



GSE FROM D9800 TO D2203

Report on Group Study Exchange from Australia to Spain 2010



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INTRODUCTION

History of this Exchange

Rotary District 9800 in Victoria, Australia invested several years selecting District 2203 in southern Spain as a GSE partner and organising the 2010 exchange. This exchange was influenced by the historical, cultural and business differences between countries, as well as commonalities in areas such as natural resources, climate and agriculture.

There was considerable competition for the team leader and four team member positions – given the attractiveness of Spain as a host country. First round interviews and the final selection day took place in August 2009.

Exchange Dates

The Spanish team visited Australia from 6 February to 10 March 2010, during which time the Spanish and Australian teams spent time together at a welcome dinner and the District Conference in Perth.

The Australian team travelled to Spain on 30 April, with the exchange ending on 31 May 2010.

Report Purpose

Given upcoming changes to the structure of Rotary Foundation's Group Study Exchange program, a number of Rotarians in District 9800 suggested that the team capture some of the GSE experiences we shared at a welcome home dinner in June 2010. This report is intended to provide highlights, rather than be a comprehensive account of the exchange.

Visits and activities the group participated in are listed as an attachment at the end of the report.



INTRODUCTION

Benefits for Team Members

As we progressed through vocational visits, the GSE team quickly learnt that Rotary International's network and the GSE program enabled access to a diverse range of businesses and the right people to ensure we got the most out of each visit. Such experiences would not have been possible for the participants without the GSE program.

Each team member returned to Australia having benefited enormously from the exchange – professionally and personally. More detail is provided later in the report on the benefits we identified, including:

- An appreciation of how our industries function in Spain
- Business contacts and personal friendships
- Time out to reflect.



ITINERARY - SPANISH DISTRICT 2203

Cities and towns visited on the exchange

Torre Vieja, Elche, Murcia, Granada, Córdoba, Sevilla, Jerez, Benahavis, Marbella - Puerto Banus, Ronda, Málaga, Mallorca – Palma, Fornalutx and Valldemosa, Alicante, Alcoy, Valencia, Benissa, Altea, Benidorm



ROTARY – CONTRASTING SPAIN AND AUSTRALIA

Meetings

In contrast with Australia, Rotary in Spain has a more relaxed feeling at club meetings. Members come together and discuss their club activities, projects and programs, after which meetings become quite social.

It is not uncommon for Spanish Rotarians to smoke at meetings – normally after the meal, when spirits are also served. Many mobile phones remain switched on and are answered.

Most lunch meetings run from 2pm until 5pm and as with all Spanish functions, whether during the day or at night, it usually takes one hour to say farewells after the meeting has concluded. Evening meetings are generally held between 9pm and 12am (sometimes finishing later).

Club activities

The GSE team had limited exposure to activities currently being championed by Rotary in Spain. Those we came across include:

- One club project outside normal Rotary International guidelines raising 4.5 million euros over two and a half years towards construction of a local hospital – achieved by a club with 26 members
- Erecting Rotary emblem monuments and having inaugurations to unveil the show piece, usually with the assistance of the Mayor.

Rotary members

Spanish Rotarians are predominately professionals such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, bankers, architects, and owners of significant businesses.



SPANISH ECONOMY AND BUSINESS

Spanish economic conditions

Throughout all aspects of the GSE program (vocational visits, Rotary meetings and discussions with our host families) it was clear the Spanish economic and business conditions are very different to the current situation in Australia. The following factors are all contributing to the difficulties in Spain:

- Supressed housing market (prices down 50%) and five year property 'bubble' – Prior to the GFC Spain averaged 300,000 home sales per annum, there are currently 1.5m properties for sale
- The majority of construction projects and activity has ceased – one of Spain's critical industries
- Tourism dramatically down
- Unstable political system
- Rapid increase in Spanish debt levels
- High unemployment levels of greater than 20% and youth unemployment of greater than 40% - Driving young Spanish professionals to seek employment opportunities abroad, i.e. Spain is losing its talent pools.

Spanish business environment

The economic status of the exchange countries varied considerably but there were similarities in what makes a successful business:

- A strong focus on satisfying customers
- Innovative products and services to drive points of differentiation
- Flexible Human Resource practice to support and retain employees
- Innovative technologies to leverage operational efficiencies



SPANISH ECONOMY AND BUSINESS

Key learnings

One of the most memorable and educational vocational visits, providing tremendous insight into the economic and business status of Spain, was to the European Union (EU) head office of Trademarks. Our hosts took the time to explain the evolution of the EU and its importance to the world, Europe and Spain. The main driver behind the creation of the EU was to achieve peace through economic stability. The global significance of the EU was put into perspective as the 3rd largest economy in the world (behind China and India), made up of 27 countries and a combined population of 508 million. For the GSE participants this highlighted the importance of keeping informed of economic and business trends in the region going forward, given the EU's influence on the rest of the world.

