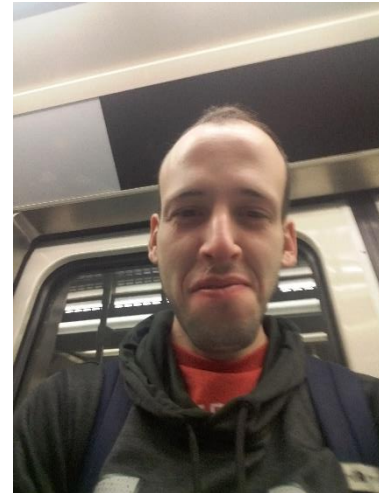


Luggage and carry-on in hand, I pushed through the Terminal A doors, simultaneously opening the door to a new world waiting for me in Seville, Spain. Travel plans for today are as follows: leave from Newark, New Jersey to Boston, Massachusetts, where I board another plane to Madrid and then finally land in Seville about an hour later. Bags are checked. Food is bought. Gate is located. In less than an hour the first flight is complete. Unfortunately, I regret to inform you that the second flight lasts longer -- much longer. Six hours, to be precise, because of unknown delays.

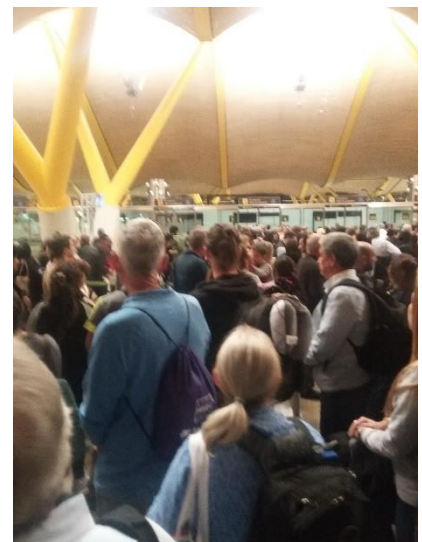


360 total minutes of restlessness, soul-crushing boredom...and a four course meal? All is forgiven when ceviche and an apple pastry are involved. Also of note: bread from Spain is good; bread from Spain is great. The collection of whimsical, misshapen cotton balls outside my window reminds me that Spain is actually happening and I freeze up. For three months I will be in a new place, meeting new people, and exploring a new culture. Pinch me just so I know I'm not dreaming.



Scratch that. The black coffee they just served did the trick. I am now fully awake and aware of how much time is left before I reach Madrid. Here is a hint: less than half an hour. If the excitement doesn't kill me, the pressure from being at such a high altitude in my ears and head will. How long does it take for that go away again? Hopefully soon after we land... 3,500 miles later.

Ultimately I arrive and I'm immediately lost in a narrow hallway leading into passport control or customs. Like sheep, everyone is herded into various cubicles to verify our passports. By the end, I get asked what I'm doing in Spain, where am I going, and for how long. Little do I know a gauntlet of escalators and elevators awaits me once I pass through. The Madrid airport can be best described as a figurative reenactment of Europe, with each terminal as big as its own country.



Not much later, my house mother and International College of Seville (ICS) Student Affairs Director, Isabel and Lisa, are waiting for me outside of the terminal. Not to mention other students also in the program. Group pictures are taken, plans are made for the day, and off I go to have my first Spanish breakfast -- bread with either butter, jam, or some form of lunch meat/cheese. Coming from the land of eggs,

bacon, sausage, pancakes, and waffles, I am immediately jarred and chug my café con leche (or coffee with milk) in silent horror. This will be my new home for the next three months and despite the light breakfast, I cannot wait for more cultural immersion.



Breakfast is cut short after my house mother receives news that one of two roommates has arrived at the ICS. She picks up a few loaves of bread and we head out to the school nearby where I meet the roommate: Graydon. He will be staying in the same room as the other student, Cullen, who is aimed at arriving later that night. One student is apparently from Madison, Wisconsin and the next one is attending the University of Hawaii on his last semester. As the three of us get to know each other a bit more over dinner at home, I continue to learn just how very different life is in Spain in contrast to the United States. Evidently, breakfast here begins around 9am, lunch at about 2 or 3pm, and dinner – wait for it – is close to 9:30, 10pm. The way of life in Europe is certainly something to experience.

Night falls in Seville and the three of us roam around the neighborhood for a bit until we stumble upon a bar known as El Pellizco. At this bar the local team (Real Betis) are playing against Real Madrid and it is revealed quickly how passionate Spaniards are about their soccer. Both teams throw the soccer ball around back and forth for close to an hour with no success – and then Real Betis scores. Game over. Real Betis wins. The bar explodes with glasses being slammed on the floor and everyone coming together for a hug. Locals are smiling, yelling, and jumping up and down. My roommates and I look at each other as if we've just walked into unfamiliar territory without a passport and just laugh in awe. Not a bad way to end our first night here.

