

BILBAO

Now that you applied for this master and hopefully got accepted, there is a couple of things that you must do before coming to Bilbao.

The first thing is to gather all the necessary documents for the visa application and start the process at the Spanish embassy. This is because it takes 2-3 months to be issued a visa for studies longer than 6 months. If you come from a country for which the visa regime doesn't apply, you can move to step two, which is to find an accommodation.

There are three very useful websites where you can try to search for a room. These are

- http://www.alkila.net/busqueda/hab/hab_sea.php
- <http://bilbao.loquo.com/spanish/sl/3>
- <http://www.pisocompartido.com/b/compartir-piso-bilbao.asp>

For those who don't speak Spanish, the words you need are

- *habitación* - room
- *alquilar* - rent
- *buscar* - look for

Also, try to look for a room somewhere in Sarriko or Deusto. Otherwise you'll need to use the metro in which case your monthly expenses will be higher (each ride is 66¢ in the first zone, 89¢ in the third). Plus, you'll spend time commuting and time is something you cannot afford to lose, especially during the first term.

A room with its own bathroom should be under €300 a month, and one with a shared bathroom can be found for as much as €210, plus the utilities,

which never amount to more than €10 per month. If they do, the landlords are cheating on you, so stay away from such places.

If you need any help with finding a room, just write to me at rsavcic@yahoo.com and I'll help you look for one.

Once you get settled, ask the landlords for '*empadronamiento*'. It is a document stating that you are officially residing in Bilbao, on a particular address. The reason you should go into trouble (although it is no real trouble at all) of obtaining this document is because you need to be registered as an official citizen of Bilbao in order to apply for any type of grant offered by the Basque government or the University. Furthermore, you may need it for your medical insurance or some other type of coverage provided only to Basque Country/Spanish residents.

For additional financial aid you can look at **Spanish Ministry of Education** webpage <http://wwwn.mec.es/univ/index.html> or the website of the **Basque Government** http://www1.hezkuntza.ej-gv.net/indice_c.htm. You can also seek help from some international institution (try **Soros Foundation** <http://www.soros.org/>) that offers financial aid to students who, for example, study in a foreign country. Money raising is a tricky business and you will need to spend a lot of time searching with no certain outcome.

So, you have all the necessary documents and you're ready to fly. Make sure you come to Bilbao at least a week before the course starts. This is to get better acquainted with the town, the university, the teachers. To buy the pencils and notebooks, or whatever you might need for the following trimester. Believe me, once the term begins you won't have the time to go for a walk, let alone explore the city or do any shopping.

While on the subject of shopping, wherever you manage to find accommodation, make sure to get a customer's club card ('*tarjeta*') of the two cheapest supermarkets around - **Dia** and **Sabeco**. **Dia** is cheaper,

especially since it has different offers every fortnight and discounts on a large number of products each month for the members of the club. In Sabeco, on the other hand, the trick is to gather 1000 points, and you get 8 points for each €5 purchase (if you buy €17 worth of things, you'll get 24 points, for example). To join either club is easy, you just ask the cashier for the '*formulario*' and fill in the general details like name (*nombre & apellido*) and address (*dirección*). Then you use the card with each purchase. The third option is Eroski, it is also cheap, but you need to mail the '*formulario*' and not simply give it back to the cashier as is the case with the first two. Eroski also has different offers mostly biweekly and you may want to compare the prices for the best deal. All three supermarket chains have their own brand and these are naturally always the cheapest stuff.

Back to the subject of metro, right on the entrance you can find an interactive screen automat at which to buy a **Creditrans** card. Choose the English option on the screen and proceed buy touching the **Creditrans** window and then, depending on how much you'd like to spend on transportation, €5 or €10 worth of ride. Then insert the money and although it gives back the change, try to use the exact amount, as this change is by rule small change, and you wouldn't like to go around with say €40 in coins. You can then use **Creditrans** for all types of public transport - metro, bus and tram.

Now you are all ready to take the metro to Sarriko. You will recognise the stop easily, but remember the address you filled in so many times, Avda. Lehendekari Aguirre, as you need to get out on this exit. Once you're out, turn right, cross the street, then left, cross the street, and you're there, in front of your new university.

