

Malaga Immersion Course 2014

Having recently undertaken the MLPS Spanish training and with a desire to expand my skills and learn more about the Spanish culture (and spend time overseas), I was fortunate enough to participate in a week long immersion course this Easter in Málaga.

Organised by LFEE (Languages for Education, Europe), who also offer a number of similar courses in France and Spain, this course provides an opportunity for teachers to improve their language skills while enjoying the food, wine and sunshine and soaking up the culture and customs of the country.

Situated on the southern coast of Spain the beautiful city of Málaga provides an excellent setting for the course. With its magnificent Cathedral, bustling narrow streets and beautiful beach it has everything you could ask for in a city break.

Our course took place during La Semana Santa (Holy Week) one of the busiest and most extravagant festivals of the year. The streets were packed, sometimes until 4am and the atmosphere was electric. Thousands of spectators gathered to watch the processions which closed off many of the streets in the city. It takes up to 250 men carry just one of the elaborately decorated floats which can weigh more than 500kg and as they swayed along the street in time to the drums and mournful tunes played by brass bands, the smell of incense filled the air. Each procession represented a particular brotherhood, identified by the colour of their robes and large pointed hats which are worn to ensure anonymity. Holding large candles, penitents walked for hours on end barefoot and sweltering under the blazing sun.

The classes, which were held daily in a centrally located 4* hotel, allowed the participants to expand their knowledge of Spanish while exploring how to impart this through the effective delivery of lessons to school children. We were shown a variety of games, strategies and online resources designed to engage and motivate the learners.

We were encouraged to speak Spanish as much as possible and had plenty of opportunities to practise while exploring the city. Being exposed to the spoken language every day by shopkeepers, waiters and hotel staff, amongst others, undoubtedly helped with my pronunciation. All of the participants agreed that they had made considerable progress throughout the week, with teaching ideas, vocabulary, grammar and most of all with their confidence to converse in Spanish.

Although the main focus of the course was the daily classes, there were plenty of opportunities to explore the city and beyond.

On the first day we were given tickets to enjoy a city tour on an open top bus. This was a great way to soak up the sun while hopping on and off at various points of interest including the recently renovated pier with its lighthouse, Mariners Chapel and interesting boutiques and market stalls. Another must see is the Gibralfaro Castle which is situated at the very top of the hill near to the marina. The panoramic views of the bullring, sea and of the whole city are truly breath taking.

After morning classes the following day we were treated to an afternoon picnic in the stunning mountain village of Ronda. The town is surrounded by a deep gorge and The Puente Nuevo bridge, towering 120 metres above the canyon floor is a sight to behold.

The town's bullring is open to the public and houses a very informative museum displaying paintings and artefacts which depict the history of bullfighting.

There are plenty of things to see and do in Ronda but taking the weight off your feet and relaxing in one of the many peaceful squares with a glass of local wine, surrounded by the blooming cherry blossom trees and spectacular views was a phenomenal way to soak up the atmosphere.

Getting in the true spirit of things, we were treated to a Sevillana dancing class which took place in a grand (but creepy) old house in the midst of old streets and alleyways somewhere in the back streets of the city. Our professional instructor looked very authentic as she put us through our paces teaching us some basic steps and encouraging volunteers to come up on stage and show off what they had learned. We visited the same venue later in the week to sample some traditional food while being entertained by a fantastic Flamenco show. As it was only a small venue with just a few extra guests, it seemed like the male and female dancer, singer and guitarist were performing just for us.

As the training took place during the Easter holiday, it wasn't all about hard work. We did make time to socialise with our new found friends and explore the culinary delights and local wines. All of our meals and most of the drinks were paid for and everyone's favourite evening venue seemed to be the very characteristic "El Pimpi" bar. Its white washed walls have vines and plants growing up them and old wooden barrels are stacked up in every corner. The walls are lined with photos and signatures of poets, film makers, politicians etc. who frequent the many chatting rooms situated off the main bodega bar. This place is usually buzzing with life and never, ever seems to close!

I would have no hesitation in recommending this course to anyone with an interest in teaching Spanish. I participated in the French course in Lyon two years ago and this was equally as rewarding, motivating me to apply for the Spanish one this year. Saving the best till last, the cost of travel to the course, the course itself, meals and accommodation were all funded by a grant which was provided by Comenius (now Erasmus Plus). You can find all the information on this course and others of a similar nature at www.lfee.net.

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From top left:

Málaga Promenade

Flamenco Night at Liceo

Procession in the City

Puente Nuevo at Ronda

More Processions



