Semester in Zaragoza, Spain for the Specialization semester of the EUREC program 2014 - 2015.

- Before arrival:

To arrive in Zaragoza you can do it from Madrid or from Barcelona and then take a bus directly in 3.5 hours without changes using (ALSA bus company). This is the cheapest way but it’s also possible to take the train (AVE) for the double of the price but you will arrive in 1.5 hours.

You have to see that finding a place in Zaragoza is easy if you can speak Spanish, but if you don’t know how to do it is better to find some help to look for a good place.

In my experience the best place to stay is in the downtown (near “El pilar church”), there you will find most of the attractions from the city, all the festivals and most of the places are easy to reach if you stay in this area. Normally the apartments are around €400 individual apartment of sharing may be €250 a month. You can use an agency to find a place but they will charge you like a month of rent for the service.

Another option is to go directly to Zaragoza may be a week before the start of the program and stay on a hostel for a couple of days and walk in the city, there are a lot of adds of free place outside the apartments that you can call and make an appointment for the rent.

For EUREC program you don’t have to prepare a lot of things before the arrival, the people of CIRCE know well the procedure for new students so you just have to be in the University on the first day and they will help you will all you may need in the university.

If you stay in downtown and you want to go to the “Rio Ebro Campus” you can go by tram, there are a couple of tram stops around it and there is one stop in front of the Campus. The cost is €1.4 one way but if you buy a transport card of the city you will pay €0.74 one way.

- While you are in Zaragoza:

  - University.

The semester is running most of the time in afternoons (Monday – Thursday from 16:00 till 20:00 and Friday from 9:00 to 13:00). The teachers of most of the lectures are foreign guys from companies and other institutions, only a few topics are given by Zaragoza lecturers. The semester in divided in 6 modules, each of them with a lot of topics, at the beginning the semester talks about general information and after is more specific topics. You will have some lectures with practical part (labs and programing sessions) but most of the time is theoretical stuff. You will need may be
a little bit of programing background because there are some programing lectures but not to deep so is better to have a little experience in (Matlab, PSCAD, etc.).

The follow-up sometimes is difficult because there are a lot of topics and are not following a specific order and because of every lecture is given by different professor sometimes they are repeating some stuff of passing to fast for some topics.

I can say that this specialization semester has a lot of electrical and electronic information, so if you don’t have a good background in this areas may be you will suffer a bit.

Also in the semester there are some visits to companies and research institutes that will help you to understand a little bit more what you are doing in the classroom. Also the foreign professors have good practical experience so you will always have opportunities to talk to them and understand their filling about the topic and to ask for some advices for the future.

You will have normally an exam and a presentation for every module, there is going to be a hard part because there is a lot of information and you will not receive a lot of help on what is going to be in the exam so sometimes is going to be practical exercises and sometimes theoretical questions. For the presentations normally you will have to choose a topic related to the module and you have to do your own research and present it on 15 min.

If you want to study Spanish in your time here is possible but in the university is going to be difficult because most of the Spanish courses are in the afternoon and the classes are going to be at the same time, but you can look and may be find something.

○ Everyday life and leisure.

For the supermarket you have a lot of options you can go to big supermarkets like Carrefour or El Arbol for cheap food, but also you can visit El Corte Ingles for some specific food a little bit more expensive but good. On the downtown there is a big market for fruit, vegetables and meet for good price. Also there are a lot of Spanish food markets around. If you are vegetarian is a little bit difficult to find specific places but also there are a few. Normally the food in Spain has a lot of meat and fish.

If you like sports there are some gym places nice and near the downtown from €25 to €50 a month or you can go out in the area and find nice places for running. In the downtown you will find a lot of Spanish restaurants to eat Tapas and a beer for good money. There are some promotions of beer and food on the week, on Thursday night you can find some Tapas place for €1 each. On the weekend also there are a lot of bars and night clubs in downtown so you don't have to go to far to enjoy the nightlife.

Also there are some malls in Zaragoza if you like to do some shopping or so, there is one big mall called "Puerto Venecia" 30min. from downtown by bus. Or another one called "Gran Casa". Also there you can find restaurants and cinema if you like.

If you prefer to go to visit another city you can do it as well very easy, Madrid and Barcelona are both around 3.5 hours in bus and there are a lot of small towns that you can visit as well near Zaragoza.
General Experience.

I enjoyed a lot my time in Zaragoza, it is a very nice and safe city. Is not a very big city but is near to the biggest cities in Spain and also is big enough to enjoy a lot of things. You will not spend a lot of money there because is not that big but is also very touristic so all the time there are a lot of tourist visiting the city.

The university is very nice and the campus is good as well. The CIRCE have good experience in grid integration topics and in electrical engineering. You will be able to understand more the electrical market and the renewable relationship but maybe I think there is not enough time to see a lot of physical practical opportunities. Be prepared to study a lot of technical information and take a look of you previous studies on these topics because they are going to be useful here.

Enjoy your time in Zaragoza and use your time wisely because 4 months is not enough time to do all the things that you will find in Spain.

Oscar Camacho