

## Study Abroad Story: Gabrielle Neuman

### Spain

My name is Gabrielle Neuman. I'm a senior Elementary Education and Spanish double major and I studied abroad in Granada, Spain the spring semester of 2018.

So I think the thing that changed me the most was my sense of independence that came from multiple experiences abroad. I traveled to Spain on my own which I had never done and that had forced me or allowed me to become more independent in the way of traveling. I had some issues in Paris. I had some issues when I got into Spain and that allowed me to figure out what I needed to do in order to get to where I was going, my destination.

And then later in the semester, I traveled quite a bit throughout the semester to places like Paris, and the Canary Islands, Barcelona...quite a few places. I was actually fortunate enough to have a week off of school in April. And so towards the end of my study abroad time, I traveled to Germany, Soberland specifically, and Switzerland on my own. Initially, it wasn't planned that way but because of certain circumstances, it ended up that I was going alone for a week. And that was a little bit intimidating at first, but it ended up being a really awesome and eye opening experience for me. I booked some tours, so I made sure I was gonna get outside of my Airbnb and do some things. I hiked on my own in Switzerland. I walked the city on my own in Berlin, got to see the Berlin Wall, all that kind of very touristy stuff. But I was very... I had a sense of pride after that. I was very proud that I was able to do that. My parents were a little hesitant right away, trying to see if my cousins could come over from the US, but I knew I could do it, especially after traveling a lot throughout the semester.

A lot of the travel took a lot of organization, and so that was a big part of knowing... Okay, I need to get on this bus at this time . . . figuring out the language barriers and at one point I was able to recall some German that I learned when I was little, so that was exciting. But yeah, that definitely created a sense of independence, especially when I came back to Spain, I knew I could do it on my own.

At the end of the semester, I also walked the *Camino de Santiago* in northern Spain, which if you're unfamiliar, you can walk from the border of France to Santiago de Compostela. And that is... I'm not sure how long that stretch of *camino* is, but the one that I walked was from Ponferrada to Santiago and that was about 220 km. So you're going in the rain, you're going in the mountains, you're doing all that fun stuff. And that was all organized on my own, just like all my other travels were. I didn't really know what I was getting into, but it created a sense of spontaneity, I think. I'm usually a very organized person so I was also a little bit hesitant to do

that, but I'm very glad I did. Another sense of independence... knowing that I can do things that I didn't think I'd be able to.

And then just generally throughout the semester, I had a block of time on Monday, I had about two hours, where I'd just walk through the city. And I thought that'd be a little weird right away. I'm not used to being on my own. I'm used to being on a college campus where there's tons of students who speak your language, but it was honestly one of my favorite parts of the semester. Just having that time to myself and putting my headphones in and walking through the city . . . seeing things that I wouldn't have been able to see if I had just been confined to my bubble, to my group of friends. And I think that was a really large part in what moved me towards traveling alone and then doing the *Camino de Santiago*. So definitely that's one of the biggest changes I've seen being back on campus. I don't know if it's always been a positive thing. Sometimes it's hard to reintegrate into this culture where we're surrounded by people all the time, but just that independence and knowing that I can do things that I might not have been able to do before.