

# VALENCIA



## PROGRAM INFORMATION HANDBOOK Semester/Academic Year



University at Albany  
State University of New York



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As the time to depart quickly approaches, you will find you have a million things to do. You have an overwhelming amount of paperwork to fill out, materials to read, and details to take care of. **Your first step should be to read this handbook.** It will be your guide before, during, and perhaps after, your time in Spain.

**Pay particular attention to the sections on Visas, Registration, and Housing.**

If you have any questions while you are preparing for your experience abroad, please contact **Renée Lucier DeCelle** at the UAlbany office: **(518) 591-8170**. We will do our best to help you complete all of the necessary forms and answer any questions for you. ¡Buena Suerte!

### **\*\*\*IMPORTANT REMINDERS\*\*\***

The academic calendar in Valencia is planned to coincide with schools in the U.S. Therefore, you should be able to participate on this program and return to your home campus for the following semester.

Classes are held Monday through Thursday afternoon, which allows for travel on the weekends. Please plan accordingly. **Although it should be evident, you should NOT plan to travel when classes are in session. Absences from class are taken seriously and will not be excused for travel.**

AIP's program guide, Miguel Angel, will meet the group at the airport. You will spend a few days in Madrid before the group will go by bus to Valencia to meet the host families and continue orientation. Arrangements for the bus trip to Valencia will be made by AIP and the cost is included in your program charge. **All students must be in Madrid on the date the group flight arrives. This is considered the beginning date of the program, and orientation will begin that day.** Even if you are traveling by yourself, you should meet the group in Madrid in order to take the bus to Valencia with the group. Therefore, be sure to give yourself enough time to get to Madrid by the arrival date. This handbook and the General Information Handbook contain very important information that you will need before, during, and after your time in Spain. **Please read them carefully!**

## ADVISER'S SPECIAL REMARKS

In your acceptance packet from UAlbany, you will find a Checklist that will guide you through the paperwork for this program. We know it's pretty overwhelming. Some items are so time sensitive that they are mentioned again and again.

- (1) You need a **student visa** for this program.
- (2) You need a valid **passport** before you can get a visa. Apply immediately if you don't have one.
- (3) You must turn in your response form, \$300 deposit, health insurance waiver request form (if requesting a waiver out of the SUNY insurance), and your **housing request** form to UAlbany immediately.
- (4) The Spanish Consulate takes its time to produce the visa and UAlbany has no means of speeding it up or granting exceptions. It is your responsibility to apply for your visa on your own. See the Visa Application Instructions for details.
- (5) You also will need **a ticket** to fly to Spain! We recommend that you travel with the group, but if you don't have your visa by the departure date, you'll have to change your flight. As long as you do your paperwork on time, you should be able to purchase a seat on the group flight with reasonable confidence.

**We must receive all forms as soon as possible in order to send them to Valencia by the necessary deadlines.** This includes the photos! The Director in Valencia must have your forms and photos as soon as possible so she can set up your housing, determine class availability, and process ID paperwork for you. Please keep this in mind and return your forms and photos quickly.

### ABOUT THOSE PHOTOS: HOW MANY???

You need to send UAlbany a total of **four (4) photos**: one for our files; and three for the office in Valencia. Please send them ALL together.

You will also need **two (2) additional photos** for the Spanish Consulate when you apply for your visa.

You will also need photos for a passport, if you do not have one yet.

### WHAT'S A EURO?

As of January 2002, Europe changed its currency to the Euro, so instead of the Spanish peseta, you will have an exciting new currency to deal with! Keep in mind that Spaniards may still be talking about prices in pesetas – so it is still a good idea to familiarize yourself with very large numbers in Spanish (since 1 US dollar = 180 pesetas). Since you will be met by the program guide when you arrive if you take the group flight and will not need money immediately, you do not have to change dollars before your trip, but if you do, don't change much!

## IMPORTANT NUMBERS & ADDRESSES

The program is administered by coordinators in Albany and in Valencia. Your main contacts will be **Cesar Ribas** at the AIP Office in Valencia or **Renée Lucier DeCelle** at the University at Albany. Someone from the AIP office is on call every day and will have a cell phone so you will be able to reach them. All members of the AIP staff speak English so you will not have a problem explaining your situation or asking for help. Check for office hours once you arrive. If you ever need to contact Albany, we are available from 8:30 to 5:00, Monday through Friday; during the summer our hours are 8:30 to 4:00. You can also leave a voice mail or e-mail message at any time.

**NOTE:** 011 is the international code for direct dialing overseas from the States, 34 is the country code for Spain, and 96 is the city code for Valencia. Anyone calling from the States will need to know this.

### **Albany Coordinator:**

Renée Lucier DeCelle, Assistant Director  
Office of International Education, Science Library G 40  
University at Albany, SUNY  
Albany, NY 12222  
Telephone: (518) 591-8170  
e-mail: [rdecelle@albany.edu](mailto:rdecelle@albany.edu)  
University at Albany web site:  
Office of International Education web site:

Fax: (518) 591-8171  
office e-mail: [studyabroad@albany.edu](mailto:studyabroad@albany.edu)  
[www.albany.edu](http://www.albany.edu)  
[www.albany.edu/studyabroad](http://www.albany.edu/studyabroad)

### **Resident Director in Valencia:**

Cesar Ribas  
c/El Bachiller, 7  
46010 Valencia, Spain  
Telephone:  
Fax:

011-34-96-339-1566  
011-34-96-360-0014  
**011-34-667 400210** (Miguel Angel)

### **AIP's emergency cell phone:**

### **Send Mail To:**

Your Name  
c/o AIP  
c/El Bachiller, 7  
46010 Valencia, Spain

**United States Consulate** 96-351-6973  
C/Paz, 6, 3<sup>rd floor</sup>, room 5

### **Tourist offices**

C/Paz 48  
OR  
Estación del Norte (Railway Station)  
Játiva 24

011-34-96-352-8573

011-34-96-352-4000

### **Numbers in Madrid:**

#### **United States Embassy**

Serrano, 75

#### **American Express**

Plaza de las Cortes, 2

011-34-91-577-4000

011-34-91-572-0303

## SPAIN

### The Country

Many think of Spain as the country of flamenco dancers and bullfights, siestas and sangria, a slow-paced place filled with sun-kissed, smiling people. It is all this and much, much more. It is a modern country filled with contrasts and diversity. Booming and bustling cities with tall office buildings and extensive metros are surrounded by small agricultural towns with narrow, winding streets. While walking along a busy city boulevard, you can turn a corner and find a quiet plaza where two old men sit, play cards, and drink their afternoon coffee. Spain has 17 distinct provinces and its people speak 5 different languages. It is a country with a unique blend of old and new. And it is the perfect place to experience Spanish culture and to develop Spanish language skills.

### Valencia

Located on the coast of Spain, Valencia is the third largest city of Spain and the capital of the province known as the Comunitat Valenciana. It is a city with much to offer. Surrounded by beaches, Valencia is known throughout Spain as a relaxing tourist destination. It also boasts a rich cultural heritage mixed with modern industry and trade. The city's architecture reflects its historical ties to the Romans, Visigoths, Moors, and others, with more modern areas nearer to the coast. The maritime districts such as Cabanyal and Nazaret, which in earlier times were independent villages, are now part of the city. Thanks to the warm Mediterranean climate, the beaches are open from April to October. The Turia river also flows through Valencia. For the past 20 years, the old river bed has been dry and has now been converted into a beautiful park.

In Valencia you will find theaters, museums, art galleries, sporting facilities, and an exciting nightlife. In fact, within Spain, the San Pio Fine Art Museum in Valencia is considered second only to the Prado in Madrid. There are also museums of modern art and of prehistory, as well as many other sites of interest. And you also will discover that Valencia is home to two major universities: the Polytechnic University of Valencia, hosting over 35,000 students, and the University of Valencia, with over 80,000 students. Valencia is definitely a vibrant city with plenty to keep you busy!

## THE PROGRAM

The University at Albany program in Valencia, held at the **AIP Language Institute**, is designed for American students who want to develop their Spanish language skills and learn about Spanish life. The program's curriculum is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of Spanish culture through exposure to the language, literature, history, arts, and economic organization of the country, while allowing you to experience Spanish life firsthand through housing with local families.

The program is intended for students with beginner or intermediate Spanish language skills. Many students admitted to the program will know little or no Spanish, but everyone will learn the basics! Classes are taught at the AIP Language Institute and enrollment is limited to participants on the Albany program. This allows us to keep the classes small in order to encourage open discussion and provide ample opportunities for individual attention.

We assume most participants with **beginning** or **intermediate** language skills have not had the opportunity to study Spanish culture, literature, or history. Therefore, the courses we offer are meant to give students a basic background about Spain and things Spanish, with the hope that they will be better able to understand the culture in which they are living. Beginning and intermediate students take a language course concentrating on grammar, composition, and conversation. These courses are taught mostly in Spanish to allow the students maximum contact with the language.

Students enroll in additional courses in Spanish studies that are taught in **English**. This is important to remember. Students will probably not receive credit towards a Spanish major or minor if they take their classes in English. Therefore, please check with your home campus if you hope to receive Spanish credits for this program.

In addition to the courses for beginning and intermediate students, we have one language course for more **advanced** students. The advanced level is designed for students who have completed some intermediate Spanish on their home campus, but are not yet advanced enough to take all of their courses in Spanish. With this in mind we offer an advanced language course, concentrating on grammar, composition, and conversation, taught in Spanish. We also offer a literature course taught in Spanish. These two courses allow intermediate level students to take some of their courses in Spanish, thereby enhancing their language learning.

Most AIP courses carry lower-division credit at UAlbany. They are designed to allow students to complete general education credits or electives within a major. Students from different campuses must ask their own school for a determination of the level of credits they will receive. Since it is possible for courses to have more than one equivalent if their subject matter overlaps several disciplines, students may ask their advisers to consider different equivalents based on the syllabi they submit along with such requests.

## **The AIP Language Institute**

The UAlbany program offers courses at the **AIP Language Institute**, which was founded by the Advisers for International Programs in Spain (AIP) in order to offer meaningful programs that combine proper academic instruction with meaningful cultural activities that truly enhance the study abroad language and cultural curriculum of our students. It is important to remember that the AIP Language Institute is not a Spanish university but rather an institute for foreign students. Therefore, you will not be taking classes with Spanish students since participants on our program do not have sufficiently advanced language skills to take all courses in Spanish. The instructors at AIP come from a variety of international and Spanish universities. As a result, our students benefit from work undertaken in different academic and methodological fields, offering diverse perspectives and ideologies from which to learn about Spain and its people and language.

The Institute is located in the heart of Valencia and boasts a modern building (with handicap accessibility), computer services for students, and a variety of student services, including organized cultural and social events. You will find everything you need close to the Institute: banks, bookstores, and many cafes and restaurants. Although you will not be taking classes with Spaniards, Spanish professors and visiting international professors will teach your courses. AIP also offers English courses for Spaniards, which allows our students an opportunity to interact with native speakers. In addition, there is a Language Partners Program that allows Spaniards and Americans to get together to practice their language skills. Through this program, you can meet Spanish students who want to practice their English and learn about American culture, while you in turn can practice your Spanish and learn about Spanish culture – and hopefully make some friends!

