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Cultural Aspects of Spain

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April 10, 2019

Cultural Aspects of Spain

Since I've studied in Spain for eight months now, I've been able to observe cultural differences between the US and Spain on a variety of levels. Throughout my time here my observations of the culture have evolved from analyzing basic language, schedule, and clothing disparities, to grappling with distinctions between religious influence, social etiquette, and moral values. I sat down with my host mom to expand on these and learn from a direct source about her personal perspective of the Spanish culture.

While Spain and the US are similar countries in many fundamental ways, there also exist a variety of lifestyle differences and contrasts between daily norms and habits. For example, my host mom mentioned many similar cultural aspects between the two countries, such as her support of democracy, her need for coffee in the morning, and wishing social media had less of a powerful influence on the younger generations. However, she also highlighted many cultural contrasts, such as lunch being the largest and most important meal in Spain; there are typically three plates, and it's the time of day when the family gathers to converse and connect. It's extremely common to come home for lunch during the work day to eat with family, reflecting the importance of familial connections and maintaining close relationships in Spanish culture. This is also reflected through my host mom's daily phone call to her son; it is a habitual part of her schedule to briefly call him and check in, something that wouldn't be considered a norm in the US. Another lifestyle contrast is the number of classes and extracurricular activities my host mom has begun since I've arrived. She's signed up for classes on both Mediterranean

cooking and yoga. These classes are offered for free to promote and preserve health and fitness for the senior citizen community, an opportunity that I don't believe is as common in the US. Her cooking, the classes she's taking, and her daily walks exemplify the larger Spanish cultural value for health and well-being. The final difference that I've observed is the severe contrast between the two countries' expectations of social life. Spain's streets are normally filled with people eating, walking, or meeting for coffee because maintaining an active social life is such a prominent component of its culture. It assumes an important role in the culture's social etiquette; it is expected to say hello to strangers in passing, greet people with two kisses, pay for them if you've invited them out, and ask them questions out of courtesy such as how their kids are doing and how work is going. My host mom is extremely expectant of me to be highly social, and always assumes I have afternoon plans and am going out at night because this is highly typical of youths in Spain, though not necessarily in the US.

The interview experience allowed me to elaborate and ask questions about the significant differences that I've noticed throughout my time here. It accentuated the fact that though there are many surface level differences between Spain and the US, our countries and their citizens aren't very different at their foundations. However, it's always fascinating to discover etiquette and moral disparities, such as those of the socializing norms. The interview allowed me to clarify apparent differences and learn about in which circumstances we are similar.