

Central Academy Spring Break Trip: Spain & Morocco

This past March, three Central Academy teachers, Dr. Tom Forsgren, Lindsay Fredregill, and Tamara Pfantz, collaborated with students to plan a 13-day trip to Spain and Morocco. A total of nineteen students participated in the biennial Central Academy AP/IB Spring Break Trip. The exciting itinerary included stops in Sevilla, Granada, Barcelona, Tangier, Chefchaouen, and London.

Students were eager to engage with local culture and to sample the foods typical of each region. We savored tagine in Morocco, tapas and paella in Spain, and exquisite Indian food in London. Those with more adventurous palates tried oxtail and noodles blackened with squid ink. Cultural highlights for the students included a flamenco show in the Roma cave dwellings of Sacromonte in Granada, a Spanish guitar performance in a cathedral in Barcelona, cozy sleeper cars on an overnight train, and bartering for goods in the souks of Chefchaouen.

The strategic planning of this trip allowed students to experience vast contrasts as we moved from bustling Spain to rural Morocco and from old-world Sevilla to modern Barcelona. Students quickly noted differences in the architecture, cuisines, and cultures of Spain and Morocco, but also recognized the many similarities due to the shared history between the two countries.

One student remarked that she loved “learning about the history of the two regions and being able to see the Catholic and Moorish cultures reflected in the architecture. Going from Spain to Morocco offered a great contrast.” –I.B.

“I loved the old-world feel of places like Sevilla and Granada. The people in Chefchaouen were much more friendly and welcoming than I could have imagined and I could honestly see myself living there someday.” —A.W.

A highlight for many was the half-day hiking excursion in the mountains of Talassemtane National Park. The steep inclines tested many, but the astounding views made the climb a worthwhile endeavor. One student commented, “when we reached the top of the big rock and just looked down the mountain, it was unreal” (I.B.). Another’s summation of the experience was “killer” (A.O.).

Students were immersed in the Spanish language which allowed them many opportunities to try out their interactive speaking skills in authentic contexts. They were delighted to discover that knowing Spanish enabled them to communicate in Morocco when Arabic and English were not shared languages. The students’ background in Spanish allowed them to connect more easily with the locals and to engage more independently in their travel experience. For many, their interest in studying the Spanish language and culture was solidified as they experienced not only how relevant the language is, but also their own sense of accomplishment in using the language for meaningful communication.

As with every trip, the greatest aspect for the teachers is witnessing our students’ worldviews broadening on a daily basis. The extent to which their ideas about people, culture, language, and history shift is, at times, incomprehensible.

“I have a more developed idea of what Africa’s countries are. I knew that it was not all mud huts and tribes, but being there, even in just one country, cemented the idea of a diversely developed continent.” –A.O.

“My view of Africa as monolithically Saharan was quelled instantly.” –A.W.

“The world moves slower than in the United States. We eat faster, we shop faster, we sleep earlier. Meals in Europe and Morocco take an hour or more...people stay out late and enjoy their life. People are less consumed by work.” –I.B.

What do students now appreciate more about life in the United States? The availability of potable water and toilet paper!

International trips such as this contribute immensely to student learning. The ability to make the world our classroom and to foster in students a desire to travel, to interact with diverse cultures, to recognize the sameness in other cultures, and at the same time to appreciate the differences, is a crucial learning for students if they want to be change-makers on a global scale. The experience of international travel pays back in dividends throughout students' lifetimes as they continually reflect on those experiences abroad and are able to engage in the world with new perspectives and a greater capacity for understanding those with diverse backgrounds.

We offer much gratitude to those who contribute to making these unique travel experiences possible for students.

In friendship,

Dr. Thomas Forsgren, IB & AP History

Lindsay Fredregill, IB Spanish

Tamara Pfantz, IB Theory of Knowledge