

Madi Aubakirov

My name is Madi Aubakirov and I am a 4th year student at the Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences. In this article I want to inspire you to accept the challenge and explore a new world by sharing with you my story of how I have spent the best semester of my life doing an internship abroad with Erasmus+ in Barcelona, Spain.

At the bachelor program that I follow - IBMS, all students have to find an internship to do during their 3rd year. The best part is that the company can be located ANYWHERE in the world – incredible influence of the international focus that my university emphasizes on. At first, I was thinking that it would be right to choose “the safe way” and stay in my comfort zone where I know all the surroundings and which I am used to. However, looking back, I am so thankful that I have changed my mind and decided that youthfulness is definitely not a good time to play it safe. I always dreamed to experience the Spanish way of life, because it sounded amazing from what I have heard. Also, I was quite tired from all the Dutch rains, so the plan was to go and catch some Spanish sun. From that moment I felt that adventure awaits – Barcelona, here I come.

Here is my ultimate list of 5 experiences that would not have happened if I did not go for an internship abroad:

- 1) New rituals. The period of my internship lasted from September to January, so I did not quite catch those great summer months to enjoy the beach and the sea. However, I could not deal with the fact that I live in Barcelona without swimming, I wanted to have the full experience. I like having some rituals that I can do on a daily basis and I like to do some crazy things even more. Thus, one of the new rituals I came up with was to run or skate in the early morning to the [Barceloneta beach](#) before the work to have a morning workout, meet the sunrise and throw myself in the cold sea. I started doing this in September, and kept doing it throughout the whole internship, January included, even when it was only 6°C. Spanish people in winter jackets probably thought that I am out of my mind, but I was really enjoying it. The feeling when you immerse your body into the cold water can be described as a thousand needles piercing into your skin and you feel as alive as never before.
- 2) New way of getting around. During the first week in Barcelona, I have noticed many skateboarders passing by on the streets of the city. Due to the abundance of narrow streets in the “old city” district where I have lived, this mean of transportation was more convenient than a bicycle that I was so used to in the Netherlands. As I was up for a change, I have got myself a longboard and learned how to use my 4-wheeled friend in a couple of days. I still remember those moments when I was riding to work past the [Columbus Monument](#), surrounded by tall palms, looking at the Mediterranean sea, being exposed to those warm rays of sunshine and singing along to that good music in my headphones. During those mornings I felt extremely happy.

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- 3) New places to visit. As my scenery has changed, I felt a big natural urge to explore. Every weekend I was going for a 20-kilometer walks in the city and every minute was well spent, because no matter where you go you see new things. I surely did not do this during my routine life in Rotterdam. I have visited so many new museums, restaurants, churches and parks. My favorite place in the city was [Bunkers del Carmel](#) – an anti-aircraft fortifications from 1938 where you have a 360° bird’s eye view of the city. It is possible to get there by bus, but I preferred to have a good half hour hike up to deserve this breathtaking view that looks majestic both during the dusk and the dawn. Also, I have visited the sacred place of Catalan people – the [mountains of Montserrat](#), where the mystical statue of the Virgin Mary of Montserrat is located. I loved the powerful holy energy and the unbelievable views so much that I went there for the second time. Last but not least, I have visited Valencia – a very unique city that harmoniously combines architecture of the past with the avant-garde buildings erected by our generation. In comparison to Barcelona, Valencia was not exposed to the wave of internationalization as much, so I took the opportunity to dive into the pure Spanish culture.
- 4) New environment to adapt to and learn from. I have found an online marketing internship in a company that promotes the best visual media worldwide. The first day of going to the office felt the same as the first day of going to the school back when I was 7 years old. I have had some nervous thoughts and maybe even doubts, but all of them disappeared the moment I have met my team and got to work. I made some great friends, exceeded expectations of the management, advanced my professional skills, learned a lot about the industry and had a great experience overall. One of the best parts about my internship was the coolest office with a fascinating daily scenery from the windows guaranteed – [World Trade Center Barcelona](#). Not to mention the fact that we got to see the world’s largest [yacht Dilbar](#), the price of which was \$600,000,000, arriving to and departing from the port Vell several times.
- 5) New language. The most obvious valuable experience is practicing new language. I cannot say that I got fluent in Spanish, but I definitely advanced my speaking, vocabulary and general understanding of some important rules. It is no wonder that living in a country is the best way to learn a language and learning a new language is an incredible skill that enriches your opportunities both in your professional career and personal life. Being surrounded with native speakers has boosted my motivation to put that extra effort in the evening and learn some Spanish.

Of course I had to overcome various difficulties like getting scammed with my first housing and having major troubles with Spanish working visa, so I can’t say that it was stress-free, but at the end of the day it was absolutely worth it. The most important thing I have learned from my travels

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is that a person adapts quickly and changes turn into casualties very fast, so you should not be afraid to leave your comfort zone and seize big and a little frightening opportunities, because it is the best way to grow and become better than your yesterday self. I hope that I have inspired you to try something new and you are not going to miss this life-changing chance. I want to conclude with a quote that reflects the moral of my story:

“We can't be afraid of change. You may feel very secure in the pond that you are in, but if you never venture out of it, you will never know that there is such a thing as an ocean, a sea. Holding onto something that is good for you now, may be the very reason why you don't have something better.”

— C. JoyBell C.

Photos:

- 1) View from the Montserrat
- 2) Watching the sunrise before work
- 3) Exploring cactus gardens
- 4) View from the Bunkers El Carmel
- 5) View from the Montserrat
- 6) 8AM Workout
- 7) Running to swim in the Mediterranean sea at only 6°C
- 8) Lunchtime with the view from the office
- 9) Chilling on the largest chair in the city
- 10) Weekend in Valencia (City of Arts and Sciences)
- 11) On the way to work (Columbus Monument)

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