

IESE Business School (University of Navarra)

Fall Semester 2017 (September-December)

MBA Full-time Program

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Congratulations !

If you were selected to an exchange at IESE Barcelona, you truly won the lottery.

You are going to live in perhaps the BEST city in Europe, and study at a Top-3 university in Europe (and 10th in the world).

The only problem will be to handle your re-location thoughts after landing back...

Barcelona

Although many people have visited Barcelona as tourists for traveling purposes, it is perhaps even more extraordinary city to live in and study.

Without a doubt, Barcelona is among the best places you can wish to live in.

It is a well-rounded city and offers almost everything you need from any aspect – great weather, remarkable architecture, beautiful beaches, vibrant nightlife, infinite attractions, warm people, super-easy transportation and a tier-1 University (IESE Business School).

Barcelona is the capital and largest city of Catalonia, and the second most populous municipality of Spain. It is located at the northern-eastern side of Spain, which makes it relatively easy to explore other beautiful locations during the stay. I managed to travel to 6 different locations during my stay and would highly recommend you to do so as well. It is cheap, easy, and contributes massively to the overall exchange experience (especially if you do it with friends from the University).

The weather in Barcelona is usually great – summer time is quite hot (but not overwhelming, unlike in Israel), while winters are better than most European cities, as Barcelona tends to have only few days of rain a month (November is the rainiest month, with around 6-8 days of rain on average). I happened to be very lucky, and during my stay it rained less than 10 days in total.

Visa

In general, Spain is part of the Schengen Visa Agreement. The Schengen Area is comprised of 26 countries that have agreed to allow free movement of their citizens within this area as a single country (The UK and some of Eastern-Europe countries like Serbia are yet not part of the agreement).

Because Israel is not part of the Schengen Agreement, in order to stay in this area in general and in Barcelona in particular more than 90 days you will need to issue a Student Visa.

For a tourist visa (the ordinary Visa when travelling inside Europe), the rule states that you can stay up to 90 days on each 180 days period. Issuing a Visa (Multi-entry Student Visa) will enable you to extend your traveling to 180 days and should cost around 200 Euros, however takes some time.

Due to time restrictions to apply for a Student Visa (which normally take between 1-3 months overall), I personally did not apply for a Student Visa, which retrospectively saved

me a lot of time and effort. Keep in mind that fall semester normally starts at the beginning of September (around the 10th, depending on your courses), and finishes at the beginning of December (around the 5th) - hence you can get along easily without it, especially if you plan to travel during the period to non-Schengen countries (UK, Eastern Europe etc.) which will not be taken in your 90-days count.

Accommodation

Barcelona is an incredible city, and similarly to Tel-Aviv, the vast majority of the important places in the city are concentrated in the center.

This is why, in my opinion, especially as you will be traveling for a limited time of 3 months only, it is crucial to pick a good location which will help you get the most out of the city, with a walking distance to most places.

Though the city have many nice different cool neighborhoods, the center is normally referred as Plaza Catalunya. The Famous "T" shape of Avenida Diagonal on the top crosses the city from east to west, and Passeig de Gracia – the most exclusive shopping street, which starts from Gracia neighborhood and reaches Plaza Catalunya.

IESE is located quite far out of the main part of the city, and you should not search for a flat there.

There are couple of neighborhoods in the center, ranked according to my experience for living:

4. Sarrià-Sant Gervasi – Located on the north-west part of the Diagonal Street. Nice neighborhood, considered an expensive one. It is the closest to IESE, but farther away from the center of the city and Plaza Catalunya. In case you choose to stay here, I would advise to pick an apartment near Plaza Francesc de Macia, which is mid-way from school to the center.
3. The Gothic Area – The touristic part of the city, located on the right side to the La Rambla Street. The place to visit when you have spare time. Very fun and energetic, contains many shops and restaurants, vibrant, old architecture and beautiful streets which are a must to explore. A great place if you visit the city for 3-5 days, however it may be a bit overwhelming if you experience it daily for 3 months.
2. Gracia – Small-urban young area. Some students live here as it offers many cool bars and places to drink & eat. Very similar to Florentine in Tel Aviv. It has a quite-centric location overall, however there is almost no transportation inside. If you pick this neighborhood, I recommend living in its southern part (close to the Diagonal-Passeig de Gracia).
1. Eixample – The ultimate place to live in the city. Eixample is located on the left & right sides of Passeig de Gracia Street. Offers the perfect balance between a centric area, with walking distances to all places (La Rambla, Plaza Catalunya and Nightlife spots) but not too intensive as the touristic neighborhoods (The Gothic & Segrada Familia). It is full with transportation and Metro lines, and is relatively easy to get to almost anywhere.

