

TO VILLAVICIOSA AND BACK FOR A WEEK

By Zornitza

“If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion and avoid the people, you’d better stay at home.”

- James Michener

A dream come true, a combination of colors, fragrances and cultures. One big country and one tiny village which I felt like home for a few days. Cheerful and hospitable people who love life, music and “bocadillos” (a sandwich with the form of a baguette). My heart filled with joy, my head – with fun, albeit a bit anxious at moments. A spontaneous smile appears on my face when I hear Spain.



Every trip brings many surprises with itself. Many emotions and worries were felt that day. This journey was filled with many new experiences for me – first flight, first time I was in Spain, first contact with Spanish cuisine, first taste of an olive straight from the tree – yuck, first time in the dock of a plane – ticked on the list of child dreams and many more wonderful and memorable moments.



With very little sleep and a lot of enthusiasm we were on our way to the airport. After lots of dramas related with the location of the food we passed the check in control, entered the customs and after waiting for a while boarded the plane. Initially we felt all of those emotions related with the first flight, then they passed until the plane was taking off after a short delay. Three and a half hours flight, landing, taking our luggage... everything as it should be. And then came time for the phrase “Wow... this is different!”. We got on a bus to the subway, from there to the bus station and with light speed to Cordoba. How light speed, not sure, but we were there in 4 hours – about 300 km-s. On our way we were talking about the nature. Rich farmlands, vast nature, green trees, orange tree forests, many birds and animals – that’s how I imagined it in my mind. But in reality – wildlife was nonexistent, maybe a bird here and there, poor vegetation but on the flip side – a LOT of olive trees. No wonder they make so much olive oil, that’s all they grow here. And lots of metal – guess what – bulls of course – Andalusia is the region of bullfighting.

Drum roll please... We have arrived in Cordoba!



After many pictures and selfies, we finally found our families. There's nothing better than a stranger kissing you for greeting ...twice. Afterwards came the typical lies of the teachers about their students. The most typical – that their students speak English, a harmless one. We were on our way to Villaviciosa, to which you get to through “the mysterious path of a million curves”, short trip during which with one of our teachers, Ani, we were trying to decipher the mystical English my Spanish acquaintance, Viki, was speaking. In the end we made it to the village. A little bit hilly, narrow streets, white houses, lots of flowers, sharp turns and many mandarin trees with a catch – they're not eatable, great...



the “bocadillos”

In the evening we went to a bar, to which we were going every night, and were introduced to the “bocadillos” – the thing we were going to be eating for an entire week. Albeit a small village, it had lots of bars and all of them worship one religion – football. Any time. Anywhere.

The warm welcome was followed by some cold water in the bathroom. And not just the water. There's nothing better in the world than going to sleep in a “warm room” and waking up in the morning to a temperature close to zero. With temperatures like these in the morning, people save up both on heating and coffee. What a better way to wake up than with your brain freezing?



After dressing up quickly because of the cold we went to the school, where we stayed for a while, after which we toured the building with the speed of Ivet Lavova (our fastest athlete). After that we took a break again because what awaited us was a 5-10-minute transition from the school to a hall where we would represent our countries. This was my biggest fear but everything went smoothly. Afterwards comes my favorite part – food. A room full of chocolates, chocolate cakes and all kinds of sweets.

There were fruit, as well, but...meh. Lots of pictures, lots of eating, some more presentations and then we went to an olive oil factory, which seemed liked one of the few work places in the village, excluding the bars if I'm not mistaken. We learnt how to make olive oil and what Extra virgin actually means – and of course that the Spanish olive oil is the best quality in the world – Greece, Italy – I'm really sorry. Now, we only have to plant a hundred olive trees, buy some machinery and we're ready to become rich. Jokes aside, I really liked the factory because it was different and it's an industry we lack in Bulgaria. Very educational!



great guy. When this explain to me, mind to meet the mayor. life. Oh well, when we meant. We sat in a hall, the mayor said a few part. It was a bag. Full The best part was that nearby mountain – But I got a picture with olive oil factory, and as



Afterwards we went to a pretty little winery, located on a hill in the countryside. I sprayed the Polish principal with water, it was an accident but I think she threw a curse or two in her mind. The owner of the winery was very nice, as well as one of the Spanish teachers – Hogan, who was kind enough to answer all of the questions I had. We all tried out one type of wine, but I tried out of the oldest one. The owner gave me the glass and informed me that it was duller and stronger. For sure it was. What a visit was over my Spanish acquaintance kindly tried to you IN SPANISH, that we were going to the municipality Following, were the most impatient 10 minutes in my reached the town hall I finally understood what she some slept, others misbehaved, we took some pictures, words, in the end there were presents – my favorite of books in Spanish. But it's the thought that counts. in those books were identifications for the birds in the Sierra Morena (though there wasn't a single falcon...). the mayor (as well as the owner of the winery and the a result with the pilots and many more people, as well).

A hard but funny day. I still couldn't explain to Viki that she should speak to me in English, but thankfully – there's internet and thanks God – Google translate. Why should she need to know a language different than her mother tongue? And once again a cold shower, a warm smile, and a chilly morning awaiting me. My brain needed a week to unfreeze, next time I go to Spain I'll pay for an extra insurance.



