

Student Article

First weeks of Uni life

Desirée Vila Bargiela

Canterbury Christ Church University

I arrived in Canterbury on the 14th of September. When I first saw my bedroom I thought that it was not going to be difficult to call it “home”. As it was my first time living alone, and really far away from my country, Spain, the first days were completely strange. I had to do a lot of things, such as cooking, ironing and laundry. Despite these things, I found the time to enjoy Fresher’s Week, which was awesome. I already knew a Spanish student who I had met during the open days in June. However, I was able to make more friends at all the parties, meet people from many other countries and share similar experiences with those new students. Everyone was kind and I was feeling myself with a lot of energy and positivity to start university!

The coolest thing about it was the society’s fair. In Spanish universities, these do not exist so I found it fascinating to have this opportunity to join a club about my interest and make friends with people with the same hobbies as me. I took advantage of this to improve my English. So, I have since participated in political speeches, even though at the beginning I did not understand it most of the time.

What impressed me the most about living here was that many of the students also work. This is possibly because the way of studying here is very different. When I realized that I did not have lessons on Tuesdays nor on Wednesdays, I felt really confused. I enjoy attending my lectures because I really like my course and my subjects. However, although it was hard for me to catch the rhythm, I was cheerful that I would have more free time to study and prepare my assignments. We have many seminars in which we have to carry out group work to put into practice the theory we learn in class. Each group member must organize themselves to look for information on their own and be interested in expanding their knowledge. In this way, those who know how to make the most of their time are able to work, study and have fun. While in Spain, students at university have lectures from Monday to Friday during the morning, but here I barely have 12 hours per week. As well, my Spanish friends have lots of exams and less holidays, but in my case, I have to do a lot of researching for my assignments, which makes me learn at the time as study about the subject I am working on. Personally, I think that this is a better way of learning rather than memorizing what your teacher wants you to repeat in your exams. It is also more practical approach as the student is not a passive element anymore.

My university, besides being enormous, is very well organized. Everything works automatically through the student card and via online in a program with a personal account to which we access the information about our course, our schedules or the duties that the teachers send. The university also has lots of other information points and help areas. For example, during the first few days we were given all the information to be able to take full advantage of our career years, and all the places are accessible to the disabled. The university has a lot of study areas, dining rooms and a spectacular library, and very often we are offered

special talks of orientation to the labour market or specific topics about our degree. It is true that university fees in England are much higher than in Spain i.e. approximately £9000 compared with £2000, but at least I believe it is worth it.

I would also say that Spanish culture is completely different to British culture, and sometimes I wonder how amazing is it that both countries are not that far away but this country has its own peculiar aspects. For example, English people say “sorry” for almost everything, and they work upside down in many ways. For example, they use particular plugs and switches and they have a distinct side for driving. As well, many people have dinner at 6pm when the Spanish have dinner at 10pm despite going to bed at 12am, as the Spanish people do. I wonder, how aren't they hungry when they go to sleep? Finally, the worst thing about being Spanish in a country where it is raining all the time, is that in winter it gets dark at 4pm in the afternoon. That is just depressing.

Nevertheless, to sum up, I just want to say that I am living an incredible experience and, at the same time as learning English, I am also learning about new cultures and new ways of living that will make me grow as a person. Spanish and British higher education systems work in absolutely different ways, and as a person who has studied in both contexts, I personally think that Spain still has a lot to learn from English universities in some aspects. Although, in other fields such as gastronomy, I would be faithful to my country.

CONTACT THE AUTHOR

desivilabargiela98@gmail.com