

Córdoba Spanish Language Trip 2nd-6th April 2019 Travel Diary and Report

I would like to thank the Old Rendcombian Society for awarding me a Travel Bursary enabling me to go on this trip to Córdoba and Sevilla in Spain.

Being immersed in a whole new culture is a challenging yet extremely valuable thing, as it presents the opportunity to live and communicate in a high intensity environment that cannot be replicated in a classroom. I successfully absorbed vast amounts of information each jam-packed day that I spent in Spain with my peers. It was a priceless experience that has reinforced my love of languages, Spanish culture and my confidence before my first Spanish oral exam on the 13th May.



Photograph 1: Typical inner patio in a Spanish house

MARTES (TUESDAY)

After an extremely early start and a long bus journey, we arrived at Birmingham Airport to catch a flight to Málaga in southern Spain. As soon as we got on the coach to Córdoba I started tuning my brain to Spanish mode whilst listening to Señor Toms and the coach driver having a conversation about the local gastronomy in Spanish! When we arrived, we dropped our bags at the language centre, and then headed out to walk around the city a little before we met our host families. Córdoba is a gorgeous city filled with white infrastructure and covered in flowers and boasting a hot climate, immediately contrasting to the wet Cotswolds! It was lovely to get a feel for what we were going to explore in more detail for the next two days and it really sparked my excitement to visit some of its attractions. My host Luisa picked Ella, Anna and myself up and took us back to her apartment next to the University of Córdoba, where we met her family and spoke lots of Spanish with them while getting a feel for typical life in a big city in Spain.

MIÉRCOLES (WEDNESDAY)

My day started with a 3 hour Spanish lesson in the target language discussing immigration and racism in Spain, a topic that actually features in our A-Level course, so was extremely valuable speaking practice. After this first lesson my confidence and accuracy of speaking spontaneously increased massively, and I felt sure that this skill would only develop further over the remaining duration of the trip. After our language lesson we had some cultural lessons, learning about the city on a walking tour of the 'Judería' old town near the Mezquita-Catedral. In the past Córdoba was occupied by three contrasting cultures – the Muslims, the Jews and the Christians. This cohabitation is evident all over the city and remains to be an excellent example to follow for modern tolerance between cultures. Visiting the Mosque-Cathedral itself reinforced this as one can really see the mix

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of different influences in the architecture. That evening Luisa our host brought her neighbour's puppies down to see us after cooking us a delicious meal!

JUEVES (THURSDAY)



Photograph 2 & 3: Inside Mezquita-Catedral and view from the Christian Tower

At the Language School we had another lesson in Spanish, but this time practicing our listening skills rather than speaking. The teacher informed us about the local patrimony of Córdoba, including its gastronomy, culture, architecture and history. Some specialities include Flamenquín (a pork dish), Salmorejo (a cold soup) and Berenjena con miel (fried aubergine and honey). We then hopped on a bus tour of the city, taking us further afield and we were able to explore the concealed residential areas away from the main stream of tourists. During some free time we were able to converse with a few locals in the restaurants and cafes, growing our confidence when speaking and proving how fast we were developing outside of the classroom. Later on we visited the Al-Andalus museum on the other side of the River Guadalquivir that runs through Córdoba. This presented in depth detail about life during the period of the 3 cultures, and how each culture complemented the other during the time of cohabitation. The roof terrace provided excellent views of the city and a great photo opportunity! For our evening meal we were lucky enough to get the chance to try the local special dishes in tapas versions – they were all delicious and I'm extremely glad that I tried them.

Photograph 4 & 5: Tapas evening and Bus Tour





Photograph 6 & 7: View from Al-Andalus museum and me getting “stuck” into the culture!

VIERNES (FRIDAY)

Early in the morning we took a coach journey to the closest big city Sevilla, famous for its Cathedral and the Maestranza bullring. We visited the bullfighting ring first in the pouring rain. With a long-standing history of tauromaquia and Sevilla being the Capital of bullfighting in Andalusia, it was both fascinating but also extremely distressing for me to visit the bullring. It is structured like a football stadium, big enough to fit thousands of people inside, not to watch a friendly match, but to watch a fight to the death. During the tour I could appreciate the long history and tradition of bullfighting that makes up a large part of the heritage in Spain, but my longstanding beliefs against unnecessary animal cruelty underpin my conclusion that it is a very controversial and outdated “sport”. We then visited the Cathedral in central Sevilla where the tomb of Cristobal Colon (Christopher Columbus) lies. This was extremely impressive, especially the Giralda tower that we climbed, boasting 35 floors and extraordinary views across the city. Climbing up felt like walking on a treadmill on high incline as it was built to be a slope instead of steps, so that horses could climb to the bell tower as well. We stopped off at the Plaza de España, just before we got back on the coach to Córdoba and to watch a Flamenco performance. I was fascinated by this passionate, fiery, expressive dance performed by talented dancers and musicians, something that was a once in a lifetime experience for me. Our kind host Luisa picked us up afterwards and we returned to pack and bid our goodbyes before the flight early the next morning.



Photograph 8 & 9 & 10: La Maestranza bullring, traditional torero outfit and La Plaza de España

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Photograph 11 & 12 & 13: La Catedral in Sevilla, view from La Giralda and Flamenco dancers



Photograph 14 & 15: Alca'zar Palace and gardens - including a maze!

This trip has fulfilled all of my expectations and more, as I have learnt so much about the culture, language and people of Spain, all of which will be extraordinarily useful for my exams this summer. I have exceeded my personal development goals that I set for myself at the start of this trip, as I have built my accuracy and confidence when speaking spontaneously to a level that I would not have been able to reach by just studying Spanish in the classroom at Rendcomb. The homestay played a large role in this, as staying with a local family enabled me to both actively and passively learn, absorbing foreign mannerisms and routines of life to further enrich my understanding of life in Spain. I am so grateful to my host family for not only letting me stay, but also playing a huge role in my learning and development on the trip; to Mr Toms for organising this amazing trip and for supporting me so far with my studies; and the Old Rendcombian Society for partly funding me. This trip has inspired me to delve further into Hispanic culture in the future, and fuelled my ambition to study Modern Foreign Languages at University.