

PICTURES AND STORIES OF OUR STUDY TRIP TO ITALY 2017



PAOLA BASILE

Departure on May 21 from Cleveland. Our first stop is in the lovely **Borghetto** by the Mincio river. Borghetto sul Mincio is a beautiful village, and it is one of those places that seem unreal. Like a fairy tale. A perfect place for a romantic getaway: stone houses, some ancient watermills, the view of ancient romantic ruins of the medieval bridge and the Castle appearing among the trees on the hill.





The ruins are those of the medieval bridge called Visconteo. It was built by order of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, duke of Milan, between 1393 and 1395 and was once connected to the castle by high crenellated walls. Borghetto sul Mincio was once a ford, a crossing point on the river, in an area that everyone desired: the Gonzaga (Mantova), the Scaligeri (Verona) and the Visconti (Milano) dynasties, the Venetians, then even the Austrians and the French.

A student: After stepping off the plane, Borghetto was the first destination. It was like traveling back in time: a small, village-like atmosphere located on a river with a castle overlooking the town from high above (a castle owned by none other than the Scaliger family). This was my first taste

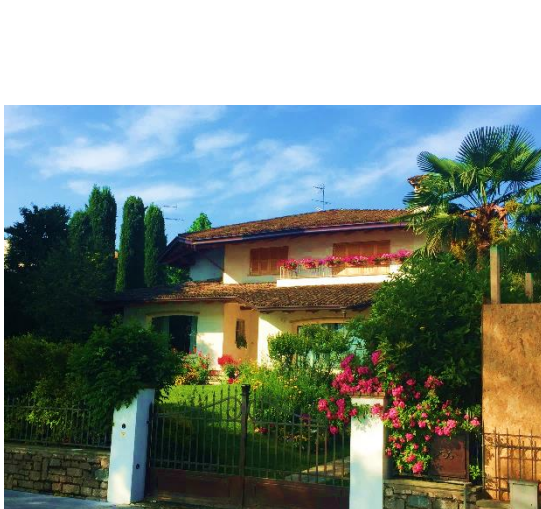
of Italy, my first abroad experience. Walking through the town I could already see the more laid-back atmosphere and the vibrancy of Italian conversation emanating from outdoor tables and cafes located along the river. Upon climbing the many stone stairs tucked away behind trees, the hillside opened up to a stone-lined pathway that soon became the remains of an old castle and fortress. To see this made me realize just how much history is located in Italy compared to the young United States whose historical monuments are far more modern than their Italian counterparts. I tried to envision the castle, its inhabitants, and the villagers below and what life may have been like for this medieval town. We ate in Gatto Moro restaurant amazing homemade tortellini....





A student: *Soon after our arrival, we ventured on to **Peschiera del Garda** – where we would call home for the next seven days. A beautiful city located on Lake Garda with stunning views and a busy city center, I was surprised how much it reminded me of home. Only, Peschiera feels much safer, much kinder, much more peaceful. The landscape was similar, but the atmosphere was much more idyllic with crisp, clear water, swans, mountain views, cool lake breezes, beachside cafes, and homey houses, hotels, and apartments nestled close together.*

Peschiera del Garda offers its visitors visible signs of every historical era through which it has lived: from the age of pile-dwellers (stilt-house inhabitants) during the Roman Age, and from the early to late Medieval years in which the Scaligeri Family ruled, to the period of Venetian nomination, then the Napoleonic Empire, and finally to the Hapsburg rule, when Peschiera was one of the four fortresses of the Austrian *Quadrilatero*, at the time the most powerful defensive system in Italy. Our hotel is in front of lake Garda with a great view. Swans gave us a nice welcome! Great dinner by the lake...

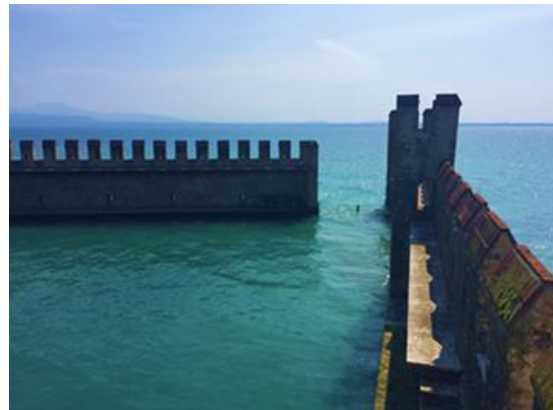




Second day in Sirmione.

Sirmione has been settled since the Stone Age, with early finds showing that it was probably a small village of fishermen living in houses on stilts on the banks of Lake Garda. Its strategic position near the southeastern "corner" of the lake and the defensive qualities of the peninsula meant that it was of military importance over the years. But the beauty of the setting also meant that it was - and still is - a popular place for people to visit. Rich ancient Romans built holiday villas on the end of the peninsula, of which one still exists: le Grotte di Catullo! The medieval castle Rocca Scaligera surrounded by water, was built near the end of the 12th century...

