

# Learning Spanish in Seville

I had done an AS level in Spanish at college but I had never had the opportunity to use it in Spain, so I was very excited by the opportunity to spend a week in Seville in order to improve my language skills, hoping to work towards a capability that would allow me to use it during my degree studies in literature. With the help of the Expeditions Fund, I was able to book a week-long course of Spanish lessons at a school in the centre of Seville. The agency that I booked with also arranged for my accommodation with a Spanish lady called Ana María. The agency instructed me to contact her before my arrival to let her know when my flight would land, but she didn't have an email address, so I decided to write her a letter. I had to do some research on letter-writing conventions, and discovered that letters are written very formally in Spain, using different grammar and vocabulary to spoken language.

Ana María didn't speak any English at all, and I found it very different to understand her accent to begin with, as several consonants are often dropped from speech in the south of Spain. Moreover, politeness is very important, especially to the older generation, and different pronouns and verb forms are used to address superiors. Having learned in a classroom environment, I had never had the opportunity to practice these forms before and they took me some time to get used to.

Before I went, the thing I was most worried about was the difference in lifestyle. I knew that I would be living with a Spanish hostess whom I had never met and that I would be expected to follow the same eating and sleeping patterns. In fact, I found that I settled very quickly into the rhythm of eating and sleeping much later in the evening. Ana María cooked excellent meals,



which were light enough not to feel too heavy late at night and it became natural to spend time outside after dark when some of the heat had dissipated.

I couldn't have chosen a hotter week to be in Seville. Temperatures averaged 40 degrees C in the six days that I was there and there were news reports on the TV about forest fires in a neighbouring town. Ana María's flat, which was towards the north of the city, didn't have air conditioning, and I found that very hard to start with, but I learned a lot about the value of water and electricity, both of which are very expensive in Spain. Ana María, also taught me about the cultural traditions of the country. Most people in Seville are Catholic, and their religion is an important part of their daily lives. While I was staying with her, Ana Maria told me that she had to go shopping to buy her son a present because it was his saint's day. When Catholics are confirmed, they choose the name of a saint to adopt as a secondary name and the saint's day is almost like a second birthday. Ana María had pictures of all her children's confirmation ceremonies in her living room, which showed the girls in white dresses, and were displayed with pride, in similar way to how graduation photos are often exhibited in England. I was fortunate while I was there to witness preparations for the Corpus Christi festival. Although on a Thursday, the day was like a bank holiday, with many Spanish people getting the day off work to attend the processions.



**Picture 1:** this is the Alameda de Hercules, where people sit outside, eating and drinking until the early hours.

**Picture 2:** Displays were put up all over the city for Corpus Christi and shop windows were dressed in red and gold like English ones would be at Christmas.