



# ASHTON MOTA

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JUNIOR AT SYA SPAIN

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## TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR INTERESTS

I am a junior in high school from Lowell, Massachusetts and love spending time with my family and friends. My interests tend to change every so often, but constant passions of mine are photography, lacrosse, public speaking and activism/advocacy.

## WHAT MADE YOU APPLY TO SYA?

Due to my Latino heritage (both parents being from the Dominican Republic), Spanish language and culture have always been an interest of mine and part of my lifestyle at home. Whether it be listening to Spanish music, sitting with my mom as she cooked *pernil* on Christmas Eve or listening to my grandparents tell me stories from their youth, Spanish culture has always had a subconscious presence in my upbringing and is one of the driving forces behind why I decided to apply to SYA Spain. I knew that applying to SYA would give me the opportunity to better my Spanish speaking skills and help me work towards achieving fluency.

## WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR YOUR SYA EXPERIENCE?

My hopes for my SYA experience are to take full advantage of the opportunities waiting for me (literally) outside of my host family's home. I hope to improve my Spanish speaking skills, not only at school but also at the dinner table with my host family. I hope to make lifelong friendships and connections with my fellow SYA peers, Spanish locals and, most importantly, my amazing host family. Additionally, this year, I also hope to grow not only as a student, but as an individual, with the goal of bringing back new learnings and insights to my various communities back home.

## WHAT ARE YOU MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO?

I know that there is a lot to look forward to when looking at the year ahead, but something that I am really excited for is Fiestas del Pilar that will be taking place in Zaragoza in early October. I am looking forward to being able to see all of Zaragoza's culture and traditions through food, music and dance all in one place while being surrounded by members of the community.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL BE MOST CHALLENGING THIS YEAR?

I think that the most challenging thing this year will be being away from my family, friends, school and everything that "I know" back in the states. In these first couple of weeks in Spain I have felt and seen how moving to a new country and having no sense of familiarity can be "challenging", to say the least, but I have also seen how the SYA community comes together to support one another and help with challenges that come our way. Though I know being away from my community back at home will continue to be hard, I am grateful and proud to be a part of my new community here in Spain.

## WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO THE DONORS WHO MADE THIS EXPERIENCE POSSIBLE?

The first thing that I would say to the donors who make this experience possible is thank you. Giving young people like me the opportunity to take a risk and jump into a new culture and way of living for a year, or semester, is invaluable because of the skills and lived experiences that we are going to take back home. If it weren't for your generosity, the experiences and memories I will make at SYA Spain would not be possible.