

# PICTURES AND STORIES OF LEC TRIP TO ITALY 2019



BY PAOLA BASILE

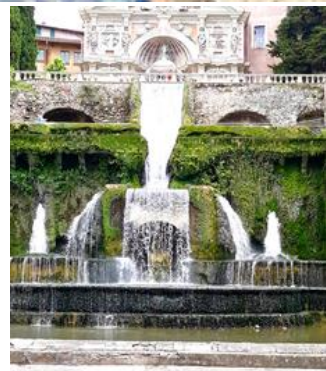




Our first stop is in Villa d'Este in Tivoli, a UNESCO world heritage site. The gardens of the Villa d'Este are among the earliest and finest of the Italian *giardini delle meraviglie* and symbolize the flowering of Renaissance culture. With its impressive concentration of fountains (500!), nymphs, grottoes, troughs and pools, cascades, plays of water, and music, it constitutes a much-copied model for European gardens. A magic place filled with beauty, myths, genius, and peace. One fountain periodically surges to splash unsuspecting visitors; a water organ fountain plays music at set times; a long row of 100 different “face” fountains offers an intimate place to take a stroll... The rooms of the Palace d'Este built on the ruins of an ancient Roman villa (absolutely gorgeous!) were ambitiously decorated under the tutelage of the stars of the late Roman Mannerism, such as Livio Agresti, Federico Zuccari, Durante Alberti, Girolamo Muziano, Cesare Nebbia and Antonio Tempesta.







Arrival in Montalcino (out hotel is here!) in the beautiful **Val d'Orcia**. Dinner and a few of us walked at night time in the city of Montalcino.

This area of Tuscany boasts of endless rolling hills covered with grain or sunflowers, a rich green valley which encompasses the Orcia river, from which the zone derives its name, and don't forget the vineyards for the renowned wines of Brunello and the newcomer on the market, the Val d'Orcia DOC. It is no wonder that this territory, which stretches along the provinces of Siena and Grosseto, is a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. This small city, **Montalcino**, has scarcely changed in appearance since the 15th century. Once you get up to the town, a magnificent spectacle unfolds for your eyes: rolling sunny hills dotted with yellow and red flowers, ancient oak trees, picturesque olive groves, scenic country roads winding through perfect vineyards and isolated cypress trees atop hills. Montalcino is not just wine, it is also very rich in artistic treasures. The historical center is dominated by the mighty and imposing Rocca or fortress built in 1361 to mark the passage of Montalcino under the domination of Siena. Another landmark of Montalcino is the tall and slender clock tower that graces the Palazzo dei Priori, the city's town hall, while below lies the main square known as Piazza del Popolo with its characteristic Gothic loggia. The streets of Montalcino with their stone pavements are truly enchanting and the village is a wonderful place to stroll around among the labyrinth of charming arts and crafts shops, cafes, restaurants and wine bars.

**Student:** We arrived in Italy at about 11:00 am Italy time. We found our bus and headed on our way to Villa d'Este. There we saw many beautiful fountains that you could not see anywhere else. It was so mesmerizing that I didn't want to leave, but we had other places to be and then we were on our way to our hotel. The hotel was a beautiful, cute little place where we would come to each night after our sightseeing. We had our first Italian dinner at our hotel and it was so good.

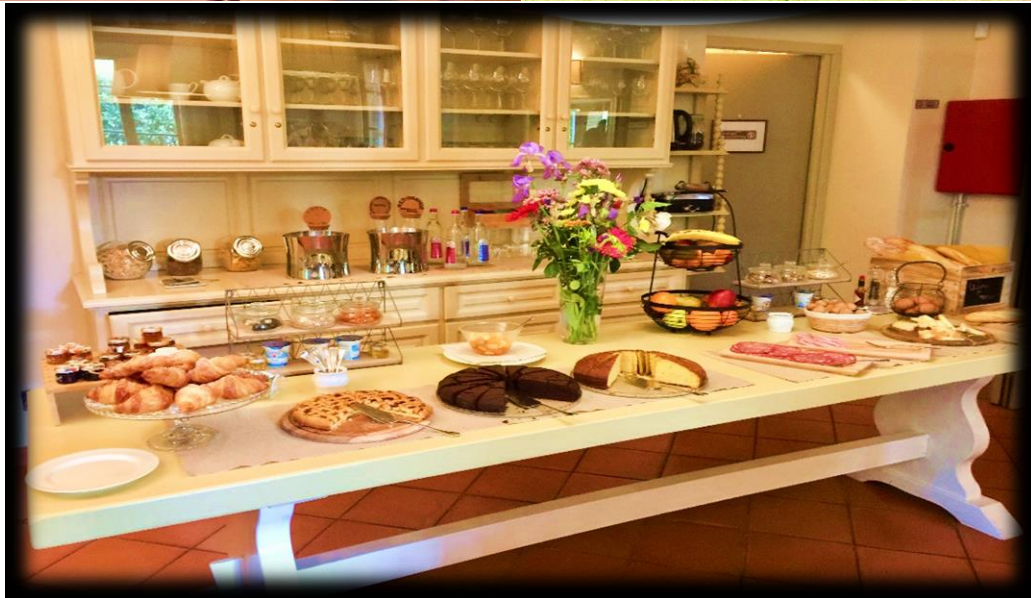
**Student:** The day we finally got to Italy was so cool and I was relieved to have finally arrived. The first thing we did was go to Tivoli and it was very cute there and the pizza we tried was so good! Then we got to Villa D'Este and after doing my project on it in class I was so excited to see all the fountains and gardens in person and it was way prettier in person. My favorite fountain was probably the one hundred faces fountains because they were gorgeous and it was cool see all the different faces they had. Even though it was gloomy that day it was still really pretty to see it all and the view of course was amazing not just there but everywhere we went. Dinner that night was very good! We ate bread and had some appetizers and pasta with meat sauce and the dessert was my favorite of the whole trip!