Keep in mind it will be a bit more expensive as a result (but yet worth it). Make sure you are close to the Passeig de Gracia, as the outer parts of Eixample can be a bit distant.

An easy thumb of rule will be to pick a place as close as possible to Passeig de Gracia (and Avenida Diagonal).

Finding an apartment can be quite a mission. The Spanish are well-known for their laziness, and many agencies close during mid-day for a break. It is important you arrive at least a week before the semester starts to search for a flat (I stayed in an AirBnB during my search, which was very expensive). A good located flat with 2-3 roommates usually ranges from 500-700 Euros. As my girlfriend joined me, we stayed in a 1-bedroom flat.

After visiting 15 different agencies, most of them being unhelpful and quite pricy, while some others horrible (Engel & Volkers - stay away), we found a fair agency with great, renovated flats – Aspacios (<https://www.aspacios.com/apartments-barcelona/>).

In case you come alone and look for a flat with roommates, I recommend you contact the coordinator from IESE and ask her to add you to the previous year's Facebook groups and post there as soon as you can.

About IESE

IESE Business School offers one of the Top-3 Master of Business Administration programs in Europe, and is ranked within the 10 best MBA programs worldwide. It was established and is under guidance of Harvard, which explains its very-demanding nature.

The school has been growing steadily in the recent years, and expanded to other campuses in Madrid, New York, Munich and Sao Paulo. The MBA program is a structured 2-year program and around 300 students start it each year, more than 80% are international students. Due to the structure of the program (which consists of 5 modules/semesters, including an internship between 1st and 2nd year) you will have courses availability depending on the module you join or participate in. In case you have a specific course requirement, I recommend to check it in advance, as unlike in Tel Aviv, each term contains its specific core-courses and you can attend only courses in your specific module.

Although the largest community is the local Spanish candidates (20% of IESE), the nationalities are very diverse, with relatively higher number of Indian, Brazilian and Chinese students. This wide range of nationalities is remarkable for exposing yourself to other cultures, people and languages. Also, many of the students took / planning to take part in the exchange in Tel Aviv University, so feel free to give them your advises and recommendations as well.

The exchange group arriving to IESE from other countries are usually around 30 people, and you will have a group meeting in the first few days of school. It is a good option to get connected and engage some activities together.

Unfortunately, there are not many Israelis that are participating in the full-time program but there is a small Jewish group, which is fun to celebrate with holidays.

Campus and Atmosphere

The school facilities and infrastructure are incredible, and are built with the highest standards possible. Classrooms are huge and comfortable, with advanced equipment to ensure students make the most out of classes.

IESE is divided to two campuses (50 meters apart) – The North and the South campus.

The North Campus is normally being used by the Executive MBA program. You may have few courses there before the semester begins (EXSIM). Some of the career activities will be taking place in the North Campus. In case you come to IESE with a bike / bicycles, you can park them in the parking lot inside the North campus. On the top floor of the North campus there is an amazing balcony, offering a panoramic view on the whole city – would highly recommend to grab a coffee and enjoy it at least once!

The South campus is the "home" for the full-time MBA program, and where you will have most of your activities, classes and time-spent. It is built in half-floors architecture, so it may be difficult at first to get by.

There are free rooms all around the campus, which you can reserve online to study or to meet with your courses groups and work on the material. The library is located at the basement of the main building (F/G). Career services and exchange offices are on the 5th floor of the same building (F-500).

In the main building there is a huge Cafeteria which offers a wide range of tasty, fresh and cheap meals for lunch (5-8 Euros) and a dining area. All students go there to eat lunch between classes, and you can elevate this opportunity to meet new students and enjoy the atmosphere. The Cafeteria crew is awesome, and will make your day each time you take a coffee. The student card you will receive in the orientation day is chargeable and you can use it to buy food or snacks instead of paying in cash each time.

Social Activities & Career Center

The two leading aspects of the MBA program at IESE are its Career Services and the Social Clubs Activities. IESE pushes its candidates to join different clubs and career fairs, and promotes heavily its students placements before they graduate.