Another critical learning was that innovative and flexible businesses are able to capitalise, despite economic difficulties. One area that has adapted to the economic hardship is Benidorm. This city on the Mediterranean coast is populated by dense high rise buildings to service the tourism industry and is normally a popular destination for Spain's 'northern neighbours' such as Germany and England. With consumer confidence low across Europe there are fewer foreign tourists, however they are being replaced by local Spanish holiday makers. Occupancy rates above 90% have been maintained by offering attractive packages to locals to keep the trade constant.

The change in tourist demographic has also influenced other industries. A local beverage distributor has softened the impact of demand changes by switching products quickly. Typically, Northern Europeans drink high alcohol content drinks such as spirits, very different to the Spanish alcohol preferences for wine. The beverage distributor's business model allowed it to pick up the change in preferences quickly and work with suppliers to meet demand. This was a great learning for the GSE group to be mindful of consumer behaviour and to have a flexible business model.

SPANISH LANDSCAPES AND WILDLIFE

Landscapes

Spain has a diverse range of landscapes – many of them picturesque and dotted with castles, farms, forests and townships. Throughout the southern part of Spain the landscape changes dramatically depending on rainfall, water availability, topography, agriculture and development.



A picturesque view from Ronda in Andalusia

Murcia is renowned for its dry environment and surprisingly quite a barren-looking landscape in areas. Due to the dry conditions, they must pipe water 300kms from the north to irrigate crops and provide enough water for consumption. Commercial and residential water consumption and agricultural usage is an ongoing and sometimes contentious issue in this region.



Murcia's dry landscape

SPANISH LANDSCAPES AND WILDLIFE

In Andalucía, the landscape is more verdant, and the Mediterranean forest predominates. The Holly Oak trees (*Quercus ilex* and *Quercus suber*) are characteristic of the Mediterranean forest and important for cork and Andalucía's other great export – Iberian Ham. The black Iberian pig spends much of its days between October and February wandering through the Mediterranean forests on farming properties, eating fruits from the oak tree, which gives the meat a distinctive sweet flavour sought after across Spain. *Jamon iberico* is a product highly consumed throughout Spain, particularly in the south.



Typical Mediterranean oak forests and Iberian pigs in Andalucía

Valencia, famous for oranges and loquats, also has a green, undulating landscape, Mediterranean forests and a number of mountain ranges. Orange growing agricultural pursuits still exist but are now more predominant in the Andalucían region.



Valencian hillsides and greenery

SPANISH LANDSCAPES AND WILDLIFE

The largest of the Balearic Islands, Mallorca, is diverse in landscape with two mountain ranges (the highest peak reaching 1,445m), green forests, plateaus and rugged coastlines. Mallorca produces a large amount of fresh food and over 130 different kinds of wine. The view from the water surrounding the Balearics is lovely, with turquoise blue waters, white beaches, limestone caves and cliff-faces.



The turquoise colours and cliff-faces of the Balearic islands

Energy

Similar to many European countries, Spain utilises a lot of renewable resources and much of the landscape is dotted with wind farms or solar installations. The largest solar installation is near Cartagena with 120,000 solar panels grouped into 200 different solar arrays. Many land owners have installed renewable technology grids to sell power to electricity companies, although selling prices fell in recent years.



Solar panels and wind farms are a common sight on the Spanish landscape

SPANISH LANDSCAPES AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife

Spanish wildlife is quite diverse, with mammal species including bears, wild boar, otters, ibex, and many bird species including falcons, storks, owls and the large Griffons vulture. Spain sustains more than 80% of Europe's population of these huge, distinctive vultures, which can be seen in rural areas and travelling across the Strait of Gibraltar.

Throughout Spain there are National Parks with high levels of flora and fauna protection, as well as Natural Parks where multi-zoned usage such as tourism, hunting and fishing is allowed. Doñana, a famous National Park in western Spain, is home to many endangered species including the critically endangered Iberian Lynx and the internationally vulnerable Imperial Eagle. One of the biggest challenges facing wildlife conservationists in Spain, particularly in areas such as Doñana National Park, is the dwindling European rabbit population in the west. Both the Iberian Lynx and the Imperial Eagle rely solely on rabbits for food and their success is in peril due to dwindling rabbit numbers.



