

Spain, Granada: Universidad de Granada

Environmental and Resource Management (in Granada: Ciencias Ambientales)

Fall Semester 2015/16

Application, Planning, and Organization

Before starting the application process, we were well informed through an information meeting. Subjects and descriptions were easy to find on the Website of the Universidad de Granada, as well as the amount of ECTS-Credits they were going to result in. The Website was comparably easy to navigate, which cannot be said about some other universities I looked at. After I was accepted for Granada, the university signed and sent back my learning agreement on time. However, the confirmation of my matriculation I only received upon arrival during the informational meeting. I had visited the city before, so I already knew the closest airport, and had heard from friends that buses can be booked from there to Granada. Even though Granada has its own airport, it is usually cheaper to fly to Málaga instead.

I found my accommodation through an online-database of the university, it was a private shared apartment, but the university also has their own dormitories. There are several in the city, for either men or women, and the rent is significantly higher (around 350 €) than for a room in a private flat (around 200€). While searching for a room in Granada, it is important to look for one with proper heating. Winters are not very cold, but heating is still needed, and much cheaper with a central heating system than with electrical heaters which can be found in many student rooms.

I found a room in a flat I shared with two others, who were a bit older than me and not students anymore, but nevertheless nice. The building was only a 7-minute walk away from the faculty where I had my lessons (Facultad de Ciencias), and in an area with a large amount of grocery-stores, bars, restaurants, and other shops (Camino de Ronda).

Studies

The university has more than five different campuses, spread throughout the city, each focuses on a different field of studies (medicine, law, sciences, etc.). Some of the campus buildings are very old, especially in the medieval city core, and some are more modern, like the new library of the faculty of law.

The faculties differ significantly in the way they design their schedules. At the faculty of science (Image 1), we had a very school-like system,

with hour-long classes in each subject every day Monday through Thursday, in the same order, and additional practical classes once or twice during the semester in almost all subjects.



Image 1: Entrance hall at the faculty of science

Despite the short classes, the lecturers managed to convey a lot of information, and at the end of the semester I felt like I had learned a lot, even in subjects which were similar to ones I had already had. However, we did not have any excursions.

The classes were all taught in Spanish, and even though the locals in Granada have a rather strong dialect, the lecturers were sufficiently understandable, and always very helpful, especially when it came to the language barrier. Classes were very well structured, with one exception, and the teachers strongly encourage participation. I would say lecturers and students were closer to each other and more eye-to-eye than in German universities. The students however seemed less mature, even though this depended on the year they were in.

Free time

In Granada, there are countless opportunities to spend one's free time. Firstly, the city is full of culturally interesting sites. From the famous Alhambra (Image 2), a Moorish palace which has been standing there for more than 500 years, to the cathedral, many smaller



Image 2: The Alhambra

churches, and museums, you don't have to go far to find something new. Even an entire city district, the quarter Albaicín, is historical and cultural heritage. In this part of the city all houses and buildings are very old, the streets which lead up the hill are steep and narrow and only rarely passable by car, and one can find the best views of the Alhambra, the city, and sometimes both at the same time. Secondly, the city is known for its tapas culture, if you order a drink at almost any restaurant you receive one or even two small dishes for free with it. And there is an endless variety of bars, restaurants and cafeterias to choose from. In the street San Antonio de Alarcón you find many students at night who meet with their friends to get a drink, eat tapas, and maybe later go to a club. And lastly, the Erasmus-community is very large in Granada. The Universidad de Granada receives the most Erasmus students in all of Europe every year, and there are also almost as many students from outside of Europe. Thanks to that, there are at least five different organizations who organize parties, introduction events, city tours, and trips to cities all through Spain, and even to Morocco. I went on tours to Córdoba, the Sierra Nevada with its small villages (the Alpujarras), a city called Ronda (Image 3), situated on a cliff with an impressive medieval and Moorish city core and bridge and to Cádiz and its carnival, as well as on a trip to the beach in September when it was still very warm, and on a tour to the "Caminito del Rey", an adventure-path through a canyon near Málaga whose environment is protected.

I also went to a few places on my own, for example to the city of Sevilla, to the “feria” (a celebration which takes place once a year in every city or village, on different dates of the year) in Alcalá la Real, and to Madrid while visiting a friend there on my way back to Granada after Christmas.



Image 3: Ronda

Everyday Life

Adapting to speaking Spanish everywhere in public was not too difficult, but understanding took a little longer because of the already mentioned Andalusian Spanish. However, people were usually helpful when something was not understood, and sometimes even tried their English skills on me. Shopping for groceries in Spain is comparably cheaper in general, but what really needs to be mentioned are the amazingly low prices and great variety of fruit and vegetables. You could not really find a lot of organic produce, but other than that almost anything was locally grown and very affordable, including tropical fruits such as mango and cherimoya. One also notices that in Spanish cities there are pharmacies on every corner, although I could not find out exactly why.

Something to get used to is the Spanish siesta. At 2 pm, almost all stores and public sites close, at least until 5 pm. Even after having been there for a few months, I still sometimes stood before closed doors because I forgot about it. And on Saturdays most stores already close at noon (although that is not uncommon in Germany either).

Because of the siesta, dinner and all activities in the evening are pushed back a couple of hours. The restaurants don't open before 8 pm and when meeting for a night out, students usually don't meet before 11 pm. However, after 8 pm it seems that all of Granada is on the streets, including the families with their children, and the city is a very lively place at night.

Granada is a beautiful, interesting city, and the people there are very friendly. I can recommend studying here to anyone who already has acquired a good basis of Spanish and wants to improve it, and also to people who like to travel, because this can be done quite easily from here.