A student: The second day of our trip began with a boat ride across Lake Garda to Sirmione, a small peninsula on the lake. Sirmione is something out of a fairytale. The beaches stretch across this small peninsula, tucked away behind trees and ancient ruins. Here we visited Castello Scaligero and the Grotte di Catullo. The castle is located on both land and water, and it is an architectural marvel. At one point, it was used as a fortress of defense in which every inhabitant, including animals, could be safely kept within its walls. The tallest tower still stands, and from there you can see breathtaking views of the city, the lake, and the rest of the castle. But the Grotte di Catullo is what took my breath away. The massive size of this ancient ruin was incredible, and to see how much of it remains preserved was, simply put, amazing. As I walked through the remains of hallways and corridors, I could see archways to former terraces, crumbled doorways from servants' quarters, hollows from horse paddocks, and remains of walls of a once magnificent home. Walking the perimeter of the Grotte, I could see that this home far exceeded the size of the Castello Scaligero, and it's hard to imagine ancient ruins outshining a castle that still stands, but the Grotte was far more impressive to me.











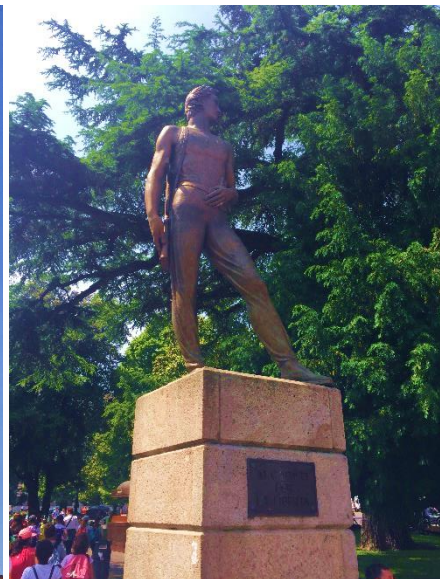
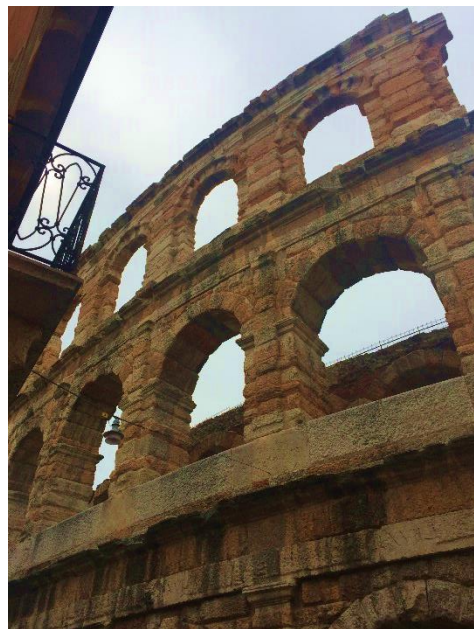


A student: *The third day of our trip was a day I had been waiting for since I was about 5 years old. This was the day we visited **Verona**. This is the Italian city of love, the birthplace of the inspiration for *Romeo and Juliet*. There was so much about this city that I could not wait to experience. When we stepped off the bus and began to enter the city, I could feel my excitement building. We entered the city across the Ponte Vecchio which leads through the Castelvecchio (“old bridge” and “old castle” – very original names, I might add). Across the bridge were several locks – locks of love – and I stopped for a second to imagine what it must have been like for William Shakespeare to enter this city long ago. I wondered what inspired him to rewrite the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, and I wondered if the same things may inspire me. This was a city that I wanted to fully immerse myself in. This is where I knew I would fall in love with Italy.*

At the city center is the Arena – and to someone who has never seen the Coliseum, it was incredible to see this miniature version. Because the Arena is still used for concerts and performances, I had expected it to be in better condition than what I saw. Along the outside of the Arena, you can see the crumbling bricks of facades once perfectly built, and I found it interesting to compare the crumbling inner walkways to the strong arches that still stand and bear the weight of this ancient building. An interesting juxtaposition to this image was the modern iron heart outside the Arena walls – a symbol of the love that Verona portrays (and most likely a tourist gimmick, but still kind of magical).

