

IESE Business School

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Degree Program at TAU: Sofaer International MBA (Class of 2016)

Before you go

- **Visa**

As a foreigner, you need a visa for a stay longer than 90 days. Since the semester is usually less than 3 consecutive months, you can probably get by without a student visa, but this restricts your ability to stay past the 90 days, or to travel around Europe after the semester ends. Getting a student visa for Spain is not very difficult or expensive (typically less than \$200) and will allow you to stay in Spain and continental Europe for up to 180 days; but keep in mind that it does take a lot of time. It will probably save you a big headache later, too, so I think it's worth investing the time and money up front. You should submit your application for a student visa as soon as you can, since it can take up to 2-3 months. When you apply, make sure to select a multi-entry student visa, which will allow you to enter Spain and the rest of continental Europe multiple times in the 180 day period of the visa. Trust me, it's worth it!

- **Accommodation & Living**

From my experience, most students live in Eixample, which is a very large area – it really encompasses most of the area built after the Gothic period. The Gothic quarter is a lot of fun, is home to many of the museums and tourist attractions, as well as great restaurants and cafes. I personally loved the Gothic quarter (Barrio Gotico in Spanish), but it's quite far from campus. Eixample spans a large area including mostly residential neighborhoods, very touristy spots, and less touristy spots with good local flavor, so when looking for an apartment in this neighborhood, keep in mind what kind of vibe you want. You also want to check out bus and train routes for the commute to school so that you won't need to

commute too long to get to campus. Many students also choose to live in Gracia, which is a super cool neighborhood, but it is often difficult to get to campus, unless you rent a moto (motorcycle or scooter). There are not a ton of public transportation options in Gracia, so you have to make that consideration when you choose where to live.

I got an AirBnB with 2 other exchange students (we coordinated via Whatsapp group before the semester), which was not that price effective (you can probably find a good, furnished apartment for 600 euros a month – I paid closer to 725 euros a month for my portion of the rent), but saved me the headache of searching for a long time. We chose our apartment based on the photos and the proximity to school, but we ended up living in a very quiet area called “Nova Esquerra de l’Eixample,” which was very residential and didn’t have as much going on as I would have liked. That said, it was only about 30 minutes from the main shopping street Passeig de Gracia.

- **The Bidding System**

Before you get to school, you’ll have to “bid” on your courses. The system gives you a certain number of points, and asks you to rank your preferred courses and assign a certain number of points to each class. The more you want the class, the high you rank it and the more points you give it. The whole process is very confusing. Just keep in mind that you might rank a class high and give it a lot of points, but if someone gives it more priority, then you might not get that class. Rank several classes (even if you give them 0 points). After a few weeks, you’ll find out what courses you got, and then you’ll have a chance to add or drop courses. A few weeks before classes start, you’ll get your final schedule.

I took these courses with their abbreviations:

- Executive Simulation EXSIM - a 1-week simulation course. It was very intense, but one of the most rewarding courses in my entire MBA.
- Ethics & Finance ETFI – awesome class. Highly recommended.
- Industry & Competitive Analysis ICA
- Omnichannel Retail Strategy RETAILI
- Corporate Communications COCOM – very good if you don’t like public speaking and want a chance to practice
- Stress Management STRESS – not recommended
- Wealth Management WEMA

About IESE Business School

IESE was established by Harvard as the first MBA program in Europe, and is usually ranked in the top 10 global MBA programs by many ranking organizations. There are approximately 300 students per year, and it is a full-time, 2-year program; therefore, there are almost 600 full-time MBA students on campus. About 20% of the school is Spanish, and the other 80% of the students are international, so there is an extremely diverse group of students with fascinating backgrounds. Many of them were born in one country, grew up in a second country, and worked in a third country; most speak at least 2-3 languages, with some speaking 5-6!

There is not huge Israeli representation on campus, so it can be a very interesting opportunity to hear what other people think of Israel and share some of the wonderful and complex aspects of the country (without getting too political!). I found that many students had been to Israel (mostly not Jewish), and had great experiences, and many more had strong desires to go visit. It's a nice idea to have some recommendations of things to do and place to see and eat so you can pass along ideas to fellow students.

