



SHARE YOUR STORY

Chris Ortiz Spanish New Year



I have always dreamed of ringing in a New Year in a different city. Towards the end of 2009, I finally got the chance to do so. I sold my best friend on the idea and we decided to travel to Europe again on a mission for good food, great people and amazing culture. We flew into Madrid, Spain and began our journey by couch surfing with someone my friend had met on a previous trip. This was only my second time in Spain, so I was really looking forward to exploring but was also excited to revisit my favorite local spots and eateries.

On the morning of New Year's Eve, I admirably looked on as the city prepared for their grand NYE fiesta. As city workers were lining up barricades in the streets to protect the people and shop owners were closing down early to spend more time with their families, it was evident that citizens of Madrid were ready to celebrate and ring in the new year. As the stroke of midnight approached, people overflowed the streets and gathered at Plaza Mayor, the central plaza in city of Madrid. Tres...dos...uno....Feliz Año Nuevo! The streets erupted with joy, cheer, laughter, high-fives, hugs and kisses. We followed the masses from fiesta to fiesta, sharing champagne with locals and tourists alike. The citizens of Madrid were so elated and made you feel like family. It was one of the coolest sights I've ever seen—truly a once-in-a lifetime experience.

After a few days in Madrid, we took a bus ride to northern Spain to a beachfront town called San Sebastian. San Sebastian is a coastal city in the Basque region of Spain and has a dynamic cultural scene. It's main economy stems from commerce and tourism and it's one of the most famous tourist spots in Spain. They eat sophisticated meals they cook themselves, mostly composed of seafood, and drink the best wines. After just a few hours of walking around the small quaint town, I had fallen in love. I speak fluent Spanish so getting around town was easy. It was also useful in helping us find more local spots instead of the popular crowded tourist areas.



One of my favorite things to do when traveling abroad is playing soccer with the locals. We may all come from different walks of life and speak different languages, but futbol is a universal language. I've played pick-up soccer games with local citizens in Paris, Brugge, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Lyon, Rome, Florence, Madrid and now San Sebastian. It's amazing how the love for sports can bring people of different cultures together.

After the new year, we continued our trip and visited other neighboring countries. My time in Spain was my favorite of the trip and I'm really looking forward to my next visit. Madrid is an amazing capital with historic neighborhoods, town squares and streets. One of the town squares Puerta del Sol is the home of my favorite sculptures in the world called El Oso y El Madroño (pictured). The culture, food and site are amazing and I would always recommend a trip to Spain!

Thank you to all wellness champions who share their international travel stories! Email askthepros@acispecialtybenefits.com to find out how you can be the next "Share Your Story" champion!



For more information contact a specialist at **800.932.0034** or email askthepros@acispecialtybenefits.com



ACI
SPECIALTY
BENEFITS