## **Our Resident Director**

The AIP Language Institute and its staff will serve as your support system once you arrive in Valencia. Your classes will be held there and you will also be able to use the facilities whenever the offices are open. Also remember that the staff at AIP is available to help you with anything – however big or small. Cesar Ribas, along with the rest of the AIP staff, will arrange your classes, coordinate housing, and offer general help and advice in dealing with academic and non-academic

matters. Cesar is a native of Valencia and has traveled extensively in the States; his energy and knowledge of Valencia is a great asset to our program. It is important to keep the staff in Valencia informed of how you are adjusting to life in Valencia. If you have a problem or concern, please let them know immediately.

## **Program Charges**

Part of the program charges collected by the Office of International Education in Albany is used to support excursions and certain cultural and social activities provided by the program. Your first group trip will be a few days in Madrid and the bus ride to Valencia when you arrive! In general, the program charges will cover transportation, AIP staff supervisors, local guides, and entrance fees for excursions. You will get more specific information about each excursion from AIP. Please note: if you should decide not to participate in the activities which are included in your program charge, you will not be reimbursed.

In addition there are trips that are sponsored by AIP but not included in the program charges. These "optional excursions" allow students to go to different cities, such as Barcelona, Sevilla, Ibiza, etc. at a student rate. These are usually very economical and a lot of fun! You will receive more information about the optional excursions during your on-site orientation in Valencia.

## **VISAS**

All American students studying in Spain **MUST** get a student visa. This is very different than a tourist visa. You must apply for your student visa at the Spanish Consulate that serves your home state. This process can be complicated. Therefore, we have provided very specific instructions on our website and within your on-line study abroad application under 'Learning Content'. Please read these instructions VERY carefully and follow instructions exactly.

## **FLIGHT INFORMATION**

The UAlbany Office of International Education has arranged a group flight at as low a cost as possible. The flight is with a major airline and departs the day before the beginning of the program. Plan to wear something purple or tie a purple ribbon to your carry-on bag in order to identify yourself as part of the Albany group flight. This will make it easier to find each other in the airport. AIP's activities guide will meet the group at the airport in Madrid. Participation in the group flight is optional, but students who do not join the group flight will not be met at the airport, unless their flight coincides with that of the group. They will also be responsible for their own transportation to the group hotel in Madrid. (This cost cannot be reimbursed later.) This allows all students to join the group on the bus to Valencia when the group leaves Madrid. Whatever your flight arrangements may be, you **must** let UAlbany know your flight plans as soon as possible.

## **ARRIVAL IN MADRID**

**When you arrive in Madrid, make sure your passport is stamped at Immigration.** If you travel to Madrid with the group, the guide will meet you at the airport after you clear immigration and customs and have transportation ready to take you to the group hotel. Look for someone holding a small sign saying "SUNY" on it. The AIP representative who is meeting you will also have a list of who is supposed to be on the flight and will make sure you are all there before leaving. Students spend the first few nights in a hostel in Madrid and begin their orientation at this time. After a tour of Madrid and some activities in and around Madrid, the group takes a bus to Valencia and is met by the host families. (You will receive a list of students' names and their family assignments just before you leave. A brief description of each family will be included.) Again, if you choose to travel to



Madrid on your own, you will not be met at the airport or the train station and must find your own transportation to the group hotel.

## REGISTRATION

Registration is very important! Please read these instructions carefully. **Remember, you must register at your home campus as well as abroad.** Ask for specifics at your home study abroad office.

### At Home

If you have not done so yet, you should **immediately** discuss your plans with your home campus. Your **study abroad office** and your **academic adviser** need to be aware of your plans to study in Spain. They can advise you as to what steps you need to take to register at your home campus for your study abroad credits. Registration instructions for UAlbany students are included in UAlbany's General Information Handbook.

### Preliminary Approval of Courses

Prior to your departure from your home campus, you should plan what kind of courses you will take and obtain preliminary approval from your academic adviser. UAlbany students should have their **Preliminary Approval of Courses** form (found within your on-line study abroad application) signed by their academic advisers after discussing their plans. **This form will not guarantee that you will get the classes you want, because UAlbany cannot control last minute changes in Spain.** However, this provides some assurance that the overseas courses will be accepted when you come back. Non-UAlbany students should check with their home campus to determine if there is a similar form they need to fill out. All courses you take in Spain will appear on your UAlbany transcript at the end of the program; your home campus will make its own determination about equivalencies.

### In Valencia

Registration in Valencia is very easy! The level of your language course will be determined by the results of a placement test that you take once you arrive. If there are questions about your placement, AIP can contact UAlbany or your home campus for clarification. See the information on course offerings for more information about your options.

### Overseas Enrollment Report (OER)

**All students** are required to complete and return a **signed** Overseas Enrollment Report (OER) to UAlbany. AIP will distribute and collect the OER from each student on the UAlbany program and send the forms to UAlbany together. Students should keep a copy of their course descriptions and syllabi in case they need to submit them to their home campus upon returning. The materials could help you get credit for certain courses you take. **This is especially important if you are expecting to petition for upper-division credit for any of your classes or if you need advanced level Spanish credit. UAlbany cannot duplicate this information for you.**

### Registration Checklist

1. Meet with your academic adviser at your home campus before leaving. Make sure you understand what you need to do on your home campus to successfully complete your studies overseas.
2. UAlbany students should complete and return their Preliminary Approval of Courses form to the Albany Office of International Education before departing. Non-UAlbany students should complete any similar paperwork for their home campus.
3. After you finalize your course registration in Valencia, complete a copy of your Overseas Enrollment Report. Send it to the Albany Office of International Education along with course descriptions and syllabi.

### Extending Participation in the Program

Students accepted for only one semester who later decide to stay for the academic year must notify AIP as early in the semester as possible. You must also send a letter of intent to the Albany office and discuss your plans with your home campus as soon as possible. Your acceptance for a second semester is contingent upon the approval of AIP, the UAlbany program officer, and your home campus.

Perhaps the most important issue pertaining to extending your participation on our Spain program is ensuring that you have a valid student visa in order to stay. If you are even remotely considering staying for two semesters, notify UAlbany immediately and plan to apply for an academic year Spanish student visa instead of a visa for a single semester. It is usually impossible to extend a single semester visa once you are overseas.

If you do participate for a second semester, you are responsible for the payment of the second semester's fees. Non-UAlbany students should contact their home campus to make proper financial arrangements. Complete instructions for extending your stay are found in Albany's General Information Handbook.

## COURSE OFFERINGS

All courses except the language courses and the advanced level literature course are taught in English. All language courses at all levels are taught in Spanish to help you acclimate yourself to the language as quickly as possible. Do not panic when you begin to hear Spanish at the beginning level! Your instructors understand that you are beginning level students and will take that into consideration when teaching. Also, be sure to ask questions when necessary - don't be shy! If you find you are having an especially difficult time, talk to your professors; they can help where possible. In addition, you can form a study group with other students in your class or ask your family for help. The more effort you put in, the quicker you will learn the language and feel comfortable in your new home.

## CREDITS

You will be expected to register for a full load of courses. UAlbany considers 12 credits to be the minimum for full-time status; but students planning to graduate in four years often must take 15 credits to stay on schedule. Check with your home campus for any other requirements regarding minimum credits overseas. **Students are cautioned not to drop below full-time status (12 credits) or their financial aid may be affected.**

### Awarding Credits

The AIP Language Institute forwards your grade report to UAlbany at the end of the semester and a UAlbany Transcript Supplement is created. If you are a UAlbany student or a non-SUNY student, your official transcript can then be issued. If you are a student at another SUNY campus, the Transcript Supplement will be sent to your home campus where it will be attached to your record there. Just as on most U.S. campuses, if there are any holds in Valencia (unpaid fines or fees, etc.), your grades will not be released. Please be sure to clear up any holds as soon as possible to prevent any delay. Keep in mind that grades from overseas are not sent until at least a month or two after the end of the semester. Please keep this in mind when looking for your transcript. If you need your grades sooner than that (if you are graduating or have some extraordinary need for faster processing), let us know. We will try to accommodate your needs but cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so by the date you specify.

## STUDENT LIFE

### Classes

Class schedules vary, but for the most part you will have language class and some other classes in the morning, followed by a break from about 2-4pm for lunch and siesta. On some days, you will need to return to AIP for classes in the late afternoon and/or evening.

Your professors realize you are not a native speaker of Spanish and did not receive your previous education in Spain, so they are prepared to give you the background you need to understand their subject areas and the academic system and expectations. However, you are expected to behave as Spanish university students would - as responsible, mature adults. You are expected to come to class prepared and pay attention in class. **Attendance is required, as is punctuality.** (You will fail if you cut class.) This is not negotiable. Some students assume that they do not have the same rules once overseas. However, this is an academic program. You will be held to the attendance policies of Albany and AIP. Professors take their jobs seriously and take offense when you do not respect them or their courses. However, if you treat your professors with respect, they will be more than willing to help you whenever possible. Keep this in mind and behave accordingly.

Students frequently ask about the level of difficulty of courses. It is difficult to generalize. Just as in the United States, some professors are more demanding than others. Because all but your language class will be taught in English, you should not have any more trouble in Spain than you would in the States. Also, the courses carry lower division credit, which is somewhat less demanding than upper division if that is what you are currently taking. But remember that the language class, even at the beginning level, will be taught in Spanish, so give yourself enough time to complete your assignments and don't be afraid to ask for help.

**Note: No food or drink of any kind is permitted in the classrooms of the AIP Language Institute.** This is a result of Spanish law and is taken very seriously.

### **Exams**

In the Spanish university system, there is one exam at the end of the term rather than a series of papers and exams throughout the semester. We have explained the American method of examination (several smaller exams and considerable feedback) to the instructors overseas. Because this is an American program at a Spanish institute, the method of evaluation will be a mixture of these two systems. In addition, your final grade will be lowered if you have unexcused absences or arrive late to class several times.

### **Computer Access/Email**

Please be forewarned: access to computers is somewhat limited in Spain. The AIP Language Institute has some computers available for student use. Although you should be able to use these computers to type your papers, **you will most likely not be able to access your email whenever you want from AIP's computers.** However, AIP does have wireless internet access as well as regular internet hook ups for laptops, should you decide to bring one with you. There are also internet cafés around the city that provide email and internet access.

As for laptops, the voltage is different in Spain and you will need a converter/adaptor. Keep in mind that you cannot use a modem over your host family's phone, as telephone services are very expensive in Spain. You will not be able to access the internet from your laptop at your host family's house. At home, your laptop can be used for word processing only.

Please advise UAlbany if you change your email address so that we can contact you if necessary. More information about computer access will be available when you arrive in Valencia. Please be patient with the computer resources at AIP. This is typical of Spanish life - please make every effort to adjust!

We hope that e-mail will help all of us communicate at a lower cost. However, if you use e-mail, do not make it your whole life. You are in Spain to experience Spain, not catch up on what you're missing at home. Regardless, don't expect to spend hours using e-mail - access will be somewhat limited.