Walking the streets, we stumbled upon the Piazza del Erbe – an open-air market that I was hoping would have much more fresh fruit and vegetables to sample – instead, I found many vendors of souvenirs and trinkets. Then, we arrived at the place I had been waiting to visit – Casa di Giulietta. The house that inspired it all. As we walked through the gated archway, I read the graffiti that lined the walls. It was all expressions of love, names of loved ones past and present; if I closed my eyes, I could hear the many voices exclaiming their love like Juliet had once called from her balcony. The courtyard was PACKED, and full of people much like myself who longed to experience the inspiration. Juliet's home has now become a museum, and being able to walk through preserved rooms with excerpts from Romeo and Juliet strategically placed around, I got to feel like I was her. Having not seen my significant other for almost eleven months now, walking out onto her balcony and exclaiming "K., where for out thou, K.?" was an experience that I can't quite describe. It was a realization that my love for this man is much like Juliet's love for Romeo – I even left behind a letter for Juliet's Secretaries to respond. And you can't forget to capture a moment with Juliet's statue in her courtyard making sure to grasp her right breast for good luck! Still not sure how that legend came to be ...









A student: The arena which was built around 30 A.D. was impressive. The arena is still being used today to seat up to 15,000 people for concerts and other performances. They have newer seats surrounded by the old cement bleachers of the original arena. It was amazing even though much

smaller than the Coliseum in Rome. I had lunch in Te'ta de Giuliaeta. I had the most delicious meal of my entire life... It tasted so good it made me want to cry...



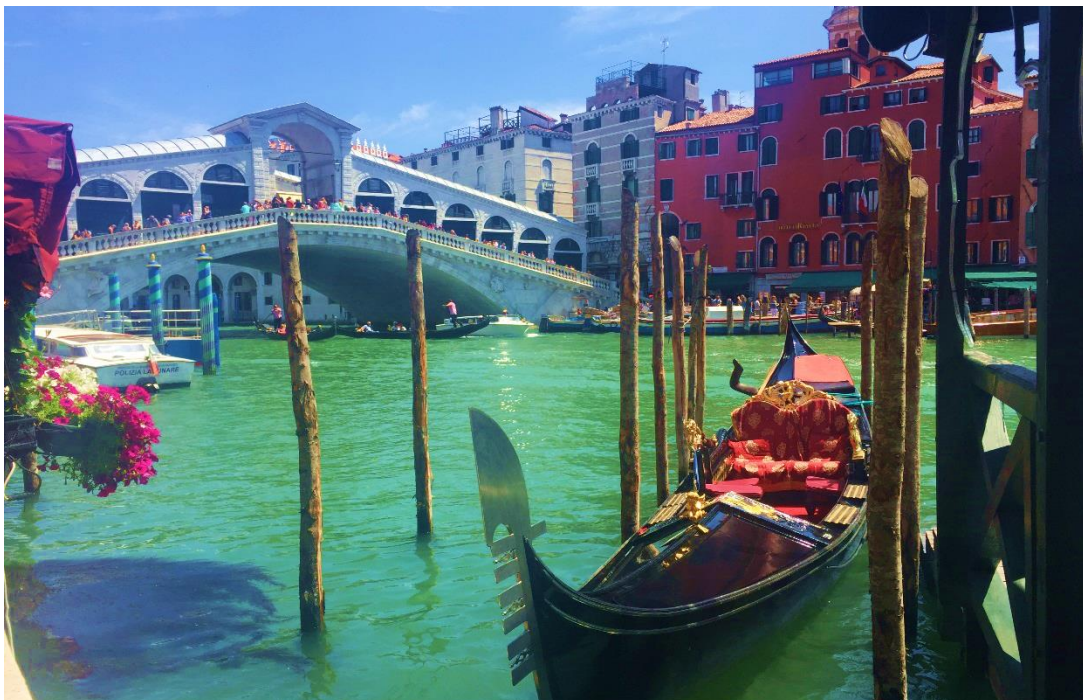


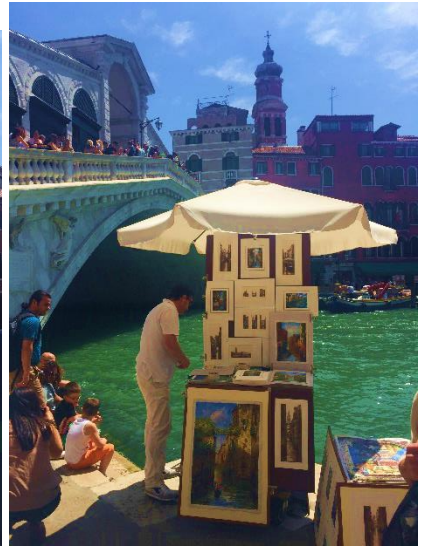




Few cities can claim such a priceless art and history heritage as **Venezia (Venice)**. This unique city with its magical, spectacular scenery is not just beautiful, it is a real miracle of creative genius: a city built on water, on mud... According to traditions, it was founded in 421 AD. The name is derived from the ancient *Veneti* people who inhabited the region by the 10th century BC. The Republic of Venice lasted for over 1000 years and is the symbol of wise government and freedom. The lagoon was its only defense, there were no palace guards except the Arsenal workers and no parade ground except the sea. During centuries of feudalism and barbarism in Europe, Venice symbolized democracy and civilization.