It is beneficial to stay closely-connected to the career service center, as they can assist in finding placements and post job offerings on an ongoing basis. Even as an exchange, you can enjoy the career services center, ask for career paths consultation and CV assistance, practice for interviews and more.

The school offers a wide variety of clubs, divided to business-oriented clubs (Consulting, Investment Banking, Fintech, Marketing, Real Estate) and social-oriented clubs (Wine Club, Japanese, Running Club, Skiing etc.). While the social clubs are open for everybody (even a non-IESE individual), the business clubs are offered only to IESE students. As an IESE exchange student, you are also eligible to join the business clubs and enjoy their services. The activities of clubs range from lectures of key-speakers, career consultations, business-related activities or interviews preparations to business trips (aka. "Trek"), where the club group flies together and visits different companies headquarters in Europe. Keep in mind

that although it is not mandatory and are permitted to register to all clubs simultaneously (some of them do charge an entry fee), it will be smarter to pick the ones which are truly within your interests and invest time in them, rather than register to all but skip their events due to an overload.

Courses

Similarly to Tel Aviv MBA's, there is a competitive bidding process to elect your courses. Unfortunately, there is no ranking for courses or reviews, but from my experience the 2 most demanded courses are always EXSIM (Executive Simulation) and MADEM (Managerial Decision Models). Try to pick one of these, and then fill the rest as otherwise you will not be able to participate in them.

Another important tip is to try to synchronize your courses so you won't have too much gap in between. Because IESE is quite far from the city, it will cost you a lot of time to go back and forth, so it's better to try to concentrate courses consecutively.

The teaching method used in IESE differs from Recanati, and similarly to its home-university Harvard, it is mainly Case-based. That means that on the one hand, most courses are without a final exam, but on the other hand, you will have a much more intense daily work. Normally after each class you will have to prepare and work on the next class's case (15-40 pages), and review the important notes as you can frequently be tackled by the professors.

Each student gets a nametag, so it is easier to get to know other students in class quickly but also for the professor to address you with related questions.

Aside from the class-to-class cases, you will have to submit several projects during the term, and a big final one at the end. Participation in classes affects your overall course score. Once again, the study volume at IESE is relatively high and demanding, so be prepared.

EXSIM – Executive Simulation

One-week intensive class and a company-management simulation with a team. Although I already did a similar course in Tel Aviv University (which was also very interesting), I would highly recommend it. It is very demanding and you'll probably spend the whole week (Monday-Friday, 8am-11pm) working on it so be prepared. The greatest advantage of it is that the course starts before the semester begins, so you'll make new connections and friends immediately. Also, the fact that it's a team-course makes it a lot more fun and interesting, and will bond you with the other members of your group.

AMORE – Advanced Method of Operational Excellence

Very nice course, excellent professor (Victor Martínez de Albéniz)

The course discusses about operational methods of organizations to increase efficiency and making smarter decision. It is quantitative and previous background in operations is recommended. The final project is presenting a comprehensive solution for a real-life company problem.

NAVEI – Entrepreneurship: New Ventures

Good course, Good professor (Mathieu Carenzo).

The Course covers the initial stages for building a start-up and promoting an idea. The course is done in groups, so it is critical you either come with your own idea of a startup before it starts, or get connected to a strong active group, otherwise can be redundant.

RETAILI – Current Trend in Retail

The professor (José Luis Nueno) is good, and very knowledgeable of the retail industry and e-commerce. The course is in general okay, and can be interesting for some. I would not recommend taking it unless you enjoy the topic.

COMDY – Competitive Dynamics

A bad course, would definitely recommend avoiding it.

Although the professor was nice and made an effort, I could hardly take something out of this course at all.

Transportation

Transportation in Barcelona is super convenient. The city is packed with Metro lines (especially in the center), buses and bicycle routes. Although you can avoid driving in Taxis, sometimes they can be a good option as and are cheaper than what we are used to (an avg. ride will cost 5-7 Euros). In case you have a good location, you will probably have most of the thing within walking-distance. For most of the other travels you can use the Metro and busses, which have the same operator (AMB, hence you can use the same ticket for both). The T-10 ticket is the cheapest option for most occasions, and is not time-limited or person-limited.

The transportation to IESE is a bit more tricky – the University is farther away from the center, and there are not many lines which goes there. One option will be taking buses, however if your classes are not consecutive you will have dead time in between.

