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Parents Ask... "Should they stay or should they go?" What parents say about the SPI Experience...



Dear SPI,

I've been meaning to write you for months to tell you what a wonderful time Andy had on his trip to Spain. **He just got a 99 his first 6 weeks in AP Spanish 4!** We hear him laughing watching TV upstairs and go in to find him watching Spanish Soap Operas!

I can't rave enough about how well organized your company is. We were prepared for everything, and when we had a question, you always had the answer.

My friend's daughter went on a People-to-People tour of London, Paris and Rome at the same time as the Tarragona trip, so I was able to compare some things. People-to-People didn't prepare their kids with proper information about what clothes to take, how much things would cost, etc. They let the drop off at the airport turn into a giant crying fest for parents and students. I really liked how you kept it very light hearted—we felt very comfortable sending him.

My friend's daughter called home and complained every single day...about the food, the bus, the places they didn't get to see because the bus driver got lost...everything. And they were not prepared for complaints like we were with the orientation information for parents you gave us (not that Andy complained about anything!) We heard from Andy just enough to be comfortable that he was okay, but not so much that we were a distraction.

My husband & I both feel this was the best experience that he has ever had and your company is responsible for how smoothly it all went!

- Spain Parent

Another Parent Letter to SPI...

Dear SPI,

My daughter has benefited from your program in so many ways. Just a few that come to mind are:

Traveling: negotiating the airports, transit systems, money exchange. Also, making new friends from all over the world, learning tolerance and acceptance.

Independence: making your own decisions and being totally responsible for the outcome.

Culture: seeing a different way of life, different foods, customs and lifestyles.

Preparation for College: spending five weeks away from home really helped mom and dad acclimate to the idea of our little girl not living at home...and visa versa for her!

Maturing: it catapulted her into the next phase of maturity.

I think that going back a second time gave her an extra comfort level to really immerse herself into the language. **This has truly been an enriching & life-changing experience for my daughter and I would HIGHLY recommend it for all high school students.**

Mexico Parent

The Best Summer of My Life...



By John Foster

San Sebastian Participant

Spanish was never a priority for me - a grade on my report card and nothing more. The hour and a half of Spanish class each day was no match for the 22 and a half hours of English I spoke and the language failed to grab my attention. I ended Spanish 2 with not too much more knowledge than I entered with and my foreign language requirements were done. Never did the need for Spanish or the benefits of speaking it cross my mind.

So imagine my surprise when my mother asked me if I'd like to study this summer in Spain. "I never gave Spanish a second look," I thought, "And now I get to go to Spain". But traveling to Spain was my second look - it was my "restart button" on Spanish. Needless to say, it was a big opportunity.

Before I left, I thought more about Spanish and what it means to be bilingual. I live just 250 miles from the Mexican Border, but that doesn't mean I'm hundreds of miles from Hispanic culture and people. You can't go the rest of your life and not be able to communicate with the fastest growing group of people in the United States. After that thought I looked at it differently: Spanish is a necessity, not a luxury. That's when I got excited about the trip.

When I arrived in Madrid I was very apprehensive. This trip was a lot of firsts for me: first time in Europe, first time to spend a month away from home, first time to have a roommate, etc. But I was very excited and I was ready for whatever challenges I might face. We started the trip by visiting many of Spain's national treasures. We saw the works of Goya and El Greco in the National Prado Museum, took pictures in front of the Royal Palace and rested in the Plaza de Espana. By then my apprehension had worn off and I knew that I was going to have the best month of my life! Everybody in the SPI group was awesome and in no time we all felt one big Spanish learnin' family.

The good times continued by the time we arrived in San Sebastian. I had researched the city before hand but was still surprised at how neat it was. This was a place that was completely different from the suburbs I call home. I was amazed at how compact and urban this town was and how I could be anywhere in a matter of minutes. It didn't take me long to fall in love with Spain.