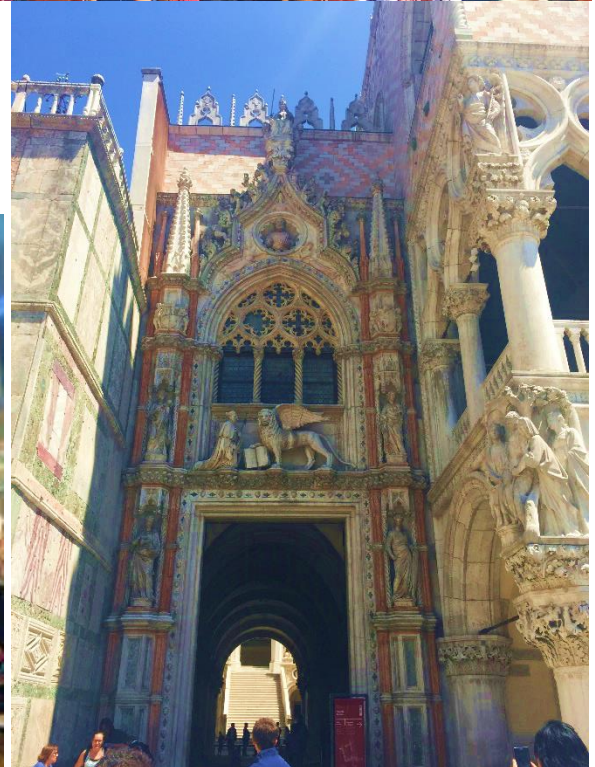
One student: *Our fourth day was a journey to the labyrinth – Venice... The channels of water always make me think of the Phantom of the Opera when he's guiding his boat along the dark rivers that lead to the depths of his lair – even though that's France and not Italy – I don't know why he always reminded me of a gondolier. I was amazed at how the bridges are just a part of the city, and that after a while, you don't even notice you're crossing yet another bridge. I had begun my day counting the number of stairs I was climbing, and I quickly lost count. The Rialto Bridge was marvelous – I had no idea that it was lined with so many shops! While crossing the Rialto, why not get some shopping done? You could spend all day just on that single bridge. But the true gem of the city is Saint Marc's Basilica. I half sprinted to the square, because I was so nervous that the line would be too long to tour, and I wouldn't get to see the inside – even though the outside is just as marvelous. Stepping inside gave me chills – even if Saint Peter's in Rome is larger. From the gold mosaics, to the marble pillars, to the vaulted ceilings, to actually being able to step foot in a Saint's church (you don't really get to do that in the United States), I was in awe. As I knelt at his tomb, I was able to pray and contemplate so many things. At that moment, everything seemed trivial, and hoping for the well-being of others and praying my nightly prayer in such a sacred and holy place... I could definitely get lost in this city – and in a good way (don't come find me, haha).*



