If you want flexibility, a good option can be renting a motor bike (120 Euros per month). I bought an electric bicycle (450 Euros), which retrospectively was a wonderful solution and eased my traveling afterwards in the city. Barcelona offers special routes for bicycles, and the ride to IESE is fund and takes approximately 25min from the center (Passeig de Gracia). In that way, you will also avoid the heavy traffic in morning hours to school.

Nightlife

One of the most enjoyable parts of the week is the BoW – Bar of the Week.

IESE clubs organize a different Bar and a Club each week (mostly on Thursdays), where all students go to party together, get drunk and enjoy the weekend. No need to pre-register, only to present your Student ID. The entrance is usually free.

Aside from the weekly university parties, Barcelona is very alive at night and you can easily find good parties / bars during most of the week. The night scene starts relatively late from 11-2am at the bars, then moves to the clubs until 5-6am. There are two main areas for nightlife – Villa Olimpica, where you can mainly find the touristic clubs, and Tuset street, where you can find more local Clubs and bars.

Opium / Shoko – Huge touristic clubs at Villa Olimpica (20 Euro entrance). You can pre-register and enter for free until 2.00am. Touristic crowd, pop-electro music.

Sutton / Bling-Bling – Local Clubs at Tuset street. Pop playlists, local crowd. Entrance might be expensive in weekends (50 Euro), however you can pre-register. A relatively strict dressing code.

La Fira – Local club, young crowd. Plays mostly Reggaeton.

Bars:

Old Fashioned – Small bar with good cocktails at Gracia.

Bobby's Free – Nice bar to sit for drinks with friends

Eclipse Bar – Bar at the W hotel on the beach. Very expensive, but great views on the Beach-line of the city from floor 27. Worth visiting for 1 drink before going to a party at Villa Olimpica.

General Tips & Recommendations

The first and most important tip, is **SAY YES TO EVERYTHING**.

This is going to be without a doubt one of the most fulfilling experiences, so try and explore as much as you can. Go with friends' recommendations, travel and organize trips together, have fun and remember that although the academic aspect is important, the networking, connections and living in a different country is once in a lifetime.

Things to Do

Day trips:

Dali Museum & Girona – Great trip, full day visiting the crazy Dali museum and city of Girona. 70 Euro per person.

Pyrenees – Beautiful mountain views. Worth seeing. On the way back stops at La Roca Shopping Village (a discounted shopping area). 40 Euro per person.

Attractions:

FC Barcelona Football Match – Watching the best team in the world. How can you miss it? Few tips – for La Liga games you may find discounted prices on the day of the match. However, after watching two Champions-League matches it is super important to buy tickets with good seats and really feel the game, even if it's more expensive (100-200 seats are great).

Concerts – Look for your favorite artists concerts during your stay. You may find good ones.

Port Aventura – Excellent Rollercoaster park for extreme fans, 1.5 hours bus drive from the city.

Barcelona Casino – Great Casino located at Villa Olimpica

Carcassonne Wine Trip – a 2-day Wine trip with IESE Wine Club. Normally is full so recommended to register as soon as it open. We had real fun, and met a lot of new students.

San Sebastian – Beautiful beach-city, 7 hours drive from Barcelona. We went there with IESE friends for 4 days and loved it. On the way there you can stop at Pamplona, where the famous bulls-run take place each year. Has many beaches for surfers, good nightlife at summer. You can also visit Biarritz, the French city across the border with 30-minute drive.

Flight to Europe – a great advantage of Europe, is that you can find easy tickets to almost anywhere in the continent (40-70 Euros). Take advantage of that, and make a nice weekend / 4 days vacation during the term. We visited Belgrade in Serbia, and London, which were both stunning in different ways.

Madrid – 2.5 hours drive from Barcelona with the fast train. Mix it in your plans for one weekend. Very different from Barcelona in many aspects, and has very intense nightlife.

IESE Treks – As mentioned before, IESE clubs tends to organize students trip to different places (like the Wine tour above, or business-related trips). Though it can be a bit pricy, I would recommend going to at least one.

Places to See

The most important tip is to always reserves online in advance.

Barcelona is an extremely touristic city, and the lines for buying tickets are horrible. Always book one day in advance your tickets online (which will also save you 10-20% normally).

La Segrada Familia – The Masterpiece of Gaudi. A must see. I visited it 3 times during my stay because of family visits, and was fascinated each time. As much as the exterior part is impressive, the interior part is perhaps more, so make sure you enter.