- **Campus and School Atmosphere**

IESE has two campuses – North campus and South campus. North campus is the home to the Executive MBA and the professional development programs. It is also where most of the career activities happen (there are 2 large Career Forums/fairs, 1 each semester, that take place on North campus), as well as conferences and other activities that are open to the majority of students and require more space. South campus is where the full-time MBA program lives – there are separate classrooms for first and second year students, so there isn't a ton of interaction between the two classes. First year students spend all year with their "sections" – there are 5 sections, and they don't really interact with each other, except for in social settings. Second year is where everyone begins to integrate more since they can choose their own classes, but many friendships stay within the sections and they have several competitions between them. Sections also have loyalty to each other, so second years from section A will often feel close to first years in section A, etc., just by virtue of their section assignments (which are random).

South campus is beautiful and manageable in size. In the beginning, it might be confusing to find your way around some of the mazes, but you'll soon learn some of the shortcuts between buildings that will make your life easier. There is a great library in the basement of the main building (G), and you can study there, take out books, and access newspapers and magazines. The librarians are very helpful too. The entire campus (except for the terrace above building G) has good wifi access – you'll need to sign in with your IESE credentials once, but then you should connect automatically.

There is also a cafeteria with good lunch options, and a coffee bar with drinks and some to-go snacks like sandwiches, pastries, fruit, and yogurt. This is open until about 8pm, so you can still stay on campus to study or get out of class late and still have something to eat/drink. There are also vending machines in the student lounge. For lunch, many students use off-campus food options – there are a few delivery services that have whatsapp groups where the caterers post the food options for the next day and you can make a request. I loved the Indian food, but there were also Japanese and Mexican options. When you get to campus, ask some of your classmates to add you to the lunch groups so you can make your decision based on what you want each day. These usually cost somewhere between 5-10 euros, depending on the service and meal option. Lunch in the cafeteria usually costs 6-10 euros, as well.

- **Social activities, MBA Office, & the Career Center**

The day before classes start, the MBA Office organizes an Exchange Student Orientation on campus, including a tour of the IESE campuses (North & South), the facilities, and an opportunity to get to know each other and some full-time students. You'll be asked to come in business attire, since they will take your official photograph for the IESE student chart. It might also be helpful to do a trial run of your commute to campus a few days before orientation so that you get familiar with your trip route, and get a preview of the campus and the layout ahead of the rest of the students. You'll feel super knowledgeable when you give directions to the other exchange students!

As an exchange student, you can join any of the clubs that are available to full time students. The professional clubs (e.g., Marketing Club, Retail & Luxury Club, etc.) require a one-time payment of 10 euros to join. Most of the other clubs do not. There are some organizations like the Japanese Business Club and other country or culture associated clubs that host dinners throughout the semester. Join these clubs!! The dinners cost 35 euros and are all you can eat, open bar, and a lot of fun! You obviously can't go to them all, but it's worth going to one or two – I personally LOVED the Japanese club dinner. The clubs also host some seminars and treks throughout the semester which are interesting and can help you to figure out what you want to do, where you want to work, and which students, staff or speakers might be good to network with.

Every week, there is a club-sponsored bar event – “BOW” or Bar of the Week. These usually take place on Thursday or Friday nights and involve going to a bar or club for dancing. These are an awesome way to get to know your classmates outside of class, and were by far, some of my best nights – and memories – from the whole semester. Many of my best friends from the program were made dancing at BOW! It's also a great way to get to know the nightlife of Barcelona. You get to go to some of the best clubs in the city!

The MBA Office coordinates all the academic activities on campus. They also prepare the printed materials for your classes, so if you are missing a casebook, you can go to them and

they will help get you one. The MBA Office is filled with really nice people, and they can help you with almost any issue you're having, on or off campus. I got really sick one day, and they helped arrange transport to the hospital and emailed and texted me to follow up for several days.

As an exchange student, you'll also have access to the Career Center for the duration of your exchange. You can attend career workshops, recruiting events, the Career Forum (a multi-day job fair), and online resources like Simplicity (the job board), VMock (a tool that grades your resume), and more. You can also meet with the career counselors, and each person on the team has an industry specialty, so you can decide with whom to meet based on your industry interests. Keep in mind that most of the recruiting events and jobs are for Europe, but there are also some opportunities in Asia, North America, and Latin America, so if you have interest in working internationally, there are definitely opportunities to find jobs abroad – many companies are also willing to sponsor visas, so don't let that stop you!

