

Ricardo's Spanish Coaching Dispatch

“When, Why and Where to Take a Spanish Immersion Course”

We all love to travel and we all love new experiences! There are few things as exciting as being in a Latin American country and there are few things like living with a *familia latina* for a week or two. The experience is really exhilarating and, for most people, life-changing.

There really are only three questions to ask yourself as it relates to taking a Spanish immersion course in a Latin American country.

They are:

1. When?
2. Why?
3. Where?

When?

This is the absolute most important question to answer. When should you consider taking a Spanish immersion course? The best answer I can give you, and this is based on years and years of experience, is **ONLY** after you are at least an Advanced level speaker.

The reason is because the immersion method is not a strong method for infrastructural development. In other words, people who start out in immersion programs are almost always weak structurally. They learn a lot of words and phrases but they do not master the structural elements of the language well.

It is also important that you time an immersion course properly because it is a non-sustainable event for most people. In other words, most people can't do it for a year, six months, or even a month. Most people go for a week or two and then come back to the states. This makes sense, of course, they have work and family responsibilities. This means that when you do take a trip of this nature you must make sure it counts for something. You must be able to get the very most out of the trip.

So, hands down, the best time to take a Spanish immersion course is **AFTER** you have finished at least our Advanced Level.

Why?

If you take a Spanish immersion course at the right time, you'll find that the experience will put you “over the top” with your Spanish. If it is administered correctly, you will dramatically improve your speech flow, comprehension and overall comfort level in a short period of time. So, you do not take an immersion course to “learn Spanish” as the method is weak to develop the necessary language structure.

You take an immersion course to fine-tune your Spanish and to put your confidence level “over the top” in real-life experiences. It’s like a medical student doing residency after they complete their book studies.

This just makes sense.

Where?

Wow, there are 21 one Spanish-speaking countries, 22 when you consider the United States, which is the third-largest in the world, so there are many options. Some, I rule out immediately just due to political instability or major crime issues. Others, I personally rule out because the Spanish spoken is too heavy on regional accent.

I am originally from Puerto Rico, for example, but I have never recommended that a Spanish student go to Puerto Rico for an immersion program. Personally, if I were choosing for myself based on everything I know, I would choose Costa Rica. The Spanish there is every bit as good as in Colombia (which would be my second choice by the way), there is a lot of incredible stuff to do there, the people, los ticos, Costa Ricans are called “ticos”, are very welcoming to Americans, the government is stable, and the culture is truly “Latino.”

Over the years, I have always recommended that our students go to Costa Rica for immersion programs.

The one thing I don’t like about the normal immersion experience is the way that schools program the program. For me, immersion should be “real life.” Of course, this only works if a student is already Advanced or Expert level so most schools don’t do this. In fact I don’t know of any that does. “Real life” means that the program should be a series of “real life” experiences with a “Spanish guide,” not sitting at a school 6 to 8 hours a day working with a teacher. No, real life. I call it *Immersion Alive!*

Several years ago I tested the concept with a few students and the results were amazing. I didn’t continue it because I didn’t have a person in Costa Rica to administer the program and I couldn’t move down there myself at that point.

Well, guess what, and this is exciting breaking news! I am going to be going to Costa Rica on June 1, 2011 to establish this program. We’ll actually be living down there for a period of time to make this happen. We’re going to create an “Immersion Alive” experience in Costa Rica for our students. This means that you’ll be able to come down, live with a selected host family, and experience a real-life immersion experience. If I’m in the country when you come, I promise you we’ll sit down and chat together en español as well. I would love to meet you personally. Anyway, no boring sitting in a classroom in this program.

You’ll be with one of our Spanish guides six hours every day being guided through real-life experiences like negotiating purchases, talking with a doctor, taking the bus from one town to another, talking with a government official, and generally living life as a real person, not a student. Your Spanish guide will then work with you to clean up and correct mistakes you are making.

You'll get immediate feedback on your Spanish and then additional practice in those areas as you need it. Also, if you have a special area of interest, we can arrange to make sure that you get some real experience in that area. This is your real-life Spanish residency. You can be in the program for a week, two weeks or even up to one month.

If you have an interest in learning more about the *Immersion Alive! Costa Rica* program, just let us know by completing the short form under this audio.

Hasta entonces, y espero verte en Costa Rica pronto para una experiencia muy emocionante.
Until then, and I hope to see you in Costa Rica soon for a very exciting experience.

¡Adelante!