

Dev's story Part 2

Spain and Portugal: A cultural adventure

Dev Atara is learning Spanish in the Sixth Form

Recently, I embarked on a three-week tour of Spain and Portugal with my family during the summer holidays. I was going into Year 13 in September, and had decided that I want to study modern languages at university. More specifically, I want to study Spanish and *ab initio* Portuguese, hence why we went! The experience was a useful one for me, and something that I would highly recommend for any A-Level language students. Here are a few of the highlights of the trip for me

1. Being able to practise my language skills

This was the first time that I had travelled to Spain since I started learning Spanish nearly 4 years ago, and I was excited by the prospect of being able to converse with the locals. It was really useful for me to practise these skills and it gave me a real sense of achievement. I think I'm quite a weird linguist because I love speaking tasks and exams, earning me puzzled looks from my classmates! Despite this, I'll always want to speak Spanish, and the chance to do so every day for a week and a half was really appealing to me.

When it came to it, I was pleased that I could order in restaurants, ask for directions, and understand the announcements on the metro. Attempting to order for all of us in Subway was a challenge, but thankfully we all got what we wanted! It was a real boost for me, and I found myself growing in confidence as the week went along. Despite the odd slip, or incorrect use of subjunctive, I enjoyed the experience, and would definitely do it again.

2. Enriching my A-Level Studies

Studying modern languages is so much more than learning about grammar and syntax; it's about exploring a whole new culture and people. A-level Spanish has opened my eyes up to various different forms of culture, such as music, art, and literature. Visiting Madrid offered me the opportunity to visit the Prado. Here, I saw in real life the paintings which I have studied at A-level, such as *Las Meninas* and *The Third of May 1808*. Being able to explain the importance of colour or light in the art to my family complemented my A-Level studies and helped me to understand the paintings even better.

Another cultural highlight was our trip to Toledo, despite the 40 degrees heat we encountered! Having read about the Arabic roots throughout Spain, it was really useful for me to visit the *city of 3 cultures*. Seeing places like the Alcázar and the Zocodover enriched my understating of the great history of the city, something that I hope to continue studying at university.

3. Confirming my desire to study Portuguese

When I first realised I wanted to study modern languages at university, I initially chose Spanish alone. However, upon further research I concluded that I needed to study another

language alongside it, leading me to choose Portuguese. I chose it because it complements Spanish well, and the two share a 90% lexical similarity.

Hence I dragged my family off to Lisbon for a few days, and the trip there helped me to confirm my desire. I was pleasantly surprised that I understood some of the billboard signs, and I enjoyed going on a tour of the city via the yellow trams to see some of the cultural highlights. Portuguese interests me in the same way that Spanish does because it is a world language (with variants) and the differences has variants such as Brazilian Portuguese, and the difference linguistically between Brazilian and European Portuguese are what I look forward to studying. However, I was extremely embarrassed when my brother continually said *gracias* to taxi drivers.....

Overall, my trip to the Iberian Peninsula was really useful in helping me confirm my university choices. The chance to both practise and perfect my Spanish whilst discovering cultural quirks about Portuguese was so helpful, and something that I would recommend for all A-Level language students.

(You can read about Dev's love of Languages also in My Story.)