

Intros

Hello! We are Julia Sloan and Isabella Dula. We both graduated from Caltech in 2022, with degrees in Computer Science and Mechanical Engineering respectively. With our San Pietro travel prize, we spent a month traveling around Spain in the summer of 2022, visiting Barcelona, Valencia, Alicante, Granada, Malaga, Madrid, San Sebastian, Pamplona, and Bilbao.

1. What lead you to apply for the SanPietro and to pursue this opportunity?

As soon as we heard about the San Pietro prize, we knew we wanted to apply for it together. After finishing our studies at Caltech, we both wanted to take some time off before starting our next career stages. We thought spending the summer traveling would be the perfect way to broaden our horizons and gain some new perspective. This opportunity was also a much needed break after spending four years working hard pursuing our degrees. It gave us a chance to ease up on technical work for some time and spend our days focusing on learning about the world around us in a totally new way.

2. How did you figure out where, you wanted to go, how to pick you partner, and what you both wanted to do? Planning advice?

When we first sat down and talked about applying for San Pietro, the destination was obvious: Spain. We were really excited about the diversity in natural landscapes, cities and towns, and people that we would be able to experience while exploring this country. Our route around Spain perfectly balanced the breadth and depth needed to appreciate the country.

We have a long friendship going back to the beginning of Rotation our freshman year. During the four years of undergrad, our friendship took many forms - from working on freshman core classes together, to being roommates our sophomore year, getting separated for a year and a half during the height of COVID-19, and then traveling together to Italy in 2021, we've gotten to see the many sides of each other's personalities and how we respond to a variety of situations. Having this close relationship before the trip began allowed us to preemptively consider any conflicts that might arise and mindfully mitigate them. We also have a lot of shared interests by nature of being such good friends. We feel that a trip like this is best done with a companion, challenging each other in the face of new experiences, but also supporting each other when needed.

When planning our activities, the easy part was selecting the those that we were both interested in - touring Gaudi's masterpieces, snorkeling in the Mediterranean, hiking el Caminito del Rey, and much more. However, we didn't agree on what we wanted to do every second of every day for the month that we were traveling together. We made an effort to compromise at every step of our trip. When one of us really wanted to do an activity, we would vocalize that desire and work together to fit it into our itinerary. Overall, this journey not only taught us more about ourselves, but each other as well, solidifying a lifelong friendship.

3. What are some tips, tools, or advice you can share for students who want to apply?

Application advice?

The biggest piece of advice we have is to plan a trip you're genuinely passionate about, and let that passion shine through in the application. The review committee wants you to have an enriching experience, and you'll be all the more engaged if you're doing activities you're legitimately excited about.

More logistically, we found cost of living calculators (such as Numbeo) very helpful when crunching the numbers for meals, activities, and lodging in our proposal. The previous proposals provided by the FASA office were also extremely useful as a template/guide for what was expected of our application.

4. How do you think this enriched your Caltech experience?

It's no secret that Caltech's education is very technical. While this is essential in the world of STEM, there's also so much more to learn from the world outside of this. Our trip allowed us to escape the Caltech bubble and meet people from all over the world with entirely different backgrounds. We befriended musicians studying in Valencia, a group of British lads on vacation, engineers from Brazil, Canadians celebrating a birthday, beachgoers from Algeria, an Italian surfer, and so many more.

This trip represents a theme we both want to carry forward into our lives: an open-mindedness for new experiences and an appreciation for the beauty and history of the world around us. By coming out of our comfort zones and learning to interact with people from different backgrounds, this trip has been truly life-changing for both of us.

5. Please add words of encouragement for students to apply.

Looking back, our San Pietro trip was one of our most treasured parts of our time at Caltech. This is an incredible opportunity and we strongly encourage anyone considering it to put together an application!