The Cathedral of the Senses

By Isabelle Bruty

Over the course of six weeks in Valencia, homesickness begins to sink in for many study abroad students. However, it manifests in an unexpected way. Around week three or four of the program, several students will begin to reminisce of home, listing things they miss most about their lives in the United States. Their families, friends, routine lifestyles, the comfort and the familiarity of home. Yet surprisingly, when talking to a large majority of students, you will hear how much they miss classic American food—a reality that my roommates experienced merely one week into our stay in Valencia.

Rather than fully immersing themselves in authentic Spanish cuisine, my roommates seemed more eager to purchase and indulge in the “Spanish version” of one of America’s beloved junk food staples, Takis. As they excitedly opened the bag, their expectations were met with a rather bland reality.

“They taste like carrots,” my roommate Ellie said.

In the days following this unexpected taste test, I began to research what could have caused such a stark difference in flavor, only to find that Spanish Takis are a much healthier and sustainable alternative to those sold in the States. My curiosity led me to a discovery that lies at the heart of Valencia’s culinary essence: the true quality of Spanish cuisine, stemming all the way to its very ingredients,

At the core of Valencia’s very own city lies the Mercado Central, a spectacular historical structure turned food market in 1839. What once was home to travelling markets has become a sort of cultural necessity to the Valencian people, as well as neighboring cities.

According to their website, “20 [percent of their customers] are neighbors, 60 percent from the rest of the districts of the city of Valencia,” and “18 percent from other municipalities,” an indication of the widespread significance of a fresher way-of-life.

\*This section will provide quotes from various vendors (2-3 max.), describing the freshness/quality of the food, their perspective of Spanish or European markets, etc.\*

[Quote from the website I want to integrate]: The market describes itself as, “a sacred temple where the professors of the fresh products receive and transmit the wisdom of the most substantial, our nourishment,” or in other words, “a genuine theme park for gastronomy.”

But what is the key motivation behind this healthy living? What makes Spanish markets different from American supermarkets?

These conversations, as well as the market’s clear mission, truly reveal the high standards for food quality in Valencia and in Spain, and how they are deeply rooted in utilizing fresh, local, and seasonal ingredients, more popularly described as the “Mediterranean diet.”

\*Integrate quotes from Rus and students about their experience with the healthier foods and diet in Valencia, and how the market/fresh groceries contribute to such a lifestyle\*

The Spanish people also view market culture as a form of interpersonal communication, or a sort of social setting, arguably a greater motivation to indulge in heathier food and behavior.

\*Integrate more quotes from Rus and students\*