**Student:** Our first stop was Villa D'este in Tivoli. To say it was beautiful would be an understatement. It was more akin to heaven itself. Villa D'este was the perfect place to begin our trip, like a prologue to what else was to come. Being somewhere so ancient felt like such an honor, like the ground might deem me unworthy of its wisdom. Definitely not something felt frequently in the U.S. Jenna and I each bought a small bottle of Limoncello from a vendor in Tivoli. Arriving at the hotel was a sigh of relief, glad to be stationary for a while. We dined and decompressed with some sparkling white wine. The desert that night was a semi-freddo cantuccio and it was beyond delicious, I consider it the best desert of the trip. That night, sleep came easy, finally succumbing to the exhaustion I had fought for far too long.

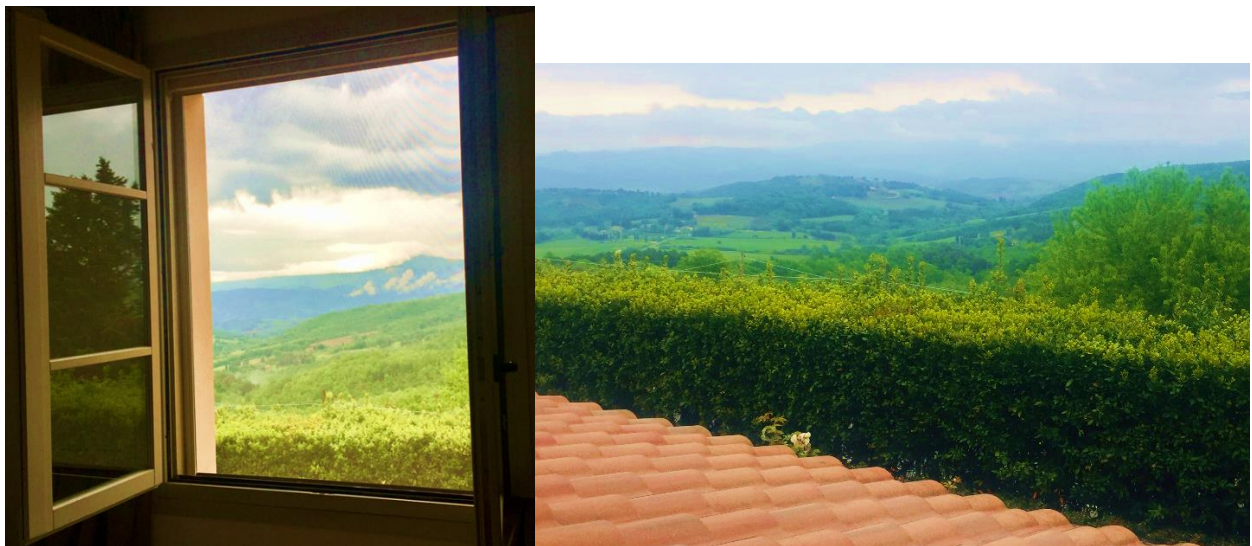












After a great breakfast, we went to Pienza and to Siena. **Pienza** is a tiny village in southern Tuscany in the Val d'Orcia. Pienza enjoys a strategic position standing high atop a hill, dominating all the Orcia Valley with extraordinary views. This charming village is widely known as the "ideal city of the Renaissance", the creation of the humanist Enea Silvio Piccolomini who later



became Pope Pius II. Piccolomini had the money and influence to transform his birthplace village into what he considered the Utopian city should be, exemplifying the principles and philosophy of classical times and of the great Renaissance. Thus, Pienza became the realization of a dream! They say that Pienza is the perfect mix of architecture, food & tradition built to represent the "Utopian City". Pienza is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

**Siena** is likely Italy's loveliest medieval city, another UNESCO World Heritage site! Siena's heart is its central piazza known as Il Campo, known worldwide for the famous Palio run here, a horse race run around the piazza two times every summer. The Campo is dominated by the red Palazzo Pubblico and its tower, Torre del Mangia. Along with the Duomo of Siena, the Palazzo Pubblico was also built during the same period of rule by the Council of Nine. The civic palace, built between 1297 and 1310, still houses the city's municipal offices much like Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. We then went to the farm Locanda Demetra, and after a detailed tour guide around the farm and garden, we had an incredible dinner there with wonderful friendly people!

**Student:** On our second day in Italy we had two towns that we visited. Our first town was Pienza. It was a cute little town and we did some good shopping. Then the next stop was at Siena. In Siena we saw the Duomo and it was such a beautiful sight to see. It was like nothing that I have seen before! Then we walked around the Piazza Del Campo and we did some more shopping, hahaha. It started to rain but it held off till the end of our activities. We had dinner at a cute little family owned restaurant that doubled as a cooking school. They showed us how they raised their garden and how everything they use is organic. It was a great way to end the day.

**Student:** The next day, feeling rested and ready, we headed out to Pienza at 10 am. The bus ride was another sight to behold. I still think this day was my favorite. The town was very charming and quaint, perfect for taking photos. Later we headed to Siena, a place with a much-welcomed peaceful atmosphere. We visited the duomo first, and it felt like walking into a painting. It would have been a privilege to have attended mass there. We encountered a group of children on a field trip, each adorned in matching white hats. An endearing little girl greeted me as she passed, saying "Hello!". We all did some shopping afterwards and headed to the piazza. We all enjoyed walking through the alleyways and streets, looking in stores. Later we sat on the ground in front of the tower and enjoyed the atmosphere. That night we ate at the family restaurant in Montalcino. The man who served us was so cute and sweet. He spoke English very well. I loved that he showed us their garden and told us the story of their restaurant. The view was stunning, and the food was delicious. I loved the focaccia.