## **Mail**

**Students receive their mail in care of the program at the AIP Language Institute rather than at the home of their host family.** You should plan to receive all your mail at this address throughout your stay. In the event that you change families, your mail will always reach you. Your family and friends should send your mail or packages to the AIP office at the following address:

Your Name  
c/o AIP Language Institute  
c/El Bachiller, 7  
46010 Valencia

AIP will advise you about what to do about receiving packages. Usually they are not delivered and you must pick them up at the post office yourself. You can send packages home and buy stamps at the local post office. There are also *estancos*, which are stores that sell tobacco, stamps, and other necessary items. Packages can be weighed there too. An estanco is easily spotted by the red sign with a T on it. All mailboxes are yellow with a red stripe. A letter or postcard to the U.S. takes a week or two to reach its destination. **Aerograms** are also available. They are less expensive to send but cannot contain enclosures. Local postage in Spain varies with the destination; anyone at the post office or estanco can tell you how much your letter will cost. The staff at AIP will give you details during the on-site orientation.

## **HOUSING**

**ALL STUDENTS: The housing form must be submitted to UAlbany before your visa paperwork can be prepared. Do not delay!**

### **Homestays**

Housing for students is provided through a homestay program arranged by AIP. All students are **required** to participate in the homestay program. The homestay provides three meals a day, laundry services, and a comfortable environment during the first weeks of adjustment to a new place and a new culture. It is an opportunity to converse in Spanish daily and experience a part of Spanish life that can be appreciated no other way. Therefore, our host families are not required to speak English to you (in fact, we prefer that they didn't!).

Students are placed two per family. Therefore, you will be housed with another student from the Albany program, which gives you a bit of support through the challenges of learning a new language. Keep in mind that if there is an uneven number of male and/or female students on the program, a participant may be randomly chosen to be placed as the only student in a host family at no extra charge.

**Note:** Students who wish to be the only student living with a particular family can request this arrangement. However, there is an **additional cost** for this type of accommodation. Please see the Housing Request Form for details. **If you request to be the only student in a house, you will be billed extra for this privilege.**

Please see the checklist in your acceptance packet for instructions as to how to complete the Valencia AIP Semester Housing Request Form. Please read the housing form carefully so that you understand all its terms. Then complete the form promptly and thoughtfully; you will be placed with a roommate in a homestay based on your answers. We do the best we can, but cannot always provide exactly what you specify. If you have heard of a particular family from a past participant, you may request placement with that family. If you want to live with another participant of the program, let us know and we will try our best to place you together. All of your requests will receive serious consideration in conjunction with all other factors that determine placement. Sometimes we receive multiple requests for a family, so not everyone can be accommodated. We will try our best!

We hope to obtain notification of the names and phone numbers of your host families shortly before your departure. Please be patient and wait for us to email you, which we will do as soon as we have any information. Be sure to check your email regularly prior to departure.

As mentioned above, all students are **required** to participate in the homestay program. This is for your own benefit and safety. There are no dorms in Valencia for our students. Therefore, you cannot simply sign up for a dorm room and move in when school starts. If you did want to live on your own, you would need to arrive before the rest of the group and search for an apartment on your own. This is very challenging for students who have never been to Spain, especially those with little or no Spanish skills. Remember that renting an apartment in Valencia entails everything included in renting an apartment here: signing a lease, setting up utilities, giving a deposit, dealing with the landlord if there is a problem, figuring out where to do your laundry and shopping. This experience is very stressful – especially when all business, including the lease, is conducted in Spanish. Therefore, we do not allow students to find their own accommodations. Instead we work with them and their host families to ensure their experience is a comfortable one.

## **Independence**

A concern of many American students is the fear that living in a homestay means losing independence. You will find it is hard to feel independent when you need advice on the simplest things: how to get on a bus, turn on hot water, mail a letter...and it is hard for a host family to know how much "help" you want or need. Over time, your needs will also change. Try to be patient as your relationship develops.

Although you will need to spend time with the family to form a successful relationship, you will find ample time to go out in the evenings and to travel on weekends. Homestay families realize you are university students and treat you as adults and expect you to act like independent adults. In general, students are satisfied with the amount of liberty they have in a host family situation. You will have a key and can come and go as you please; but always be courteous! Mealtimes are important; meals are usually when the family gathers to discuss their day and touch base. This is a time to get to know your family and also to learn about Spanish culture and current events. Your host family has been told that mealtimes will be established according to the family's own preferences, so you have to show up on time (there will be a long mid-day break between classes to allow time for meals). Be sure you give ample notice for meals missed or travel plans. A few other rules they have been given: you are allowed one quick shower or bath a day and you are allowed to receive phone calls (discussed later). In accordance with Spanish customs, however, visitors will probably not be allowed to visit you in your room. Occasionally, students are given permission to have visitors of the same sex in their room. You should see how your señora feels about this type of situation. Definitely, do not expect visitors of the opposite sex to be allowed in your room or the house in general.

## **Family Life**

Living with a Spanish family will provide you with many insights into Spanish values, customs, and life experiences. Host families may have had previous American boarders or you may be their first American. In any event, all are screened by AIP staff and have a written agreement with AIP, as will you. The families will come from many walks of life and will have varying degrees of education.

Some will be professionals; others may work in government jobs or in industries. Some may have children growing up in the household, but more likely, they will be adults whose children have left or señoras who live alone. Usually other members of the extended family live close by and are frequently present. We hope that host families are entering into the program because they enjoy the company of American students. We know that they also do so because of the economic advantage of the room and board income. However, they are expected to welcome you into their family; they should talk to you and include you in their lives, which will help you learn a lot. Enjoy the differences you will encounter. They will just enrich your overall experience.

It is important that you realize that "family" does not mean the same as you expect to see in the States. Most host families will NOT have a mother, father, kids, and a dog. This is just not the type of family that has time or extra room to take in a student. In fact, most students live with widows who may have an older son or daughter living with them or perhaps other international students. There are some more traditional families; however, you cannot expect to be placed with one. Students find that when they do live with non-traditional families, they often have a greater opportunity to learn about the differences between our two cultures. Also, some students have found that they receive more attention in non-traditional families; just as in the States, raising children takes a lot of time and energy, leaving little for a foreign student. At any rate, please be prepared to adjust your idea of "family", even if only for a semester. Enjoy the differences you will encounter - they will just enrich your overall experience.

Overall, you will find that the quality of the relationship between students and hosts varies greatly from individual to individual. In some cases, you may be considered only a boarder - some students want that. In other cases, you may be invited to join family gatherings. Regardless of your situation, you should not be surprised to find that you do not have the full run of the house, kitchen privileges, unlimited snacks, and meals you are accustomed to. Please remember that this is their home. They may want certain areas they can go for privacy. Nevertheless, you should be adequately fed and you should feel safe in your surroundings. If you do become a "member of the family", be prepared to go to family events even when you might have wished to travel. This is really a privilege and a compliment to you that they want to include you. Do not feel bad if this is not your situation – again, it is an exception to the norm. In all cases, your *señora* will greatly appreciate your willingness to discuss with her how she would like you to handle everyday matters such as kitchen privileges, bathroom use, missing a meal, or coming home very late.

Most students have enjoyed their homestays, but not everyone is pleased all the time. This is also "part of the experience", although not always the best part. The program makes a conscious effort to weed out families who are rated unsatisfactory by students; but sometimes what one student complains about is what another student wants: other international students in the house, a higher degree of independence, etc. **The quality of the relationship depends greatly on your efforts to get to know the family and adapt to their customs.** Your acceptance in the household very often depends on your own desire to learn by observing and adapting to the Spanish way of life. You may also try really hard to get to know them and still not feel that your efforts are appreciated. Every family is different. Regardless, all families consider you adults, but they do have rules. We expect you to follow these rules. In addition, we expect them to follow certain rules set by Albany. You will be given a copy of the rules during your orientation in Valencia to help you in case you are confused about something the family might be doing. Please be considerate and thoughtful of the fact that it is their house, television, etc. You will probably have at least one housemate, who will probably be from the Albany program. If your placement is not what you would have wished, talk to the staff at AIP and see what can be done.

You will see that in the family everyone always makes a point of greeting others when they return home, wake up in the morning, or simply walk into a room with others present. When you come out for breakfast, your *señora* will typically ask "*¿Qué tal has dormido?*" She probably will ask about

your day when you return. There are also ritual *abrazos* and *besos* when people greet each other. When they leave a room occupied by others, a *con permiso* is required. The degree of closeness you experience with the family depends in part on personalities and interests. Usually family members are the ones who will give you much of the practical information you need; they will take you to the Institute and teach you how to use public transportation. Most students rely on their families when they encounter problems. Home is also a place to study. You will want to keep this relationship as open and friendly as possible. Here are some things you can do to get things off to a good start:

1. Bring a gift for the family when you arrive. Candy, a knick-knack, or any other hostess gift is appropriate. Former participants recommend bringing something from your home state or region, such as music or unique crafts or a special packaged food (no raw ingredients that can't clear customs). Also remember later on to bring an occasional gift to the family when you travel. (Albany never knows any details about these families, as we are not involved in their selection, so our advice here is rather general. Therefore, if you call us for specific ideas for gifts, we'll have nothing new to tell you. Just keep it generic until you get to know your family, then you can buy them something more specific.)
2. Accompany the *señora* to the market. It is fascinating to see how the everyday shopping takes place. You can show her foods you like or want to try, and she will appreciate your interest.
3. Plan to spend your first few weekends at home (i.e. not traveling), except of course if a trip is planned expressly for the Albany group as part of orientation. Stay close to home and get to know the family. Sunday dinner is usually a major family event and often includes extended family. Chances are other members of the family will be eager to meet you; and you will want to know the family. Contacts made through the family can be very important for meeting other Spaniards.
4. If possible, accept the family's first invitations to join them for an occasion or to go on an excursion. Then they will know you are genuinely interested in them and appreciate their efforts to welcome you and include you.
5. It is also a good idea to bring along pictures of your own family, home, dog, whatever! People will be curious about them, and they are also great ice-breakers. Even if you feel tongue-tied about some topics, you know that you can talk about these. And, you can't be wrong! You'll want to have these pictures along anyway.

### The House

Typically the families live in urban apartments scattered around Valencia. **Very few** are within walking distance of AIP; but, public transportation is very easy to use. The family should provide you with a set of keys, and let you come and go as you wish. Always remember to let them know where you'll be and when you'll return - simple courtesy will make you stay that much more pleasant.

The Spanish concept of living space is different than ours. Their apartments are usually much smaller than what we are used to. You should expect to have a small to medium bedroom that you will probably share with a roommate. It will have a table or desk for studying and adequate storage space for your belongings. You will notice that most Spanish homes are kept immaculately clean. You are expected to keep your own room neat. Keep your things picked up. If you do not keep things really neat, your *señora* will probably "organize" your things one day while you are out. She is not trying to invade your privacy; in her mind, it's just part of her job as your *señora*.

The family may have a maid, and you may be uncomfortable with the authoritarian way in which she is treated. The house may be cleaned several times a week, and laundry may also be done frequently. It is appropriate for you to maintain a cordial but somewhat formal relationship with a maid.

