We landed in Madrid, Spain to spend a few days before traveling to the city where I would be staying. Everyone was calling me crazy before I left – I went alone and I had never taken a Spanish class in my life! To survive, I quickly picked up a few crucial phrases and made friends with kids who were a little more advanced in the language. I immediately fell in love with the culture of Spain. I loved the warm air, the slow atmosphere, the flamenco music playing in the streets, and how everyone came out at night. Spanish people are known to stay up until all hours of the morning eating, dancing and socializing.

When we went to Alicante, I met my host family. Although they knew some English, it was hard to communicate at first, but I immediately felt welcome and at home with their family. They cooked me wonderful meals every day: Spanish paella, soups, pasta, and my favorite, chocolate croissants. The beach was a 15 minute walk from the apartment where I stayed. For the first two months I was there, my friends and I went everyday to the beach after class, swimming in the warm turquoise Mediterranean and laying in the sun. The best part of the beach was that there was a huge castle on a mountain overlooking it. Often times, I had to remind myself that yes, this was real life!

Alicante was not all fun and games however, because I did have to go to school every day. However, it was a very enjoyable experience for me. I took beginner and intermediate Spanish at the University of Alicante for three hours a day every day of the week. I came to Spain not knowing more than “Hola” and “Adios” and came back with four semesters worth of Spanish. It was a very rewarding experience to have even just a simple conversation with a Spaniard, when I could have never done that before.

While I was in Spain, I took advantage of how cheap it was to travel to different countries while within Europe. My friends and I took inexpensive flights and stayed in hostels or couch surfed to different places. I spent weekends in Amsterdam, London, Florence, Paris, and a few different cities in Spain. They were all different and beautiful, and I loved some and hated others. It felt so crazy to be going to so many famous and beautiful places in just a short four months.