

How to Get Out of Your Slump and Into the Tapas

By Kara Martin

The New Year is upon us and for many within INC, this season brings us the opportunity to experience the trials and triumphs of adapting to a new country. I recall a time not so long ago when the idea of adaptation, acceptance and plain old agreeability toward Spain seemed a remote possibility.

Three months after arriving in Spain during a particularly low period, my husband cautiously said to me, "A country will not adapt to you, you must adapt to the country." His message was not mere fluff. A Spaniard who had lived over 12 years in the United States, my husband's words carried a more than fair amount of truth. However, at the time, I wasn't prepared to take the steps necessary to embrace life in Spain.



INC "Intercambio" group enjoy High Tea at the Ritz Hotel

You see, during those first few months any little thing might set off my emotions. Finding A&W Root Beer at Taste of America reduced me to tears. My own crazy paranoia would cause me to feel as if any sideways glance from a native was directed maliciously toward my children or me. And tackling the *carreteras*? Forget it. I missed home, and worse, I missed myself!

These feelings are not unique. I know that when confronted with change, the first reaction of most human beings is to confront that change with a degree of skepticism followed by adaptation, a reluctant resignation, or complete rejection. Which brings us to the most important question of all: how do we get out of the slump and into the *tapas*?

For me, several factors were involved. First and foremost, finding others going through the same experience at various stages was important. One friend and I spent hours on the phone commiserating over our foreign experiences in Spain. She had lived here much longer than I had, but we both were in a very "dark place" when we met. After about a month of such negative conversations, we came to the joint conclusion that we were not helping our situation. For every negative comment we had, we forced ourselves to think of three positives. Together we found groups where we could share our interests: INC, running, church groups and family-friendly places to explore around Madrid. With a growing group of friends and a new perspective on Spain, we found a way to see the brighter side of our new lives abroad.

Simply getting out and facing the world was also a crucial step. Not only did I find the experience liberating, I also began to understand the rhythm of the country and of Spaniards themselves. Not every sideways glance was directed toward me. Most of the people I met were quite friendly and helpful. However, if I hadn't stepped out the door and engaged them in a conversation, I never would have found that out.

Lastly, I owe my final snap-out-of-it moment to a visitor from the States. One of my oldest friends came to visit for a week and listened patiently to my ramblings on about life overseas. After a long ride home from Salamanca, she very gingerly said to me that while she understood my frustrations with life in Spain, it sounded more to her like I was having a good time. Simply hearing this statement from an outsider helped me realize that maybe life overseas wasn't all that bad.

As we face a New Year together, why not resolve to make 2004 in Spain one of growing appreciation for the Spanish culture and people, and our INC friends and family.