When Spanish is more than an hour and a half class, when it is your life, you pick up on it at lightning pace. What I learned in that month in Spain dwarfs what two years in class at school in Texas did. I think my best learning occurred outside the classroom as well. If I wanted to order food or get somewhere I had to talk Spanish! I definitely became more confident in my Spanish and in myself.



When the month long adventure was over, I reluctantly boarded the plane with a heavy heart but with high spirits of my future. Although I have much more to go, I have come a long way and I am committed to master Spanish throughout college. After the long plane ride, I remember riding home from the airport. When we passed the grocery store that I worked at last year as an after school job, my mom asked me if I would have rather worked this summer or have gone to Spain. The answer was obvious. "Thank you mom" I said

My Home Away from Home...España!



By Kristin Wangler

2005-2006 Spain Participant

Returning to Spain for the second summer in a row opened opportunities I hadn't predicted. Due to my experience the summer before, I returned with SPI as a study ambassador intern for five weeks. I spent two weeks with the first program in Tarragona, on the Mediterranean coast of Spain, and three weeks with the second program in San Sebastian (my second summer in San Sebastian!)

This second time around I saw Spain in a whole new light. During my first trip, I learned a lot about Spanish culture and how the people lived. The whole experience also forced me out of my shell and I became more independent and confident. I entered my second trip with less fears and more excitement. Going back a second time helped me immerse myself completely into the culture - I really was embodying the daily lifestyle.

I enjoyed everything more the second time – the food, the people, the *shopping!* San Sebastian really began to feel like my second home. I would run until the sun set every other day after dinner with my homestay family, then go on *paseos*, walks, in the evening with my roommate and Spanish friends.

Studying Abroad changed my life completely – I love Spain and In the future, I plan to have an international business.

The Journey is Sometimes More Important than the Destination...

By Kim Fox

Former Las Lomas HS Student - Walnut Creek, CA

Ever since I can remember I have been a die hard academic student. I was always pushed by my parents to do my best at every subject. I started taking Spanish my freshman year simply to fulfill a graduation requirement but had no idea it would become so important to me. I ended up taking two classes of Spanish during both my junior and senior year, six classes in total over my four years of high school. Let me tell you, that's a lot. I always considered myself such a shy person, and I wanted to be able to speak perfectly before leaving on my trip. I was so scared of making an error. I didn't even want to sound foreign. I learned later that your ability to speak a language has little to do with your ability to communicate.

Of course, language itself fascinates me, and my main goal upon leaving the United States was to try to become as fluent as possible. I had no idea how many more of life's lessons I would learn through my experiences. I had no idea what a blessing I was receiving by taking my first steps on to foreign ground. I learned more about myself in those few weeks than I had in my entire life.

I lived with a wonderful woman named Elisa. In every way I now consider her my sister. She taught me to be free and explore life for what it is. Communication was rarely a problem with her, she was so patient, and kind. Her favorite English word was "anyway" meaning if we weren't able to understand each other's words, it made no difference, we just laughed it over and talked about something else. I think she saw a lot of herself in me. We both cried when I left. I'm not even sure how it all happened that we all became so close on that trip – me and my home stay family Elisa, our whole SPI group. Sometimes you meet the most wonderful and inspirational people when you reach out as far as you possibly can.

I'm in college now, and truly loving every moment of it. My parents gave me a wonderful gift when they sent me to Spain. They had no idea that they had given me confidence that has carried over in to my life now. I sometimes just don't even know how to express my thanks to them. I'm not sure what I want to do for the rest of my life, but I'm sure that being able to speak Spanish (and I'm also now starting to take Italian) will certainly be a big a part.

The one thing I learned most from my trip to Spain is that the journey is more important than the actions. Going to Spain was not just about learning about Europe, about its history, its cultures, its language. It was about learning about how to connect with yourself, your surroundings, and the people around you—an invaluable experience.

I can't think of any one experience that prepared me for the rest of my life like Spain did. It was simply indescribable. Nothing has ever made me believe more in myself, or given me so much value out of my time. I left on that trip simply to learn a language, and with out even knowing it at first, came back more prepared than ever for the rest of my life.