**Student:** The second day was also incredible. I think Pienza was my favorite stop we made the entire time. I'm not sure what it was about it, but I didn't want to leave. Going to Siena and seeing the Duomo was really cool. I couldn't get over the beauty of the architecture and how intricate everything was, both on the inside and the outside. I think dinner on Wednesday at Locanda Demetra was my favorite. I loved listening to him tell us about the food and showing us where everything came from. I could really tell that he took pride in their family business and I knew the food would be delicious, which it was. If I ever go back to Tuscany, I would definitely consider going back to Montalcino so I could have dinner there.

**Student:** My favorite part of this day was being able to go to the farm we ate at for dinner and learn about the history behind that and to learn about how everything they grow is completely organic. It's refreshing to know exactly what you are eating, and the food was amazing. I would never get tired of eating Italian food, especially if it were from one of the amazing farms we ate at in Italy.













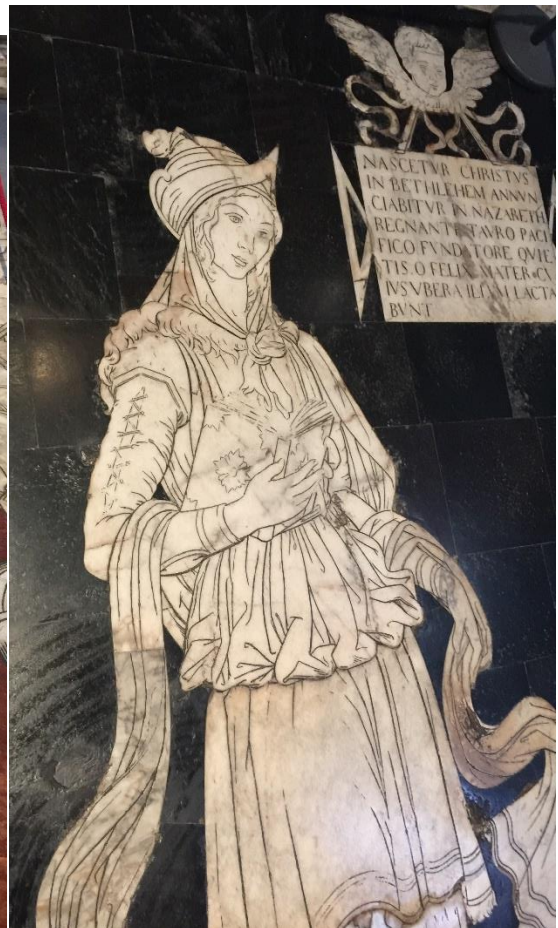
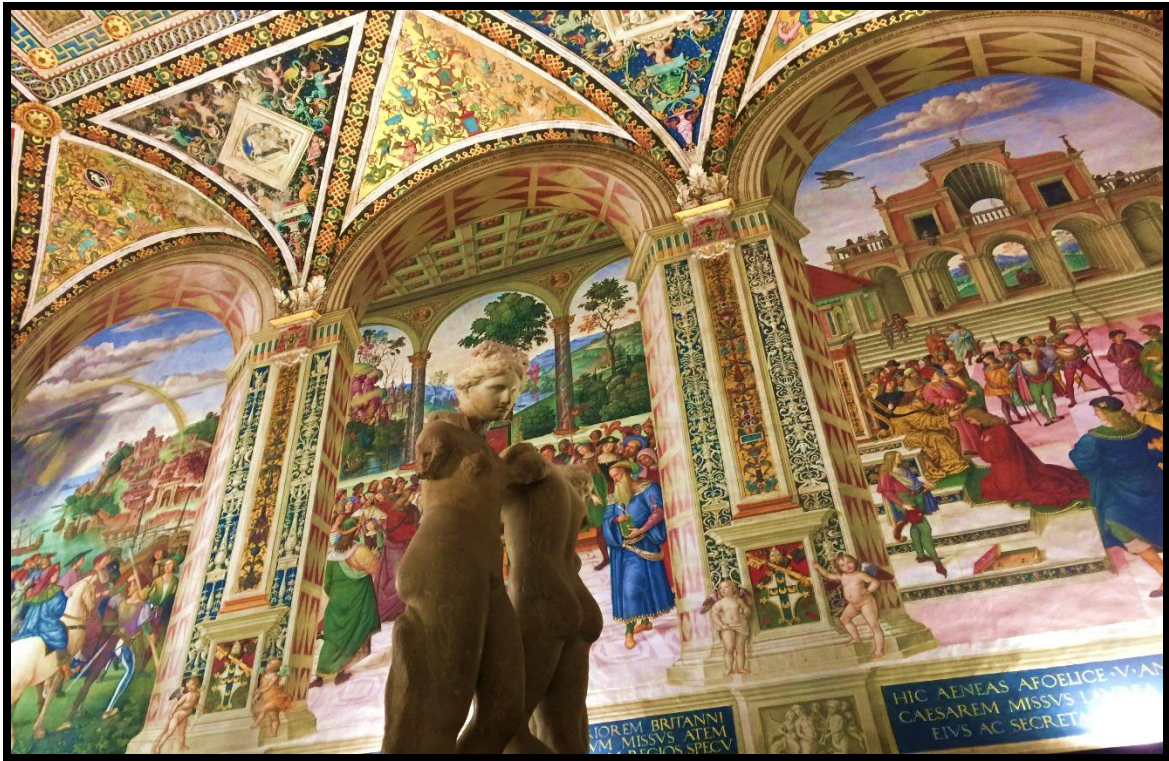






























