

Selling a dream: the sunsoaked world of the expat influencer

How influencer Katie Boggs romanticised (and monetised) her life as an American abroad

Katie Boggs didn't mean to stay in Spain. Her initial position as an English teacher in Granada was only supposed to be a gap year job before starting medical school back in Kentucky. Like many of her American peers, Boggs, 25, has moved from being a temporary resident in Spain to a expat. Unlike many of her peers, she's documented the whole process online to over 130,000 followers across TikTok and Instagram.

"I don't think I'm meant for med school any more, now that I know what it is to enjoy my life," Boggs tells me, as she shares humorous anecdotes about Spanish bureaucracy over Zoom, from the small town of Vinaròs, about 90 miles up the coast from Valencia. In the background are whitewashed walls, and a particular kind of medium brown marble tiling familiar to anyone who's spent time in a low rent Spanish apartment complex.

Looking at the state of US politics and society, it's understandable why so many Americans are desperate to leave for a new life in the Mediterranean. Popular programmes in Europe targeted at Americans looking to teach English as a foreign language award over 4,000 placements a year, expats gush about their lives in the [international press](#), and Facebook groups with titles like 'Ladies Moving to Spain' and 'Teach English in Spain' have members numbering in the thousands.

Boggs' own move to Spain was partly precipitated by the death of her father in 2020 in an act of gun violence. "I think it honestly did change my life goals, because, he lived his life to the fullest," she says. She calls herself a "huge family person", and speaks with admiration of Spanish attitudes towards the family unit: "At breakfast, everyone stops and then sits down together [for] every meal. We never do that in America."

Two years after moving to Spain, Boggs now leverages her background in acting (she initially pursued musical theatre professionally before committing to medicine) to create social media content alongside her primary school English teaching salary; she will continue to post alongside studying for her Master's in Barcelona next year.

An initial swipe through her social media accounts (@katietheguiri, a handle based on a lightly pejorative Spanish colloquialism for foreigners) reveals a tone both informative and appealing to the Gen Z sense of humour, balancing clickbaity headlines in block caps with well researched deep dives into practical aspects of Spanish life.

“Some Americans literally don’t think €250 a month for an apartment isn’t possible, but other places in the world have it figured out,” Boggs says of her first viral hit, a detailed breakdown of the cost of living in Granada, which set the tone for her particular brand of educational shock value. In a crowded market of expat and travel influencers, Boggs stands out for her level of research – detailed city guides and cultural explainers sit neatly alongside supermarket hauls and light ribbing of Brits and Australians abroad.

At a time when Spain lurches further to the far right and grapples with various separatist movements (Boggs lives not far from the Catalan-Valencian border), I wonder aloud whether Boggs’ accounts will ever engage with Spanish life in a more nuanced way. In response, she recalls some of the most controversial content she’s posted – a TikTok discussing the Catalan, Basque, Galician, and Valencian languages, which was widely criticised for referring to these minority languages as “types of Spanish”. The Basque language, in fact, has no linguistic relation to “standard” Castilian Spanish.

“I just responded to one hate comment with ‘oh, my bad’. You just have to ignore them, because you’re going to get [negative comments] on every video.”

Boggs works in a school where the majority of the staff teach in Valencian, and would be interested in covering bilingualism in the region in a future video, but worries about making this relatable to her mostly non-Spanish audience. When pressed about the way in which her content perhaps presents a simplified and romanticised version of Spain, she explains: “Well, you have to make everything look like it’s out of this world, or else it won’t get views.

“But I wouldn’t want my extremely good experience to make someone move to Spain and then think that they’re going to live in a fairy tale.”

Boggs’ content is perhaps most successful when she doesn’t position herself as an expert, but as an expat – her most viewed content is anything which compares Spain directly to the US, whether that’s in terms of the cost of groceries, popular festivals, or even the dating scene. At her best, the version of Boggs in her videos seems both exhilarated and bewildered by various culture shocks, and anyone looking to move to Spain can place themselves firmly in her shoes. Her secret? A remarkable lack of shame approaching strangers to farm content ideas.

“One of my best video ideas was from a random stranger I chatted to at an airport, about how in Spanish [secondary] school your grades are made public, so you can see who passed and failed. That’s crazy, that would never happen in the US.

“It’s all about having a creative brain and tuning in your ears. There’s just so much content in the world.”