The Iberian Lynx and Imperial Eagle risk extinction due to low rabbit numbers

Conservationists are noticing some species increasing in numbers as they acclimatize to human habitation, increases in food resources through farming or greater protection in areas such as National Parks.

SPANISH HISTORY AND SIGHTS

Spanish Regions Visited

The GSE team from Australia visited three regions – Andalucía, Valencia and the Balearic Islands.

Andalucía is a stunning region, rich in Moorish and Christian cultures. It is blessed with beautiful landscapes and 900km of coastline. The team visited Córdoba, Málaga and Granada.

Valencia has much tradition. Paella originated in this region, which also includes the Costa Blanca, one of Europe's most visited areas. The team saw Calpe, Altea, Benidorm, Alicante and Torrevieja.

It's believed the Balearic Islands experienced first human settlement around 5000BC and three centuries of Muslim domination ended with the Christian Reconquista. Mallorca, the largest island, was a highlight of the exchange.

Sights

Murcia



El Monasterio de Santa Clara - museum containing an operating enclosed convent



Casino de Murcia - opened 1847

SPANISH HISTORY AND SIGHTS

Granada



La Alhambra – a 9th century fortress

Córdoba



*Impressive Islamic Architecture
in the Mezquita*



Córdoba's Patios

SPANISH HISTORY AND SIGHTS

Ronda



El Tajo Gorge and 18th century bridge

Valencia



Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias by local architect Santiago Calatrava

SPANISH CULTURE

Lifestyle

Spain has age old customs and traditions including flamenco dancing, bullfighting and fiestas (week long town and village parties). Its citizens have significant passion and pride for their region and their country. The lifestyle is relaxed, making the most of the excellent climate and spectacular cities and scenery.

In the public sector, typical working hours are 8am to 3pm. In the private sector, it tends to be 9am to 2pm, then 5pm to 8pm.

Gastronomy

Spanish culture is based around enjoying meals with family and friends, particularly long lunches. The team attended numerous Rotary meetings over lunch or dinner, involving multiple courses. We were absolutely spoilt in terms of culinary experiences, because Rotary clubs in every region were keen to show us the dishes they were known for.

Meal times are much later in Spain than Australia, with lunch running between 2pm and 5pm, and dinner between 9:30pm and 1am.



Paella

HOST FAMILIES

Hosts

Our Spanish host families were incredibly warm, supportive and accommodating. They treated each member of the GSE team like members of their family and we were sad to leave every one of them.

The team cannot speak highly enough about what a valuable part of the exchange staying with local Rotarians is. Even cultural visits were enhanced by the presence of locals who were truly interested in maximising our experience.

Some of the strongest contacts we made were with our hosts – with many of these friendships already reinforced via the sharing of emails and photos since our return.

My thoughts on the GSE Experience

Ken Vasquez

Team Leader

With the Rotary Foundation discontinuing the GSE Program after 2013, there will be a great void left for future young professionals to further their Cultural and Vocational training as they pursue the sharing and development of contacts in other countries. What better way can we show this younger generation an opportunity to work towards global understanding and peace.

To see my team members not only get a Vocational experience but also get a lifelong Cultural experience they were not expecting was in itself a highlight of the GSE.

Their Vocational visits were well organised and prepared, giving them a better insight to another country's assets and liabilities. These young professionals have made not only lifelong friends but been made family members by the many host Rotarians and families

They were diligent, professional and dedicated, delivering presentations to 23 Rotary clubs in Spanish and 1 in English (only one member was completely proficient in the language) travelling throughout southern Spain in four weeks. The District Governor, Rotarians and families in D2203 were so impressed with this group and their aptitude and ability to communicate in another language, which was unexpected but greatly appreciated.

This is why GSE is so important. It brings out that extra talent from each individual to become a team player and a future leader.

As a Rotarian it was an honour and privilege to a part of this group, to see each member go through the selection process, form a team, become friends, share the work load, perform our presentation at D9800 Conference Australia, travel and deliver presentations throughout Spain, representing District 9800 with the utmost sincerity and dignity anyone could wish for.



My thoughts on the GSE Experience

Ken Vasquez

Maybe the current reporting required from GSE teams after returning is not showing the true value of the program. A few questions, ratings 1-5 on certain items, may not be enough. Should we be looking for a more detailed report from all members to get a better evaluation of their experience.

We have sent you this full report from our team members who individually describe how the experience in Spain has not only helped them professionally but how their experiences and interface with new procedural methods to solve problems and areas of concern, will assist them in introducing these new concepts to improve the efficiency of services and the quality of life of people in their own community.

I am sure a more comprehensive reporting process along the lines of Global Grant reporting would show very clearly the true long term benefits of the GSE program and would enable the Rotary Foundation to resist changing the focus of the GSE program with the introduction of the Vocational Training Team program.

