



Granada!

Gabriella Sonnenschein

I felt guilty on the bus ride to Granada. It felt weird to not know a thing about the place I was going to for two days. And now that the trip is over, I am patting myself on the back for that. I loved going into Granada and learning about its beauty by my own experience, not by some random person telling me online. I seriously have an obsession with Granada now. I already have my next trip there planned in two weekends!

The first day in Granada, Friday the 10th, I had to wake up at 6 IN THE MORNING. This is unheard of in Spanish time! Little did I know it was so worth it. I slept the whole ride there, as did most people, and woke up to the beautiful views of the fertile farmland and the Sierra Nevada. The whole group went to the Alhambra right when we arrived. (By the way, saying the Alhambra is a little redundant because Alhambra already means “the red.”) We learned that people migrated from Morocco to the South of Spain primarily due to the nourishing soil that provided for an agricultural heaven. They created farms right outside the city of Alhambra. First we traveled through the “farmland,” which is now more aesthetically pleasing gardens full of flowers and decor. The gardens overlook the whole city of Granada including the old wall that used to protect the city. After we explored the gardens and got our fill of pictures, we ventured on to the summer home of the rulers of Granada at the time. This home is called the Palacio de Generalife. I couldn’t believe my eyes when I saw it. It was HUGE!!! If you go to Granada, you really cannot miss this. It’s hard to believe somebody had that to just casually go to over the summer when the city got to be too overwhelming and they just needed a break. Can I do that?!



Let's be real, you want to go to the Alhambra for the photo-ops.



See why I felt like a princess? Part of the summer home.



Last but most definitely not least. #goals

It could really take days to be able to explore everything we saw in just 2 hours. But alas, we needed to go to our hostel and get showered up before the long night ahead of us. Promise me you won't miss the nightlife when you come to Granada, the most loving community!

I had the best roommates ever. When you study abroad, I highly recommend trying to room with people you don't know yet. I e-mailed the housing director and told her to place me wherever, with people who didn't have roommates yet. I think that was the best decision of my weekend. We all had the best time together, us 5 girls. We all wanted to do the same things and it was nice to be with newer people. We explored the wonderful town after we settled in. The shops there are amazing! There were henna artists along the streets, souvenir shops, tea shops and restaurants, unique markets and bakeries, and even a natural perfume shop with oils from Granada itself! The whole vibe of the streets was comforting. I felt like I could be myself and people let me practice my Spanish without making me feel rushed or ashamed for not speaking it fluently. Everyone was relaxed and judgement free. I think I really needed this trip to Granada to have a piece of home with me again. Granada reminded me of home where I can dress however I want and do whatever I want without looking weird or "out of it." The group of 5 girls ventured onto a tea shop to enjoy food and the best tea I have had...maybe EVER!!! I had fresh jasmine tea. I've always wanted to have a real tea party, not just plastic cups full of air from playing house when I

was 5 years old. Thankfully, mission accomplished. I felt like a princess being served my own teapot and place setting, as well as delicious crepes, and an even better atmosphere.

DAY TWO

Today was packed. The bus was leaving at 4 and I was trying everything in my power to make time move slower...it didn't work so well. To start the day, my friend brought the whole room breakfast in bed from a local bakery. If that wasn't the perfect start to a perfect day, I don't know what is. We had the traditional pan tostado con mantequilla (with butter). We leisurely enjoyed the food and went outside on our balcony from some fresh air and beautiful weather. We then went onto the bus and started our adventures for the day! We first went to a Catholic monastery which was truly a powerful experience. I had never been to a monastery of any kind, whether still in action or one that has been converted into a museum. I have always wanted to go to one, I fantasize about going to Thailand and spending a week in a monastery. I thought it could be a very humbling experience. Maybe just not a Catholic one...these people got pretty intense! This monastery in particular was converted into a museum. We walked into the different rooms such as the living room, dining room, and cathedral. We learned that the monks in this monastery would fast every single day. They would only eat a bowl of soup for lunch and some bread. The rest of their time was spent praying and reading the Bible. Every part of their lives was partly given up to show their god their commitment. The monks believed that they are living to die in the arms of G-d and he has a place for them. Death was not looked down upon, unlike us where we are scared of it. It was enlightening to go to a place and learn how normalized these traditions were for the monks. For us it seems crazy, but they felt comforted by the fact that G-d had their back and that they were in good hands.

The cathedral was definitely the most impressive portion of our trip to the monastery. The marble sculptures and delicate designs in such an intimate religious site was unbelievable. I felt like I was at Disney with all of the colors and sense-heightening views. Seeing the commitment monks had to their religion is something you have to see in person, words can only describe so much.

Okay, best part: seeing Isabel and Ferdinand's grave. And it wasn't just their tombstones; we were able to see their actual coffins. I almost felt bad that I was looking at such a private thing in someone's life, their resting place. When I go back to Granada in a couple weeks I am definitely going back to this cathedral that they are buried in. The sculptures behind the graves are eerie, gory, and have incredible stories behind them. It is a very intimate cathedral, much more modest than other ones we have seen. It is so worth a trip to Granada just to see the crazy designs and the resting place of such important people in world history. Philip the Handsome as well as other leaders of Spain are also buried there and you can see their coffins right next to Isabel and Ferdinand's.

Disclaimer!

I am so sorry there aren't pictures of the cathedrals or monastery! Pictures were not allowed. Boo.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a few very valuable social lessons I have learned in Spain. Especially in Granada, I picked up a few important rules to live by while studying abroad and traveling. One in particular really stood out to me. TRAVEL IN GROUPS OF 2. Seriously. Even if you don't know the person, break off from the rest of the group. Why? Because when you're in a group of people that are all from a different country, you are less approachable by locals. When my friend and I broke off from the group, we probably met 10 new people within 3 hours of free time. The locals took us to a park with their dogs and we laid in the sun practicing our Spanish and befriending the amazing people of Granada. When I walked around with Jessi, we didn't need to consult a group of 20 students to make decisions. We both expressed what we wanted to do and did it. Many times when I am with a big group here, decisions are very hard to make because no one wants the same thing. Please take my advice and limit your group to 5 people at the most. Of course don't exclude your incredible other friends, but if you are in a group that isn't coming up with a decision, grab someone by the arm and GO! The people of Granada are incredible human beings. I have never seen a whole city so peaceful and loving. I am so glad that Jessi and I got to experience a Saturday with the locals. I would totally move to Granada when I get older due

to the loving society they live in, the nature, and the music. I cannot express how excited I am to go back and cannot express how badly you need to visit.

WHEW! What a couple of days, right?! I have to go study for midterms, but I will catch you all next week with another update from the best school in the world! Hasta pronto!