About Barcelona & Spain

- **Transportation**

The busses and trains are extremely efficient in Barcelona. Most people get T-10 cards (10 trips) that you can use for an unlimited amount of time. You can buy T-10s and other cards in any train station – a T-10 costs less than 10 euros. I often bought two or three T-10s at a time so I could use them on the bus without worrying about running out. If you do run out, you can also buy a one-time ride for 2.15 euros. Almost all the travel that you do in the city will be in Zone 1, so you don't need to get a multi-zone travel card. Also, in the city center things are very accessible by walking.

- **Insurance and Health Services**

Unlike full time students, exchange students don't get health insurance through IESE, so you should find some travel health insurance in case of emergency. I am American, so I was able to use the site <http://www.internationalstudentinsurance.com/> to find a plan. Keep in mind that the Spanish government requires a \$0 deductible, so it's best to get the highest-level plan without a deductible. You'll also need proof of insurance when you submit your visa application, so get your health insurance sorted out early.

IESE has an on-campus doctor, who is available by email and has office hours. You can email him to make an appointment. He doesn't really do a thorough exam, but he can provide basic prescriptions and recommend specialists. I got sick on campus at one point and he sent me to the Emergency Room at Teknon Medical Center, which is a very nice hospital with friendly staff (just in case you need a hospital). At many hospitals, you might be asked to pay a deposit (maybe 300 euros) before seeing a doctor. After you are seen, they will consider how much you should pay (for example, 120 euros), and refund you the difference (in this case, 180 euros). The deposit will be higher if you are going to be

admitted to the hospital. If you do end up paying for your health visit up front, you should be able to submit a claim to your insurance company to get the money back.

- **Food** – Some of my favorite spots
 - Mostassa – awesome for brunch and a good place to study mid-week. Free Wifi, really good food, and friendly staff.
 - Ugot – great café with good coffee and desserts.
 - Cervceria Catalana – one of the best tapas restaurants.
- **Night life**
 - Espit Chupitos – 2 euro shots and they light them on fire. Definitely favored by a younger crowd and tourists, but it's a great way to start the night.
 - Opium, Shoko, Sutton, Bling Bling – some of the big nightclubs. Worth going to at least once. Most of these places will have a BOW there at some point.
 - Go to Nasty Mondays at Apollo at least once!
 - Boca Chica – great cocktail bar; a bit pricey, but worth visiting even just once for the awesome décor and atmosphere.

Tips

- Most taxi apps don't work in Barcelona, but I found Hailo to be a good one.
- For good restaurant and bar recommendations, Yelp can be very helpful! So is TripAdvisor.
- Come to class prepared. Some teachers "cold call" on students, especially if no one volunteers to speak up. You don't want to be embarrassed if you haven't read the material for that day. That said, don't be afraid to participate in class – it might seem intimidating, but it really improves your experience. It's what you came to IESE for!
- Try to take a class with Jan Simon – he is a little scary, but I took two classes with him and loved them both. I especially loved "Ethics & Finance".
- Don't miss class! Attendance is mandatory, and if you miss more than 20% of any class, you automatically fail! It's not worth the risk (unless you're sick or have justification for missing a class), and the whole point of studying at a top school like IESE is to have the full academic experience.

- Try not to lose your nametag! You'll get a plastic nametag when you start the semester, and it's a running joke among the students that they get left all over the place.
- Make friends with the cafeteria workers – they'll learn your name, how you like your coffee, and will brighten your day, every day!
- Go to BOW – as often as possible – you get to know people, you find out gossip, and there are always great memories!
- Travel around Spain – Madrid is beautiful and highly recommended, but there are several spots all around the country that you shouldn't miss! It's a diverse and historic country with awesome scenery, architecture, art, and more! If the weather is nice, Ibiza is also supposed to be amazing!

General Experience

Studying at IESE was one of the best experiences of my life. The students there are extremely friendly, smart, and outgoing, and it was difficult to find someone that I didn't like! I made amazing friends from all over the world. Academically, I learned a lot and purposefully took courses that I felt covered stuff that I didn't learn in my MBA program. I finished feeling like I had a really well rounded course work.

The most important advice I can give is probably to just say YES to as much as possible. This is a once in a lifetime experience, and you don't want to miss anything! Just be open to new people, adventures, trips, and experiences. And don't be afraid to ask other people to do stuff – even though they've been living in Barcelona for more than a year, many IESE students haven't done many of the tourist things in the city and would probably love a chance to go see the Sagrada Familia or the Picasso Museum!

Have a great time, be open, and take it all in! It will be an experience you never forget!