

Spanish home stay

Dark, dismal, wet and rainy. But enough of London, we were going to Salamanca.

Buzzing with anticipation we entered London Gatwick. Duty free, a scene of organised chaos, bustling bodies but everyone had a place to be, and so did we. After a quick stop where the Burger King queue was too long to wait and the supposedly cheaper merchandise was too expensive to buy, Alex finally found his boarding pass and we boarded the plane. Following a relatively short flight in which I watched Schlinders List, a terribly depressing movie. I would not recommend if you wanted to be in a good mood afterward, we were in the warm early spring air of Madrid.

Madrid – a wonderful place. However our tightly regimented task force of Miss Price, Mr Ogilvie and Miss Clarke only had one destination in mind: The Real Madrid Stadium. Now, I cannot say that I am a football fan, or have any knowledge of football, but that stadium was impressive!

However, before we could enter its somewhat sacred walls, Mr Ogilvie and Miss Price did a snack run. Now this is no turn of phrase, they ran! That's right, something Mr Ogilvie had sworn not to do on this holiday but low and behold, with a bag of food in each hand, he came toward us at quite a pace. When all snacks had been distributed and consumed, we entered the stadium.

Football is not something I have a lot of knowledge on, but by the look of awe that struck the other students' faces when they laid eyes upon the intricately carved trophies and old tattered footballs, they clearly had a lot of meaning. Projected infographics adorned each wall and as we moved through years of football history, I gained some respect for the sport. Finally, we entered the field. Amazing, truly amazing! 81,044 seats staggered to the rooftops, lush green finely cut grass. The people who have been there, right where I was standing – incredible! The tour finished up and we were back on the coach, heading for Salamanca.

The coach journey was long, and I was tired, so I slept. Through my varying states of consciousness, I heard arguments about football; who was fastest in the year, who would beat who in a fight, usual rubbish. When we arrived, we met our homestay family. Ours (Kelechi, Arnav and mine) was a lovely old lady who would refer to herself as mama but whose real name was Carmen. I am not sure she spoke a word of English and she did not hold back on her Spanish either, my brain had to work at twice the speed just to get the gist of what she was saying, something hard to do for someone who had just woken up. For dinner, we had bread with a chicken broth and some surprisingly small noodles. They were 4cm long, but that is Spanish cultural food and I can't argue with that. With our stomachs fit to bursting with soup, small noodles and bread, we rolled into bed and immediately fell asleep.

The next morning brought with it a quick warm shower, a breakfast of biscuits whilst watching a Spanish Amazing World of Gumball and the knowledge that we would be joined by some Italian girls later that day. With a fresh orange and a map, we were sent off to meet the rest of the group at the Plaza Mayor. The Plaza Mayor is a wonderful place, a bustling center of Salamanca. A huge square with restaurants on all four sides and exits on each corner, leading down streets packed with traditional food shops, with huge legs of meat and chunks of soft cheese, as well as souvenir stalls overflowing with the word Salamanca in a hundred different fonts. Once all the members of our group had arrived and Kelechi had finished his episode of Prison Break, a great Netflix series which I strongly recommend, a tour guide arrived from the

Dice School (the place we were working with). Our guide was one of those people who always seem to be happy. Who could blame him, he lives in a beautiful part of the world.

The tour started in the Plaza Mayor which has a carved head of every influential visitor to Salamanca. It then moved through the streets to the University; a University older than Cambridge and only just older than Oxford. We found the hidden frog in the University entrance and looked at the carved space man who was supposedly carved before space suits existed. In addition to this, we entered the library whose front wall is covered in Shells, and legend has it that underneath one of the shells is gold. The shells represent the shells brought by those walking the pilgrimage route which happens to travel through Salamanca. All this information was given to us in Spanish.

After the tour, we returned to our host families for lunch and a siesta. As expected, when we returned home another of Carmen's rooms was full, they had already had lunch, so we sat alone for our meal of, firstly a thick chicken soup, then a leg of chicken, the Spanish do seem to like this feathered poultry. Once we had returned to our rooms, we were quietly talking, then, something strange happened. We heard a deep gravelly voice from the room next door, the look on Arnav's face was priceless. It came as a bit of a shock to us, but it turns out we had either misinterpreted or Carmen had got it wrong. It was a group of Italian boys, not girls.

After our siesta, we returned to the Plaza and were sent on a task to complete the suggested items on the sheet we were given. This included talking to Spanish people and asking them questions whilst filming it as well as taking pictures with great monuments from the tour. We then had some free time to look around the streets of Salamanca and to eat a snack (I had ice cream with a bubble waffle). Once we had all met back at the Plaza and numbered off, we returned to our homestay. For dinner, after a warm greeting from Carmen, we had something which I can only relate to a Schnitzel in sauce and bread which again was incredibly filling. Time works differently in Spain, because of the siesta people stay up much later so we went to bed around midnight each night and woke up early the next morning.

Speaking of the next morning, there was a vicious rush for the shower, what with the three other Italian boys as competition. Luckily, we managed to gain the upper hand and all of us were showered in time for Carmen to take us to the Dice School, which I mentioned earlier, for our morning tuition. I will not say that tuition was the most fun part of the trip, I would be lying and however, it was extremely informative and interesting to be taught by a fully Spanish teacher. When tuition had ended, everyone was a little stir crazy as we'd been for sitting down for three hours, so we had free time. I took this opportunity to try some of the traditional Spanish salami and cheese baguettes, under the guidance of Miss Price. I must mention that Miss Price eats like she will not do so for the next week. Every time we came back from a free time session, she would show Kelechi and me the huge platters of food that she had managed to consume. It is crazy. By now we knew the streets of Salamanca quite well, so we decided to return to Carmen, after letting our teachers know of course, and had an extended siesta.

After lunch and the siesta, we met back at the Plaza Mayor with our group. It was time for tapas! As soon as we had arrived at the restaurant, what seemed like hundreds of plates of tapas came across our table. We had mini paella, chicken wings, patatas bravas, Spanish tortillas, what I think was scampi and deep-fried cheese and ham melts. We were stuffed. We had just finished our tapas when we had to return for a dinner of chicken and tortilla. I could not move from my bed. I literally could not get up until the next morning.

Our final day in Salamanca. Again, biscuits for breakfast, yet another set of Spanish tuition. Then salsa dancing. Now dancing is not something Kelechi enjoys, you could see from the pain on his face that he hated every moment of it, which just made everyone else enjoy it twice as much. It was enjoyable and we have some good dancers which I did not know of. Rigorous salsa dancing finished, now free time. I had made a habit of eating something during our free time so had this interesting pot of rolled up ice cream which was made by putting crushed Oreo and Bueno on a cold plate with cream then chopping it into shape with ice scrapers. It was delicious. Then we were back to Carmen's for one last time a lunch of, and I thought this was a strange meal, plain rice and two fried eggs with tomato sauce. When we had digested that strange (but very Spanish) assortment of foods, we were back on the coach to the airport, dreading the cold of London and School to follow the following week.