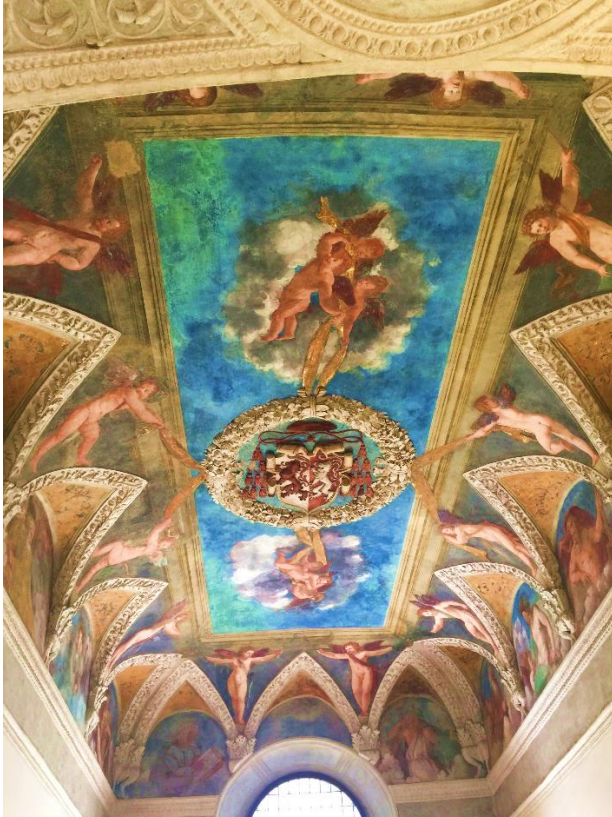


A student: *Our fifth day was an excursion of variety. First, a castle and the “painted” city of **Trento**; second, **lake Tenno**; third, a northern lake town, **Riva del Garda**. The Castel Buonconsiglio is massive, and exactly what I would picture any castle to look like. The castle is actually very well preserved with so many frescos, and mosaics, and arches, and statues, and paintings, and furnishings still intact; we even got to witness a team of artists working on restoring a painting from the castle. I lost count of all the rooms and how they connect and where they let out and all the different passageways and secret areas and tucked away places. But it was no surprise that the gardens were my favorite – that is where I would have spent all of my time - outside under the sun or stars, in the grass amongst the many plants. The landscaping was incredible and the architecture of that portion of the castle was so intriguing – so different from everything else within the castle walls. It must have been their escape, as well.*









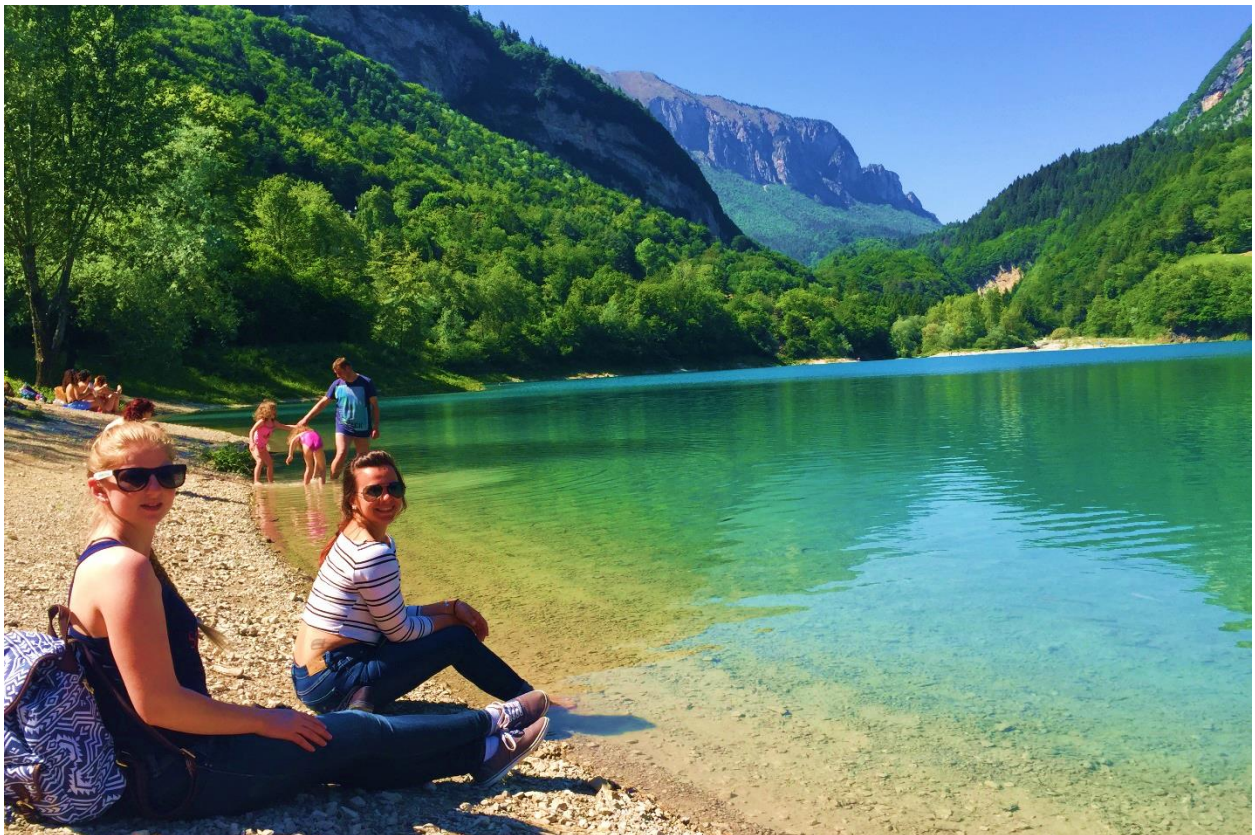




A student: We ended up going to the most beautiful body of water I have ever seen. The water was about 3 different shades of blue but was still crystal clear. It was surrounded by mountains,

lots of trees, and tall grass. I had the most delicious piece of apple pie in my life. It is supposed to be the symbol of America but no apple pie in America has tasted this good.

