

Dispatches from Italy: A long trip, the Alps and meeting the flat mates

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By John Miller

“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I— I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.” – Robert Frost

The journey started during January break. I felt the need to take the road less traveled by and leave familiar shores once again. Last May, I took “Darwin, London and Literature” at SUNY Broome and got to spend a week wandering around London. So, I got in touch with our Study Abroad advisor, Maria Basualdo, and she gave me my options for the summer of 2015: Italy or Ecuador. Honestly, Ecuador sounded like more of an adventure and more off the beaten path, but it required the participant to be fluent in Spanish (yo no hablo Espanol). So Italy it was, for a month.

When studying abroad in Italy, you have three choices of location: Rome, Tuscany or Florence. No matter which location you choose, you’ll be studying at a branch of the Lorenzo d’ Medici Institute (LdM). I chose Florence. There are a lot of classes to choose from; you can do a maximum of two, but I chose just one. Classes range from local history to international business, art and cuisine. There is a longstanding joke between my friends: the only school subjects I am good at are writing and art history. So, I enrolled in Art History: Antiquity to Early Renaissance. By early March, I had sent in all the necessary paperwork and bought my plane tickets. I would fly out of John F. Kennedy Airport, in New York City, on May 27 and return June 26. I was sure it was going to be a magnificent experience.



Ponte Vecchio bridge

With too many clothes and not enough money, I left Vestal with my Mom at 9:30 a.m. Wednesday, May 27. I picked up my Dad in Johnson City and started the three (ish) hour drive to JFK. We stopped for lunch in Clarks Summit. Just like every other time my family passes through Pennsylvania, we got subs from a Sheetz Convince

Store. I got a flatbread Italian sub.... It was terrible. It was just a piece of salami and a slice of onion sandwiched between two dry, hard slices of pita bread.

The drive itself was uneventful; we only slowed for traffic around Scranton and once in New Jersey. Even driving across the George Washington Bridge wasn't horrible. Cars slowed down on the road into the airport because the road was under construction. However, no one was actually out rebuilding it — thanks, Mayor de Blasio!

I first set foot in JFK at 2 p.m. Check in at the Air Berlin counter was very easy and I was able to check my luggage through for free. Security was also a breeze. With two hours to kill before my flight, I wandered around the airport. I finally boarded my plane at 5:30 p.m. There were only two seats in my row and I was sitting next to a girl who appeared to be about my age.

It turned out that her name was Isabel and she was studying at LdM as well. We chatted for a while and I learned that she was originally from Puerto Rico but is currently a junior at Bentley College in Boston. Small world, right? Idle small talk made the flight pass much faster.

Six hours and 45 minutes later we landed in Dusseldorf, Germany. This was going to be our only layover of the day.

The airport in Dusseldorf, Germany.

This layover was the first time I had ever set a foot in a non-English speaking country. As bizarre as it was to hear people ordering food in another language, it was extremely exciting. I was finally somewhere new! Isabel and I found breakfast (it was 7 a.m., local time) before wandering to our departure gate.

The chairs at the gate were filled with what turned out to be other LdM students. In fact, almost all of the passengers on this second flight were students. The flight was only an hour and a half, but the miniscule plane made it feel much longer. The best part of the flight was the Alps — snow-covered, jagged and stretching on as far

as the eye could see. The white peaks contrasted beautifully with the lush, green valleys far below.

Flying over the Alps.

Italy looks like exactly like what you think it does. Tall, sharp, green hills covered in olive trees and surrounded by little red-roofed villages. When we landed, the steward gave us each a chocolate heart and pointed us in the direction of our bags. Interestingly, my passport was not stamped in Italy but in Germany ... which means I have more paperwork to fill out now!

Isabel and I hopped in a cab (Italian drivers are insane — there are, literally, no rules here), went to the school to get the keys for our flats and endured a rather boring orientation. After, I found my flat and met my flat mates: Mark (my roommate), from Boston, Vince from California and Luis from Mexico. They are all very interesting characters: Mark had a delayed flight from Turkey to Rome, which caused him to miss his train and actually hitchhike to Florence. Luis is as smooth as it gets, speaks four languages, has slicked-back hair and, when I met him, was wearing a pink smoking jacket and rolled-up jeans.

John's flat.

The remainder of the day passed in a jetlag-fueled blur, which concluded with me calling my Mom at 10:30 p.m. begging her to get me home, regardless of the cost in American dollars or human lives. Fortunately, she was able to talk me off the ledge and I fell asleep hoping for something that would give me an excuse to fly home ASAP.

I woke the next day with a better outlook on my trip and life in general. After all, this will be my greatest adventure to date.

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Study Abroad experience.

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