The next day we went to Cordoba. A pretty town which once was the capital of Spain or something like this. Charming and inspiring, respect for the architects of the mosque, the fortresses and temples that they built.

The mosque was built by Arabic architects, who came to the peninsula bringing algebra and all their knowledge with themselves and built this majestic building. Arches containing more arches (archception), which all make up one incredibly stable system, made not only to support the entire

building, but also to counteract earthquakes. The cathedral in the middle has wonderful details depicting masterpieces of the Catholicism. In the surrounding halls the walls were filled with Arabic elements.



Unforgettable place! And an amazing tour guide, with steel nerves, who answered every single question I had. Then one of their teachers gifted me a book about the mosque. After the following break, it appears to be a kind of tradition, we were shown around in the Jewish neighborhood. Narrow streets, white houses, lots of flowers, busy people, visitors and flamenco. Next comes something shocking – another break – what a surprise. We had some “paella”, which I had no idea how to eat but it was very tasty.

Day number three. We went to Seville. While Cordoba was beautiful, Seville had its charm. The building, which we visited, were amazing and we spent a really great afternoon there.



In the evening, after three days of cold showers, I was so tired of pretending, that with a lot of effort and the kind help of Google™ with some Spanish phrases I was able to explain the situation to my host family and so they offered me another bathroom with hot water. It was pleasant but the following days I had to say goodbye to the hot water again. In the same evening I was even able to tell them that I wanted to try out traditional cuisine. I'm not exactly sure what it was, but it resembled fish worms and soup, which consisted of water and vermicelli. When the dinner was over what followed was a present from Viki's mom. It was a scarf - so kind of her. I was a stranger but that didn't prevent her from being so caring. She even put a blanket on me when I fell asleep.

On the following day there was "a walk through the countryside". What does it mean: temperature about 5 degrees, fast walking for 10 kilometers, in a hurry, with no time for taking photos, short break in the middle of nowhere followed by more rush garnished with some jokes with us - maybe it's typical for the local boys to show respect to their guests this way. Later this day we went to the school where we had a farewell lunch after which there was a photo contest. Needless to say, we won it.



At the end of the day we visited a museum of local tools. On our way home Victoria told me, in English, that we'll be having dinner at a friend of hers, whose father is a cook. The cook made us hamburgers.



It was Friday, the final stretch when we would become part of one of the Spanish traditional holidays. On this day people lit bonfires whenever they like. They explained that there are 2-3 days in the year when it is allowed. This is part of their fiesta – days of rest, and as most of the children interpret it – a day of absolute laziness. At around 11 in the morning we went to a place in the countryside where everyone was gathering. On the way we were talking with some of the girls. When we got there with horror I realized that Valeria and Plamena weren't there. The kids had already lit a fire, drinking and singing, and I was talking with the Greeks. Later my friends came and

after a short period, in which we were standing on a rock and freezing to death, we went to a café in the village with the Greeks, where we enjoyed the best hot chocolate I've EVER tasted. That, I think, appeared to be a problem for our Spanish hosts.

In the evening there was an enormous party. We went home for a while, so I could prepare my luggage and we went to the street fire again. For less than an hour some people were quite ahead with the alcohol. We stayed for a while, after which we said goodbye to the Greek students and I went home, which apparently made Viki angry, because she was really enjoying the party. But her brother came with the speed of light and got us home. Final night. Her father had gotten home since he works in Seville and had a break. We chatted a bit in "Spinglish" (Spanish-English) and I went to bed.



At 6 o'clock in the morning everyone was ready, and after taking our teachers from their hostel, we went to the bus station in Cordoba. Heartily goodbyes, pictures, smiles, hugs and kisses – that's how our stay ended. Before we went Paco - the senior Spanish teacher gave us presents from Alberto – the junior Spanish teacher who was of much help and who we chatted with. There was a book for everyone.

On to Madrid we went. We arrived, settled in the guest flat that we had hired and the tour began. Their fiesta was something BIG. A parade with costumes, explosion of colors, lots of feathers, music and many songs. We saw some of the landmarks – A monument of the person who made the Inquisition – Ignacio Loyola, fountains representing 2 of their football teams, yes, they have their own fountains. After a victory they gather there to admire how great they are. We saw the Prada museum, the monument of Don Quixote and Sancho Pansa and many, many more. What a beauty. And the best part was that the end of the tour was in the evening when everything was gleaming in the beauty of the night.

Cold water, people, who don't speak English; mandarins, which you can't eat; olive trees in the distance, rude shop assistants; cold houses. What's left in the end are only the nice, delightful moments. And most of all, those sacred moments, which were left only in our team – an amazing one, I may say, which will be always #1 for me.



In the end:

“No one realizes how beautiful it is to travel until he comes home and rests his head on his old, familiar pillow.”
-Lin Yutang

PS: If you see a mandarin or olive tree in the street, DO NOT EAT IT. It is a trap! And if someone tells you that Spain is a hot country – when you go there, especially in winter, take your coat with you – you'll need it, believe me!