*A student: **Lake Tenno** was tucked away in the mountains with such crisp, aqua blue water; it was a little paradise. I may have even tried to catch one of the many fish swimming close to shore. Cooling off my sore, swollen feet in the cool water was so relaxing...*

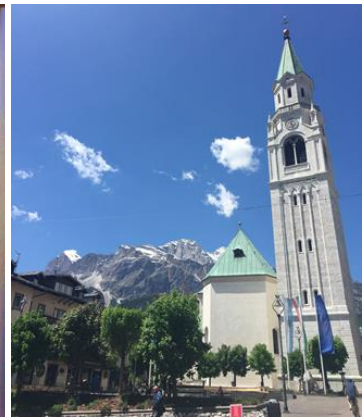




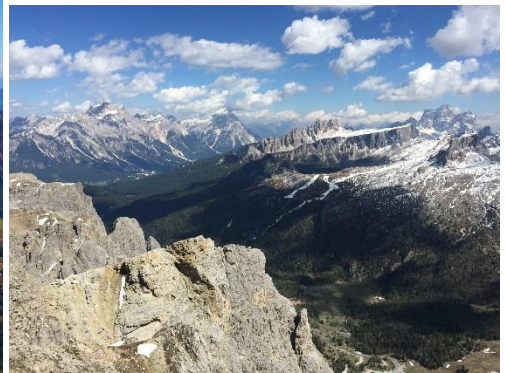


A student: *Our sixth day was a grueling day – whether you decided to hike or climb. The **Dolomiti (Dolomites)** were a marvel I am glad I didn't miss. The mountains are so different from anything I've seen, because their composition is so different from any other mountain – these mountains rose from the sea. And I loved that they have become an UNESCO World Heritage site, because of the many trenches and bases carved into the cliffs during WWI. I didn't know whether to picture myself in *The Sound of Music* or an old war movie. And **Cortina d'Ampezzo**... this is the place that I had the best views of Italy. This is the place that Italy's unique beauty shone through...*

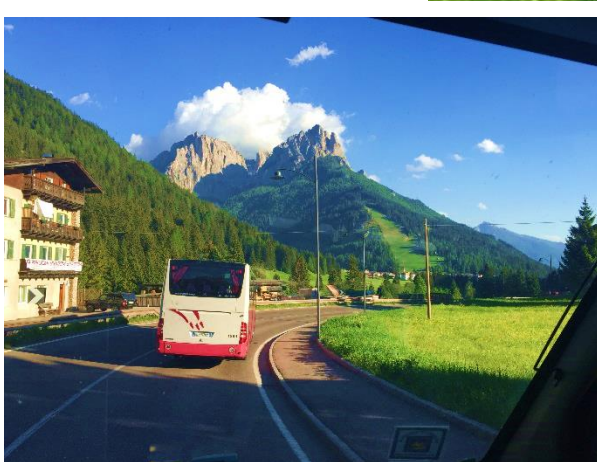
A student: *When we arrived, the town was asleep... Some students went for a walk on the trails and others went to the top of the Dolomites. I went to the top, to **Passo di Falzarego**. At the very top was snow, but it wasn't cold snow because the air was so warm. I kept walking up higher and higher trying to get to the highest point. The landscape was majestic. I would have liked to set up a tent and spent the night there at the top away from all civilization and just being one with nature. This was my second favorite part of the trip being at the top of the mountain and just looking at Italy 3,000 meters below me.*





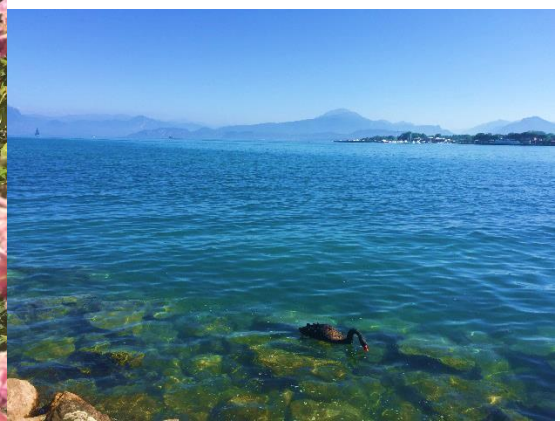






At the end of the day we had an amazing dinner, it started with 12 different kind of delicious appetizers....





A student: Our seventh day was a relaxing day spent in a garden and in the city of **Mantova**. The Garden **Parco Sigurta`** grounds were expansive and hard to believe that it was a part of a single property. Between the many different gardens and animals, and things to do – I hardly had enough time to enjoy it. I could have spent days exploring those grounds. The best part – the hedge maze that led to a Gazebo overlooking the rest of the grounds – we got lost in there for a good half hour. But I sure must have been determined to find my way out, because when we finally emerged from the maze, I had several groups of people following me out cheering that I had found the way for them! I felt like Alice in Wonderland. I also contemplated stealing one of the baby goats to bring home.... Mantova was a true medieval town – even though there were modern shops and cafes lining the streets, it still felt like the city was stuck back in the medieval era. It was a cool feeling – the city has not lost its charm or its history...

