

Featured Articles

Wanted: Outgoing English Speakers for a Spanish Experience

By Roy A. Barnes
 January 2007

Not only can travelers participate in a volunteer holiday where many of their expenses are covered, they can make a difference in the lives of the people they will interact with at an off the beaten path destination in Europe. This opportunity exists in Pueblo Ingles. Pueblo Ingles is held at a restored 18th century village called Valdelavilla. Valdelavilla is located in the north-central Spanish province of Soria, approximately four-hour's drive from Madrid.

A Trail-blazing Vision

In 2001, Richard Vaughan and Juan Carlos Medina had the desire to help Spanish businesspeople gain a quicker fluency in the English language, which has as many twists and turns as the roads that lead to Valdelavilla. The dreams and hard work of these men have not only proven to be effective, but the Pueblo Ingles program has positively impacted the lives of thousands of participants to date. The contributions of the Pueblo Ingles staff and the volunteers who've come from all over the globe to assist the Spaniards in applying the English language effectively through talking, talking, and more talking, via a variety of daily and nightly activities, have also been paramount to Pueblo Ingles' success. The Spaniards depart the weeklong program with a greater mastery of the English language. Volunteers leave Pueblo Ingles soulfully enriched in other ways.



Imagine having to go away for seven days to a place where cell phones don't work and access to the internet is much harder to come by; a place where you are forbidden to speak your native language; that is, you must communicate in a foreign tongue in which you will be misunderstood and pronounce many words and phrases incorrectly. This is what makes the Pueblo Ingles program so unique for the Spaniards. They are sent by their respective companies to Valdelavilla with the hopes of returning to their jobs more confident in establishing rapport with those who work for



primarily English-speaking firms. The difficulties that the Spaniards have in speaking and understanding English are overcome in an atmosphere that is as low key and supportive as can be, especially when compared to the business environment, where not being able to understand English and the nuances this language carries can be very costly.

The Volunteer Experience at Pueblo Ingles

The first general requirement for volunteers, besides being at least twenty-two years of age, is to be fluent in English. Any kind of English fluency will do: Texas English, Canadian English, South African English, Australian English, etc. An outgoing personality and being open to interacting with people of a different culture is also a must because conversing is job one for all the participants. The day starts with the 9 a.m. breakfast call and runs until after 10 p.m., when the last meal is completed. A 90-minute siesta break in the afternoon takes place after lunch. Even the three daily meals serve as class time for the Spaniards, who are matched evenly with volunteers at the dinner tables for conversation. The other talking and interacting sessions vary, including pairing up for fifty-minute, one-on-one talking periods throughout the day. Each one-on-one alternates with a different Spaniard for the volunteer.

The pairs can take a walk on the cobblestone streets of the Valdelavilla or along the trails that lead to and from this village, which is nestled in a valley of Mediterranean scrub forest. The couples can also lounge around in the spacious patio area of the village. Anything, so long as the student and volunteer converse in English. During one such conversation between a young Spanish participant named Maria and a volunteer, the subject came up about what happens after the phone rings in her office. Maria and her co-workers check the Caller I.D. to see if the call is coming from an English-speaking country. If so, a game of "hot potato" over who is to take the call ensues. By coming to Pueblo Ingles, this participant had become more confident in dealing with her company's English-speaking clients, and was looking forward to getting back to work to apply what she had learned through the intense conversational immersion process. Over the course of a week, each Spaniard hears and speaks more than 105,000 English phrases.

What adds to the adventure of being at Valdelavilla, where a sense of timelessness seems to reign, is the close proximity to a vulture preserve. So while the participants are discussing the issues of the day or life in general, the above sky will be filled with a number of these scavengers. As long as the participants show signs of life, the vultures will leave them be!

Because many of the Spaniards drive themselves to Valdelavilla (the volunteers are solely bused in from Madrid), a fifty-minute session might include a quick side trip to the nearby town of San Pedro Manrique. San Pedro Manrique is where the annual June "passing of fire" celebration takes place. This festival, which ushers in the summer season, features men and women walking over burning coals while they carry another person on each of their backs. San Pedro Manrique has a little market to get the necessities of life as well as a tapas bar for socializing. Tapas are small plates of any finger food snack like olives, chips, or sausages.



The Pueblo Ingles day continues after a nice siesta. After siesta time, a group activity, which incorporates critical thinking along with

English language immersion, will occur; for instance, groups of four to six will have to decide on what five things they would bring along with them if they found themselves stranded on a deserted island for three months. Afterwards, matched pairs will get together with other



couples to play badminton or a table game like Spanish Trivial Pursuit. The Spaniards have to interpret the Spanish game cards into English. An hour before the 9 p.m. dinner, everyone gathers at the big meeting room above the restored village for a nightly variety show. It is here where both students and volunteers alike can each make presentations about any subject they desire to talk about. Spaniards and volunteers are also put in groups so they can perform one improvised presentation during the week, making up their own skits.

The Quantitative Approach To Fluency

This intensive exposure to around forty other people speaking the English language (including the Spaniards having to speak English for a week) brings about a new confidence in the Spanish participants, due in part to the variety of accents the English-speakers bring to Valdelavilla. Some accents are very difficult for the Spaniards to understand at the beginning of the program. Yet by the completion of Pueblo Ingles, a definite meeting of the minds via the English language takes place amongst the participants! The Spaniards emerge with improved second language skills and establish many new friendships in the process with people who've come from all over the globe.

The gift Pueblo Ingles volunteers get in return for assisting the birthing process of the Spaniards into a greater fluency of English is being able to connect with people who are really accepting and inquisitive of the world in general. Pueblo Ingles volunteers become temporary Spaniards, made to feel at home by these countrymen and women as they strive closer to their goal of English language mastery.

****All Photos by Roy A. Barnes**

If You Go

www.puebloingles.com

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- Pueblo Ingles also offers many programs at La Alberca, which is located in Salamanca.
- Programs run year round.
- Slots fill up fast, but if applicants are flexible with dates, they have a great chance of securing a spot.
- Volunteers are responsible for paying their transportation costs to Madrid, plus their room and board expenses in the city before and after the program. Once Pueblo Ingles officially begins at the bus pick-up site in Madrid, the company takes care of the transportation to and from the

program.

- Accommodations and three daily meals, including traditional and regional Spanish dishes, are also provided by Pueblo Ingles.
- Accident insurance is provided from the time volunteers board the bus in Madrid until they arrive back a week later.

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