Third day: Trip to San Gimignano, Vinci, and the farm Poggio Alloro. **San Gimignano** is a small walled medieval hill town in the province of Siena. Known as *the Town of Fine Towers*, San Gimignano is famous for its medieval architecture, unique in the preservation of about a dozen of its tower houses, which, with its hilltop setting and encircling walls form an unforgettable skyline. Locals say they are the oldest towers in Europe! Within the walls, the well-preserved buildings include notable examples of both Romanesque and Gothic architecture, with outstanding examples of secular buildings as well as churches. The Palazzo Comunale, the Collegiate Church and Church of Sant' Agostino contain frescos, including cycles dating from the 14th and 15th centuries. The "Historic Centre of San Gimignano", is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The town also is known for the white wine, Vernaccia di San Gimignano, produced from the ancient variety of Vernaccia grape which is grown on the sandstone hillsides of the area. The locals are very friendly, the scent of roses is always in the air, artists and musicians welcome the visitors with their art, children play soccer...many tourists from different countries walk around us. Second stop in **Vinci**, the birthplace of the genius Leonardo da Vinci, such a picturesque town! Dinner by San Gimignano in the Agriturismo (farm) Poggio Alloro with a guided visit to the farm and winery. **Fattoria Poggio Alloro**: *"Sharing is the basis of our philosophy. We like our guests to get familiar with old country traditions, to experience the beauty of nature, enjoy the genuine and organic products of our land, and fully appreciate the true spirit and essence of Tuscan culture and tradition"*.

**Student:** The next day was San Gimignano and Vinci. I was amazed with San Gimignano. I bought a leather wallet for my dad there, and we all got rings in a very nice shop. I had some delicious gelato there. There were people painting the gorgeous views on the edge of the city. The ride to Vinci was a little long, but I didn't mind. I enjoyed the long bus rides because we got to see the gorgeous countryside. Before we left for Vinci we went into a supermarket to get some snacks, and that itself was interesting. Seeing Leonardo da Vinci's home was unreal. I think in the moment it didn't really sink in. I am still comprehending the things that I saw on this trip.

We saw a group of school children there as well, and they were so funny. They kept us entertained while we waited to leave for the next museum. I think they got a kick out of seeing a group of Americans. They smiled at us and said hello and we replied "Ciao!" Later we climbed a tower in the town that gave us an amazing view. We ate dinner at a farm/vineyard. The ride back that night was so much fun. I remember feeling so content as we pulled out with the sun was setting. That was the first night I felt bonded with the group. Mauro (the driver) let us use the microphone to play music, we were all feeling our wine at that point.

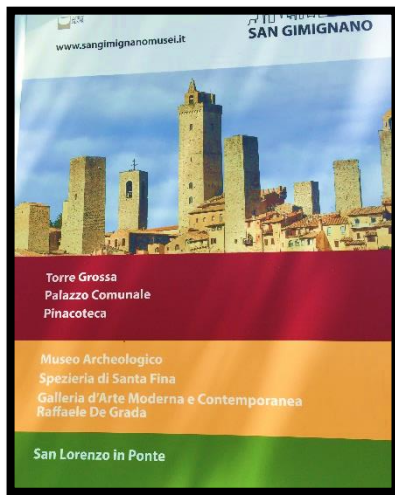
**Student:** The next day we visited the town of San Gimignano, another cute town with lots of shopping. It was very cool to climb up the hills and see the few couple towers that still stood in the town. After that we went to the town of Vinci and saw Leonardo da Vinci's house which was small with only three rooms upstairs and one downstairs. We then went to two museums one with paintings and the other one had Vinci's flying machines and inventions in it which was very cool to see. We all climbed to the top of the tower that looked over the little town of Vinci. That night for dinner we toured the farm and where the wine was made for dinner and one of the groups favorite appetizers was the bruschetta with mozzarella and zucchini on it.

**Student:** San Gimignano on Thursday was really fun. Again there were incredible views that made it seem like a fairytale. The buildings were incredible and I could see how much history there was in the town. I enjoyed going to Vinci because we got to see the house where Leonardo da Vinci was born, which was really cool. I love history, so being able to see that I something I'll always remember. I liked the museum as well, and the views from up in the tower were absolutely incredible. I loved touring the winery and the farm for dinner.

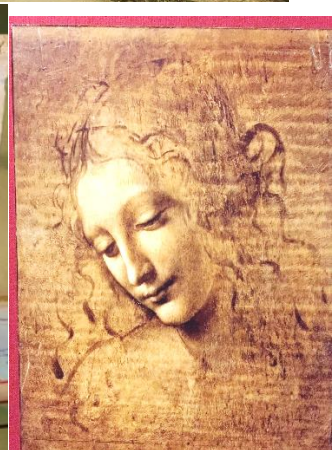
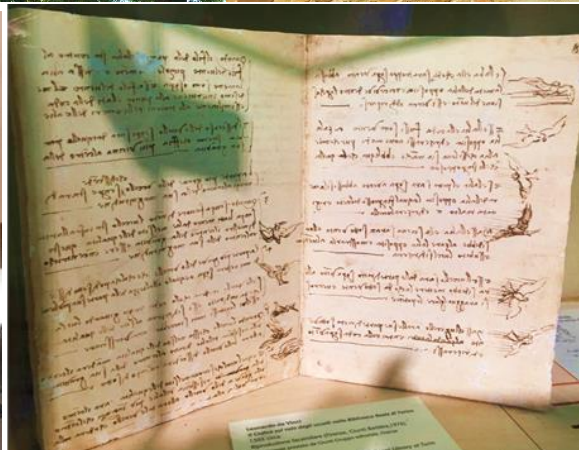