### Food

All of your meals will be provided by the family. The adjustment to Spanish food may or may not be difficult for you. In general the Spanish diet is less varied than the American diet – please keep this in mind and try to adjust. Olive oil and garlic are a part of just about every meal. The most common method of cooking is frying in olive oil, but it is not by definition greasy. We recommend that you try all the foods offered. Previous participants have stressed the need to try everything - you'll probably be pleasantly surprised. If there are items that you really dislike or cannot learn to like, it is better to state so openly. As mentioned, Spaniards enjoy fried foods, and you will probably need to eat them even if you would prefer some other method of preparation. Chicken, rice, and fish are plentiful. Breakfast frequently consists of bread and *café con leche*; supper is often a *tortilla* (potato omelet) with bread and salad, eaten around 10:00 at night. The *comida* is usually eaten around 2:00 in the afternoon and is the large meal of the day. Because there is such a space between breakfast and lunch, students often eat a snack mid-morning. In fact this is a custom for most Spaniards as well. (This snack is not provided by the family – just a suggestion as to how to survive until 2:00!)

Obviously, if you have allergies or religious reasons for not eating specific foods, you must make those things known in advance. Be sure to mention them on the housing questionnaire you will be completing before family placements are determined. Be specific on your housing form and reiterate your needs once you get settled in with your family. Students who are vegetarians might have a problem. Some families will be very receptive and will be able to come up with a variety of tasty vegetarian meals; others will not. There are very few Spanish families that understand how to prepare a vegetarian diet. Be patient and help them learn by preparing meals with them. All students should try to get as involved as possible. This could mean fixing your favorite American meal with your family. It helps you share your own culture, and you get to eat something you know you like!

Many *señoras* take pride in feeding their families well and pampering their husbands and children. If you are thin or pale, your *señora* might try to fatten you up or feed you to give you more color (you'll probably hear *come más* often). This protectiveness and fussing over you may seem hard to get used to after living independently in college. We encourage you to be cheerful about it and enjoy it, knowing that you can still be independent in many ways. This desire to fatten you up is balanced by horror at the prospect of being eaten out of house and home. If you feel you are not being fed enough, speak to the Resident Director or Housing Coordinator. If you simply don't like what you are being fed, find a mature way to deal with it.

Food storage is sometimes not what we're used to. Milk is processed in such a way that it does not need to be refrigerated before opening. To Americans, this is very odd. However, it is completely safe. (Just don't expect to get an ice-cold glass of milk anywhere!) If you have real concerns about the safety of your food, please discuss it with the Housing Coordinator; she can tell you if it's safe or talk to your *señora* if it's not. As a side note, bring Immodium or some other antidiarrheal product. All travelers run the risk of a reaction to new foods and eating schedules - this is not food poisoning!

### **Laundry**

The family will provide laundry service for you. Laundry may be done quite frequently or only once a week. Spaniards probably do laundry differently than you are used to. This does not mean that they do it wrong. However, keep this in mind when you pack. Please do not bring your favorite outfit that might be ruined by improper washing. Plan accordingly. If you are staying with a family, you do not need to bring any bedding or towels, as they will be provided.

### **Utilities**

**The family will expect you to be very careful with electricity, telephones, and hot water.** Some students feel that these restrictions are unwarranted, but utilities are expensive and you must think of how to conserve energy.



You might need to ask for instructions about how utilities are to be used. In some Spanish homes, the hot water heater is sometimes not left on, and there will be special arrangements to turn it on for each shower. You will be expected to **always** turn out lights when you leave a room, to use only one light in your bedroom - desk or overhead, not both - and to use electric appliances sparingly. The current in Spain is 220V or 125V (in the USA it is 110V), and outlets are different (they are round). It is difficult to use a conversion set. Therefore, we suggest that you limit what electrical appliances you bring. Better yet buy whatever you need when you arrive in Spain. A reliable travel alarm clock (battery operated) is absolutely necessary. Check with your host family about how they want you to carry out all the details of everyday living and respect their wishes. Again, if you feel there is a true problem with hot water or utilities, then talk to AIP. They can explain why it is that way or try to fix it for you.

### **Phones & Long Distance Calling**

In the homestay program, students are allowed to **receive** phone calls. Calls should be limited to a few minutes once a day, usually just to arrange to meet friends. It is customary to make phone calls from public phones on the street (there are lots of them). In most homes, you will not be allowed to make calls. If you find you can make calls, consider yourself lucky and keep them very short. Spaniards do not use the phone like we do because the charges for private phones are very high.

**Long distance phone calls cannot be charged on the family phone.** Long distance costs will vary according to which plan you have. If possible, establish a time with your family and friends when they can reach you at home and give them the number of your house phone. Calling card services are available in Spain also. Some are very inexpensive! Calling cards should not be used from your senora's home. (First, it probably won't work; second, the señora might not understand how it works and might think she will be charged. This will cause a lot of unnecessary tension, so just don't try.) Be sure to get the access numbers for AT&T and MCI before you depart. Telephone services change so rapidly that other services may be available to you through your own long-distance carrier or another service. Inform yourself.

### **Cell Phones**

Cell phones, or *moviles*, are everywhere! Many people use cell phones in place of regular phones in their homes because they are much cheaper. You can get specific details when you arrive in Valencia. More and more students find this is an inexpensive way to receive and make calls while in Spain. Since you will most likely be unable to make calls from your home, and phone booths are inconvenient and sometimes hard to find, students seem to find the cell phone worth the extra money it might cost. There are too many cell phone providers to name here. This is a decision that you can make once you arrive in Valencia and see how often you need to use the phone. Keep in mind, you can survive without a cell phone. The staff at AIP might be able to give you basic information on carriers and choices, but the real research and final decision is up to you.

### **Payment for the Homestay**

Your family will be paid by AIP. Unless you are staying on with your host family beyond the end of the program, you will not pay your family directly. **Students and their host families should not be involved in financial matters** under normal circumstances. If you have been advised that there are expenses that you must pay directly (for example, if you have broken something), arrangements will be made through AIP (you will pay AIP and they will pay the family). **Please avoid these situations.** If you are staying for the entire year and want to live with your family over the break, you should make arrangements for payment through AIP. They will handle the details and payment for you. However, you must give them advance warning – at least 2 months. Therefore, as soon as you decide you would like to stay, let AIP know.

Please remember that UAlbany and AIP contract your families for the entire semester. Therefore, if you choose to travel during the semester or eat out a lot while friends or family are visiting, you will

not be reimbursed for missed meals, etc. Your family will be paid as usual for the entire month. You also will not be reimbursed for days you are away due to traveling. We assume you will stay through the end of exam week and will pay your family accordingly.

If you are using financial aid to pay for study abroad, make sure that you have made all the proper arrangements before your departure. Give power of attorney to someone you trust (such as a parent) who can handle your financial aid while you are overseas. **YOU MUST MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR FINANCIAL AID BEFORE YOU LEAVE.** Students who are using financial aid should realize that we send money to Spain on your behalf before the start of the program. However, you **MUST** have your financial aid sent to us to cover those charges or a financial hold will be placed on your account until the debt is paid.

### **Conflict Resolution**

The AIP coordinators in Valencia have had a great deal of experience in matching students and homestays. Hopefully, you will be placed with a family that meets your expectations. However, no matter how great the match between student and family, there are issues that arise. Your unconscious assumptions about the right way to do the simplest, most common everyday things can cause misunderstandings. Try to resolve any minor issues yourself. If you have more serious problems or are unable to resolve an issue on your own, see the AIP staff; they'll talk to the family, try to find out what is going on, and help you clear the air. In addition, AIP is in constant contact with UAlbany and will inform us of any and all conflicts and their solutions. **Please deal respectfully with the staff in Valencia and with your host family.**

In previous years, we have generally been able to resolve housing issues promptly. It is possible to change families if there is a serious mismatch. In such a case, you should **not** take matters into your own hands. You should be aware that changes made without approval will not be paid for. UAlbany can help if you feel your needs are not being met. We do not want you to remain in housing that you find unsafe and will intervene immediately. But, please bring your issue to the AIP staff in Valencia first.

## **HEALTH CARE**

### **Medical Insurance & Treatment**

The SUNY health and emergency insurance policy for overseas study is mandatory for all participants in the Spain program. You will have the SUNY health insurance in effect, unless you have received a waiver from UAlbany's health office. In order to request a waiver, you must submit all the documentation required by the health insurance office. You cannot get a refund later because you had your own coverage or you didn't get sick. **If you do not pay for the insurance when billed or submit the paperwork to have it waived, it will be paid on your behalf, and there will be an automatic hold on all your records until that bill is paid.** This will hold up the release of your grades, so please **pay attention to this.** Please refer to the General Information Handbook for a description of the coverage and to the Estimate of Costs sheet for the approximate cost. Useful information about the SUNY health insurance policy (including info on English-speaking doctors abroad) can be found at [www.hthstudents.com](http://www.hthstudents.com). When you receive the bill for this insurance, check the dates of coverage **carefully.** If you are planning to remain in Europe after the end of the program, you may wish to have coverage for a longer period. You must indicate your preferred dates of coverage when you return your form to UAlbany's insurance office.

Even if your health insurance waiver request is approved, all participants on UAlbany programs are required to have the **MEDEX** portion of the SUNY policy because it provides essential emergency

insurance coverage. MEDEX automatically provides accident and hospitalization insurance anywhere outside the United States and emergency evacuation and repatriation benefits.

Only UAlbany's Student Health Insurance Office has the authority to give you an exemption. You must contact them with questions about exemptions or other issues at (518) 591-8170. Please see the General Information Handbook for additional information.

In Spain, you will be expected to pay for treatment at the time you receive it and then seek reimbursement from the insurance company. **This is important.** The system is NOT like an HMO here in the States, rather, you pay first and get reimbursed later. Therefore, be sure you have an emergency reserve of two hundred dollars or more throughout your trip. Get a receipt so that you can file a claim with the insurance company. You can find instructions for filing insurance claims at [www.hthstudents.com](http://www.hthstudents.com). **The Office of International Education cannot process insurance claims.**

If you need medical treatment in Spain, you should first contact AIP for referral to program-approved physicians. They will be able to help you get health care should you require it in a non-emergency situation. The **Unidad Medica** is open from 9am-9pm and has English-speaking doctors. If it is an emergency, you will have a phone number of someone on the AIP staff. Contact that person immediately. If for some reason that person isn't available, your host family will help. AIP will provide you with information for medical care during your orientation in Valencia.

You should also know that in Spain pharmacists are able to prescribe "minor" medications, such as antibiotics, without a prescription from a doctor. In other words, some drugs that require prescriptions in the States may be available over the counter. Be careful about this. If you know you can take a certain medication for an illness you have had previously, you can go to the pharmacy and request that medicine. You may or may not be able to get it that way. However, it is always best to consult with a trained medical doctor before taking any drugs.

If you take a medication regularly and will need to do so while in Spain, bring along the amount you will need to last the duration of your stay in Spain. **Always bring medicines in their original containers.** Also bring along the prescription in case you need to have it refilled. If you wear contact lenses, think about bringing a few extra pairs and a supply of your favorite wetting solution. Bring your glasses as well. No inoculations are required for travel to Spain. However, be sure your tetanus immunity is up to date and check with a physician to see if other inoculations are recommended.

### Other Health Issues

Smoking is very common in Spain; there is no way to avoid it in normal social situations. Even though over 50% of Spaniards smoke, the attitude toward smoking seems to be changing. There are families in which no one smokes. Many young people are choosing not to smoke, and older people are choosing to quit. So, although you may find yourself in smoky conditions (bars are very smoky), you do not have to take up the habit to fit in.

