

SOME ADVICE FOR VOLUNTEERS AT FSC

SCHEDULE

As the contract explains, the Foundation requires that volunteers commit to a minimum of six months of volunteer time. The weekly schedule will be decided upon mutually between the volunteer and the Foundation, but it must include a *minimum* of 20 hours/week. The volunteer is expected to be flexible with the schedule if deadlines or unforeseen circumstances arise. The Foundation also tries to be very flexible with its volunteers.

VISAS (for Americans)

You do not need to apply for a work visa since you will not be making a salary here. Getting a Spanish work visa granted is VERY difficult and we don't recommend approaching it this way. Since the Foundation is not paying you, there is no way for us to get the necessary governmental authorization. For our purposes, you don't need a student visa either. You should only pursue the student visa path if your university is demanding that you show them a student visa in order for you to get academic credit for the experience. We would expect/hope that the volunteer contract with the Foundation would be good enough for this purpose.

What we recommend is coming on a normal tourist visa that is automatically granted every time you enter Spain. When an American enters Spain, their passport is stamped with a tourist visa giving them the right to remain in the country legally for 90 days (three months). In practice, all you have to do is leave Spain before this period of time expires, re-enter, get stamped, and the 90 day period starts again. A trip to the States is perfect. Or a simple weekend trip to Portugal or France, for example, would be fine as long as you make sure to get the stamp upon re-entry (sometimes immigration agents don't bother to stamp, but tell them that you need one). We have had quite a few volunteers work here for periods of several months this way—on a tourist visa. Basically it takes advantage of a loophole in the system, but it is legal.

HOUSING

It is tempting to try to plan your stay well in advance of arriving. But, in terms of housing, the best advice is to look once you get here. It may feel a little more stressful that way, but it's much more efficient.

If you know friends here in Barcelona, the most convenient (and inexpensive) option is to stay with them for a week or so while looking. If you don't know anyone here to stay with, someone at the Foundation might know someone who can house you for a short while (send us an email). Otherwise, there are plenty of reasonable pensions and hostals that will give you a good home-base from which to look. Expect to devote your full-time attention to finding housing when you arrive. It should take between 5 days and two weeks, depending on how motivated and/or picky you are. The Foundation is very understanding of the stress involved in arriving in a new country, and we will give you the time you need to find housing and get established before starting to work a full schedule.

It is best to look for an apartment by word of mouth, through the ex-pat network, postings at International House, postings on a great website called www.habitatgejove.com, or www.rentabedroom.com, postings at universities, postings at hospitals, the local classifieds newspaper "Segunda Ma" (which you may also be able to find online), etc. Or if you are willing to spend the money, the easiest way is to get a "broker" who charges about one month's rent to provide you listings. Be aware that many of the classified listings that you find in "Segunda Ma" will be brokers. If you are looking to avoid the fee and deal directly with owners, respond only to those that say "particulares". Rents for one bedroom in an apartment tend to run about \$300-400/mo. Living alone would be more expensive.

When you go looking at places, take a list of questions that you want to ask, including but not limited to:

Is there a fianza (security deposit that you get back at the end of the stay)?

Are gastos (utilities) included? Which ones? If not, how much do they run per month?

Is there access to a telephone? Incoming and/or outgoing calls?

How is the hot water/water pressure (gas tends to give you a longer run of hot water than electric)?

Is there a washing machine?

Do I have unlimited access to the living room, kitchen, etc.?

Is there heat? Or estufas (electric heaters) for each room?

Is there a microwave/ television?

Do the other roommates mind if you have visitors?

Do cell phones get reception in the apartment?

Is there a portero (doorman)?

As for neighbourhoods, it depends on what you are looking for. Definitely devote a day or two to getting a feel for the areas once you get here. Buy a good map with a street index! Campsa prints a good big one, or you can find the taxi driver's map to the city sold in newspaper stands. Gràcia or Barrio Gótico are good areas if you like narrow streets, older buildings, less expensive rents, with more cool bars and restaurants. Gràcia is one of the up and coming neighbourhoods at the moment. The Born is similar in feel, but since it is a very hip area of town, it is more expensive. The Eixample, Sagrada Familia, or Sant Antoni are great if you can go a bit more expensive and want a modern building, wide avenues, more affluent, but more residential. We don't recommend the Raval (also known as Barrio Chino) especially farther south near the water. Most of it is cheap but a bit run down and dangerous; though the part up by Ronda Universitaria is fine. Poble Nou is another option; an area that used to be dominated by warehouses but now is being reclaimed by clubs, bars, and residential space. It is a little farther from the center of town, but it is on the same metro line as the Foundation. The neighbourhood closest to the Foundation is called Eixample Dret, but any neighbourhood that has a metro stop on the Red #1 or Yellow #4 subway line (or any of several different bus lines) will be convenient (our closest stops are Arco de Triomfo and Uroquinaona).