The main entrance is to the left, when you face the building, but you will want to go to the teachers' offices, and these are in the right wing, on the 3rd floor. Take the stairs, or the elevator, and when you see Sara's or Amaia's or Aitor's name on the door, you will know you're on the safe grounds.

EAP

Make sure you start studying the moment you end the first lesson on the first day of the course. I am not joking. This Master is intense and although it may not seem that way at first, it is difficult and comprehensive and requires a whole lot of work. Especially with such excellent teachers as you will have in the first term, things will look easy and intuitive, but it is simply because the teaching staff does its job superbly. Believe me, once you start studying on your own, many questions and doubts will pop up, and you better resolve these before you get any homework.

As for the homework, once you are given one don't wait a single day to start doing it. I will repeat myself, but I cannot stress it hard enough - time is the thing you will value most in this course and make triple sure you time yourself properly. Otherwise you run the risk of missing out on things, and you will simply not be able to afford to miss out on anything. Just imagine that during these three months you will start preparing to run a marathon. Three months is very short time for such a quest, but it's doable. However, if you fall short of one week, the chances you won't reach the finish increase substantially. And this week you will never be able to retrieve, unless you prefer to try it all over again next year.

I've got four sound advices to give you regarding homework:

- Do not even think about handing it in late. It won't be accepted and you will end up wasting your precious time. Try to finish each homework at least a day or two before the deadline, as thus you might have the time to discuss your results with the teacher and make sure you did it properly. All homework assignments count and add up to your final grade, so watch out.
- Do your homework on a blank piece of paper. Be very neat and accurate. Don't make the teachers guess what it is you were trying to write down. If you need to use a computer, have all your results

printed out. Maybe you will need to use Microsoft editor of equations (it's in Word programme: go to **Insert**, then **Object**, and choose **Microsoft editor of equations**). At first it takes time to get the hang of it, but once you have some experience, it is a great way to present your homework.

- Write down everything you know regarding the question. Explain each step you make towards the final result. Be descriptive, but clear and precise. Don't simply write down equations and proofs - explain them properly. Teachers need to know how much you understand of what you write down, so make sure you exhaust your knowledge on that piece of paper.
- Work in groups to solve problems and discuss issues that may be troubling you. Brainstorming is a good way of learning, especially since with all the variety of backgrounds you will probably have different ideas and views. The way you do your homework may be your private thing, but try to benefit from the input of others, as in this fashion you will be able to resolve your own dilemmas and discover much more than you thought there was - in Serbia we say that two pairs of eyes see things better than just one pair.

And now that I hopefully succeeded in scaring you, let's move to the fun part. As you may have read in my brief description of the course, the teachers are the best feature of this programme. You can ask them anything anytime. Ok, try not to overdo it, but feel free to discuss any doubts you may have on the subject they are teaching. You will be surprised at how nice and helpful they all are. Don't shy away from asking questions. I am sure they'll appreciate the interest you take. Especially if later on you make a proper use of your newly gained knowledge when presented with an assignment.

You will also need the books to study. It may take a while before you get the library membership card, without which you cannot take out the books, so make use of the library facilities to do the studying at this time. People there

speak only Spanish and Basque, so try to learn these couple of words that may come in handy once you start going to the library:

un libro - a book

revistas - journals

llevarse prestado - to borrow (a book)

devolver - to return (the book)

quiero llevarme prestado un libro - I want to borrow a book

quiero devolver este libro - I want to return this book

Since you are enrolled in a Master programme, you will be allowed five books which you will have to return after 15 days. Naturally, if you need to keep the book longer than this, just tell them that you will like to return and borrow the book. If they start asking questions in Spanish, don't panic, just show them which book you want '*devolver*' and which one you want '*llevar prestado*'. Later on you will be able to do this in Spanish, but it make take some time and practise.

Now I think you have all the necessary tools to proceed with gaining knowledge which is why you applied to this Master in first place. I wish you all the luck and many sunny days. You won't have much time to enjoy the weather, but even studying is more fun on a brighter day. And, remember, all you need to pass this course is a strong belief in yourself. Since the admission committee already put its trust in you, there's no need to doubt them. So, do your best and try to have fun along the way!

