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The Study Abroad Experience Explained Through Oranges

First week in Sevilla: I try eating an orange off a tree by the Cathedral. Its intense sourness instantly teaches me that these oranges aren't for human consumption.

I'm inhaling second-hand smoke by the pack. I've never been stared at so much in my life. The city is a maze of cute but impossible alleys that branch off and intersect and change names at whim. I'm starving by noon and tired before dinner is served.

First week in my homestay: I make a terrific mess peeling an orange at lunch. My hands are covered in sticky orange sap and smell wonderful.

I try wearing cute shoes like Spanish women, but with two hours of walking daily, my feet protest and I revert back to sneakers. I purchase a phone entirely in Spanish. The salesperson surely thinks I'm an idiot, but I did it, my first successful business transaction in Spanish.

Second week in my homestay: Seeing me struggle repeatedly, my señora teaches me how to peeling an orange neatly. I'm stubborn and try to perfect my own method instead.

Everything shuts down at mid-day and on Sundays; I wonder how anything gets done in this country. Isn't it unhealthy to eat dinner so late? I won't catch a cold because I'm not wearing slippers, that's ridiculous!

Third week in my homestay: Still struggling with my technique, I try my señora's. I'm surprised how easy it is and no longer dread eating oranges in front of my señora.

The lack of internet in my homestay is killing me, but I force myself to try new things in my downtime. I explore the local library and check out a collection of Spanish short stories. I put up with annoying ads to watch my señora's favorite TV show with her and find it addicting.

Halfway through the semester: In a lecture about Spanish etymology for my interest group "España y sus Vecinos," I learn that the word "naranja" comes from Arabic and realize that the word for "orange" in my native language, Telugu, is almost identical.

Elders here complain about the state of youth, children are in a rush to grow up, and everyone's struggling to make ends meet, just like in the U.S. I realize it's impossible to tell whether someone is a Spaniard or a foreigner based on his laugh.

Semana Santa: The orange blossoms emerge, filling the city with their sweet scent.

My family visits me in Sevilla and I proudly show them around, telling them information I've learned from cultural activities. They meet my señora. I'm nervous because they don't speak

Spanish, but she yaps away so enthusiastically that there's no time for translation or awkwardness. Her warmth and love for what she does transcends language barriers.

Last week of classes: In my semantics class I learn the phrase "media naranja," meaning "soulmate."

What'll happen to Pablo and Lucía on Arrayán after I leave? I'll miss crossing the Guadalquivir everyday. Will I remember how to drive? I'd like to walk more. I'll miss my Spanish friends and guías who've made me feel comfortable here. I want to reach out to international students at my home university. I'll miss every sign and commercial being a learning opportunity. Oh no, I'm spelling English words "-ción."

Studying abroad is a process of peeling back layers to discover a culture- messy, juicy, and bursting with vitality- while opening yourself up to that culture. As with oranges, it may not be love at first bite, but eventually you'll find some aspect that's a perfect fit for you.