You also might want to think about whether you want to live alone or with others. Unless you know you are only happy living alone, living with others tends to provide a better support and social network. Think about whether you prefer to live with Spaniards, with people from your home country, or with other foreigners. If you live with people who speak your own language you will rarely have the opportunity to be fully immersed in Spanish. Living with Spaniards is the best way to learn the language and to learn what life is really like here. At the same time, the ex-pat community can be very fun and is filled with interesting people from all different cultures. It all depends on what you are looking to get out of the experience.

PHONE

Buy a mobile phone once you are here. Everyone has one and you will be hard to reach if you don't. They are also indispensable when house-hunting. On a tourist visa you will not be permitted to sign up for a contract plan, but prepaid cards work just as well. A mobile phone store (or the Corte Ingles) will be able to help you choose the carrier and phone model you prefer. Ask about special sign-up deals with extra free minutes.

(For Americans)

In terms of long-distance calls with the States, it is MUCH cheaper to call from the US to Spain than vice-versa. Look on the internet or in the newspaper stands for good plans, cards, dialup numbers. The long distance rates you will have on your mobile plan are a rip-off. Best of all is to have friends and family from the States call you on the cheaper plans that can be found there.

BANK ACCOUNTS

Without a work visa you will not be allowed to set up a regular checking account here. Though there are special accounts that foreigners can open with out a visa. However, it's not necessary since working from

a foreign (American or European) account is no problem. ATM cards and credit cards work wherever (and tend to give a good rate). Personal checks are not very practical.

APPLIANCES

Hairdryers, electric razors, and other small appliances will work here, but buy your converter (for the voltage) and your adapter (for the shape of the plug) in your own country. It can be hard to find them here (especially for Americans). Many PCs, mini-stereos, battery chargers, and other high-tech appliances will not require a converter because the plug will already be able to adapt to anything between 110-220 volts (read the sticker on the back). You will still need a plug adapter.

You can also buy appliances here, though note that electronics tend to be a bit expensive.

METRO

The 3 and 5 day passes end up being pretty bad deals unless you are travelling *a lot* on the metro. It is better to go with a T10 pass. If you show a passport or drivers licence you can buy an economical monthly pass (just don't lose it because it is non-refundable!).

DOCUMENTS

Don't travel day to day with your valuable documents. There is a lot of petty thievery and pick-pocketing here. Carry your drivers licence, a fotocopy of your passport (and visa if you have one), and emergency contact numbers with you. Leave the passport, airplane tickets, original visa documentation, etc. at home. Keep copies of your credit cards, drivers licence, insurance cards, etc. at home too, just in case your wallet is stolen/lost and you have to cancel them. Travel within the country does not require a passport, just a form of foto ID.

PLANE TICKETS

Fares are much cheaper in the off seasons, so avoid buying to travel over Christmas and after March if possible. If you buy the ticket in an off-period, the return leg can often be during a peak time without incurring the rate hike. For example, buying a January-May roundtrip ticket in January is still relatively cheap. For good fares try the internet, try Council, try STA, all the usual suspects.

If you buy a roundtrip ticket FROM Spain once you are here, be sure to travel with a photocopy of your FINAL return-leg ticket to prove that you do intend to leave Spain at some point. Otherwise, the agents will see you returning to Spain on a second return-leg of a ticket and will give you a hard time because it looks like you are coming to Spain to stay (illegally). They will want to see proof that you have a ticket booked to leave at some point.

A good, cheap travel agency once you are here is Viatgi located at Ronda Universitat 1, viatgi@grupoeuropa.com (Tel. 93 301 16 29). It's open through siesta.

WEATHER

The weather in general is coastal Mediterranean. During a winter cold snap temperatures will get down to freezing for a few days at a time, but more often it is between 7 and 15 degrees C (about 45 and 60 F). Winter lasts between about November and March. Fall and Spring are pleasant (even beach weather at times). Summer is very warm, with temperatures reaching the low 30s C (high 80s F). Blue skies are the norm year round, though rain falls more often in the Fall. Be aware that despite the temperate climate, buildings tend not to have central heat, so in the winter the temperatures can feel chilly.

ATTIRE

The dress at the Foundation is quite casual. You won't see people in suits, ties, or formal wear. Slacks, casual skirts, sweaters, or tops are fine. Jeans are acceptable as well. Note that Spaniards tend not to wear shorts, even in the summer. Girls, especially, will look very foreign in a pair of shorts.

QUESTIONS

The Foundation has (and has had in the past) many foreign students, a handful of long-term ex-pats, and a good number of Catalans who have lived in the city for years. With so many perspectives, we can give you a well-informed response to almost any question you can come up with. Do not hesitate to email us with any concerns about preparations or about living here!