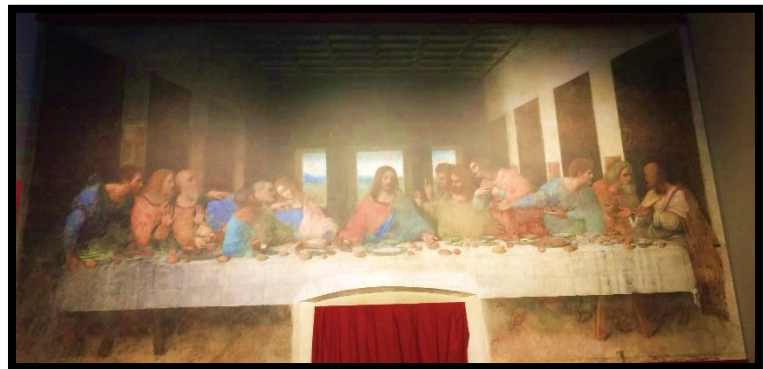
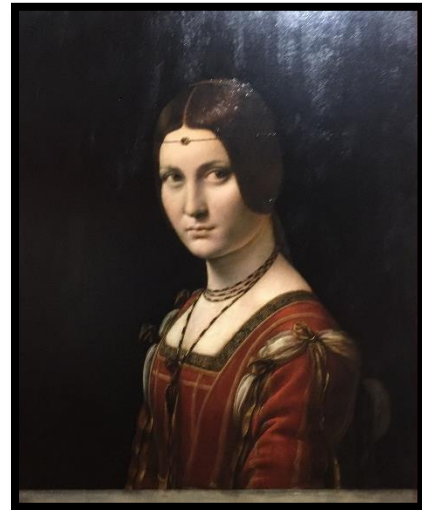
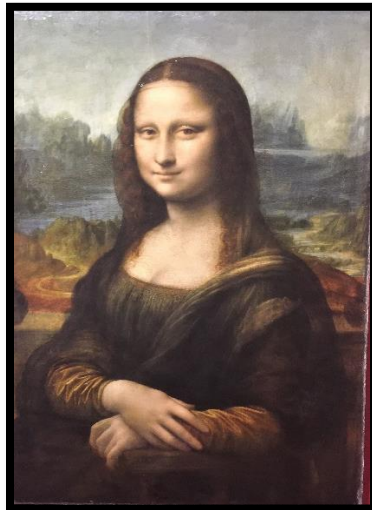
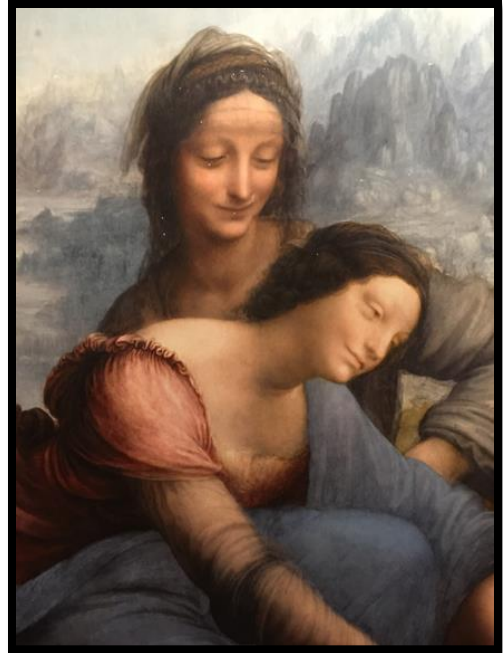




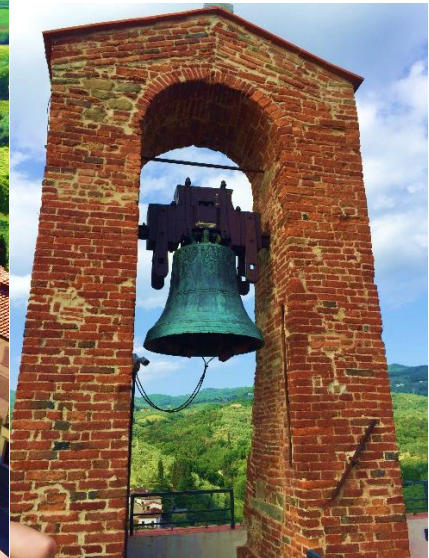






















Fourth day: trip to Civita di Bagnoregio and Bolsena, in Lazio. **Civita di Bagnoregio** is a stunning little gem, a jewel on the hills, a magical place officially included in the tentative list of the UNESCO world heritage sites. The town teeters atop a crest rising high above a vast canyon ruled by wind and erosion. Civita di Bagnoregio, has worn away. Today, the only way in or out is by a footbridge. Supplies are ferried in on mopeds. The main entrance is a huge stone passageway, cut by the Etruscans over 2,500 years ago and decorated in the 12th century with a Romanesque arch. Passing through the portal, you enter another world — one stuck in the ancient past. You can feel history in the smooth cobblestones under your feet. Civita di Bagnoregio is an artist's dream, a town in the nude. Each lane and footpath hold a surprise. Ivy drapes over arches and scrambles up walls; potted flowers parade across balconies. The warm stone walls glow, and each stairway is dessert to a sketch pad or camera. A pre-Roman tunnel below the town doubled as a bomb shelter in World War II....

**Bolsena** is a picturesque city situated on the northeast bank of Lake Bolsena (ancient Lacus Volsiniensis). It occupies the site of the ancient Etruscan town of Volsinii. The city has a 10th- and 13th-century castle and a small museum of Etruscan and Roman remains. The lake is the largest volcanic lake in Europe and one of the cleanest!

**Student:** The next day was one of my favorite days we first started the day by stopping at a pretty red poppy field and taking pictures that was on our way to Bagnoregio. The falling city was very, very gorgeous view from far away and in it. We all climbed the very big hill to get up to but it was definitely worth it with the yummy pizza I had, the view, and of course all the cute cats up there. After that we went to the lake in the town of Bolsena. Another very cute and pretty town and the lake was very pretty it was very cool to see the black volcanic sand and it was fun paddle boating on the lake. That night for dinner we got some fries and the steak was very very good.

