of reservations to draw upon. Spain’s banking system is set up much differently than the U.S., as it is centralized to a few larger banks rather than thousands of smaller banks. Although, more recently, the trend in the U.S. has been moving more towards centralization as smaller banks are going under, the larger asset-deep banks are buying them up in hopes to turn them around into long-term realized profits.

So whether you’re looking to experience the art and culture of Spain, or how their economy works and their role in the EU, or even just looking for an adventure, Spain is a great place to visit. From the warm climate and beautiful beaches in the south to the magnificent architecture of charming Spanish villas and divine cathedrals and palaces. Not to mention the great food, such as *tapas* and *paella*, chased with sweet and fruity *sangria*. And last but not least, the people are very friendly and you can usually pick up on the common Spanish phrases rather quickly.

On a more holistic perspective, I encourage business students to not only consider doing a business-related study abroad, but also other types, such as this arts one, to maybe step out of your comfort zone and learn things that you can’t necessarily learn in school. Seeing the culture first hand will only further compliment your international experience and knowledge, which is very attractive to potential employers, and I promise you will have fun while doing it.