
2019-20 Postcards

Postcards from Abroad

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Slow Down!

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Slow Down!



The last couple of weeks have been full of travel, exams, swim meets, zumba, funky weather, cool orange juice machines and lots more. Time is flying by much faster than I'd like it to—it's hard to believe I have only a month left in Spain. Seville has truly come to feel like a second home. I don't like to think about another exchange student taking my place next semester, staying in my room, having dinner with my host mom and brother and playing with my host mom's granddaughter when she comes to visit.

We recently had our fall break, and three of my friends and I decided to visit Madrid and Valencia. I think Valencia liked us better than Madrid did, so it's probably a good thing we ended the trip in Valencia. One of my friends was pickpocketed our first morning in Madrid. We were walking to a cafe to have breakfast, and in the five minutes it took to get there her phone vanished into thin air. We really couldn't fathom how it happened. Believe people who tell you pickpockets are extremely skilled at their job.

Later that day we got trapped in the palace gardens. We found four or five gates, all of which were locked. Our wandering in search of an exit was not in vain, however, because we witnessed a woman fall into a fountain while attempting to take a selfie. She submerged completely and crawled out unharmed but with soaking hair, fur coat, hat, scarf and leather pants. We wandered through the Market de Santo ?, visited the Prado Museum and strolled through Parque de Retiro with its lake, crystal palace and a surprisingly high cat population. Our day ended with a woman mooning the restaurant where we were having dinner.

Valencia was a bit calmer, much to our relief. Though Spain is known for its paella, Valencia is the region in which it originated and is actually the only part of Spain in which it is regularly eaten. Elsewhere, paella is considered more of a tourist attraction, so we decided to

wait for the real deal and eat it in Valencia. The plate was so big that the waiter had to wheel it out on a special cart. It was delicious, even though we weren't exactly sure what sea creatures we consumed. We hit the beach after, and even though it was extremely windy, I had to swim in the Mediterranean. No one else was swimming except for a man wearing a rubber-duck patterned swim cap. I was probably considered just as crazy as he was by the fur coat-clad people strolling along the boardwalk. But for me, the sun, blue sky and palm trees indicated that it was perfect weather for swimming.

Speaking of swimming, I competed in a meet with the team I've been training with here. In some ways, it was just like any other meet I've attended in the U.S. and in other ways it was completely different. It was a pretty small meet—there was no electronic timing system—but nearly everyone was wearing technical racing suits (known as “fast skins” in the swimming world), which are usually only worn for championship meets as they are pricey and wear out after a few uses. My teammates asked me why I didn't have a fast skin (which they use the English words for, just pronounced with a Spanish accent) and seemed very concerned that I had not even brought mine to Spain. The whole team was quite animated during the meet, screaming for everyone who raced. They have a lot more variation in their cheering vocabulary than just “go!” and “come on!” I tried my best to learn but had no idea what they were yelling for the most part. After the meet we took a team photo. I did not have a jacket like the rest of the swimmers, but someone's dad tossed me his to borrow for the photo. When I tried to give it back he insisted I keep it as a present even though it was a bit large and had his name written in it. It's totally cool to have a jacket from a team in Spain, I just felt a little bad about taking it.

Last week was midterm week at the University of Seville. I was terrified, but the exam went a lot better than I expected it to. However, I was a bit confused when my professor returned it to me. There was no grade, comment or correction on the exam itself—only a note on the back that read “You're passing, but you could do better. Good for you!” I asked him what he meant by that. Was I doing well? Was I not? Was “good for you” meant sarcastically? “No, you're doing great! Most of the class is failing,” he said with a big smile.

I've met some wonderful Spanish friends and have been trying to spend time with them in my last month here. They're all older than me—mid to late twenties—but they don't seem to care. We have lots in common, we have fun together, and that's what's truly important in a friendship. Making plans happens extremely last minute, which I've been trying to get used to. Last weekend, one of my friends texted me to come over to her house in an hour. She told me I could come to her zumba class with her before meeting some more friends for dinner. Then we decided to use the spa at the gym and chat with the lifeguard. By the time we left it was after 9. We went back to her apartment where she showed me her travel album and chatted for a while longer. Her boyfriend and several more friends joined us for dinner, and we ate and hung out at the restaurant until 1:30 a.m. I was surprised at how late it was when we left, but there were still people arriving as we headed out.

Hasta luego,

Anne