**Student:** The next day was Civita di Bagnoregio and Bolsena. On the way there we stopped in a spectacular field of poppies. We all took gorgeous photos. Bagnoregio was definitely one of my favorites. The hike there was not easy, but it was so worth it. The city was so sweet and relaxing. It felt timeless. I really enjoyed having pizza... Afterwards I went into the church in the main square. It was beautiful and peaceful and I immediately felt a connection there... I was the most at peace I felt in a long time... Later on, Michaela, Miles, Dr. Basile and I found an Etruscan cave that was over 3000 years old. This blew my mind... One can hardly comprehend being in a place so old. We went to Lake Bolsena later. We walked through the ancient city down to the lake. The group rented paddle boats but Ashley and I decided to stay on land. We enjoyed a glass of wine and some Gelato overlooking the lake. Then we walked around the city and did some shopping. We eventually met up with Dr. Basile and found a cute shop where we each bought a homemade anklet. I haven't taken mine off since. Dinner that night was lovely. Ashley met Marco that night....

**Student:** on the fourth day we visited Civita di Bagnoregio, what a breath-taking city there really is nothing like it anywhere else in the world. The walk up that hill was a killer though, but it was completely worth it. I liked all the little shops and restaurants. I did get lost in the catacomb's underneath the city, but it did lead me to finding that crypt which was cool. Then after we left Civita di Bagnoregio we went to the city of Bolsena on the lake. The lake was beautiful, one of my favorite parts of that day was going out on those pedal boats. That was just so much fun even though I didn't get to go swimming it was still a blast.

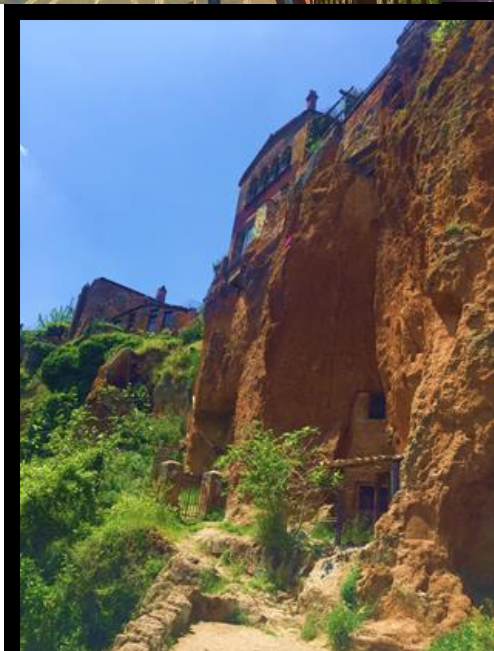


























Fifth day: a day trip to magnificent **Firenze (Florence)**, the birthplace of the Renaissance, of many artists, poets, philosophers, scientists, musicians... Firenze is a world UNESCO heritage site. Its museums, palaces, buildings and churches house some of the greatest art treasures in the world.

**Student:** The following day was the day I had been waiting for... Florence. It did not disappoint. I had a wonderful time despite the crowds. Florence was the busiest place we had visited. When we were at the Galleria Dell'Accademia we met a man who was from Painesville. What a small world! I was in awe of the Duomo of Santa Maria. I couldn't take my eyes off it and could have gazed at it for so much longer. It's so much bigger than I imagined. There was a lot of shopping in Florence. We all enjoyed walking around looking in high end stores at things we couldn't afford. Michaela and I enjoyed a glass of wine on the Piazza della Repubblica.

**Student:** Florence was very pretty and it was fun taking the tram there and doing a whole bunch of shopping. We went to the museum where the statue of David was and was very cool in there all the paintings were gorgeous and the statue was huge! The old bridge was also very cool to see! For dinner it was a big pizza night we got so many pizzas that were so delicious!

**Student:** Florence itself is a breathtaking and fast pace. It was an awesome day to visit the statue of David and go and see the lock bridge. I was taken by how simple the bridge was but how big of meaning it had to so many. Then getting to shop is always a fun way to explore other cultures and see how they fashion matches ours (even though they are almost entirely the same/different). The Duomo was beautiful, and the sights that could be seen from inside were breathtaking. No wonder why so many people want to visit it inside.

**Student:** Florence on Saturday was busy, but also really fun. I was completely blown away by the Duomo. Its massive size and breathtaking architecture and detail were amazing. It's mind-blowing that something built in the 1200s is still standing in such great condition. Seeing the original David by Michelangelo was amazing. It's so cool that I can say I was able to see one of the most famous and amazing pieces of art in the world. Standing over the river overlooking Ponte Vecchio was an incredible view. I think if I ever go back to Florence, I'll need 3 days just to get around the entire city. It was massive, but it was so much fun to walk around and see everything.





























Sight day: trip to the **Elba island**. Elba is the biggest island of the Tuscan Archipelago and the third largest in Italy after Sardinia and Sicily. Together with eight other islands, including Giglio, Giannutri and Montecristo, it is part of the National Park of the Tuscan Archipelago, the largest marine park in Europe. It was then inhabited first by the Etruscans and later by the Romans, who really appreciated the island and its rich deposits of iron and its mud baths. There are several memories of its glorious past, from the archaeological findings in its museums to the impressive fortresses and military constructions such as Castello del Volterraio and then on to the Napoleonic residences of the 1800s such as Palazzina dei Mulini. Elba is also famous and renowned for its clear blue sea and beautiful beaches.

**Student:** The following day was the trip to Elba Island. Unfortunately, it rained nearly all day. I really enjoyed the ferry ride there. I had only seen the ocean once before in my life, so I was really excited to see the beach. The water was so beautiful and blue even without the sun. I found some sea glass and my aunt is going to make jewelry out of it for me. We went up onto the Medici fort, which gave us incredible views as we went higher up. It was breathtaking to see the island from the highest point. That night we went to dinner at a small restaurant. Upon arriving, we had found that Marco was waiting there for us. The restaurant owner was very funny and tolerated our lively group. The pasta that night was fantastic and one of my favorites from the trip. After dinner we tried an herbal liquor that was very strong but very delicious. That evening we enjoyed wine and limoncello in front of the hotel. Jenna, Ashley and I had fun talking with Marco. We compared English and Italian colloquial. It was a lovely night.

