

Example Essay #2

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Running with the Bulls

The only things I knew about Spanish culture before I visited Spain included flamenco dancing and the running of the bulls. When I had the opportunity to watch the bulls run, I wanted to experience this cultural tradition. Previous to my visit, I could not imagine why people wanted to participate in such a dangerous, unorganized event. It turned out to be very different than I imagined. Watching the running of the bulls changed everything I thought I knew about this famous cultural tradition.

First, the timing was quite different from what I expected. When I first arrived in Spain, I was surprised to find out that the running of the bulls would not happen until some time in the summer. I thought it happened frequently. When August finally arrived, workers built fences in the streets. These fences marked the path the bulls would run.

I knew the time was getting closer. Once the fences were completed, advertisements were placed on them with the schedule. The event actually lasted for six days instead of one like I thought. They planned one run each day. On the day I planned to watch the running of the bulls, I walked down to find a spot on the spectator's fence. I waited near the stadium (where the bulls end their run). There was a nervous excitement in the air as people began to arrive. After waiting for about thirty minutes, I heard bells. Then I saw the first runner come around the corner.

The running itself was also not what I expected. The trail itself was much longer than I thought it was. The route was about a half of a mile of curving roads, rather than a short, straight sprint. Once I saw the first runner run past me ringing some bells, I expected to see a handful of frightened people run past me with an equal number of angry bulls close behind them. What I saw in reality was actually a huge mass of people and no bulls. I guessed that there were maybe 800 men running in the street. Toward the end of the runners, I saw a group of runners dressed in white clothing. They had long sticks and wore red bandanas. Then, I finally saw the bulls. There were more men in white clothing running in front of, behind, and next to the bulls. I asked a worker and discovered these men were trained professionals. These men were there to help protect the runners and handle the bulls. The risk I had previously imagined seemed smaller now because the runners at the head of the group were far away from the bulls, and there were professionals nearby.

There were obviously risks, but not the risks I had imagined. Injuries were usually due to a human mistake instead of the bulls. From my place on the fence, I saw a man trip and fall down in the road.

He laid still and covered his head with his hands because he could not get over the fence fast enough. Then I saw the bulls run to where he was. The bulls just jumped over him. However, another man who was running did not see the man on the ground and kicked his head. Other people got hurt because someone pushed or tripped them. Sometimes this caused a bull to hit a person, but the injury could have been prevented if the other runners had been more careful.

Overall, running with the bulls was an eye-opening experience for me because what I had always imagined was not true to reality. The actual experience was quite different. It wasn't as dangerous and chaotic as I thought it was. The timing was different, the running was different, and the injuries were different. I went home that day with a new perspective. I thought about a future visit to Spain. I wondered if I could come back in the summer again. I never would have considered it before, but I wanted to join the event next time as a participant instead of as a spectator.



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