

How You Fell For Italy

Dear Rookie International Traveler Hannah,

Fasten your seat belt, you are now en route to Italy, a country that will take hold of your heart for years post trip. Your months of preparation varying from watching *The Lizzie McGuire Movie* on repeat to hitting all the Italian restaurants Marquette has to offer—so 3 places—has built your excitement to a level you have never thought was possible. Though, what Italy has in store for you will be nothing like what you've imagined in your head, but the quirks about this country and people you encounter will have you head over heels, wanting more, in love with it.

From the moment you leave home, to taking off to Milan, to landing and meeting your host family you will have been up for over 24 hours. You'll be exhausted but keep pushing through because in just 8 more hours you'll be on your way to a private party held in a bar with your host sister, Mavi. At hour 34 you'll have your new black dress and black heels on stomping around the dance floor singing popular American music and even music from the 70s and 80s—to your surprise. You will be the honorary life of the party simply because you're the only one who knows all the words to the songs. Your new Italian friends will be floored and periodically ask you what an artist is saying in the song. Nine times out of ten, it will be something dirty. You will blush looking like you have a permanent sunburn while you try to explain words that are incomprehensible to your Italian crowd. To thank you for deciphering the songs everyone will pay you in beers and shots. And those heels will be the bane of your existence by closing time as you

wobble trying to navigate the bar. Come hour 39 your host father will come to pick you and Mavi up. Don't worry about being slightly intoxicated around Giovanni, by week two the both of you will be doing shots at dinner and washing them down with wine—who thought homemade Italian pasta could get any better?

The first time you will get to see Milan will be the next day by bike. Yes, I said by bike. With no bike lane, and of course not riding on the sidewalk. With panic and fear in your eyes you will follow behind your dear Italian sister and swerve in and out of the thick unmerciful Milan midday traffic. The traffic that only 18 and older individuals can drive a vehicle in due to how outrageously dangerous driving in this country is. But don't worry even though you'll want to shit your pants multiple times throughout the 20-minute biking venture, you'll surprisingly make it through with shit free shorts. But let me tell you, the roundabout the two of you navigated was probably the closest you ever got to soiling yourself.

You'll very quickly become use to and tolerant of cigarette smoke. Mavi, that dear girl will smoke at least a pack and a half a day for that month. To say the Italian people smoke like chimneys is truly an understatement. I do not believe there is any idiom that could help express the Italian peoples smoke habits. Some nights you'd think smog was in the air—nope just everyone's cigarette smoke. As odd as it sounds, smoking will be a big part of your trip. The smoke breaks you'll take with Mavi will be times where you will retain the most wisdom. You and Mavi will discuss topics like love, religion, politics, and philosophy that will open your mind and even change beliefs about yourself and your country. Smoking will bring you a strange comfort and will have you waiting for the next break so the two of you can pick each other's brains. You'll meet a

friend named Marco when you go to stay at Mavi's seaside home. Mavi will trust Marco enough to take you bar hopping one night around the town and Marco will offer you the first cigarette you will ever accept. With one inhale however, you'll give it right on back, but how many people can say they tried their first cigarette in a foreign country—I mean many could, but I think it makes for a more interesting “first time trying” story. Your lips won't grace another cigarette until college, but every time you stand outside a bar or frat house you'll think back to Mavi blowing smoke into the late June Venice heat with the sun kissing your backs as you dangle your feet off a street and into the canal.

After two weeks of living like an Italian, you'll start to understand the language better than you or your host family ever thought. The few years of Spanish and French were beneficial for this month abroad even though you thought you'd never need to learn another language—so wrong. You'll start dreaming in Italian even—hard to believe but I swear you will. It won't be Italian that makes much sense and it will include a lot of profanities, because what else would Italian teenagers teach an American teenager but obscenities. But being well versed in Italian cussing will bring you and your non-English speaking host mother closer together. You'll sit in the back of her car one day and realize just how dirty her mouth is when carrying out conversations—like with your youngest host sister whom will be the third passenger. As you start giggling in the backseat about how vulgar her vocabulary is, she'll look up and into her rear view mirror at you. With a puzzled look she'll ask in Italian if you can understand her. You'll nod and burst into tear laughing with Coti. Your host mother will turn a vibrant red and then join the two of you in your belly laughs. From there on out your host mother, Francesca, will no longer be scared to speak to you in Italian or her extremely broken English. Instead of avoiding

contact and exchanging speech with you, she'll brush up on her limited English and practice your understanding of Italian—something you will forever be grateful for.

I know leading to you leaving for this trip everyone would tease you about finding an Italian boy. Bringing boys around your family wasn't your style, so everyone thought Italy would be your time and turn into that quintessential fairytale story for you. You've rolled your eyes for months at these preposterous fantasies family—mostly your mother—dreamed up for you. I wish I could report that she was way in left field with her predictions, but you will meet an Italian guy. You'll be at the bar with Mavi and a few of her friends during your stay at their seaside home in Savona. Of course you'll be drinking beer, trying to concentrate on the Italian being said, and also the English being spoken at you by the drunk Italians. A gorgeous model-faced boy with truly textbook Italian looks—dark hair, eyes, and skin—will all of a sudden pull up a chair right next to you. And of course this will be the one night you wear a t-shirt and no makeup to the bars. For the rest of the night Lupi will buy you drink after drink—all Sex on the Beach, his favorite—practice his English, and tell you all about his experiences in the United States. He will hold your hand as he pulls you to all his favorite bars that night—with Mavi of course taking on the role of mother bear and walking a few feet behind with Lupi's best friend. The two of you will dance, drink and talk the night away and even into the wee hours of the morning. When you part ways, he may or may not kiss you, and you may or may not see him again due to his persistent texts to your host sister, but why give away the best parts?

You'll leave this country feeling like you weren't there long enough and need more. You'll leave this country feeling a bond you've never even felt with your own

homeland. You'll leave this country and feel as though you've left home and a family behind. You'll leave this country with dreams of returning—you will again one day.

Baci Baci,

Your Future Italian Citizenship Seeking Self