

Lockdown diaries: Rosie, recently engaged and managing two international language schools in Madrid

If you've been brave enough to live abroad, learn a new language and launch a career in a new country, then you're set to survive some bumps and changes along the way!

Rosie was planning her wedding, managing two international language schools, and enjoying *sidra* in San Sebastián with friends just before the lockdown hit. When she got back to work the next day in Madrid, everything changed...

Originally from Liverpool, [Rosie Hegarty](#) has lived in Madrid for seven years. She's the Marketing Director for [LAE Madrid](#) and [LAE Kids](#) (the boutique Spanish Academy) and [TtMadrid](#) (TEFL school), and has spent many years working in international marketing in both the UK and Spain.

What was your life like just before the lockdown vs. today?

My fiancée and I work full time and we were so independent and active. We had just got engaged in February and were preparing budgets and viewings for venues to get married in 2021. We spend a lot of time traveling and visiting family in Madrid,

Liverpool and Zamora and had three trips booked for March, April and May that we've obviously had to cancel.

When the lockdown happened it was such a shock and everything happened so fast. We spent the weekend before in San Sebastián at a cider house with friends. We were laughing and joking about having to use hand sanitiser whenever we took a drink and we took the scenic route back to Madrid, driving down the coast and dipping our feet in the sea when we stopped for fresh fish. When I went to work the next day, it hit me that things were really serious.

It's been a bit of a bump into reality from that weekend of fresh air and eating out in the north of Spain. We live near Plaza Castilla in a little apartment – we're lucky to have our space separated into different rooms (and with lots of light) but it's definitely been a challenge now that we're together and confined 24/7.

Our days are split between work and trying to keep active: baking things that never look as good as the photo in the book, fitness videos of people who have more than 5m² to work with, and taking our little dog just far enough that he'll perform before coming back. Our wedding is probably going to be on hold (and a lot smaller than what we were planning!) and we had to cancel our engagement parties too.



How did the lockdown affect your work life?

I work at TtMadrid (a TEFL course provider) and LAE Madrid (a boutique Spanish school), managing the day-to-day of the school and international marketing, under the guidance of owner and founder, [Natasha Mason](#). She started the company 15

years ago and we've been a necessary hub for our students ever since. We offer them somewhere to come to print, access materials, give them general help with legal paperwork, translate calls or emails in Spanish, etc. or just offer them somewhere to escape from their housemates.

When you work with students from all over the world, it sounds really corny I know, but you don't just give them a language or training course, you help them adapt to their new life in Spain and support them through some really difficult and uncertain moments.

With so much information coming from the government and so many changes on what seemed like an hourly basis, we were inundated with current and past students emailing, phoning and popping in to see if we could give them information. We spent the next couple of days helping students organise return travel plans and generally making lots of cups of tea – reassuring parents or students themselves that everything was going to be ok.

The whole thing was a massive shock for them AND us. We decided to take all of our classes online the day that public schools shut down. We weren't legally obliged to close and knew it would be a huge financial hit for us but we just knew deep down that the safety of our students and staff was the most important thing, especially with rising anxiety about public transport and moving around the city.

By the time the lockdown was announced on Friday, we had cleared everything out of the school, made sure staff had everything they needed to work from home and were set to start online classes the following Monday. I don't know how we

managed to get it all done but the adrenaline of the situation seemed to help us through and on Saturday morning my desk was set up at my dining table.

Now, six weeks later, how are your language schools adapting to the new reality?

In the space of six weeks, we've gone from a small business that is ticking along well and employing around 30 local and international people, to seeing practically no income whatsoever. We offer Spanish immersion courses for kids and adults in Madrid and a TEFL course that's super practical and a great way for people from all over the world to start their career as an English teacher here. But both rely on international travel, so neither will grow or flourish without tourism over the next 12 months.

