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Erica Debley

This past year I had the opportunity to study abroad with the program School Year Abroad (SYA) in Zaragoza, Spain, for my junior year of high school. I became interested in the program through my home school's partnership with and promotion of study abroad institutions, and eager to explore another culture and master my language skills, I decided in the winter of 2016 to apply. I originally believed that it would mean sacrificing ski racing, but after discovering and reaching out to a local team at Formigal Ski Resort in the Spanish Pyrenees, the possibility that I could continue competing while abroad arose. In the months following my acceptance to SYA, I made every effort to emphasize my desire to race with Formigal and that, while I was willing to arrange my own transportation on the weekends, it seemed plausible that a host family could be found in Zaragoza that was a part of the team. My efforts, along with a little bit of luck, paid off. In August my classmates and I received our host family assignments, and to my amazement my family not only had a child on the ski team, but also had an apartment in a small town 45 minutes from Formigal that they commuted to the mountain from on the weekends. And so began my year abroad, unlike any other.

I spent the year living with a host family – with whom I formed a close bond – and attending an American school with 66 classmates where, excluding English and Math, we were taught in Spanish by Spanish faculty. Through a variety of subjects, ranging from History and Politics to Environmental Sciences and from Spanish literature to AP Calculus, I listened, spoke, read, and wrote my way to not only a proficient level of Spanish, but to a more enriched and comprehensive view of the world around me. But while my classmates spent their winter weekends traveling around Spain – an incredible experience on its own and difficult to exclude myself from, I must admit – I spent mine in the Pyrenees mountains training and competing with Formigal Ski Club's U18/U21 FIS group. From December through April I lived through breathtaking views, incredible teammates and coaches, and an enjoyable first year of FIS that was topped off by my competition in the Spanish and Portuguese national championships. And while ski racing in Spain did force me to cut my training and racing days in half from what I would have completed in the U.S., it was one of the best decisions I made during my time there. Not only did it allow me to continue to pursue my passion for ski racing while abroad, but I also gained an added level of cultural and linguistic immersion that was unique to my experience.



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