**Student:** Although it rained, we did get to spend the day at Elba Island. The beaches were beautiful and unlike anything that we have here in America. We also got to ride a ferry on order to get to the island. The water was so clear and beautiful, I wish we could have swum but it was too cold and rainy. We of course also did some shopping!

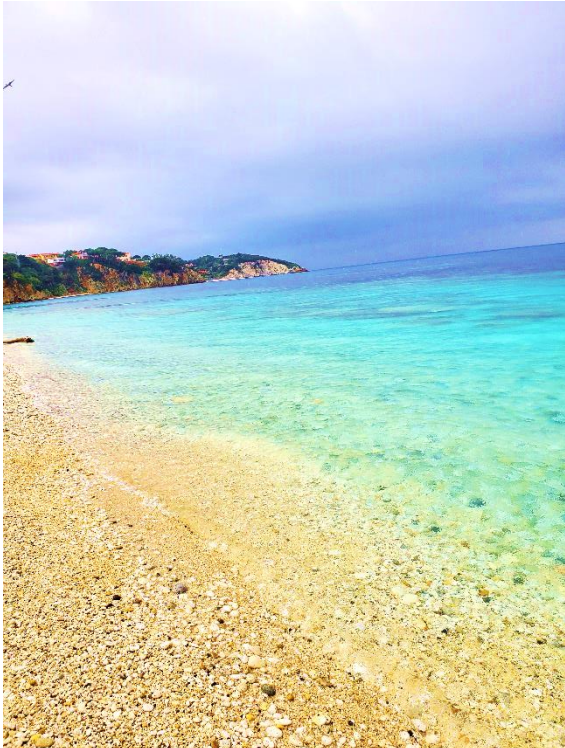
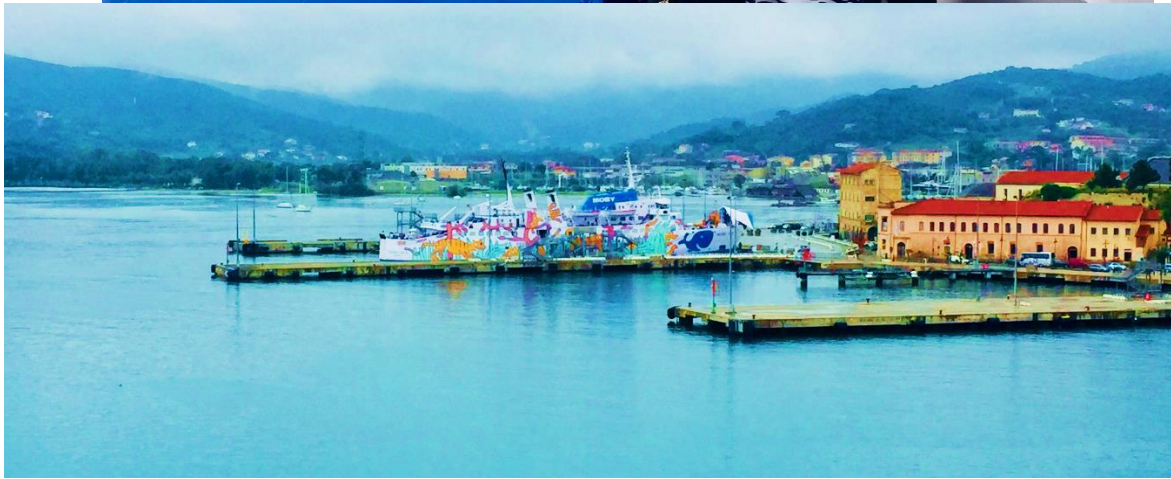
**Student:** The next day we went to the island of Elba and it was very fun the ride the very big ferry and the water was so gorgeous some of us went to have lunch in a restaurant near the water and we could not stop looking at how pretty it was. A few of us also got to climb the big fortress on the island and it was a very pretty view of the island. Even though it rained that day the island was still very pretty and so was the water.

**Student:** Even though it rained on Sunday when we went to Elba, I was amazed at how beautiful the water was. Even with no sun and tons of clouds it was still the bluest and the clearest water I've ever seen....

**Student:** I loved the ferry ride.... I loved watching the island pass and more come into view with the possibility of seeing dolphins. This island gave such a quiet beauty that you do not want to miss out on it.













Seventh day: **Montalcino, Bagno Vignoni, Thermal Baths** and dinner in the *agriturismo* (farm) “**Il Cocco**”. Bagno Vignoni is different from the others: what in traditional towns is a main square, in Bagno Vignoni is a pool 49 meters long and 29 wide, from the bottom of which bubble up a number of hot springs whose therapeutic quality has been renowned since antiquity. The waters are bicarbonate-sulfate-alkalinoterreos-hyperthermic, flow out at a temperature of around 40°Celsius. They were highly appreciated by the ancient Romans for their healing powers, and found a use in bathing-mud-therapeutic treatments beginning in 1170. After lunch and some shopping, we relaxed in the private luxurious thermal baths and SPA “Posta Marcucci”.



**Student:** Our last full day in Italy we went to a little town where the spa was and shopping around before we went to the spa. A few of us in the group went for lunch and got delicious pizza and I got some yummy bruschetta with tomatoes and garlic on it. Then at the spa it was amazing, the water felt so good and the view was great from the pool we all got some sun on the nice day and we all look silly wearing the swim caps. We had another good dinner and some good wine like we did all trip long. We all went back to the beautiful hotel we stayed in, sad that we had to pack to leave.

