

The Erasmus Experience

March 2024 was my lucky month: I had the opportunity to be part of the Erasmus experience in Valencia. In this article I am going to talk about this incredible, life-changing and inspiring adventure.

The Erasmus is an European project which allows students from different countries to take part in an exchange experience to get to know each other's cultures.

This year our school has organized this awesome trip to Valencia, which has lasted a week. In November some Spanish students had already come to Italy to stay with our families and share our daily life. I hosted an exchange girl called Sofia and we really enjoyed our week together, so in March it was my turn to visit her in her hometown.

I left from Bologna's airport on Monday 4th with a group of Italian teachers and students from the third year of secondary school. There were also some kids attending the fifth year of primary school. As older students we were assigned the role of taking care of a primary school boy or girl during the trip. I really enjoyed bonding with my little girl, Linda, and I think that this responsibility made me grow, too.

We arrived in Valencia at about 9pm, we were a bit tired but also excited because it was the beginning of our first big adventure abroad without our parents.

However, we got to know our "host parents" pretty soon: when I arrived, Sofia and her mum Lily came to welcome and hug me, which made me feel very at ease and definitely less anxious. We went to their house on the northern side of Valencia and I immediately loved it! It was a really cozy apartment and I felt at home.

I spent an amazing time with Sofia's family: we went to the seaside together, I ate my first churros with her and her dad, I tried Lily's paella and my first Bubble Tea with Sofia and her friends in the city center where we went shopping, too. I was lucky enough to see people building some Carnival rides for the most popular celebration in Valencia: the Fallas.

I adored the city: it was vibrant and full of history, the roads were spacious and with orange and palm trees all along the streets, which made it pretty exotic.

During the time I spent in Valencia, I also had the chance to go to Sofia's school and get to see how Spanish schools work. The name of the Institution was Comenius: I was amazed at how big and colorful the place was. The walls, the stairs and the hallways were full of students' drawings and inspiring quotes by important people like Nelson Mandela. The school was very luminous as well, there were balconies all around it, where students could hang out and enjoy fresh air. In the school there were also lots of gardens and places to play every kind of sport, such as basketball or soccer, but also an amphitheater where people could sit down and eat their snack or listen to a lesson. Comenius was definitely an inclusive and modern place, full of technologies to help also students with disabilities, such as computers, tablets and even a t-shirt printer. I thought that everyone should want to go to school there every morning!

I loved this Spanish school because students were more independent than in Italy: they could move to different classes for every subject, go wherever they wanted at break time and they didn't have school on Saturdays.

During our week in Valencia we spent time in the classrooms listening to the lessons and took part in special workshops using Arduino and 3D printers which we used to make medals with the first letter of our name, and t-shirts with our drawings to keep memory of the trip.

We also made a special Valencian drink, the Horchata, it was so tasty!

We visited lots of places of interest in the city too, like the historical city center, a modern Art museum with optical illusion artworks, the City of Arts and Sciences, where we learnt about the planets, and the Oceanographic Museum, the fantastic aquarium where we saw fish like sharks or jellyfish, but also penguins and a dolphins' show: it was stunning!

I really loved Mascletà, a famous and unique 10 minute long fireworks show that we saw in the city center. It was so exciting but when it began I was a little afraid because everyone told me that it was going to be very loud, but I liked it so much!

The last day in Valencia I felt blue because I had had a marvelous week in the city, meeting great people and seeing so many new things: everyone was so friendly, kind and helpful and I really bonded with my host family so I was very unhappy to have to say goodbye.

Now that I am back home, I think that during this experience I gained more self-confidence and independence, I improved my English, I met a lot of Italian students with whom I shared great adventures and built new friendships, I learnt something more about technologies and Spanish culture. This exchange project showed me a new version of myself: an open-minded Maria Sole always ready to gain experience and learn something new that make me grow.

I would like to become a doctor and I believe that Erasmus has been an experience which will help me to reach my future goals, so I couldn't be happier about this opportunity that has definitely been one of my year's highlights.