You should also take appropriate precautions if you are sexually active. Albany is **not** encouraging you to be or to become active (in fact, we are trying to **discourage** it); but, if you are, be sure to bring proper protection with you. What you ordinarily find in every drugstore here may not be so available there. Diseases can be transmitted in Spain, and women get pregnant all over the world. Furthermore, aside from the health risk, you should know that your activities or the intentions of others are easily misconstrued in other cultures. Americans are sometimes courted for reasons unrelated to their personal qualities. **We urge extreme caution in intimate relationships.** Further, we point out that being abroad often heightens feelings of liberation. Many people have the feeling of being an entirely different person when they live in another culture and speak another language

all the time. This can lead to lapses in judgment. Be aware of yourself as a person whose integrity you are responsible for protecting. Also, do not expect your host family to be receptive to the idea of visitors of the opposite sex in your room. They will not be! It may be possible for a guest to join you at a meal if you make arrangements with your host family in advance (you may or may not be asked to pay for the meal). But expect that your social activities will take place outside of the home.

## DRUGS & ALCOHOL

We all know that drugs and alcohol are not harmless substances. Illegal drugs in particular may subject you to imprisonment abroad. Once you leave the U.S., you are subject to the laws of the country you enter. **WE CANNOT HELP YOU! Any American citizen charged with violation of Spanish laws related to drug possession or sale can expect no assistance from the University or the United States Consulate.** Do not engage in foolish and/or dangerous activities.

In addition to the legal concerns surrounding drug use, you must strongly consider the safety issues involved. Although students think they are not at risk and that they can handle themselves in any situation, this is just not the reality of studying overseas. You do not know the culture. You do not know how to read Spaniards. You do not know who is dangerous and who is not. **Do not under any circumstances put yourself at risk by participating in drug-related activities.** Use your best judgment and remove yourself from any potentially dangerous situations.

Alcohol is a more difficult matter to deal with. Alcohol is more a part of every day life than it is here and, as such, Spaniards have a much different attitude about drinking. Spaniards might drink a glass of wine with their meals or meet out for a *copita* in the afternoon or evening. But Spaniards do not drink to excess as we often see on American college campuses. Many bars are family places where people in the neighborhood (including children) meet to talk and visit, not at all like the bars you are used to. There are also clubs, which are primarily for dancing not drinking, even though alcohol is available. In fact, Spaniards find drunkenness to be offensive; they don't like loud, drunk Americans. Furthermore, if you have been drinking you are much more at risk by becoming an easy target for less desirable people and by impairing your judgment.

You will have to decide what to do for yourself, but be sure that alcohol does not interfere with your studies. Outside of school, you will probably find yourself in many alcohol-linked situations. If you do not wish to drink alcohol, it is always possible to buy *agua mineral (con gas or sin gas)*, as you prefer) or another non-alcoholic beverage like coffee or juice. Do not exceed what you yourself know to be prudent. Keep this in mind and behave accordingly.

## MONEY MANAGEMENT

It is difficult to estimate how much money you will need in Spain as everyone lives differently. You are likely to spend \$400 to \$500 per month eating out, going out, and traveling. The estimates given on your Estimate of Costs are minimal – based on the average student who travels occasionally. **You are likely to spend at least \$500 per month if you travel, for a total of about \$3,000 per semester.** Remember the cost of travel to other parts of Europe can be high. Previous participants have said that they changed money every few weeks. They carried from \$20 to \$40 on them and extra money in travelers' checks when out of town. It is up to you to decide how much you will spend while overseas. Try to estimate how much you'll travel, how often you'll go out, how much you want to buy for yourself or as gifts; your actual costs will depend on these things. If possible, plan to bring a little more money than you think you will need and budget it carefully from the beginning.

However much money you decide to bring, converting dollars to any other currency almost always entails fees. These fees are usually a percentage of the amount of money you are converting and

can be as much as 20% if a bank has a minimum charge regardless of the amount of money you are changing. Therefore, it is important to explore your options, and to compare prices in Spain when you do need to change money. You are always watching two numbers: the rate (how many euros you will get for each dollar) and the fees (the basic charge for performing the transaction). Banks and *cambios* ("stores" where they exchange money - at not very good rates) post their rates, but what you see is generally what they are selling dollars for. You are selling the bank your dollars, so you must find out at what rate they are buying dollars. You will probably have to go in and ask.

There are various ways to finance your stay in Valencia, all of which are not listed here. **It is not a good idea to bring many dollars in cash.** The bank rate exchange for euros is often worse for cash than for traveler's checks; it is also much more dangerous to travel with cash. Cash is not insured, so if you lose it, it's gone. Traveler's checks can be replaced, but they are not always convenient to use. Sometimes a small amount of dollars is advisable to pay for travel incidentals and immediate expenses upon your return to the U.S. (telephone, taxi, bus, for example).

Before leaving the U.S., it is wise to get some euros (\$50's worth) at your local bank or at the international airport from which you are departing (assuming it is open; they usually are open most of the day, every day of the week). That way you will not have to worry about changing money immediately upon your arrival in Madrid. We do not recommend that you bring a large amount of euros since the dollar/euro rate is very poor in the U.S. and at the airport. A bank will be open the following weekday or Saturday so you can exchange more money to euros when you need to. In general, most students have found it easiest to have a small amount of cash in euros (for immediate incidentals), as well as some cash in dollars to exchange after arrival in Spain. ATM cards and/or credit cards seem to work well for most daily expenses and offer the best exchange rate. Travelers' checks are a good back-up, since they are insured and replaceable.

**NOTE: Until you have figured out what things really cost and see how much money you will need for your trips and other plans, spend your money cautiously.** Almost anything you want to buy the first week will still be available for sale in a month! Take your time! And remember you will want to have some available to you throughout your stay. Also, be careful about using coins, since they can be very valuable. Euro coins can be worth anywhere from one-tenth of a euro to 20 euros each.

### **ATM Cards**

Many students like to use their ATM card as a source of daily money in Spain and highly recommend this form of money retrieval for its convenience. ATM cards are widely used, as long as they have the NYCE or CIRRUS marks. Cash machines are quite prevalent, but you must be sure that your ATM card will work overseas -- some do not work or there may be very high transaction fees for withdrawals. Check with your home bank to see what type of fee will be charged if you do use your ATM card overseas. Be aware so as to avoid any unpleasant surprises! You will also need to notify the security department that you will be using your card overseas to avoid having the card cancelled due to suspicion that the card was stolen. In Valencia, there are lots of ATM locations. You never know what you will encounter in other areas though; therefore, you should have some money in the form of traveler's checks for those times when you are traveling and you cannot use the ATM card.

### **Traveler's Checks**

Traveler's checks are the safest way to bring money overseas, but they are not the most convenient. You may want to purchase them in denominations of \$50 to \$100 for some travel and daily expenses. We don't suggest you buy traveler's checks in Euros; the rate is usually not favorable.

All travelers' checks are signed twice: once at the time of purchase and again at the time of use. Therefore, traveler's checks cannot safely be sent to you since your parents cannot sign a check to

be used by you, and unsigned checks are really cash to whoever first signs them. Therefore, buy them before you leave. Whenever you buy traveler's checks, make several copies of the serial numbers and keep copies in a separate place, including with someone in the United States. If they are lost or stolen, you will have a much easier time getting them replaced if you know the numbers. (But if you don't, they are still insured and will be replaced eventually.) You will need your passport to change traveler's checks.

### **Credit Cards**

In Europe, the most widely used card is Visa; MasterCard is also common. Your card can be used in the same types of establishments as in the U.S. These cards can be used with ATM machines, but you should call your own credit card company before your trip to find out if your particular card will allow you to do this overseas. A note on using your credit card for cash: It is possible, but not always practical. In addition to whatever basic fee there is for that service, you are also actually taking a loan on your card. If you hit an emergency situation and withdraw some money, make sure that someone at home can receive your bills promptly and pay them or this will cost you a fortune in interest charges. Generally, the interest on loans accumulates from the day they are made, not from the billing date: there is no grace period! Once again, talk to the bank that issued your card to find out exactly how you will be charged and how to protect yourself from massive fees. You will also need to notify the security department that you will be using your card overseas to avoid having the card cancelled due to suspicion that the card was stolen.

The American Express card is not widely accepted, although it is becoming more popular. However, the Amex card can still be very useful for you overseas. With an Amex card and your personal checkbook, you can go to an American Express office and withdraw money directly from your checking account in the U.S. - your card serves as ID. This service is available in any city where there is an Amex office. In emergencies this works well as money can be deposited into your account at home, and you can withdraw it all over Europe. You should call Amex for additional information.

### **Bank Accounts**

Due to Spanish banking regulations, opening a Spanish bank account normally is not recommended. Checks deposited in U.S. dollars may take 6 to 8 weeks to clear. **Therefore, your personal checks are not negotiable in Spain.** Please do not ask AIP to cash them for you! (You can cash checks at the AMEX office if you have an American Express card.)

### **Sending Money from the States**

If you must receive money periodically from home, and you do not have a major credit card, there is a convenient way that doesn't involve checks or long waits, but there may be substantial fees involved. Money can be sent via **American Express's Moneygram Service** - even if you do not have an American Express account. There is a fee that varies according to the amount of money sent, but you can have the money you need in 10 minutes in Madrid, Barcelona, or Marbella; and this service is available 24 hours a day. The person sending the money must go to a proper service center in the U.S., directly deposit the amount of cash to be sent, and make sure that it is sent via a branch of the Banco Popular in Valencia. American Express will be more precise. Western Union can also be used to transfer money speedily to Spain and other countries as well. They also charge a fee for this service. If you intend to transfer money, do a little comparison shopping before you leave.

### **Paying Bills Here**

Insofar as payment of bills here in the U.S. is concerned, contact the Financial Aid Office at your home campus if there are any special arrangements to be made. Some financial aid matters can be done for you if your family has **power of attorney** to execute your checks and other documents as necessary. We strongly suggest you grant P.O.A. to someone you trust. Otherwise things have to

be mailed to you in Spain for signature. This can really delay your receipt of money. In emergency situations, see the on-site staff if there is a money matter that needs immediate resolution; however, don't look to them for banking services.

## **SAFETY**

### **Personal Safety**

You should always tell your family in the States what you are doing. Contact them as soon as possible after your arrival; tell them you are safe and tell them how they can contact you. Make some sort of plan to keep in contact with them on a regular basis.

Theft of documents, money, and jewelry is an increasing problem for international travelers. Students have reported thefts on the streets and in the subways. Be attentive. In Valencia, you should find a place at your residence to keep valuables when not needed for business transactions. You can carry a photocopy of your passport rather than the original. However, **you will need your actual passport to change traveler's checks**. Do not bring any jewelry of great sentimental or monetary value. Chain necklaces, rings, and bracelets may be snatched from you. Some people wear their necklaces tucked inside a shirt so they can't be seen when on the street.

It is a good idea to carry as little money as possible and to carry any large amounts of money where they cannot easily be seen. **Your back pocket is not a good place! Neither is your backpack**, since it can be easily be unzipped. A money belt worn inside your clothing is recommended, especially when you travel. These can be purchased where luggage is sold. Purses with inside zippered compartments offer some protection against pickpockets. Be aware of your luggage and other belongings at all times. Don't make yourself an easy target for theft. (Old women who approach you to sell you flowers or read your palm may also be pickpockets. And, although it is a terrible stereotype and not always true, be careful of gypsies. They are often dangerous. Use caution!)

