

MyHome TuCasa

Exchange Service

Barcelona/Wirral

my Home  tu casa

Sagrada Família, Barcelona

**It seems we are big fans of the Catalan capital, with almost 250,000 people flying from Liverpool to Barcelona last year. But now many Catalans are actually vying for the opportunity to send their children to spend some of their summer over here on the Wirral through new exchange service MyHome TuCasa.**

Up until about ten years ago, by and far the most common language to study at school was French. This was most likely due to a number of considerations, such as the fact that France is our nearest continental neighbour, the historic importance of French as a global language and basically the fact that many of us took our holidays there. Dover to Calais anyone? Nowadays though, in our world of low-cost airlines, Europe is at our mercy and Spain has been steadily catching up to France as one of the most popular destinations for the English seeking blue skies and much-desired summer sunshine.

Our recent love affair with Spanish holidays – sun, sea, siesta and fiesta – has seen a significant increase in the last decade in the popularity of Spanish in British schools, whilst more classic choices like French and German have witnessed a rapid decline. This could well also be due to the realisation that as the world's second most spoken language, Spanish can get you a lot further on your travels or in international business.

But Spanish in the classroom is one thing, and genuine 'real life' Spanish is another. Most of us feel proud if we can successfully



Exchange students Libby and Aina in the River Dee

order a meal from a Spanish menu without the waiter helping us out in English – which they invariably do, even if you don't want them to. But to truly get the knack of a language, there is no substitute for full immersion. And for those of us who have experienced a foreign exchange, immersion is certainly the correct word. As well as bringing your language studies to life – experiencing a the Spanish culture from the inside, rather than looking in as a tourist – they also open up our eyes to the similarities and differences between us, not to mention providing us with our very own native tour guides and personal tapas and paella chefs.

Most Wirral schools have foreign exchange programmes with Spanish schools during term time, but for those who would like to take advantage of the long summer holidays, a new summer exchange service called MyHome TuCasa offers this opportunity, matching families from the Wirral with families from the Barcelona area. The founders, David and Kirsten Wilson, who are based in Barcelona but originally from West Kirby, started out by simply putting families in touch who were keen for their children to get some genuine language practice. David explained to *The Lake*: "English is obviously huge in Spain with every child learning it from an early age. Most parents are really keen for their kids to get ahead with their English but complain that lots of agency-run exchange services are too expensive, or that their kids go away in groups and spend most of their time speaking their own language and wasting their money. So we had friends with kids asking us if we knew any families in England who might be interested in taking part in exchanges simply organised between themselves. And

that's how it started – just doing people a favour really. After some really positive experiences we decided to take it further and offer a basic matching service based on several criteria such as age, gender, interests and travel date preferences. We personally visit the families too, in order to get to know them a little before we suggest them as potential matches."

One such example was Libby from West Kirby Grammar School who took part in an exchange with Aina, from Barcelona last summer. Libby says; "There is no better way to learn Spanish than staying with a Spanish family. It was great to be shown Barcelona by someone who lived there because I got a real feel for the city and the Spanish way of life. I really enjoyed my time on the exchange and would definitely do it again! It's an experience that I will never forget."

David concludes: "So far it's worked well, although we have lots of families in Barcelona still hoping for potential exchange families for this summer. It's been a lot harder to spread the word on the Wirral as obviously we're based out in Barcelona and not everyone here studies Spanish. But if anyone is interested for this summer they can just create a free profile and we'll see if we have a match for them. And if not, there's always next year."

**MyHome TuCasa is an official partner of Wirral Multilingual, featured in our April/May edition. If you would like to find out more information about its services and hear what previous exchange students have said, you can visit the website at [www.myhometucasa.com](http://www.myhometucasa.com). You can also sign up to the mailing list for information on future exchanges.**