Casa Bastillo - Another one of the impressive architectures of Gaudi. Casa Bastillo and Casa Mila (another house by Gaudi) are very close one to another. We visited only Casa Bastillo as tickets are not cheap, and enjoyed it.

Gothic Quarter – Take a free walking tours (you can find plenty across the web) or wonder around the small amazing streets.

Palau de la Musica – A remarkable concert hall – probably the most beautiful we have ever been to. If you want to have a unique-local Catalan experience, order tickets to one of the daily concerts (preferably Flamenco). We enjoyed it a lot.

La Boqueria – Barcelona's flee-market on the Rambla street. Very enjoyable, you can find fresh meat, fish or vegetables inside.

Parc Guell – Amazing park created and designed by Gaudi. One of the must-see places in Barcelona.

Parc de Montjuic – The Jewish mountain. Beautiful views of the city from the top, very close to Plaza Espania. Inside you have two museums if you are interested (Juan Miro's and The National Museum. We visited the first, which was nice).

Font Magica – a Magic Fountain show with lights, music and a huge crowd surrounding it from 8.00pm (Check times online). On the entrance to Montjuic.

Tibidabo – Nice mountain with a nice panoramic view on the city. Has a small adventure park at the top (Much smaller than Port Aventura).

Picasso Museum – Were very disappointed. Would recommend to skip and go to others instead.

Barcelona Aquarium – Nice attraction. 2-3 hours visit.

Food

As a general guidance, unlike the average high-quality food in Israel, the Spanish cuisine is not the best. Although there are several good places in town, it is not recommended to sit in a random restaurant without pre-checking it (especially the touristic places around Passeig de Gracia and La Rambla Street which are overpriced).

An important note, is that TIPS ARE ALREADY INCLUDED. So no need to pay an extra 15%, unless you really enjoyed the service and want to make their day.

Tickets – a Michelin-star restaurant, considered to be one of the top in Barcelona. Very expensive (60-80 Euro per person)

Reservations are extremely difficult, and on a +60 days basis (two months ahead). Try and book yourself a table already at the first weeks of your stay, otherwise you will not be able to enjoy it.

Robata – The best Sushi in Barcelona, hands down. Was our favorite place, each dish is amazing and never misses. Expensive relative to Barcelona, cheaper than in Israel (30-50 Euro per person)

Brunch & Cake – Tasty & healthy breakfasts. 10 Euro per dish.

Bacoa - Great hamburgers place.

El Circle – Average restaurant, but sitting on a terrace with incredible view on one of the main streets in the Gothic quarter. Romantic for a casual dinner and nice for a quick breakfast.

Ciutat Condal – Spanish cuisine (Pintxos, seafood and more). Israelis favorite local restaurant. I did not visit, but worth checking.

Others

Learn Spanish – IESE offers free courses of Business Spanish in different levels (BSP). In addition, you can find many Language Schools across the city.

Gyms – for sport lovers, DiR is the largest Gym group in Barcelona. You can also find other clubs for other activities quite easily in Eixample.

SIM – you can find 20 Euros packages for internet and local phone calls at El Corte Ingles (7th Floor)

Shopping – Sales seasons are either August-beginning of September, or after the King's day at January. In general, local Spanish brands (Zara, Massimo Dutti, Stradivarius, Mango etc. are very cheap).

Overall Expenses

Although the exchange experience is unforgettable, it is definitely not cheap.

Obviously your overall expenses is going to widely vary dependent on the amount of traveling, attractions and restaurants you will visit, but I here are my monthly averages, to provide you some perspectives:

Accommodation – 600-700 Euros with roommates. 1,400-1,800 for a full apartment (if you arrive with a partner. We paid 1,700 for an amazing-located furnished 1-bedroom).

Transportation – 200 Euros per month (Taxis, Metro and Bike)

Groceries – 350-500 Euros per month

Eating Out – 300 Euros per month

Entertainment – 400-800 Euro per month (Nightlife, Attractions, Sights-seeing, Activities)

Sport – 50 Euros per month (Gym, classes, etc.)

Extra Trips – 1500-2000 Euros in total (Flights, Madrid, IESE Treks)

Final Comments

The student exchange experience has been an invaluable, meaningful experience.

Retrospectively, I could not imagine skipping such a life-changing opportunity. Exposing yourself to different culture, language, opportunities and network is something that will hopefully stay with me many years forward.

Study, travel, explore, enjoy, meet and make the most of every moment, as this will pass in a heartbeat!

Photos





