

# Beyond

The ISI Florence & Umbra Institute  
Studies in International Education

n.2

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## Reflection of Studying Abroad in Florence, Italy: May 2018-June 2018

Veronica DeFelice

Writer's block has come over me as I ponder the pleasurable fascination I had when fleeing by air to Florence in early May last year. The prospect of involving myself in a culture that was different from my own in America made my mouth water. Beforehand, in my imagination, I had a beautiful, spirited desire to stroll—for the first time in my life—through the streets of Firenze, soaking up heartwarming sights, listening to my own thoughts, and savoring the aromas.

Although I had never been to Italy before, I knew *mi piace la frutta* ("I like fruit"), a phrase I learned how to say in my Italian course in Connecticut, USA (and I do salivate at the thought of fruit). I would soon be at Sant' Ambrogio Market, gathering delicious fruits and vegetables to cook my daily meals with.

Prior to my arrival in Florence, as my planning nature took hold of my mind in preparation for departure, I attempted to research and map the walk from Aeroporto di Firenze-Peretola to the International Studies Institute; I clutched the idea that I could conveniently walk to my destination from the airport and that it would be a joyous way to absorb my first steps on new soil! I imagined my enjoyment strolling along the Arno River. After I snapped back into logistics, I realized I was getting ahead of myself and needed to get settled first: *Aspetta!* ("Wait!") Deep inside my mind, I knew my time would naturally unfold in Italy, and it would allow me to explore, learn, and appreciate my environment. My stay would be short, but I would experience it with great attention and heartfelt gratitude. I knew that this would be a six-week-voyage I would go through intensely, meaningfully, and with careful contemplation. The time, hard work, and money of my own I put into being able to come to Italy, excluding any financial help from my parents, created a yearning inside of me to



spend my time and money wisely and with active energy.

Upon arrival at my apartment on Via Luigi Carlo Farini, following being greeted by the lovely smile and liveliness of Serena Giorgi (*Community Engagement Coordinator* at ISI Florence), I peered at the synagogue across the street and imagined the stories surrounding the iron-oxidized dome and within its interior. As my mind and body were now present in Italy, the past and present function of all the buildings and landscapes grabbed my attention, like they had done when applying to the program back in America.

I decided to take a class called Villa and the Gardens and Architecture of Italy: History and Preservation with Professor Silvia Catitti, a licensed architect. In reflection now, the courses were delivered in the most delightful way with information I will hold onto for a lifetime. The ingredients of an Italian formal garden – geometry and symmetry, evergreens, water, and lack of floral abundance – has been painted in my mind as not only beautiful but also as a structurally untranslatable landscape. It has permanently been added to my brain's knowledge of many elements of harmony. The gardens in Italy became a memorable part of my peace about which I would journal my feelings and considerations. I received many doses of floral wonders in Florence, like in nearby Piazza D'Azeglio and a small garden across the Arno River called Giardino Martin Lutero that I documented.

As I set sail on my journey to Florence, I chose to take in all the sights through solitary adventures. The preservation of ancient structural inspirations by the Romans and the built-up city were colorful to my eyes. I pondered the attention to detail that must have gone into quarrying the material to build these homes and buildings and the significance the architecture holds today to the Florentines and to its visitors.

Above all, I became more in touch with myself during the silent moments I experienced in Florence. Simply closing my eyes while sitting on a cobblestone sidewalk near Ospedale degli Innocenti, in stillness with my thoughts, or going on walks and runs throughout the city became the most loved "monument" to me. I can recall looking towards the sunlight

and hearing the laughter of the locals.

I became engrossed in Italian culture. Thus, at a local bookstore, I chose to purchase two books written in Italian by Italian authors, one called *Non vi lascerò orfani* by Daria Bignardi and one called *La bottega del caffè* by Carlo Goldoni. I feel that the best way to connect is through understanding the conveyed feelings and language of my surroundings. I am in the process of translating these two books for my own learning.

Culturally, my moments in Florence were musical and vivid, like the bright red, fresh tomatoes that are dear to my stomach. The ISI Florence staff and the Florentine lifestyle I acquired have made a distinguished mark inside of me, and my heart and mind are forever changed in a way that allows positive growth for me as time prevails.

Thank you, ISI Florence.