### **Especially for Women** (but everyone should read this!)

Women can generally feel safe living and traveling in Spain, but should take normal precautions. It is a good idea to travel with a friend, and one should be careful and not go out alone at night.

**Unwanted attention on the streets of Valencia is a problem that virtually every American woman faces.** A barrage of verbal comments, known as *piropos*, can follow you as you simply walk down the street. People may call out from passing cars. The comments can be very obscene or complimentary. The attention does not mean you will be physically accosted in any way. It is best to simply ignore the comments and develop a tough skin. No one has said that this is easy to do. When you don't react, they probably will not continue. Students often report that they find dealing with this attention to be unpleasant and stressful. They have not suggested any way to resolve this other than to be aware of it and try not to let it get to them. If you hear "*¿Qué quiere, mi corazón?*", you are probably just being asked politely what you want. Don't overreact - there really are lots of nice people who just want to talk to you. You'll hear this question in stores, taxis, and other public places.

In the United States women generally expect to be "just friends" with men they know. In Spain being just friends is less likely. Women formerly on the program report that the men they knew generally were looking for more intimate relationships. In pursuing a woman who interests them, Spanish men can be extraordinarily attentive; their approach can be hard to resist. When it comes to American women they may be operating on the stereotyped assumption that "American women are easy"; or they may want a fling with a person who will conveniently be gone in six months. This does not mean that all Spanish men are like this; there are examples of good relationships that do develop. We simply recommend taking time to get to know people and using caution and good

judgment. Also, have your host family meet anyone you feel you are getting serious about; they know how to read other Spaniards and can advise you.

### **Safety While Traveling**

When traveling any place outside the United States, we recommend that you be very careful to avoid petty theft and pick pockets. The following steps should be taken to help ensure your security while in Spain or traveling abroad.

1. Make 2 photocopies of your passport and keep them in separate places. While in Valencia, carry a **COPY** of your passport and visa. Leave the originals at home unless you are planning to exchange money. If you are traveling overnight or a long distance, take it with you. If you are crossing into another country, even Portugal, you will definitely need your passport. Again, keep your passport, valuables, and money in a pouch under your clothes. If traveling, do not trust that you can leave your things unattended. It only takes a second for someone to come and take your bags and valuables – it has happened.
2. Make copies of your travelers' checks' serial numbers and credit card numbers and keep them in a separate place.
3. Do not wear valuable earrings, necklaces, watches, or other jewelry in public places.
4. Travel with a hidden money belt around your waist and use it to carry your passport, money, and travelers' checks. In cheap hotels, sleep with the belt on.
5. Don't bring anything you can't afford or stand to lose.
6. Do not leave your backpack or luggage unattended. Do not accept packages from strangers; do not carry anything for strangers, especially across a border. Do not keep anything valuable in an exposed section of your backpack. They are easily unzipped without your notice.
7. Be aware of the movements of other people around you, especially in a crowd.
8. Use extreme caution in selecting friends. This is difficult but important. Be especially respectful of your host family's opinion of anyone you are spending a lot of time with. They are accustomed to interpreting intentions in ways you are unable to.
9. Use caution in accepting drinks at a bar from "friends." We don't want to make you paranoid, but people can be drugged and robbed. Be careful about drinking too much; some people have been followed home after a late night out. Use common sense!
10. Be cautious in revealing information about yourself and about other participants in the program.
11. When you get lost (and you will, at some point), avoid having a look of distress on your face. Walk confidently and go into a store to ask for directions.
12. Use traveler's checks or bankcards (ATM cards); do not change larger amounts of money than you will need for a given period. In countries where there are several types of currency and/or black markets, do not engage in illegal activities.

### **Common Causes of Problems**

We have asked past participants to identify Spanish behavior that bothered them and American behavior that bothered Spaniards. Here is what they report:

- While it is necessary to be forward to meet people, being too forward can be misinterpreted as aggression or flirtation.
- All women should expect to hear comments made about them and should ignore them (easier said than done, of course). Spaniards are surprised that this bothers us.
- The "Ugly American" is a stereotype. This is a fact. They think we are loud and criticize us if we stick together too much. See the section on how to meet locals.
- Stores and businesses close at lunchtime, which is around 1-2pm. They reopen later. Restaurants are very busy at lunchtime. Plan accordingly.

### **Safety During a World Conflict**



Your safety during any conflict situation is very important. We will do everything to ensure that you will be protected. You should also know that "home" in your host family's house is a very secure place. It is also important to dress discreetly at all times... no college sweatshirts, etc.

The following general advice is important for your safety if Americans in Spain in particular have been identified as possible targets:

- Be as inconspicuous as possible. Avoid areas frequented by Americans such as bars and fast-food restaurants, U.S. banks, etc. Avoid using American logos on your clothes and belongings.
- Keep in close touch with the program office. If you have not registered with the U.S. Embassy or Consulate, do so immediately. Make sure people know where you are.
- Report suspicious persons or events to the police.
- Remain in your residence if advised to do so.
- Don't be careless with information about students or events.
- Watch bags and luggage carefully. Again, do not agree to carry, look after, or store any package, parcel, or suitcase for anyone.
- Never agree to drive a car for someone else, especially across national borders.
- In trains and airports, do not hang around ticket offices or airline counters. Go quickly to your train or the lounges beyond the passport controls.

## SOCIAL LIFE

### Meeting Spaniards

We asked prior participants in the program to tell us how they met Spaniards. Students recommend **intercambios** (language partners program) very highly. AIP can help you find a language partner. They also suggest going to cafes and bars; or if your host family has children of the appropriate age, you can meet other Spaniards through them. Many students went places with other Americans; but try to speak Spanish while together (not always easy - but try!). They also met people on trips and excursions. Being open, friendly, and not in large groups seemed to help. Students say not to be intimidated because the Spaniards really *do* want to meet Americans, and to be yourself and be willing to experience different things. We suggest you learn from Spaniards where the best places are. A word of caution here: Be careful when approaching strangers...there are some bad people in all parts of the world. Always have a buddy with you!

Always keep in mind that you are a guest in Spain, and that you are representing the U.S. Don't give Spaniards any more reasons to believe the "ugly American" stereotype. Be respectful of the people and customs of Spain at all times. Spaniards will appreciate this and be more willing to meet you and become friends.

### Going Out

The amount of money an individual spends on recreation depends on personal interests and tastes. Think about your safety **constantly!** AIP can advise you if there are areas you should avoid. Pay attention to what they say - after all they live there! If you go out to a club or bar with a group of friends and enter into a conversation with a stranger, you might not be able to walk away as easily as you'd hope. For this reason, it is safer to be in a small group than by yourself. On the other hand, don't go with a big group of friends and just speak English; this will immediately identify you as an easy target. This is yet another reason to try to use Spanish at all times. When you travel to other cities in Spain or Europe, always find out about any areas you should avoid before you wander around. Safety is critical!

## **Restaurants**

There are many informal cafeterias that serve restaurant-type meals where people have coffee and snacks, or *platos combinados*, a quick meal with various things on the same plate (more or less American style). One of the pleasures of traveling is trying as many restaurants as you can afford. Since it would be impossible to name even half of the good ones, and since the "good ones" may change from year to year, we leave the discoveries to you.

## **Theaters and Movies**

Valencia has a great arts environment! You may find theaters that sell half-price *entradas* to students who present a Spanish student ID on Thursdays and Saturdays. The average price of a movie ticket varies, depending on the film being shown. A new movie shown for the first time in a city (an *estreno*) will cost the most. Many cinemas sell reserved seat tickets only and the price of your *entrada* varies depending on where in the theater you want to sit.

## **Museums and Monuments**

Valencia is home to one of the most important museums in Spain (the San Pio Fine Art Museum) and has several galleries to enjoy. You'll want to explore those that interest you. Most charge a small entrance fee, although in many cases a student ID will enable you to enter free of charge. AIP will give you details.

## **Sports Facilities**

Valencia is on the coast of Spain and the weather is rather mild (but still bring warm clothes and a jacket for the winter). You can expect to be able to take advantage of the beaches during the warmer months. During the winter months skiing in Spain is quite good. Many students enjoy weekend trips to the Sierra de Guadarrama, where there are several ski resorts (Navacerrada, Cotos, Valdeski, etc.). Skis, boots, and other necessary equipment can be rented there at reasonable prices. You should be able to get there conveniently and fairly inexpensively by train or bus. There may be special buses for students on weekends. Students interested in more extreme skiing may want to spend a vacation in either the Pyrenees in northern Spain or the southern Sierra Nevada, the highest mountains in Spain. Also there are several gyms students can join. AIP will give you details during the on-site orientation.

## **Beaches**

Yes, the beaches are right there! The metropolitan beaches are "Las Arenas" and "La Malvarrosa" and they are reachable by urban buses No. 1, 2, 19, 20, 21, and 22. The bus will bring you close to the beach from AIP in about 10 minutes. Beaches are open for swimming from March/April until September/October. There is a beautiful boardwalk-type area that offers wonderful restaurants and cafes and bars where you can sit and view the ocean. Enjoy it as often as you can!

## **Shopping**

The shopping in Valencia is great! They have a typical mall, but the real fun is found in town. There are shops along the winding streets - and you can find just about anything you want. Expect to greet and be greeted by the staff in a small store. And don't do all your shopping the first day! Give yourself time to compare prices and quality. Valencia also has a beautiful *mercado* (market) where you can buy fresh fruits and vegetables and other foods. For Americans, shopping in an open market is usually a new and very interesting experience – check it out. You will find that Spaniards have a much different way of taking their place in line in markets. Usually everyone mills around in front of the counter, rather than standing in a nice straight line. However, you will hear the question "¿Quién es el último?" asked, and its answer, "Soy yo." That way everyone knows who's next.

## **Transportation**

If you are using public transportation extensively to get to school and to explore different neighborhoods in the city for restaurants, shopping, and museums, you will want to do this as economically as possible. AIP will advise you about this, but you will most likely be purchasing an

**abono**, a monthly ticket that entitles the bearer to unlimited usage of buses. Wait until you see how much you use public transportation before you decide which kind (monthly, a certain number of rides, etc.) to purchase. There are different bus companies that cover different areas. Local bus service (suburbs) is part of the **CVT (yellow busses)**. **EMT – red buses** are the main means of public transportation within the city. For travel to other destinations, all buses leave from the bus station, Avda. Menéndez Pidal, 13 (phone 370-9500). There are a variety of possible tickets – ask AIP for help.

**The metro** system has lines that connect different places in the city with the villages that surround Valencia. To benefit from lower rates, you need to buy an underground card sold in any of the underground's stations. **Subways** and **buses** do not run 24 hours a day in Spain. Plan accordingly and expect to take taxis.

**Taxis** are metered. You want the meter to run so that the driver doesn't make up a price; the expression is *bajar la bandera*. When the counter is started, you are immediately charged the minimum charge. There is a night supplement and an extra charge for train station pick-ups, airport travel, and luggage. The AIP staff will advise you of the actual cost of a taxi during orientation. You can talk to taxi drivers, but if the conversation is too personal, cut them off. There are many radio-dispatched taxis. Although there is an extra charge, it may be worth it if you are not on a main street where many empty cabs are passing. AIP can tell you how to find their numbers.