**Student:** The following day was the wonderful thermal bath day. The town where they were, Bagno Vignoni was so cute. I bought perfume for my mother there and we enjoyed pizza for lunch. The spa and hotel where the baths were very luxurious. The water was so warm and relaxing. We all loved it. Even Mauro joined us. Afterwards we enjoyed laying out in the sun for a little while. It was a perfect way to end a perfect afternoon. That evening we went to Montalcino to finish up our shopping. It was raining in the evening but we made the best of it. Roberta, Michaela, and I had gelato while we waited for everyone to shop. We had delicious lasagna at a small family restaurant near Montalcino for dinner that night. Some of us bought T shirts. The waiter was very cute and had a cat named Cappuccino who watched him intently from outside the restaurant. Packing up that night was so sad. I didn't want to leave this beautiful place that I had come to love in such a short amount of time. I would miss the picturesque scenery of the Tuscan countryside, the cornettos and cappuccinos, and the people I had grown close to on the trip.

**Student:** The thermal bath on Monday was awesome. The weather cooperated while we were there and it was a beautiful day to lay out and relax. I would've stayed there for the rest of my life if I could've.

**Student:** Miles, Ashley, and I went exploring and found where the water goes after leaving the spring baths. It falls down a small waterfall to be collected in a basin. In the pond that forms you can swim. There was also a cave there that was fenced off. The baths were very cool to see. The landscape beyond it was forested hills giving the place a good view. The baths were split into two pools. Both were warm, but one was much cooler than the other. The warmer one contained a small waterfall structure that added water to the pool.

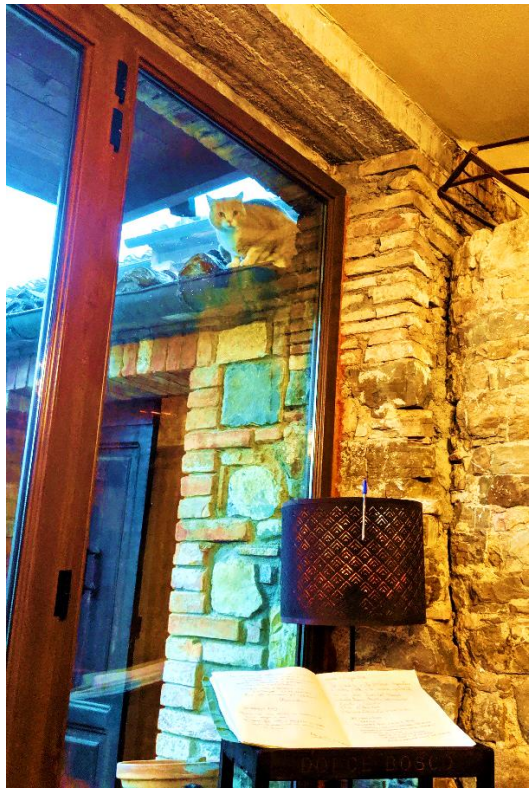
















### *Comments by the students:*

- ❖ *While I was looking forward to this trip and being able to come back to Italy, I never expected to see and conquer such beauty as I did during this trip. If I wasn't dying/conquering the "falling city," I was Walking through a beautiful small town or Church. The places we went and toured were beautiful and had so much meaning behind each site seen. Like in Vinci where we got to see Leonardo's house and museum with some of his work. Where we got to meet young kids on a school trip and talk with them about what they learned and see how much they loved going to different places and learning besides in a classroom. It's all these adventures that were taken on this trip that made me fall for Italy once more.... I enjoyed this group and all of the adventures, whether big or small, and we could not have gotten to experience this without you - Dr. Basile - so thank you!*
- ❖ *Hi Dr. Basile, I wanted to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the beautiful trip. You did an incredible job putting it together, and we are so grateful to have someone like you take us to Italy. Your passion and energy for everything gave the trip something special. The trip was everything I could have imagined and more, and we have you to thank for that. I am already thinking about going again next year! I am still in awe of everything I saw. I am so grateful to have been able to go on this trip of a lifetime. I will cherish all the beautiful memories I made for the rest of my life.*
- ❖ *Dear Dr. Basile, I would like to thank you for the wonderful trip it was really a life changing experience. You were a more than wonderful guide and professor so I just wanted to thank you for everything. This trip opened my eyes to great possibilities for my future and was an incredible opportunity and journey that I am grateful to have been part of.*
- ❖ *I will never forget the trip we took to Italy. Especially since both sides of my family have Italian heritage, it has always been a dream of mine to visit there one day. Thank you again for this amazing opportunity that I will be sure to remember for the rest of my life! Arrivederci, grazie mille!!*
- ❖ *Dr. Basile! I had the best time, thank you so much for this incredible experience!! Ciao, grazie mille!*
- ❖ *I had an amazing trip it was a lot of fun and such a great opportunity of a lifetime. I made great memories and great new friends. I enjoyed every day no matter the weather or the temperature and thank you Basile for taking us along!*



- ❖ *My study abroad experience was one I'll never forget. I'm grateful I had the great privilege of traveling overseas for the first time in my life.*
- ❖ *Going to Italy was a wonderful experience that I hope to do again.... I have always enjoyed learning languages and about other cultures and the trip only strengthened that love for learning. Taking this trip allowed me to apply what I had learned in my language classes as well as what I learned in this class.*
- ❖ *My experience going to Italy was one that I will never forget. I really learned a lot from traveling to a different country and it made me want to continue to travel throughout the rest of my life. Without this trip I would've been completely blind to what happens in different countries. I am so glad I am a little more culturally aware. This trip has also made me become more open minded and accepting of new things. I can't wait to go back!*
- ❖ *Thank you so much for the wonderful experience! I had a great time!*