

PSH student storms

—on

PICTURES AND STORY BY MARKO PRIMORAC

As this year's spring break began, I packed my rucksack (with far too many things that I never used or wore), got in my car and drove to Dulles International Airport for a "free-form" excursion through Europe.

My flight from D.C. to Zurich was especially smooth since my cheap ticket actually entitled me to a seat in Swiss Air's Business Class. After I boarded the plane, I put my feet up, had a glass of complimentary champagne and fell asleep for the first time on any flight I have ever taken.

After landing in Zurich, I boarded a plane for Madrid. Even though the flight ran into heavy turbulence, the ride over the Alps, southern Europe, France and the Pyrenees was still enjoyable. Besides, I was finally in Madrid, a city I had long wanted to see.

In the airport, I picked up a map of Madrid and walked over to the information desk. In my broken Spanish, I asked about a hostel room in the center of the city. The woman at the desk seemed amused with my attempt at Spanish. She smiled and then asked me in English what price range I was looking for. I told her I was a starving student who needed the cheapest room possible, and she gave me the address of a hostel in center-city Madrid.

While I waited at the bus stop outside the airport, I noticed that loud, rowdy drunks speaking horrible English were scattered all around me.

I knew I was in luck - there had to be a soccer game in town. I hopped on the first bus that came and, although I didn't know where it was going, to my surprise, it took me to the



Central Station in Madrid where I got a cab that took me straight to my hostel.

The woman at the airport had steered me in the right direction. This was a pri-

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vate hostel, run by an elderly Spanish couple and their Mexican maid. With hand signals and grunts, we came to an understanding. I would be staying for three days. The room was small but had a bathroom and shower — for \$12 a night, it worked for me.

I did manage to take in the soccer match that night in Madrid. I took a cab to the stadium and purchased a ticket for the upper rows in the stadium.

After enjoying a few spirited conversations in a nearby cafe with Englishmen from Leeds who'd come to cheer their team on, I noticed that the streets were packed with

fans: hooligans, professional people, families - you name it - they were all there. It seemed that everyone from every walk of life in Madrid came to support their team.

Madrid won the game, 3 to 1. To the drunken English hordes' credit, they were as loud as the Madrid fans, even though they were outnumbered.

After the game, I walked back to the hostel and even though there was a downpour and I was drenched when I reached the hostel, I didn't mind - I was in Spain.

My sightseeing in Madrid included visits to the Palacio Real (Royal Palace), the Old city, the Prado Museum and the city park.

Despite Madrid's bureaucratic status as the country's capitol, it is a beautiful city. It was a small provincial town before Ferdinand II decided to make it his capitol in the 1400s, largely because of its prime location in the center

of Spain.

I was amazed that in almost every restaurant and cervceria in Madrid, I found art everywhere, whether it was in the tiles on the floors, the paintings or frescoes on the walls, or even the chairs that had been hand-carved, drawn-on or painted. The people were all friendly, and I found all I had to do was to try and speak Spanish and they would gladly converse with me.

One evening, I stopped in at the Flamenco Bar and was treated to a local spectacle. At the Flamenco, the women were just as beautiful as their dances and costumes - and they danced for hours. The music and energy they expended traveled through me, as did the stomps of their heels and the loud claps of the hands. A live band played the guitarra and sang Sevillian ballads while the flamenco dangers hypnotized the audience with their hip gyrations stomps and claps.

The evening before I left Madrid, I met an American woman who was working in Madrid. She and I spoke of the Spaniards and their culture and then

tried to compare the United States to Spain. But there is no comparison; they are two distinctly different cultures. I was pleased to be experiencing the Spanish world after reading about it for so long.

The next day I hopped on the morning train to Barcelona. I suggest traveling on the train by day if you have the time. The ride takes about eight hours and is great. The countryside unfolds before your eyes: villages nestle at the base of mountains and castles and fortresses are scattered all along the route. The last hour of the ride is especially memorable with the coast on one side of the train and the mountains on the other.