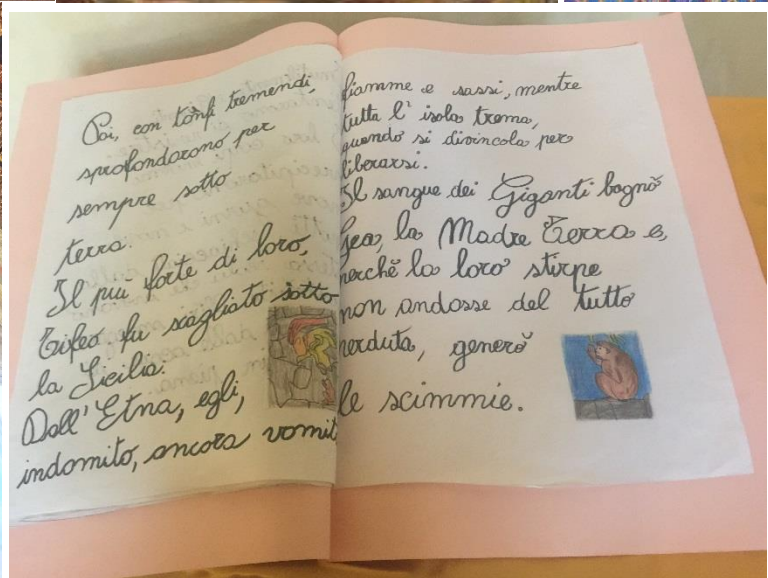
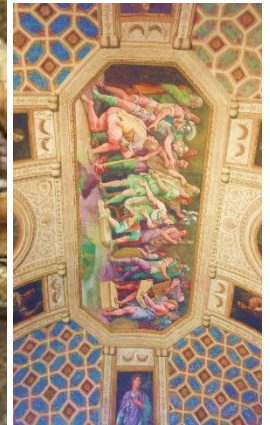
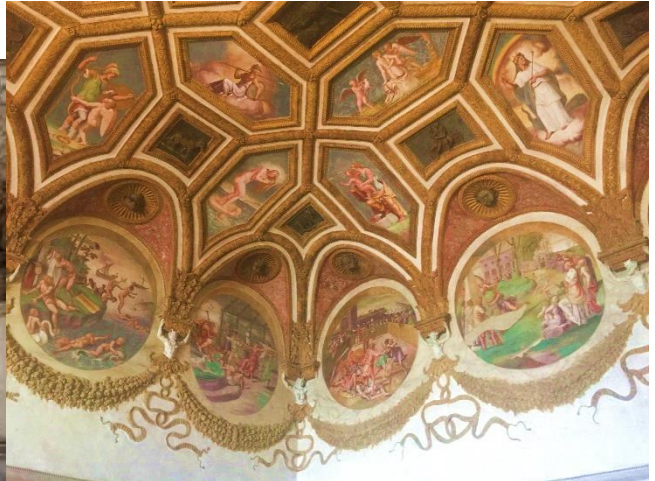


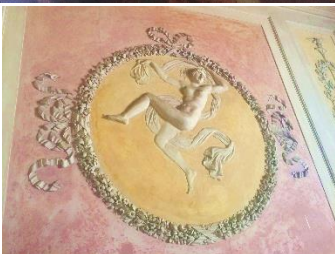




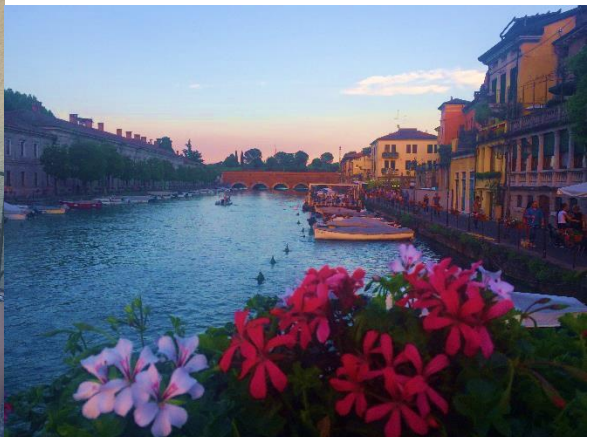


Palazzo del Te (next page) was designed and built (1525–35) by Giulio Romano, who also executed several of the fresco murals decorating the interior. The palace and its wall paintings are traditionally considered among the most important architectural expressions of Mannerism.





Our last night in Peschiera del Garda.