## GENERAL EXPECTATIONS

### Your Behavior

We expect you to be honorable representatives of the US and its culture. You will find that you will be held personally responsible for the policies of the Presidents and will be expected to know all about them and this country, even if you were a kid during their presidencies. You will be amazed at how much more some Spaniards know about our history than you do! You should be as well informed as you possibly can be about world events to participate successfully in any such discussions. You soon will discover that the world does not do everything the way we do. This is usually "interesting", but sometimes not to your liking. You will be more surprised by the small things than by the big. Keep your eyes and ears open, and ask about anything you feel you need information about. If you have been given instructions but really did not understand them, ask again. **It is easy to fall into the trap of faking comprehension**, but it is not useful to either side if you do not really understand.

Depending on your own personal background, you may also encounter curiosity or hostility (rare!). Be as mature in these matters as you can. If there are problems with your host family because of your ethnicity (there should not be!), see the AIP staff for help. You may have some concerns about religious pressures from your host family. However, this most likely won't be the case. Although almost everyone in Spain is Roman Catholic, many are not practicing. In many families only the older generation still attend church regularly. If you are not Catholic, your host family will probably not know much at all about your religion. They may be curious; they may not. It is up to you how much you wish to share on the topic.

### Social Customs

You will also notice that Spaniards use both the *vosotros* and *Uds.* forms in their relationships with a person. *Ud.* is used with your professors, people to whom you should show respect, strangers, and elderly members of the family. *Vosotros* is used with friends and people you are more casual with. You should familiarize yourself with the *vosotros* form and its uses.

Spaniards do most of their socializing in the streets at bars or cafés. They rarely entertain in their homes. If you are invited to a party or to accompany a group, you can accept or not as you wish. You should give a clear signal of your intentions; don't accept and then fail to show up. Women should be cautious of invitations from men. Use your best judgment and don't put yourself in any uncomfortable situations. If you want to invite your family out or want to get together to just talk with someone, invite them for a *cafecito*.

Spanish time will take some getting used to. "Let's meet at 8:00" could mean 8:00, 8:30, or even later. On the other hand, if you have an appointment with a doctor or any official type, you must arrive on time, even if you are kept waiting for a long time. This goes for classes as well. Expect buses to run on schedule if you are going on a trip, even if they don't.

### **Students' Advice**

In a recent survey, students had the following suggestions regarding local customs and American behavior that irritated the Spaniards they encountered. Some of these are repeats from previous information, but they are important enough to mention again.

- Americans are often thought to be loud, obnoxious, and demanding, so try not to be.
- Realize that breakfast and dinner will be smaller meals, but that at mid-day the meal will be large.
- Siesta is real and you'll learn to love it.
- The majority of people you encounter will not speak English. This is good!
- Spaniards are often late and it is not considered rude. Also, don't expect quick service as the lifestyle is more "laid back".
- The first week or so can be frustrating, but things will get better.
- Be sure to dress nicely when you go out.
- Your host family will do your laundry, but may only do one small load per week for you, so if you like to wear a million different outfits a day, rethink this habit. Also, detergents may be harsher than the ones you use. Don't bring anything you really love unless you plan to have it dry-cleaned (which is expensive).

Here are some more suggestions:

- Valencia is active all the time. It's a city but not impersonal. People are very helpful and friendly. Travel is easy and cheap, especially by bus. Nightlife is amazing. You can usually feel comfortable in Valencia, but you should watch out for situations where your pocket can be picked and avoid areas you are told to avoid!
- You need to be fashion conscious. If you dress only for comfort, your wardrobe will draw comments. Spaniards tend to have fewer, but nicer, outfits. You can wear whatever you want, but should think jeans without holes for casual wear. And don't worry about wearing the same thing too much. You'll fit right in!
- Most bars do not have a cover charge (clubs do). You'll probably have bottled water or wine, either of which will be cheaper than soda.
- Be prepared for BESOS - in some situations, everyone is going to be kissing everyone (a kiss on each cheek) and you are going to have to get used to this. Even when you first meet people who are friends of a friend, they will give you besos. Also be aware that the distance between people who are just standing and talking is closer than the usual American distance and may make you feel uncomfortable at the outset. Don't feel invaded! This is just the Spanish idea of personal space. You will get used to it and not even notice it after a short time.

### **STUDENT TRAVEL**

Most students want to travel while they are abroad. It is a great way to get to know the country where you are studying and other surrounding areas as well. However, travel anywhere has its issues. Please keep the following in mind when traveling abroad, no matter where you're going.

**General Hints:** AIP will help you understand the best ways to travel from Valencia. There are a lot of decisions to be made and many different sources of information. Your families, Spanish friends, and the staff at AIP are all good sources for information on travel. From Valencia, you will be able to travel directly to many other sites in Spain. At times, you will probably travel to Madrid first and then go on from there.

If you plan to stay in hostels or pensiones, which you are likely to do on short trips around Spain, find out first if they will give you a key because many hostels/pensiones have curfews after which they lock the doors. You may want to bring a sleeping bag to use, but you do not need to bring any bedding for your homestay. Following the suggestions in *Let's Go* is okay - it's usually reliable - but every other American is reading the same book and showing up at the same places. Ask Spaniards your own age where to go in Spain. There are some wonderful villages and unknown locations that you might otherwise miss.

**International Student Identification Card:** This card is **optional**. You can purchase an ISIC card on-line at [www.isic.org](http://www.isic.org). A student ID is helpful while traveling, since it may enable you to get discounts on certain modes of transportation, entrance to museums, etc. Some hotels and stores also offer discounts if you show your ISIC card.

**Youth Hostel Card:** You can buy this card at the T.I.V.E. office. It will enable you to find fairly cheap lodgings easily during your travels through Europe. Note: Youth hostels and pensiones usually don't have towels for their guests.

**A few additional tips:**

- While traveling, **ALWAYS** keep track of your passport and valuables. Passports have been lost and stolen because of carelessness. Be careful not to leave these things unguarded in youth hostels or train/bus stations.
- Travel as lightly as possible. A heavy knapsack or suitcase will only make any problems you may have worse.
- Even in summer, be prepared for cold weather and rain (especially in Northern Europe).
- Don't be afraid to show your student card and ask for a discount. You could save a lot of money on entrance fees.
- **YOUR WHEREABOUTS SHOULD NEVER BE A SECRET!** Make sure that others know where you are going and when you expect to return.

## **Travel in Spain**

Travel within Spain can be fast, cheap, and easy. It can also be slow, expensive, and difficult. Fortunately, you have choices. Before deciding, think about what is most important to you: your time? your budget? your anxiety level? Make your choice based on what you need for that particular trip. Also, feel free to talk to the staff at AIP to get some tips on travel. Use them and your Spanish family and friends to find out about possible destinations; there are many great places to visit in Spain that only native Spaniards would know about.

**Train:** In Spain, travel by train requires somewhat more patience than in the rest of Europe, since trains are usually slow. They are classified as follows:

- **Talgo** - The best, most comfortable, quickest, and, of course, most expensive Spanish train. All major cities are Talgo stops. Even in second class you'll be comfortable. If you are using a student rail pass, it will be necessary to pay a supplementary fee.
- **Inter City** - The next best train.

- **Express** - In spite of its name, not a very rapid train. This is Spain's local train, which stops at all the little stations along the way.
- **Rápido** - Once again, the name has no relation to reality. It travels slowly and stops at all major points.

While traveling throughout Europe by train, you seldom need to reserve a seat. However, within Spain or on Spanish trains, a reservation is almost always required (even if you have a Eurail pass). In Madrid, there are three main terminals where you can make train reservations: Atocha, Chamartín, and Nuevos Ministerios. You can also make reservations at the terminal in Valencia, of course. There are special rates for young people on some trains on some days. You can obtain a *tarjeta joven* that gets you a 40% discount only on blue days. (There is a color-coded calendar that identifies these days.) This is a good way to save some money, but it requires some advance planning.

**Bus:** There is good bus transportation in Spain from Valencia and from Madrid to most other cities. Sometimes it is almost as comfortable and as quick as the train, so when you plan your travel, look into both possibilities. Also check out bus passes similar to Eurail Passes that may work for your needs. One student claims: Within Spain, it is probably better to travel by bus than train unless you want to spend the extra money for the high-speed trains. Buses go everywhere and trains can be slow. Eurail passes and other special tickets have lots of restrictions. You will find that travel is easy after your first trip.

**Car:** Cars can be rented in Spain, but normally you must be either 23 or 25 years of age to rent one. Because of the obvious danger of accidents and police problems in some countries, the SUNY program does not recommend renting cars. You will have to check with the various rental agencies to find out about prices and regulations, but in general, insurance rates, upkeep, and gasoline are **very expensive** in all of Europe. Other drivers may be unpredictable as well. Although many Spanish highway are now very convenient and safe, the tolls for these are astronomical! Other than new highways, European roads are often curvy and are usually in poor condition, so that you cannot travel as quickly as in the United States. Traffic regulations and road signs are different and must be learned before driving in Europe. If you still choose to rent a car, the rates are likely to be cheaper if you call from the United States and make the reservation there. You will need an **International Driving Permit**. This permit can be obtained from the AAA in the United States by submitting two photographs, a fee, and a valid American driver's license. Once in Spain, you can obtain one through the American Embassy.

**Hitchhiking:** Because of the obvious dangers, **UAlbany program cannot approve of hitchhiking as a means of travel**. It is a very common, and of course, the cheapest way of traveling. However, it is not worth the potential dangers!

## Travel in Europe

Again, traveling within Europe can be a great experience; it depends on the choices you make. Talk to your friends and the staff at AIP to get some ideas about the best way to travel internationally.

**Train:** Within Europe, trains are the most frequently used means of transportation for students. They are an economical and faithful mode of travel. In most of Europe, trains are very good, comfortable, and punctual. While traveling, however, be sure to check the stop names written on the sides of each **car**, not just the train in general. Many trains split up or add cars along the way; if you're not careful, you may find yourself a long way from your original destination. Most trains have both first class and second class sections. Second class is less expensive and usually comfortable.

Railroad Passes are available for travel throughout Europe. Some students buy the **Eurail Pass** (for 1st class) or the **Student Rail Pass** (for 2nd class). Tickets are good for travel in various European countries and can be purchased for varying lengths of time from fifteen days to two

months. The passes themselves can be costly so check your options before buying one. There is also a European InterRail Pass that you can get at RENFE. Recently though students have found that it is cheaper to buy tickets once you arrive in Spain. In addition you have more flexibility regarding when you can travel. Look into your options before deciding.

**Plane:** Airplane travel within Europe is very comfortable and rapid and recently has become very affordable. There are many trips throughout Europe and Spain planned by university student organizations that you can take advantage of once you arrive. This is probably the least expensive way to travel. Look into those trips and also check out student discounts at any local travel agent in Valencia. You should be able to find some bargains on airfare.

