

## Chi Psi Final Report

Prior to going abroad, I did not feel like it was a big deal to study and travel abroad. I had never traveled out of the country, much less west of the Mississippi river, but I was naïve enough to believe that it was only normal for me to do it one day; after all, I have many friends who have traveled outside of the country; whether with family or for a study abroad program. The few of my friends that were fortunate to study abroad would tell me about their experiences. I would listen and watch the excitement beam in their faces as they would discuss in a nutshell their adventures and how it was such a life changing experience for them. I would tell them how I was happy they had a great time then that was it.

Now, I can say that prior to studying abroad, I never had nearly the appreciation and understanding of how much an experience like this meant to a person than I do now. Saying you had a “life changing experience” is not something that should be thrown around all the time. When people would tell me they had a life changing experience, I guess I could never understand what they meant until I had one for myself. Prior to studying abroad, I cannot think of a time I had an experience that was life changing. Studying and traveling abroad was truly a life changing experience.

My first surreal moment occurred as I got off my flight into Florence, Italy. My watch said 3 AM but I knew it was supposedly 9AM. Outside, the sun was already up and people were out and about. I walked off my plane and suddenly noticed a foreign language I had never heard. I knew what to expect when I landed in another country but it was still a shock.

Trying to communicate without knowing the language was the first challenge I incurred. I met two of my friends in baggage claim and we planned to get a taxi together to ride to our

checkpoint spot. Once we got our taxi, we soon realized he did not know any English. I had thought that prior to going that mostly everyone knew a little English. This occurrence made me think back to when I would hear other people talk in different languages in America. To me, I was normal because I spoke English; however, I now thought of myself as not being what is considered normal in Italy.

My two classes were Monday thru Thursday. The first class, Art Drawing and Composition was from 9-12:45 and my second, Italian 101, from 1:30-3:45. In both of these classes, my teachers were native Florentines. They helped me adjust to the culture and suggest things to broaden my experiences in Florence. Taking an art class in the birthplace of the Renaissance was incredible. We would review art works from Michelangelo and other famous artists who worked in Florence at some point in their life. It was truly remarkable to talk about things in class of these famous artists then go out in the city to the Uffizi or the Accademia and see their works.

Florence itself is such a wonderful and historic city. I felt spoiled in a way being able to live there for four weeks. Throughout my time there, I tried to take advantage of all that Florence had to offer. I really tried to implement the Italian culture into my life. Italians love relaxing and enjoying life. They believe you work to live, not necessarily live to work. Most of the restaurants and businesses close from around 3-6 in the afternoon for siestas. I thoroughly took advantage and enjoyed taking my daily siesta around 4 o'clock when I finished up classes. Taking siestas is something that I really want to continue back in America. Overall, the biggest take away from the culture is to just live life. You cannot spend time stressing about things that are out of your control.

One of the things I enjoyed the most was having the ability to travel all over the country. I traveled all over the country. During my first weekend in Italy, I traveled to the Amalfi Coast through a student travel group. I left on a Thursday night and came back Sunday. I stayed in Sorrento every night and took day trips to Capri and Positano. The last day, I went to Pompeii then subsequently, hiked up Mt. Vesuvius.

The next weekend I visited Venice and Lake Como. I departed early, by train, to Venice. What struck me the most about Venice were the amount of Cathedrals. There seemed to be a different church every hundred yards. I was told prior to going that I would get lost, and sure enough I did...multiple times. I went to Piazza St. Marco's and St. Mark's Basilica. St. Mark's Basilica was the most beautiful church I have ever seen in my life. While walking inside, its beauty stuns you. The interior walls were completely gold plated. While in Venice, the world famous Biennale art exhibit was showing so I was fortunate enough to go. After visiting the Biennale, my friends and I took a gondola ride around the city then departed back to Florence after. The next day, two of my roommates and I took a trip to Lake Como. We stayed for two days and this was my first experience staying in a hostel. I had to stay in a room with 7 other people, with no fans or air conditioning. Although the sleeping arrangements were uncomfortable, it was a great bargain for the price. Lake Como had the most stunning scenic views I had ever experienced in my life. The lake is in northern Italy and is nestled in the Alp Mountains. The towns are right on the lake, on the side of the mountains. Here, we hiked up the mountains and relaxed by the lake both days.

The next weekend, I went to Rome through a school trip. I saw everything from the forum to the Coliseum. I had always read about and saw photos of ancient Rome so I had an idea of what to expect to see. However, these photos do no justice to actually being there and

experiencing it first-hand. For the first time in my life, I could actually picture how life looked like in ancient Rome. It is incredible how the buildings remain in great condition after thousands of years. In the United States, things that are 300-400 years old are considered old. In Rome, I was able to witness things that were over 2,000 years old.

Coming back to the Lodge, I hope to share my experience and encourage anyone that is interested to travel and study abroad. I have gained a different understanding of the world and a new perspective to see things through. The more I saw when I traveled, the more I realized I haven't seen of the world. There is so much out there and this experience spurred my desire to travel and explore what the world has to offer. This experience has allowed me to appreciate other people's culture and lifestyle that differs from mine. I leave this experience more open-minded than I was before. I want to thank the ASF Summer Enrichment Foundation for their donation in helping me experience a truly once in a lifetime experience.