Departure day; at dawn from the balcony of our hotel...



A student: Now on to the best part of the trip – the food. From cooking and baking to tasting things I have never experienced before, food is one of the ways I really connect with places. And that may be from learning about my heritage through cooking with my grandpa. I couldn't have experienced better food – Italy is a gastronomy heaven. From the polenta and meat appetizer and three types of tortellini (meat, asparagus, squash) of our first meal to the fresh, melt in your mouth seafood of my last meal in Italy, I truly experienced all that the region had to offer. I'm still trying to figure out how I didn't gain weight on this trip. But much more than just the dishes themselves, I was able to experience how Italians eat. For them, it's not just a necessity. It's an opportunity. An opportunity to enjoy what the Earth has to offer, an opportunity to take time and be grateful, an opportunity to appreciate your time with your family and loved ones. Meals aren't a quick eat and go experience; they are long, slow paced, enjoyments of flavor and conversation. This is something I wish the United States could adopt.



By the students:

- *The first way I really began to experience Italy was through history. This part of my journey started with textbooks and studying, but I can honestly say that I learned much more by having the history right in front of me and experiencing it firsthand. The biggest example of this would be the Dolomites; it is one thing to see pictures and read about them, it is*

another altogether to be there and breathe the mountain air and really be there. Putting into words that kind of moment is so difficult for me, as I've found words simply don't do it justice. While the Dolomites were magnificent, the moment where I really connected the places we studied was in Sirmione at the Grotto. In the ruins of the Grotto our second day in Italy it really struck me how impressive the history and construction is, even in a small town like Sirmione. As our trip progressed several other factors surfaced to make this trip even more of a once in a lifetime adventure. The second "wow" factor of Italy undoubtedly was the food. Without question the meals we enjoyed there were some of the best foods I have ever eaten. Like the Dolomites, however, it is really hard to put the wonderful aspects of the food we had into words. Our very first example of Italian cooking is one moment that has really stuck with me. In Il Borghetto we had our first lunch at a small restaurant where they served us several types of filled pastas. There is no other way to describe it other than amazing. The little carefully made dishes practically melted in your mouth. Beyond that I had the opportunity to try a multitude of foods from real Italian pizza made with buffalo mozzarella in Verona to the number of cured and dried meats we had all over the region. I was able to broaden my horizons to all manner of foods, many of which I will never see in the United States.... As soon as we arrived in Italy there was an immediate difference, so much so that it almost felt palpable in the air. Every moment in Italy from how people greeted each other to asking for directions all the people we met were friendly and welcoming. The staff at our hotel as well as people we met and befriended on our day trips were all very nice. Even in the "big" cities like Verona and Venice people smile when they speak, people stand outside their shops or restaurants and say hello as you pass... In Italy, the welcoming sense when you get there permeates the entire culture, from big cities to small towns. Another big factor in the culture was the sense of health, caring about your body and staying healthy beyond just vanity... Overall, I can spend hours relaying stories of the places we visited, the history of the regions, and above all the food and the friendly welcoming nature of Italian culture.

- *Dear Professor, I would like to thank you for this marvelous opportunity. Our trip in Italy was incredible! The people, the castles, the art, the food, the other travelers, everything was really very beautiful. Thank you very much, I am so lucky....*
- *Thank you for a great trip to Italy... I hope to go on another trip to Italy as there is never a dull moment, lots of learning, good times and friendships that are built.*
- *Thank you for an AMAZING trip and an AMAZING experience. I couldn't be any more grateful.... After spending a week abroad, for once in my life, I was left speechless. I have spent years dreaming about what an excursion throughout Italy might be like, and this trip more than fulfilled those dreams. The Veneto region is full of beauty, tradition, history, culture, and value; each day was unlike the last. This trip taught me so much. From actually being able to apply what I have learned in my Italian studies and attempting to hold conversations in full Italian to experiencing history and culture first hand instead of through a textbook or lectures, I allowed myself to fully immerse in a foreign culture, and I am in awe of the results I reaped....*
- *Thank you again for a wonderful experience in Italy.*

- *Thank you so much for putting together this trip it was an amazing experience. I can't wait to continue learning Italian with you in the Fall...*
- *Our trip, while brief, allowed me to experience Italy for the first time in a multitude of ways. I was able to enjoy both the wonderful foods and the extensive history of the area as well as the unique blends of culture in each place we visited. In short, in eight short days I was able to experience Italy through its history, its food, and above all its people... this was a magnificent, once in a lifetime trip. I enjoyed my time in Italy immensely, and cannot wait to go back if I can. Thank you very much Dr. Basile for giving me the opportunity, as it was most definitely an experience I will cherish.*

NOTE: A big Thank You to the students for their nice words, stories, comments, and photos.