As a committee member of the D9800 Rotary Foundation Future Vision Vocational Training Team, I hope that the proposed program doesn't become just a RAWCS project funded by Foundation, and see the very important cultural interactions of team members with their international hosts disappear. The theme for the 2010-2011 Rotary year of Building Communities - Bridging Continents is particularly relevant to the GSE Program for there is no better vehicle to bridge continents than by a group of people, motivated, skillfully acting as goodwill ambassadors for Rotary and their country.

As the GSE leader from D9800 Australia to D2203 Spain, I would strongly urge that the GSE program continue to be a program of Rotary International, funded by participating Districts from their District Designated fund, to run parallel with the Vocational Training Team program funded by both global and District grants.



My thoughts on the GSE Experience

Adam Booth

National Sales Manager

The main goals I wanted to achieve during the GSE program were to increase my breadth of experience both vocationally and culturally. The time, effort and money invested by all Rotarians was extraordinary and provided an amazing opportunity to achieve this.

The GSE program gave me a better appreciation of the rich culture Spain possesses and how this drives behaviour in Spanish life. Spain has an excellent focus on having the right balance - The Spanish work to LIVE. Spanish businesses generally possess modern technology to allow efficient work practices, facilitating time to focus on family and friends. The experience showed me Australia is losing this balance. Since returning home, I have begun to implement professional and personal changes to ensure my exchange learnings are not wasted. The learnings were only possible through the extensive business networks of Rotary to provide access to excellent businesses to study.

My professional experience in Australia has been limited to the packaging industry. The vocational visits in Spain included hospitals, banks, fresh food producers, governments, the European Union, shoe manufacturers, packaging manufacturers, recyclers and much more. I found the diversity of visits incredibly valuable and an opportunity I would not normally have. By studying different business models I can now select the aspects of other industries that will complement and enhance my current working environment.

One of my most memorable vocational visits was to the European Union (EU) Head Office of Trademarks. We were privileged to meet with senior members of the EU who took the time to present the history and evolution of the EU and the goals and impact it has had on participating countries. After this meeting, our Rotarian hosts facilitated cultural visits to the significant sites of the town (Alicante) and explained how this affects everyday life for the locals.

I can't thank Rotary enough. No other program can provide these experiences and I hope the program continues in its current format to allow other young professionals the same learning opportunities.



My thoughts on the GSE Experience

Ana Geskovska

Communications Specialist and Relationship Management

I feel extremely privileged to have been a team member of Group Study Exchange to Spain.

The GSE program provided me with invaluable international experience and other benefits including improving teamwork, leadership, communication, presentation skills and giving me greater insight into my strengths and weaknesses.

My vocational visits were valuable and well organised.

Working for one of Australia's largest banks I was keen to visit a number of banks and financial institutions in Spain.

I had the opportunity to meet with senior management, make professional contacts and share business opportunities and ideas.

It was interesting to discuss the banking and economic differences between Australia and Spain. I also gained insight into the Spain's banking system and current economic position and pressures.

The cultural aspect of the program was incredible. Together with our various hosts we experienced Spain's rich history, lifestyle and culture.

The most rewarding aspect of the GSE was the opportunity to stay with host families and immerse ourselves in Spanish life. I made close connections with my host families.

It was also very rewarding knowing that my Spanish language skills improved during the GSE.

I now have a great appreciation and love for Spanish language, lifestyle, culture, and look forward to continuing my language studies and returning to Spain to further explore the country and visit my host families.



My thoughts on the GSE Experience

Ana Geskovska

The GSE program in its current format is the only exchange of its kind for young professionals. Our team consisted of 4 very different individuals and we all achieved so much in such a short amount of time.

The GSE has enriched my life and I hope that it continues for others, to have the opportunity to experience cultural diversity, professional understanding and development, great friendships and memories that will last forever.



My thoughts on the GSE Experience

Trudy Hart

Government Executive

I can't speak highly enough about the GSE program and my experience as a team member. The benefits from the exchange to Spain were numerous, so I will just focus on three areas – Industry knowledge, the power of language, and professional motivation.

Industry Knowledge

Working for the Victorian Government, I was keen to meet health sector professionals in the larger cities we visited. While the formal meetings were very interesting, the highlight was observing innovation in the sector that could be adopted in Australia. In two cities the team saw an Electronic Health Record System in action, which has increased efficiency through patients and medical professionals being able to track waiting times, treatment progress, drug costs, etc.

The system, known as Florence, was purchased off the shelf, and has had a significant impact on satisfaction levels across the community. I am now undertaking research into this system, with a view to briefing senior government executives on its potential.

