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Degree Program at TAU: Sofaer Global MBA

Host University: ESADE (Ramon Lull)

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Exchange Experience

About the country and city

Can't imagine a more vibrant, wonderful city to be in. I was there during the (so-called) "Catalan revolution", and even then it was extremely peaceful and fun. The Spanish have a relaxed culture that values socializing, aesthetics, football, and a beer during lunch over most other things. The city itself is extremely beautiful and multifaceted – you really have it all there (culture, history, bars, cafes, parties, parks, beaches, you name it), and can keep finding new gems till your last day there. It's pretty central in Europe and quite easy/cheap to travel to other places during your exchange.

About the Host University

ESADE is considered a top b-school in Europe, which really shows in the quality of fellow students and professors that are in the program. Unlike the other top-rated school nearby IESE, however, they really stress the socializing and networking part, which results in very high "school spirit", cultural & networking events, and overall inclusion. The full-time folks are from all over the world (a very small minority are actually from Barcelona/Spain), making them very inclined to make friends within the program as well as with the exchange students. Expect weekly bar events, frequent go-out nights, and (at minimum) monthly "big" parties/events hosted by their student organization (i.e. a big celebration for the Indian holiday Diwali with Indian food and dances).

Courses and professors

The course material itself isn't so different – I can't imagine MBA curricula varying too widely within decent programs worldwide – and the quality of teaching is generally high. Again, the overall experience and capability the other students bring with them to class discussions and projects provides really high and tangible value, and is great for networking. The program was relatively organized and the facilities

were very nice. There's a multitude of courses to choose from, so you can concentrate on different areas that might interest you, that you may not have been able to dabble in yet. I took courses on IoT, Big Data, Fintech, while others may have focused more on sales and finance...you get the picture.

Accommodation

Note that ESADE is not technically located in Barcelona – it's in Sant Cugat, which is a charming little town maybe 25 minutes north of BCN. Please note that there are 2 campuses – one in Pedralbes, one in Sant Cugat. Don't make the mistake that almost all of us made in your planning, since Google automatically shows the Pedralbes one (which is a lot closer to the city). Commute to school is usually 1 hour each way by train.

I would advise against living in Sant Cugat. It might save you a little commute, but you would be totally out of the loop in terms of meeting people, attending events, and socializing. There are no dorms to my knowledge.

Living in Barcelona is one of the greatest aspects of the exchange. Normally you'd pay 500-600 euros/month to live with roommates, of course with considerable deviation depending on your standards and how many roommates you want.

There are 3 ways to find a place:

- Facebook groups. Just like TLV. It's messy and inefficient, but you avoid the realty fees which are exorbitant
- Realty websites: probably easier for someone abroad, but a pretty bad deal overall for most exchange people because of the fees and prices. Try other methods first.
- Probably the best method: Try to get connected with the ESADE whatsapp group, and see if students that are going on exchange need a replacement. About 75% of the class will be on exchange, so it's pretty likely, and just guarantees a certain standard of living and quality of roommates.

There are a few areas that are worth considering living in (look at a BCN map as you read this):

- Gracia: Slightly newer area (in BCN terms) but still extremely charming and aesthetically pleasing, tons of bars/cafes/restaurants/clubs and hidden alleys. Probably your best bet in terms of centrality and access to the university – stay near the diagonal/provenca station.

- Eixample: Area between diagonal and Plaza Catalunya. Slightly older than Gracia, but again a popular and vibrant area to live in. Most people live here, in Gracia, or in the overlapping area between those.
- Born/Raval/Gotico: the historic areas between Eixample and the beach – we’re talking up to thousands of years old. Absolutely beautiful to walk around in, but generally more touristy and expensive. Some people really enjoy living there, kind of depends on personality.
- Barceloneta: This is an old, little peninsular beach area. Not the greatest choice because it’s very touristy, more expensive, extremely far from the university, and a bit removed from where most other students live.

Visa

Most countries’ citizens can get a free 90-day entrance to the European “Schengen” region without a visa, so that’s what I did.

Pro tip: if you have a dual citizenship, you can exit the region (Morocco, UK, etc) and come back with your other passport, resetting your 90 days. Kind of a loophole I found.

Transportation

Trains and buses are all excellent there, and are quite cheap. There are a few different transport “packages” you can buy, depending on frequency and distance. Barcelona to Sant Cugat requires a “2 Zone” pass. Depending on what package you get, a roundtrip to school would cost you a couple of euros.

If you’re into it, get a little scooter/motorbike from Cooltra for something like 125 euros/month.

Insurance and Health Services

I took out travel insurance just in case.

If you have a medical emergency, you would either need to wait a few weeks for their public health service, or go to a private practice. ESADE has an excellent service to help students deal with life in BCN, and they have a list of English-speaking doctors that are recommended.

Living expenses

Spain is surprisingly cheap, especially compared to TLV. You can easily live out your few months there not spending too much money – transport, groceries, and rent are all quite affordable.

However, you'll likely be going out a decent amount, especially in such a social school. Late dinners with wine and tapas are common, and those can add up, so be careful :)

Cell phone plans are really easy to get – go to Vodafone or a competitor, pay about 20 euros for a few weeks' worth of data and calls, recharge as needed.

Food

Spanish food isn't mind-blowing, but the concept of tapas is amazing and dominates the scene. The city is basically made up of tapas bars and cafés, so there are endless cheap and delicious food options. Of course, there are many nice places as well, so it depends on your budget.

I also enjoyed the variety of ethnic food spots: Indian, Vietnamese, sushi, Bangladeshi, Korean, south American...it's all there, and all affordable.

Groceries are really cheap, especially if you have a big store like an Aldi nearby – a full cart of food, including veggies and meats, may only cost 30 euro. There's 24/7 groceries open everywhere.

Night life

Barcelona has a legendary night scene. Whether you're into just having a dinner & cava with friends, or want to go to an underground techno club till 7am, or anything in between. People can go out very, very late there (entering clubs around 2:30AM is normal). There's something to do any night of the week.

Tips

- Travel around Europe, sure, *but make sure you really get to spend weekends in, and enjoy, Barcelona*. People who traveled every weekend missed out on the real experience, and frankly were quite miserable and tired. You'll probably get visit other cities later in life, but really living in such a wonderful city is a unique opportunity. I did 4 trips (including one in southern Spain, which I highly recommend), and even that felt like a little much.
- Be active about making friends with the full-time people and exchange students alike, and attend the events. It's a really high quality group of people that's really worth getting to know and hang out with. Don't be shy about it.
- Be super careful with your belongings in busy areas. BCN has world-famous pickpockets, and more than a few of my colleagues got their stuff stolen.
- When going to an FC Barcelona game (which you will, obviously), get a seat behind the goal, that's where the best atmosphere is, and it's actually cheaper.

General experience

It's probably clear from what I wrote so far that I'm pleased with my time at ESADE, but that doesn't even do it justice! Couldn't have imagined a better experience, both in terms of the program & it's people, and the city itself (and I'm usually a rather cynical person). Going abroad is a must-do, and I think ESADE/BCN is the greatest place to do it in.