

## My stay abroad – Universidad de Huelva, Andalusia, Spain

I stayed in Huelva, which is a small city in Andalusia, in the South of Spain, for almost half a year, exactly 5 months. I left Austria on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2015 and returned on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2015. In the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup> of January we started really early in the morning because our flight was at about 11:30 am from Venice. I really had no doubt about spending one semester abroad, I was really looking forward and excited because half a year my life would be totally different than I was used to it at home. Maybe I was less fearless because I went to Huelva together with Nicole, who is a really good friend and colleague of mine. So I knew if there would have been some obstacles we could have handled them together.

So when we first arrived in Huelva we had a really big problem because of the language barrier. We learned Spanish for one semester at home, but we felt like people who learn German and then try to understand some Austrian dialect. Nevertheless we managed everything and stayed for the first few nights in a hostel, which we already booked at home. People are really friendly and so we had a lot of help with searching a flat (especially from people and students who work for the ESN, the International Exchange Erasmus Student Network), which we did in our first days there. Our flat was great. It was big, not that expensive and in the middle of everything. We lived there with one German guy, who also spent his semester abroad in Huelva and one Spanish guy, who was already working and was directly from Huelva. So we were really confident that it will become a great semester, because of the great beginning. After we found our place to stay we had to register at University, which means fixing all our classes, get to know the University building, and so on. Therefore there was the “orientation week” with different activities, where we got a lot of information and opportunities to get to know other students. Anyway the ESN and the International Office members supported us whenever we needed some help or had some questions. We also got to know a lot of other people. It was really an amazing experience to get to know so many different people, especially students, with different cultures, different languages, different ways of thinking and a different lifestyle. We found a lot of friends for life in those five months. For me also the Spanish lifestyle was something really different than to the life and habits in Austria.

We had to get used to the “Siesta”, which means that most of the shops and restaurants are closed for a few hours in the afternoon. First it was really strange for us, but after some time we really liked it and were thinking about import this tradition to Austria. I was also really amazed about the nature and the climate. From the beginning I felt in love with the palm trees and the hot weather, which we had almost every day since March. In my opinion the Spaniards are really open hearted, flexible, unimaginable friendly people.

At University we attended five classes at two Campuses of the Universidad de Huelva. Three of them were classes which had their focus on business, one was a Spanish language course and one was called Spanish Geography. All of them were really interesting and informative and all the professors were so friendly and motivated that it was a pleasure to attend their classes. The life as a student was almost the same than to be a student at home, but of course it was a great experience to study surrounded by many people with different cultures and values. We had to work in groups a lot. In most of the classes there was no exam, there was a group presentation instead of an exam. These group works with all the different people and different opinions and values were a big enrichment for me and my future life and future carrier. I had to learn how to cope with it, how to find a way with which everyone is confident and of course a language which everyone is able to understand. In my opinion this is an ability which someone should have if you want to be successful in the world’s economy. I think I did not just learn something for my future carrier, also for my whole future life. Staying abroad, in a foreign country made me more self-confident, more self dependent and kind of let me grow up, which means it let me realize what it means to handle my life by myself, without parents and without the daily routine from home.

When there were no classes, there was a lot of time to travel and Huelva is surrounded by a lot of beautiful and breathtaking cities. I went to Madrid, Tarifa, the most southern city of Spain. It is a really amazing city, which is well known for surfing. I liked it a lot there. Gibraltar was also one of my travel destinations. Gibraltar was amazing too and of course I took a lot of pictures with the famous monkeys there. I also visited Cadiz and Sevilla and Granada with the famous Alhambra. My favorite city in Andalusia is Malaga. I felt in love with this city immediately. The beach, the view, everything was awesome.

For a few days I went to Portugal too, I visited Lagos, Albufeira, Faro, and so on and from Huelva it took us only 1.5 hours to go to the boarder by car.

To sum up going abroad was the best decision I have ever made and I would recommend it to everyone because it is an one life experience which everyone should make. I really learned a lot, not just for my studies, also for my life. I also recommend Huelva for a semester abroad because it is a really beautiful small city, from where you can visit a lot of places. Additional the life in Huelva is really cheap, because the south of Spain is unfortunately very poor, but it offers you the possibility to spend the money for traveling or doing other great things during the semester. It is not only possible to visit cities situated in Andalusia, like Tarifa and Malaga, also Portugal is really close as well as Morocco, the north of Africa. They also offer a lot of interesting classes and the support is great. I really enjoyed it and in the end it was not that easy to go back home.