Language Education

When contrasted with Europeans, relatively few Australians have language skills beyond English. Our exchange would have been very difficult without some Spanish skills within the team, and the ability of so many Spanish Rotarians (or their children) to communicate with us in English. As globalisation increases, our country will be held back unless we do more to develop skills in languages other than English.

For some time I have been passionate about establishing a Spanish language stream in Victorian schools, and have been working with the Spanish Education Adviser to this end. That remains a priority, but the exchange really highlighted the personal benefit of being able to communicate in the language of another country. So I have returned to Australia determined to invest more effort in my home and community, to help build language skills in my son and his peers.



My thoughts on the GSE Experience

Trudy Hart

Professional Motivation

Most Spanish Rotarians we met were highly successful professionals. They were great examples of what life can look like when you reach the top of your field. Interacting with these wonderful people enabled me to return to the office with renewed drive and energy to succeed in my role.

Having one month away from the day to day realities of work was a great opportunity to do some self reflection, in terms of the way I conduct myself, and what I should focus on going forward.



My thoughts on the GSE Experience

Prue Simmons

Biologist and Environmental Educator

The GSE experience was absolutely amazing and gave me a greater sense of my strengths, limitations, skills and abilities in both my personal and professional life. Traveling with four other people for four weeks in a constant living and working environment has enhanced my skills in team work, communication, patience, compromise, professional speaking and presentations, Spanish language abilities, as well as increasing my professional networks, international experience and global perspectives.

The lead up to the GSE experience, working with the other members of the group to secure sponsorship, prepare presentations, learn a new language, attend the District conference in Perth, acquire gifts for hosts and learn more about Rotary International and Spanish culture was excellent training for the trip, giving the group a sense of camaraderie.

Through this GSE experience I now have a greater understanding of how my Spanish counterparts in the environmental and tourism fields undertake their business and deal with similar problems, and together we discussed a variety of shared opinions and solutions. This sharing of ideas and solutions is particularly helpful for the global environmental industry as many countries must deal with the same problems and it is far more efficient to work on the solutions together to strengthen environmental education and programs between nations.

From a cultural perspective: getting a chance to be hosted by families and to experience a country so rich and vibrant in history, lifestyle and culture greatly added to our enjoyment alongside our professional visits and knowledge of the country.

On a Rotary level, the GSE experience in Spain and being able to visit so many different Rotary clubs has really put the organisation's global reach and span of networks into perspective as we met people from all over the world at these clubs, gaining more ideas of how Rotary International operates in their respective countries.



My thoughts on the GSE Experience

Prue Simmons

The current GSE program is a wonderful chance to grow professionally and personally and get insight into a different country and culture. From this GSE program, I have memories, friendships and experiences that I will treasure for the rest of my life. I feel very privileged to have been a part of the Rotary GSE and hope that it will continue to provide these amazing experiences and opportunities for other young professionals in the future.



ATTACHMENT – GROUP VISITS AND ACTIVITIES

| TYPE | DETAIL |
|---------------------------|---|
| Professional Group visits | <p>Torre vieja Hospital</p> <p>Gioseppe Shoe Manufacturer</p> <p>Murcia Bank</p> <p>Palma Local Government</p> <p>Altea Fruit Export Company</p> <p>European Union Legal Trademarks Department</p> <p>Mallorca Waste Recycling Centre</p> |
| Cultural visits | <p>Elche Museum, Palm Preservation Park, and walking tour of Elche</p> <p>Basilica de Santa Maria, Convent of Lady Clara, and Salzillo Museum in Murcia</p> <p>Granada Alambra and walking tour</p> <p>Córdoba Mezquita and walking tour</p> <p>Jerez Carriage Museum, Sandman distillery, and walking tour of Jerez</p> <p>Ronda walking tour, Puerto Banus walking tour</p> <p>Malaga Alcazabar</p> <p>Palma de Mallorca walking tour, Cathedral, Castle</p> <p>Bus tour of Mallorca mountain-range, walking tour of Fornalutx and La Granja de Esporlas</p> <p>Santa Barbara Castle and forest</p> <p>Tour of MARC museum and Egyptian exhibit in Alicante</p> <p>Valencia walking tour with Rotaract members, visit to Albufera Natural Park</p> <p>Benissa walking tour and coast visit</p> <p>Penyo d'ilfach Natural Park</p> <p>Flamenco dancing show, cultural show at District Conference in Altea</p> |
| Media and press | <p>Torre vieja radio interview, press conference and reception with Major</p> <p>Altea press conference</p> <p>Benidorm official reception with Major</p> |