

Life Lessons
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Going into the study abroad experience I had some ideas as to what I should expect. I would travel. I would see the world firsthand. I would make leaps and bounds in my maturity as never before. I secretly expected to fall in love with a tall dark and handsome foreigner, a fantasy I quickly filed under the Nora-Roberts-romance-novel scenario.

The biggest lesson I learned was about my host family. It was a lesson, overall, in patience. Now the typical thing to say here would be how I fell in love with my family, how my Spanish skyrocketed, and how I now have a second mother. This is true, but what I learned more so is this:

Only Americans snack and your host mother really does want you to become fat. She told me I could be thin when I returned to the United States. I've learned all about meatballs and lentil soup, just as quickly as I've forgotten about real mashed potatoes, pesto, and dishes without garlic. I cannot drink Spanish caffeinated coffee (not even once) because it makes me *muy nerviosa*. Eating the same thing for a week straight, then having it disappear for another three is a common occurrence. The television is a prerequisite for every meal. In fact, most of my life revolves around food and I have somehow grown the capacity to devour 6 tons a day. Oh yeah, and oranges cure all.

Soft feet are a must when walking up the stairs at 5 in the morning. I can live without dryer-tight jeans. I give myself at least forty-five minutes to get to class from my house, yet every weekend I find it okay to leave 10 minutes before meeting halfway across town. Three-inch padded socks do not equal slippers and if I come in sweating it is not okay to take off my jacket because, just as my parents always said, "It's cold, put on your coat."

I can now be spoken to like I am ten-years-old, and not take it personally at all. Living with my *senora* is like living with my grandma.

But I mean, come on, she is so *guay* (cool). For who else would have *La Maja Desnuda* by Francisco Goya on the wall next to the television, or stock five chocolate bars in the fridge and remind me to eat as much as I like? Who else would imitate a snail to describe it, or have an irrational fear of wind?

My experience is not exactly the same as everyone else's but we all have at least one thing in common. My classmates are going to go home and think about their apartment and whomever they lived with when they go back to the U.S. They're going to settle in and one day, out of the blue, develop a sudden longing for *croquetas* and *Pasapalabra*. At least I know I will.