

# My experience in Oviedo, Spain

My experience abroad will always be one of my best memories, and helped me a great deal on many levels, be them social or professional. I know it all sounds cliché, but it really was like this, easily the best period in my life so far.



*Friends of mine at the Mirador de Ordiales in Los Picos de Europa*

I'm a biology student at the VUB, and I went to Oviedo during the first semester of my first master year in biodiversity and ecosystems. Oviedo was actually my second choice looking from an academic perspective, because my first choice, Firenze, had the more appropriate subjects regarding my studies. The master in Oviedo was called 'Marine conservation and biodiversity' and is a part of an Erasmus Mundus master, taught all over Europe. Courses are in English and the international character let me expect high standards. But my motives to go abroad were not only academic but also of social nature, and were also strongly fueled by the call for adventure.

I encountered a lot of administrative problems, but most of them came actually from the VUB, where they failed to register my courses that I had to match in Spain. There will be some frustrations during your stay abroad, but it's worth it. I also needed to change a subject last minute because they inadvertently changed the course schedule, but it was not a big deal.

The courses I had were different from the ones at the VUB. First, there was the unique (for that master especially) system of having 1 or 2 courses per week. Each course lasted 2 weeks and was then done. This resulted in some hectic weeks, where presentations or tasks had nearby deadlines, or exams were awaiting at the end of the week, while courses were still ongoing, but when you have a week without courses, it's super relaxed because you cannot prepare anything on beforehand so you can just enjoy of a week of free time. There was some heterogeneity in the courses as some were reaaally easy and other much harder, but generally I'm quite satisfied with the lessons I had. The level was not so high generally, but many courses were more practical and dynamic than anything I ever had on the VUB, so you're learning on another way, and I obtained quite a lot of new insights. Another advantage of an Erasmus stay on an academic level, is to have contacts with other professors. I contacted some of them recently to find a thesis subject in mountain ecology for example.



*My fellow biology students in Gijón*

It's fairly easy to find accommodation there. I stayed in a BnB during my search for housing and found something after 3-4 days. I paid 200 euros a month for a quite crappy room, but there are cheaper rooms to find for even less money, you just have to look around a bit. Generally, life is way less expensive than in Brussels, although the Erasmus grant of 285 a month is unlikely to cover all costs.

Oviedo itself is the nicest city I can imagine to live in. It's a bit smaller than Ghent in population size, and everything is reachable by foot. The city center is beautiful and extremely clean, full of life and the locals are delightful and will help you with whatever you need. Spanish people love to party, and it's no exception in Oviedo, where some 'party streets' (e.g. Calle Mon) get only crowded after 2am until 6 or even 8 am on Fridays and Saturdays and assure some very enjoyable nights.

I absolutely recommend to 'force' yourself to go to ESN activities like tapas night if you want to meet new people. The second day I was in Oviedo I went, met an awful lot of formidable people and even managed to motivate a group of 10 persons to hike up the Naranco hill the next day, which lies next to Oviedo. From then on, I met new fantastic people every week or every day, and I hiked, climbed or surfed at least once a week. The county of Asturias is fantastic for nature freaks, as there are a lot of mountains waiting to be ascended, lots of forests to be discovered, while 25km from Oviedo you also have the possibility to go surf etc.

The combination of meeting new people and have awesome experiences with them hiking though Asturias' nature, together with parties, and, of course, interesting classes, is the reason why my Erasmus stay in Spain is one of the best decisions of my life. So yes, I really recommend going on Erasmus, and especially to Oviedo.

Loïc Gillerot

PS: You can always contact me for information about Oviedo or hiking routes in Asturias!



*Some friends and me on top of Torre St. Maria*