Second Draft of Main Article

Ella Denny

Suggested Headline: Healthy Living Abroad

Word count: 1,160

Living in Valencia, Spain is a break away from life in America. Being here gives access to easier ways to get physical exercise, and some might even say a better quality of life. After discovering several ways locals and visitors incorporate healthy living in Valencia, you may agree it all comes down to everyone’s personal fitness journey.

Oriana Goncalves, the Coordinator of the Cultural Program at the Florida State campus in Valencia explains how she prioritizes healthy living through commuting around the city on foot and with the foods she eats. Her main form of exercise during the week is her commute to work, which is a 20–25-minute walk from her home. She says that in Valencia, “Everything’s very walkable,” and that walking clears her head at the end of a busy workday.

When Goncalves is at the store, she tries to stray away from buying too many sweets and prioritizes purchasing fruits and vegetables which she cooks as a part of her whole foods-heavy diet.

Brianna Cloutier, a rising senior at Florida State University who is a part of the Valencia Summer Study Abroad Program, also enjoys walking around the city. She describes herself as a “people person” and says, “I feel more at peace when I am surrounded by the hustle and bustle, but Valencia still feels like home to me and feels very safe.” Averaging about 10,000 steps per day, Cloutier loves to go on her walks to find unfamiliar places to eat and new shopping spots while being amongst the crowds. She claims that when she first got to Spain the ground was “so clean she could see her own reflection”, describing the ground was “almost slippery”. Being such a clean city, as she even says, “a dangerously clean city,” Cloutier is more encouraged to walk around and explore new areas of the city.

*“Did You Know?” bubble: Did you know that Valencia has 1,100 sets of traffic lights? That is about one traffic light per 705 residents, giving Valencia the second highest density of traffic lights per capita on Earth after New York City. (explain how this is why people walk so much because the best way to navigate the city is by walking)*

*Stat from:* [*https://www.thinkspain.com/news-spain/33090/fun-facts-about-the-comunidad-valenciana-to-celebrate-its-regional-day*](https://www.thinkspain.com/news-spain/33090/fun-facts-about-the-comunidad-valenciana-to-celebrate-its-regional-day)

Goncalves’s favorite weekend activity is grabbing a group of friends and going on a hike local to the Valencia area. One of her favorites is called Tueles de Pena Cortada, which is just an hour outside of Valencia. With hanging bridges and magnificent views, Goncalves recommends this hike to anyone able to make the journey. When it comes to hiking and being outside, Goncalves says that “it’s just so nice to get lost in it.”

On the contrary to life in Spain, she says some cultural differences in the US between daily schedules includes people being “always on, on the go. You’re here then you’re there, and then you need to do this, then you need to do that. And here, it’s fine. We don’t need to be stressed all the time. We don’t need to be running all the time.”

*Sidebar: You will not find me without wearing my watch on my wrist. Like most sports watches, my personal Garmin watch tracks many health statistics including the number of steps I take per day. Since coming to Valencia to study abroad, my 14-day average has gone from a little over 5,000 steps per day to 13,490- almost 6 miles a day!*

As the Coordinator of the Cultural Program, Goncalves is responsible for planning group events for the students over the summer study abroad program which include weekly activities such as soccer Mondays, group fitness class on Tuesdays, a cultural activity on Wednesday, and day trip almost every Friday.

Every Monday there is an email sent by Valencia International Programs that gives information to the students for events they can participate in. Megan Santayana, a rising sophomore at FSU, prioritizes healthy habits in her life too. Like Cloutier, Santayana also enjoys getting her daily steps in through walking around the shopping areas in Valencia and on class trips. She says, “We walk to museums every day for class which I really enjoy.” Furthermore, she explains, “From living in the US to being a student in Spain, my walking steps have increased dramatically from roughly 6,000 to 16,000.”

On Tuesday, July 2nd, nine FSU students, including Santayana, gathered in the Valencia Riverbed for the weekly group fitness activity, functional training. The workout included circuit training and group exercises that had everyone visibly tired, yet satisfied, and the group completed the strenuous workout as one. Though Santayana mainly does individual workouts, she did the group fitness class to try something new. She says, “doing group fitness classes is inspiring. I loved working out as a group in the Riverbed because we all were encouraging to each other and cheering each other on.” Moreover, in the riverbed, Nina Raymond, another rising sophomore at FSU living in Valencia for the summer, finds pleasure in biking through the park. She says, “I usually don’t bike much, but when I heard about being able to rent bikes and how popular it was, I decided to give it a try.” Raymond spent an evening biking through the park with a friend, which gave her great views of the riverbed and a fun, new way to get exercise.

Working out with others helps create new bonds and a more comfortable environment, which Goncalves explains is the purpose of the FSU cultural programing she oversees, as the transition from living in the US to Spain can be difficult for some students.

According to Beckwith Health Club, group exercising can include many benefits such as the output of endorphins that increases dopamine, encouragement, and motivation from the people within your group, which is important when being abroad for the first time.

Link to stat: <https://www.beckwithhealthclub.co.uk/8-benefits-of-group-exercise/>

Though Valencia’s walkability can correlate to a healthier lifestyle, living here is not the key to having a picturesque, healthy life. To this idea, Goncalves says, “I feel like the European life is definitely different,” but says that ultimately you must, “choose your better.” She discusses how at different times of her life she has balanced being healthy in various ways. When she was in school, she participated in many sports such as soccer and ballet, but as an adult, she finds the best way to include exercise in her daily life is walking throughout the city.

It all comes down to how you want to incorporate healthy living into your health journey. Goncalves says, “it feels like time goes a bit slower” when she is out in nature away from life’s busy distractions. Perhaps lessons learned in Valencia can be applied to life in the States; normalizing slowing down, taking the longer route, stepping back and enjoying life.