**Note:** If you plan to travel extensively, perhaps during a long break, it is wise to call the country's embassy to insure that no other documents, aside from your passport, are needed to travel to that country. You may be unpleasantly surprised to find you need an extra letter or even a visa to enter a certain country. And, most importantly, always bring your passport – you cannot cross international borders without it. You must have the original, not a photocopy. If you do not have the proper papers, you may be asked to get off the train at the border. (It has happened, trust me!) Be prepared before you go.

## WHAT TO BRING

### Valencia

The weather in Valencia is mild. Winter is relatively short. There is very little rain and the average temperature is in the 50s or 40s. It will get cooler in the late fall through early spring and students remind us that you should take some warmer clothes for those days. Be sure to bring some warm clothes (and a jacket) as buildings are not heated as warmly as in the States. It is very nice beginning in late spring through late fall and hot during the summer (May through September). In general you can expect a much more moderate climate than in New York.

### Other Parts of Spain

If you plan to travel throughout Spain, keep in mind that each region has a distinct climate. To the north you will find cooler areas with more rainfall and several spectacular mountain chains. In the south the climate is hot and dry in the warmer months and moderate and mild in the cooler months. Andalusia has weather similar to the southwest United States and is a great place to go in the spring. (Visit the Feria if you can.) Remember that Spain is a developed nation with consumer goods similar to those found here. If you forget something, you can always buy it in Spain. Buildings in Spain are not heated as warmly as in the United States so warm shirts and sweaters that can be layered, as well as warm socks, a bathrobe, house slippers, and gloves, can be very useful if you are in the colder regions.

### Planning Your Wardrobe

No matter what we advise you to pack, you will find some things are necessary and others aren't. It will depend on what you do and how you live. You will want to be able to blend into your surroundings at times, and your clothing can make a difference. Therefore, it is wise to come prepared with clothes for all occasions. In Spain, dressing appropriately is more important than having a lot of variety. In general, Spaniards dress up to go out and have a few nice outfits rather than twenty casual ones. But you will still need jeans, as they are in fashion, and sweats to relax around the house. Clothing prices in Spain are higher than in the US, and the quality is variable. You might find some nice outfits to buy there, but will probably want to depend on what you already have. You can ask friends who have been to Spain, read about dress in the *Let's Go* guidebook, and then pack whatever you think will be best for you.

Although laundry services are provided as part of the homestay program, the laundry may not always be done exactly the way you would hope. It is prudent to wash all new garments before you take them with you, just to be on the safe side. Furthermore, do not take your favorite, favorite things if they cannot withstand unpredictable happenings.

Toilet articles and medicines comparable to those in the U.S. are easily available. If you anticipate needing a certain prescription medicine, you may be more comfortable bringing a supply with you. Carry copies of prescriptions you use regularly, including eyeglasses and contacts. You may not be able to get exactly what you want or need abroad. On the other hand, do not bring enormous amounts of day-to-day products unless you absolutely must have your favorites. Such products can be purchased easily and quite inexpensively in Spain.

## **Packing**

**Pack lightly!** If you can't carry your luggage around the block without undue fatigue, repack, because no one is going to carry it for you. If you don't already have the luggage you intend to use on your trip, check out bags with wheels or a wheeled carrier, since two large suitcases can be very hard to move. **You may have to carry them up the stairs to your homestay** if there is no elevator in the building. If you plan to travel extensively while in Europe, take along a smaller bag to hold just enough for those trips. This backpack or another similar piece of luggage can be used as a carry-on when you fly over. The basic guideline is, "Don't pack more than you want to carry yourself." Again, Spaniards don't have a different outfit for every day of the month, so you won't need one either. And remember, you can buy just about anything you need in Spain. Students who have been to Spain recommend the following:

- Guide book of Spain
- English/Spanish dictionary
- Pictures of your family, friends, home town, and university
- Small gifts for your host family and new friends
- Batteries (expensive in Spain)
- Battery-operated alarm clock (a must!)
- Camera
- Sweatshirts, sweaters, or a light jacket of some sort for cool evenings, plus a warm jacket
- Umbrella
- Sneakers or comfortable shoes
- Sunglasses and sunscreen
- Journal (a great way to keep track of your adventures)
- I-pod
- Feminine products (if you have a brand preference)
- Zip lock baggies for traveling
- Dressy clothes (one outfit, anyway, to be on the safe side; see the discussion above about what is generally appropriate)
- Hairdryer (but note comments on using electricity in someone's house)
- Some sort of small purse or pouch to put around your neck so that you can keep valuables on your person. This should be something that you might wear under your clothes.
- Chapstick! (Spain is much more dry)

**NOTE: Your host family will provide bedding and towels so you do not need to bring any with you.**

## **CULTURE SHOCK AND OTHER NEW FEELINGS**

Here are some **strategies** that previous participants found useful during their time abroad. The first thing to bear in mind is that you are going to be a foreigner. Your hope is that people will be "nice" to you and most will. However, people vary in their reactions to those who don't seem to know what



to do and how to ask for information. Usually, they try to speak slowly. (Or sometimes more loudly! Be prepared: they are not yelling at you, rather they are trying to help you understand.) They also try giving directions, being friendly overall, and perhaps introducing you to another person. Others may get frustrated and irritated at the person who does not understand; sometimes they get annoyed at having to repeat themselves. After a certain period of time, they think that you should *know* certain things by now, and they don't want to help any more. Try to be understanding of other people's positions. Just as they need to be patient with you, you should be patient with them.

When you first arrive in Spain, there will be a certain "grace period." You won't know how to do the simplest things, such as how to mail a letter or take a bus, and you will sometimes say the wrong thing without meaning to. People will have to show you how to turn on the water; they have to tell you what you're eating; they'll have to try to figure out your wants and make their own wishes known. Take advantage of this good will as long as it lasts! Soon enough you will be expected to be independent.

The second thing to bear in mind is that you will be subject to some mood swings that may be mild or severe. It is normal to feel euphoric when you first arrive. A few weeks in, it is normal to feel down and to wonder why everything is so "backwards" in whatever country you are in. Since you are trying to use a foreign language as well, it is common to think that you will never master it and that you have wasted many years in trying to learn it. Then comes a period of adjustment, both cultural and linguistic. By the end of your stay, you are likely to experience a strong wish to go home and remain in Spain simultaneously. After you come home, there is a further adjustment as you try to reconcile what you have experienced with what you have missed by being away. Don't be surprised at feeling culture shock upon coming home - it can actually be harder sometimes to adjust to life back in the U.S. You have been experiencing a completely different lifestyle for an extended period of time. There are definitely things about the United States that you will seemingly notice for the first time. This is normal and you'll readjust soon enough.

The third thing to be aware of is the feeling of having no constraints, of being invulnerable. **Be careful!!** You are away from your own culture, yet unaware of the unwritten rules of behavior in Spain. This liberation can lead to serious lapses in judgment if you do not watch yourself. If you violate actual laws, you could end up in jail. While you will have to talk to strangers in order to function, you must still use caution and good judgment in forming relationships. And while you are perhaps unaware of possible risks to your personal safety, they may still exist. You must remain alert. Remember, the same dangers exist in Spain (and all of Europe) as here. In cases where you do not have complete mastery of the language, there could be more dangers! Do not do anything you would not do at home, on campus, or in a big city like New York. Again, **always be careful and use good judgment!**

## LEARNING AND USING SPANISH

Using a foreign language for a long period of time is fun but exhausting. Until you have developed an efficient listening strategy, you pay too much attention to individual words. Relax! About two weeks in, exhaustion hits if you really have forced yourself to speak nothing but Spanish. Then you get over it. Obviously, you will be using English in your classes that are taught in English. It's outside of class that you must think about. Allowing yourself to speak English frequently will not help you learn Spanish, so try to avoid doing so. It's hard to do this when English is so much easier for you, but if enough of you have this goal in mind, you will be able to maintain the use of Spanish in many situations. If you can, speak to AIP staff in Spanish. If you can't, of course you should use English!

Everyone says they are going to Spain to "become fluent." Here's how to do it: when you get stuck, which is bound to happen, first, you learn to "talk around" the vocabulary you do not know, because you will never know all the words in Spanish any more than you know all the words in English. Then, you wait for someone to suggest the right word for what you have just tried to describe. People usually do this. Then you end up asking what the word they have just suggested means, and they tell you. Then you have to figure out if that is the right word, unless you recognize it as a word you already knew. Depending on how they explain their word to you, you will probably also have to look up the word in your dictionary to see what it means. Your language growth will occur because of this whole procedure, so welcome it and learn to do it. Eventually, the new words stick, but often not the first time! This is normal, so don't feel discouraged or embarrassed that you have to ask what something is called a million times.

Remember too that you control what you say; what you cannot control is how others speak to you. So even though you feel sheepish, you must ask if you do not know what you have been told. Also, don't be afraid to ask someone to slow down. Some Spaniards speak very fast. And, just like in English, there are many different accents and in Valencia, there is even another language that will sound something like French/something like Spanish to you: it's actually neither. **Warning:** You will become fluent in Spanish by using this method, but you may also cement your mistakes. It is important to pay attention to what you are learning in class so that you are **accurate** as well as fluent. Having said all this, recognize that speaking English once in a while with a native speaker can be "refreshing"; you can permit yourself an occasional treat without serious qualms (remember: occasional).

Another way you will develop your language skills is by eavesdropping. If you hear something that you don't understand very well, you may be able to have your host family explain it to you later. You can also benefit a lot from watching TV. But remember, if you tune into the middle of a Spanish language soap opera that had been running for ten years, even though you would understand all the words, you would not understand the situation or the relationships. So be kind to yourself -- you're not going to "get" them in Spanish if you can't even get them in English. Try the world news, movies, dubbed U.S. shows, and documentaries first, or watch a show with someone who has seen the series before and can get you up to speed.

## OTHER RESOURCES

Here are some additional resources that I've read about or others have mentioned. I can't vouch for them all, but they seem to be worth a look. Happy hunting!

### Web Sites

#### Spain/Valencia

[www.valnetro.com/](http://www.valnetro.com/)  
[www.upv.es/cv/valintro.html](http://www.upv.es/cv/valintro.html)  
<http://www.hostels.com/>  
[www.ozemail.com.au/~spain/valenci.htm](http://www.ozemail.com.au/~spain/valenci.htm)  
[www.upv.es/cv/visit.html](http://www.upv.es/cv/visit.html)

#### Travel

<http://www.webofculture.com/edu/gestures.html>  
<http://www.eurotrip.com/>  
<http://www.ricksteves.com/ccinfo/sp.htm>

## **Books**

There are many, many books on Spain.

**Lonely Planet Spain**, John Noble (Editor)

**Discovering Spain: An Uncommon Guide**, Penelope Casas

**Travelers' Tales: Spain**, Lucy McCauley

**Iberia**, James A. Michener

**Homage to Catalonia**, George Orwell

**The Cambridge Companion to Modern Spanish Culture**, David T. Gies (Editor)

**Culture Shock: Spain**, Marie Louise Graff

**The New Spaniards**, John Hooper

**Spain: The Root and the Flower: An Interpretation of Spain and the Spanish People**, John A. Crow

**The Spanish Labyrinth: An Account of the Social and Political Background of the Civil War**, Gerald Brenan

**The Spanish Civil War**, Gabriele Ranzato

**The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War**, Peter Carroll

**The Spanish Inquisition**, Henry Kamen