

**Exchange university**

UPM - Universidad Politécnica de Madrid

Degree programme

Farkostteknik - Systemteknik och robotik

From Stockholm to Madrid - a lifelong memory

Before departure

In sixth grade I chose to take classes in Spanish as part of our modern languages class. Our teacher would show us short documentaries about the Spanish-speaking world as a whole and Spain in particular. We learned about their history and culture. This made me really interested in the Spanish-speaking world, adding to my fascination with the language.

Even though I found Spanish hard because of its complicated grammar rules, I still felt something inside me. I really wanted to go to Spain and learn the language properly someday. But I didn't know how until I started studying at KTH. That's when I found out about the Erasmus program, which lets students study in other European countries. I knew I wanted to go to Spain, but I wasn't sure where exactly.

I decided on Madrid because I didn't want to be around too many tourists, so I didn't choose the coastal cities. Later, I found out that my department only worked with universities in Madrid. So, Madrid it was! As a Swedish citizen, I didn't need a visa or a passport to go to Spain. But I brought my passport just in case I lost my ID or driver's licence while I was there. That way, I'd still have some form of identification.

I didn't have any specific expectations since I had never visited Spain or any other Spanish-speaking country before. I didn't research Madrid a lot because I wanted to experience everything firsthand with my own eyes. This way I would maintain the excitement and curiosity of exploring a new place.

Regarding preparations, all KTH students with a desire to study at UPM are required to complete a Spanish language course at Level B1 or above.

Upon arrival

UPM recommends arriving at least 2 weeks prior to the start of your studies to ensure sufficient time for settling in and, most importantly, securing accommodation (more details on this will follow). However, due to my summer job and other commitments, I arrived just 6 days ahead of the semester. Despite the shorter timeframe, I found it beneficial to arrive earlier, allowing me to explore Madrid before my classes began. Hence, I strongly recommend following UPM's advice and arriving 2 weeks in advance to arrange accommodation and accostumber yourself to life in Madrid. Additionally, consider travelling around in Spain during this time as school can be demanding depending on your choice of courses, leaving you with very little time to travel outside Madrid.

There was an official welcoming ceremony during which we received important information about studying at UPM. Following this, a group of UPM-students voluntarily organised some social activities. Furthermore, Erasmus-students initiated activities like group parties or trips to neighbouring Portugal. Notably, students from the same countries, particularly Portuguese, Spanish, French, and

German, tended to form groups among themselves. Hence, I recommend you not to be shy and approach people from the beginning to make connections before these groups form and solidify.

There was a two-week intensive introductory Spanish course offered before the official start of the academic year. This course included city sightseeing and various other activities. However, it came with a high cost, and KTH would only cover a portion of it. Given that I intended to enrol in a Spanish language course during my time there regardless, I didn't see the necessity of participating in this particular program.

Financials

I didn't receive any scholarship besides Erasmus+. While it's difficult to determine whether living expenses are higher or lower compared to those in Sweden (as it varies based on individual spending habits), I noticed that grocery prices were similar to those in the Stockholm area. However, public transportation costs were significantly lower, especially with the discounted rates for individuals under 26. Additionally, KTH provides free insurance coverage, so there are no expenses to be paid directly to UPM. Just ensure you provide the international student office with a signed and stamped copy of your insurance and upload it on time. Regarding union memberships, I didn't participate in any, so I can't provide information about any associated costs.

Accommodation

Please be aware that finding accommodation in Madrid can be challenging and time-consuming. Here are some personal tips based on my experience:

1. Set your budget early on. Realistically, you'll need between 800-1200 euros if you're renting a flat for yourself, or 400-650 euros for a room in a shared flat.
2. Don't worry too much about the distance from the university. Public transportation in Madrid is highly efficient, with trains departing every 3-4 minutes in some cases. The metro system offers extensive coverage, supplemented by a large network of buses. Living a bit further from the university can often result in more affordable accommodation.
3. If you're using websites like Idealista to search for accommodation, sort the results by date rather than cost. Many landlords forget to remove old ads, so you may end up applying to listings that are no longer available.
4. If possible, try to contact landlords directly via WhatsApp rather than through Idealista messaging, as they may receive numerous inquiries (in the hundreds sometimes) and might not have time to respond. Better yet, if you can call them and speak to them in Spanish, it may improve your chances and allow you to present yourself better.
5. Follow UPM's recommendation and arrive in Madrid two weeks before the start of the course, as finding accommodation can sometimes take up to a month if you're unlucky. Keep in mind that the university does not provide you with any valuable assistance when searching for an accommodation. Once you are in Madrid, you'll be on your own.
6. It's crucial never to move into a place without signing a contract. Make sure to carefully read through the contract and ask for a copy in English if needed. Ensure that all the terms and conditions you've agreed upon are clearly stated in the contract, including the notice period, deposit refund policies, minimum stay requirements, etc.

University and studies

At times, universities in Spain are decentralised, meaning each department has its own building and they are also scattered across the city. The ETSII campus is located in Chamartín, while other departments are situated elsewhere. Consequently, the campus itself is relatively small, and its condition may not be optimal, with visible cracks on the walls. However, the atmosphere is friendly, and there is a cafeteria, outdoor seating areas for lunch breaks, tennis courts, and a nearby museum. Depending on the courses you choose, you may experience either a relaxed workload or a more intense one. Typically, each course is 3 credits (hp), so if you opt for ten intense courses, you will have very

little time for other activities. It's advisable to balance your workload by selecting some elective courses in Madrid. After all, you are there to enjoy and experience a new culture so be thoughtful about what you chose there.

Courses

The courses I initially had in my learning agreement were changed in Spain due to scheduling conflicts or because certain courses didn't match my expectations. My goal was to maintain a balanced workload while selecting courses that were both interesting and relevant to my studies. Overall, I found the teachers to be generally helpful and approachable, though some were stricter than others, while some were more "forgiving".

City and country

I didn't encounter any cultural shocks during my stay in Spain, and I felt genuinely happy being there. However, it's essential to have some knowledge in Spanish, as not everyone speaks English, and some may feel uncomfortable speaking in it. This can affect your ability to interact with Spaniards and affect your experience. Knowing some Spanish will greatly enhance your experience and allow for more meaningful interactions. Additionally, I had the opportunity to travel to nearby towns like Segovia and Toledo, which, despite their size, are rich in history and offer plenty to explore. Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed every place I visited in Spain. I recommend following news outlets on Instagram or TikTok, as they often announce festivals and celebrations happening in the streets. Attending these events can provide a unique and entertaining experience, both in Madrid and elsewhere in Spain.

Leisure and social activities

I enjoyed exploring Madrid at night because the city is incredibly beautiful, especially after dark. Sometimes, I would go for a run or work-out in one of the many parks or open areas, taking advantage of the ideal weather, which typically lasts until late October. If you're particularly interested in sports, the university offers various clubs, and you'll find many affordable gyms throughout Madrid.

Sustainability

When sorting your garbage in Madrid, be aware of the colour-coded system used there. Sometimes, containers may lack labels or have labels only in Spanish. Familiarise yourself with the colours to ensure proper sorting. Additionally, many buses in Madrid are eco-friendly, so you can travel in a sustainable manner within the city.

Other recommendations and observations

Don't be afraid of going abroad, particularly to Madrid. I'm confident you'll have an amazing time and enjoy your experience. All the best and good luck!