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Italy

A country rich in art and culture.

Seven months had to pass after I decided to join the study abroad to Italy and finally, the wait came to an end on June 10. This was my first time going to Europe, and I was excited. However, before my departure, I was afraid because I knew that everything would be new to me. My heart was bumping when I was saying goodbye to my mother. At that moment I just kept in my mind that It was God's will that I had the opportunity to be a scholar in this program and God had a purpose for me during the trip. I was one of the last ones to arrive at the airport, after we got together and passed security, and I saw the plane that we were going to take to go to France. It was a two-floor plane; I could not believe it because I have only seen this type of aircraft at the movies and not in real life. On our way to Italy, I had the opportunity to interact closely with other scholars, students, and professor and I got to know them little more. During my stay in Italy, this country not just taught about itself as a country, also it touched my spiritual and emotional area.

First, the study abroad to Italy improved me cognitively in different ways such as social and cultural. Being part of a group taught me how to be patient, how to cope with any circumstances or problem in the best way, how to become united so that all of us protect each other, and also being aware and attentive of our surroundings. I am glad that I could live this fantastic experience with mostly each one of the group. I would always be grateful to each of them because how they were with me during the trip including the tourist guide Angelica. In my opinion, I learned from both of the program leaders, Professor Ken Jassie and Stan Friedman.

For instance, with Professor Jassie, we could share our ideas, our opinion about each sculpture or painting that we observed and analyzed; whereas with Professor Friedman, I learned details and facts of materials and construction of any of the sites that we visited or objects that we saw inside of them.

Being able to be in another country allowed me to learn from the people who were around each other. For instance, the tourist guides, the people at the hotel, and the waiters at the restaurants. In my case, because I have been continuously moving, It did not have a cultural shock. However, I like the hospitality of each of the place that we went. For example, at our last night in Rome, some of us went to eat in a restaurant close to our hotel. The restaurant was not fancy, but the customer services and the food that they gave us was fantastic. I did not regret to go to that restaurant.

Culture is a word that involves many things. In this case, Italy is a country rich in it because of its art, architecture, food, and history. During my visit to Italy, the art and history captured my attention at all. I could enjoy that experience in the three cities that we visited. For instance, In Naples, something that attracted my attention was the sculptures in the Archeological Museum of Naples. While I was walking in the museum, I saw an enormous and massive statue called Farnese Hercules. I was amazed. The figure was made of marble during the ancient period. The sculpture tells the story of Hercules leaning on his club, which has the skin of lion draped over it after he killed it. It characteristic such as a muscular and naked body, the contrapposto posture, and its clear details points out to be ancient Greek characteristics. In Rome, one thing that captured my attention was the pantheon which architecture and the way how the built up is unbelievable. Florence was the city that I like the most. I love it because his

center was small and was accessible at every point without taking the metro. Also, Florence is where the Renaissance began with different artist like Giotto. Having the chance to be in front of the Holy Trinity by Masaccio and in the other side a cross made by Giotto, it helped me to analyzed each of one and appreciated their differences and also their characteristics.

The food was delicious in Italy. I enjoy everything that I ate from the beginning to the end. In Naples, I ate mostly seafood, and it was excellent. In Rome, I like it the sandwiches that tour guide suggest us. The place that we went to was perfect, it was like subway but more delectable. This subways are traditional in Rome because those sandwiches are fast food and it is suitable for a tourist. Also, the kinds of pasta and wines were very delightful during dinner time. When I think about a dessert, I recall the gelatos. Every time we went to eat gelato, pretty much every single night, for me, I had difficulty to decide which one because they have different flavors. Moreover, the food in Florence was luscious. Florence is a city rich in bovine livestock. As a result, Florence makes much product based on leather and in the food. They cook delicious and huge steaks. When we tried the steak in Florence, one piece was enough for three people, and that made us full.

The study abroad to Italy also touch my spiritual area. Being surrounded by churches and religious sculptures and painting helped me to understand the life of Jesus, Apostles, and Saints of the Catholic Church. While I was in my art history 201 during the spring semester, I learned about the Ecstasy of St. Teresa by Bernini. When I arrived at Rome, one of the sculptures that I wanted to observe was the Ecstasy of St. Teresa. To had the chance to see the statue, I woke up early in the morning and took the train toward Santa Maria de la Victoria Chapel, where the sculpture is located. I arrived at the church, and I stood up in front of the statue. Whereas I was

reading the letter, which Bernini took the idea of sculpture, I felt something inexplicable. St. Teresa's letter says that angel came to her and threw an arrow in flames and that she could feel the love of god, but she also said that the pain was great because it was spiritual. I imagined how was the connection of St. Teresa so that she could feel in that way. Furthermore, every time I entered the chapel, It made me feel something special inside me. It was like God touched my heart.

Being in Italy was a spectacular experience that I would never forget, We were lucky to have the opportunity to see Paris for the day. Most of the people on our trip were so kind to me. I will never forget Mrs. Chong. I had the chance to be seated next to her on our way to France. She was wise in every advice or comment that she shared with me. Even though we lived in an open-minded country, before the trip, I was afraid of how the other students were going to behave with me because of being gay. However, my thinking was wrong, and I felt loved and respected by everyone. That made me feel more comfortable and made the trip more enjoyable than I thought.

Something else that it was helpful in my case was my level of maturity. I was able to integrate myself quickly in the Italian culture. One thing that I proud of myself is that I am oriented and aware wherever I go. This ability helped me to guide the group on a particular occasion when we got lost. Also, it helped me explore the cities on my own.

Nevertheless, This study abroad taught me knowledge for my future. I consider this study abroad as learnable and knowledgeable. Learnable because there are different things that I can learn from the Italian culture and knowledgeable because the things that I learned such as art and history; it would help me in my future career as teacher and professional. Being in the art history class before the trip was helpful. In my opinion, I was able to live alive the two classes that I

took before. Having that chance allowed me to understand better each sculpture, painting and ancient buildings.

The experience abroad was essential for my future in the aspects of life. For instance, It was beneficial for my career. Since I am in the History and Social science major, the trip ensured and improved my knowledge while I analyzed and observed the different types of artifacts and painting. I would be able to explain to other each piece of art because I have seen it in person rather than read in a book. Also, it was beneficial to improve my social skills. While I explored the city my own, I had to communicate with the Italian people. Even though I did not speak Italian, I learned some word from the tourist guides that helped while I was by myself. The trip changed my life, and I know that it is more things to explore in those cities and I would like to come back and continue my study at one point in my life.

In conclusion, the study abroad has improved knowledge regards the Italian culture, has touched my soul and emotions, and help me to create a path to my future in my career. When I arrived at The United States, I felt fulfilled about myself and study abroad. The study abroad exceeds my expectation. Eventually, I did not buy any souvenir for myself; because the experience and knowledge are what I gain in my life. Those memories and education are the ones that would prevail for the rest of my life.