We've tried to keep as many staff on as possible and we're working hard to make sure that our community stays together to continue to offer courses for many years to come. We've launched online Spanish courses – both group and individual classes – for anyone who wants to get working on their Spanish. We've also put the finishing touches to a project we've been working on for a while: a Virtual TEFL, to continue to train ESL teachers as it's a solid market to work in during uncertain times and now anyone can take our course, wherever they are.

We've had to put on hold our wonderful Spanish Summer Camp for kids and we probably won't be able to go ahead with it but we're trying to offer online classes for kids to make sure

they still have contact with Spanish. Needless to say, we're latecomers to giving online classes and courses so it's difficult to make a long-term plan right now and even harder to imagine how we'll get back up and running until international travel is running fluidly again.

Have you noticed any acts of kindness or uplifting things recently?

Any kindness during these very difficult moments is something that we should be very grateful for. Managing a business and being a part of someone's life's work means that any setbacks are very difficult to overcome. The owner, Natasha, has spent 15 years working to build up this small business that brings together an international community of people that are passionate about travel, languages and teaching. This is devastating for anyone working with tourists or relying on international travel; and we're no different.

We've been very lucky to have built a special connection with thousands of students in the last 15 years and I've had messages from students and old co-workers from all over the world wishing us luck and offering words of support that came at just the right time. It's been a gradual realisation for us and a lot of our community that the world we all took for granted is going to be very different, for a while at least, so we'd best make the most of what we have and be grateful for it.

Who are you in quarantine with? Any

advice for people in your similar situation?

My fiance and I, along with our little dog. I made sure I had a solid schedule every day. We get up before 9am, shower (very, very important when cohabiting) and start work or do chores, have lunch and dinner around the same time and make sure we do an activity each day. We also go to bed at the pre-lockdown time mid-week, get a good night's sleep and make sure weekends are different to weekdays so it breaks the week up.

There've been moments when we've been so bored. I mean, bored to the point of us both standing in the hallway trying to think of some way to kill the next couple of hours before dinner. I suppose we've managed to find new things to try and we've made an effort to be kind to each other and do as much as we can to make life easier for the other person.

Have there been any comical moments in this unprecedented time?

One of my favourite moments of the day that always makes me laugh is when we go outside to clap at 8pm. There's an elderly lady who lives across from our building who comes out everyday. As there are lots of us in our building all facing onto her terrace she's the only person we can really see properly that's close. When we started going out during the first couple of days, we all waved and asked how she was and we sort of just carried on doing it every day.

After doing this every day for the last six weeks she now gives us all a very regal wave individually. There must be like 20 of my neighbours saying hi to her so she's the closest thing to a celebrity we've got from our window, and I imagine it's just as much a highlight of her day as it is mine.

How are you coping?

I'm quite resilient in general and I think that if you've been brave enough to live abroad, learn a new language and launch a career in a new country then you're set to survive some bumps and changes along the way!

I feel it's important to remember how lucky I am and why we're having to stay inside in the first place. People are grieving loved ones and having to cope with not being able to be with them in their final moments. My problems don't seem so important when you think about everything that's happening right now.

What goals are you hoping to achieve as our time in lockdown continues?

Try and get through it as best as I can. I started out writing this huge list of things to do over the weeks in confinement but it's a challenging and uncertain time for us all. I feel like the best I can hope for is to finish lockdown and get back to work, travel, see friends and family and get married. I'm not sure I need anything else right now.

What's the first thing you'll do once this lockdown is over?

If England is still in lockdown and I can't buy a ticket and get on the first plane there, we'll go to Zamora to see my fiancée's family. We're both very family-centric so not being able to see either side of the family for so long has been really tough.

Do you have any tips for how we can help those in need?

If you're in a position to continue to support local and small businesses, then do. It may not seem like much but it will make a massive difference to the team of people behind it.

If you could tell the government one thing right now, what would it be?

Keep going and keep listening to experts.

What's going on in your hometown and would you like to send them a message?

The people from Liverpool in England are the kindest and most selfless people, so I know that everyone will be doing their bit to help their neighbours and friends to get through this.

- Connect with [Rosie on LinkedIn](#)
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