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Glowacky: Ciao, Italia!

Ciao, Italia!



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Letter From The Editor

Academic Festival, Event 15 (2017)

The moment I stepped off the plane in the Rome Fiumicino airport, the first thought to pass through my mind was, ‘What the hell am I doing.’ I had just taken a seven-and-a-half-hour flight halfway across the world by myself, not knowing more than one person, whom I hadn’t seen since my childhood. Not having a working cellphone, being surrounded by people speaking a language that I couldn’t say more than five words in, and realizing that I was completely on my own, I was anxious, unsure, and terrified of how I would be able to spend the next six weeks studying abroad in Italy. Luckily, that all would soon change. Day after day, I fell more and more in love with Rome, and Italy as a whole. From the beautiful side streets to the magnificent architecture and ruins, I was constantly in a state of wonder and awe. The culture was unlike any I have ever experienced; it was like New York City on steroids. People always lined the streets, talking, laughing, eating, and drinking. No matter what day of the week, or what hour of the day, Rome was always a party. The food was an entirely different scenario on its own. I thought New York pizza was the very definition of pizza was, but I was sadly mistaken. The pasta was so authentic and wholesome, as were the many different wines I had the pleasure of tasting.

I can certainly say that studying abroad for six weeks has changed my life, and me as a person. For these reasons, I chose to create a magazine portraying my experiences in Italy for my senior project and Capstone. Creating a magazine makes sense not only because it would be the perfect way to showcase the beauty of Italy and the stories that accompany it, but also because magazine production is where I was most focused during my college career. Most pictures in this magazine were taken by me on my journey through one of the world’s most beautiful countries, and every article was written based on my experiences. I hope that this magazine leaves you feeling inspired to travel, and I hope you fall in love with Italy as much as I did.



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Positano

The most iconic beach in Italy

When people think of the Amalfi Coast, they typically envision Positano. Featured in many films and written about in a number of novels, Positano's iconic, colorful high-rises and turquoise waters have served as inspiration for people to come explore the Italian coast.

Positano offers a variety of activities and attractions to its visitors. Rent a private boat with family or a group of friends and cruise the crystal-clear waters, or try paddle boarding take in the spectacular views. If lounging on the beach is more your thing, you may want to rent a beach chair, since the sand is pebbly and can be uncomfortable when lying on a towel. When you step into the water, however, the sand is noticeably smoother.

Nestled between the brightly colored houses on the streets of Positano are various restaurants, home goods stores, hotels, hostels, and fashion boutiques. The boutiques and other stores are great if you're looking for something unique to the Amalfi coast. Hand-painted kitchen pieces are nice souvenirs to take home, and you can also find some great fashion items that you would not be able to find anywhere else.

Capri is an island that offers some of the best sights and activities. If you like high-end shopping, you will love Capri. Along the Via Camerelle, luxury shops line the street. From Prada to Pucci, you won't have trouble finding stores that cater to your taste. If you're more into small boutiques and stores, there is an abundance of them, too.

Limuncello is another great thing Capri has to offer. Limuncello is made from lemon zest steeped in alcohol and simple syrup. It's a dessert drink that's served chilled, and is the second most popular alcohol in Italy, after wine.

You can't visit Capri without seeing the Blue Grotto. The sea cave is 197 feet long and 82 feet wide. It has only one entrance, and you must enter in a small, four-person rowboat and lie flat on your back to clear the shallow height of the cave's opening. Inside, the water becomes the most beautiful shade of royal blue, due to the sunlight that shines through the opening in the cave, casting a reflection on its ceiling, which is what gives the water its signature color. Due to the cave's popularity and the fact that only small groups can enter at once, wait times to enter the grotto can be very long, depending on the day.

Capri

The island of luxury and Limuncello



La Cinque Terre

Academic Festival, Event 15 [2017]

La Cinque Terre literally means “the five lands” in Italian, and refers to five villages perched on sea cliffs and hills in the Liguria region of Italy. Riomaggiore, Manarola, Corniglia, Vernazza, and Monterosso are the five fishing villages that make up the Cinque Terre National Park, and are a popular spot for tourists. Each town has its own unique characteristics and charm instilled by the steep and rugged Italian coastline, and it is easy to hop from town to town. Very rarely do you see cars on the Cinque Terre, as trains run frequently between the five towns. Also, you can hike the Cinque Terre—after all, it is a national park. While some sections have been closed due to floods and landslides that damaged the region a few years ago, there are still parts that can be walked on.

Riomaggiore

Traveling north from southern Italy, Riomaggiore is the first of the five towns that you will reach. Known for its historic charm and wine industry, Riomaggiore offers a diverse selection of activities and interests to indulge. Spend an afternoon touring a vineyard and tasting its wines, or shop and eat along the town’s main street, the Via Colombo. Rent a boat and travel around the shores of the Gulf of Genoa. Whatever you choose, make sure to make your way down to the marina at sunset to see one of the most breathtaking views imaginable.

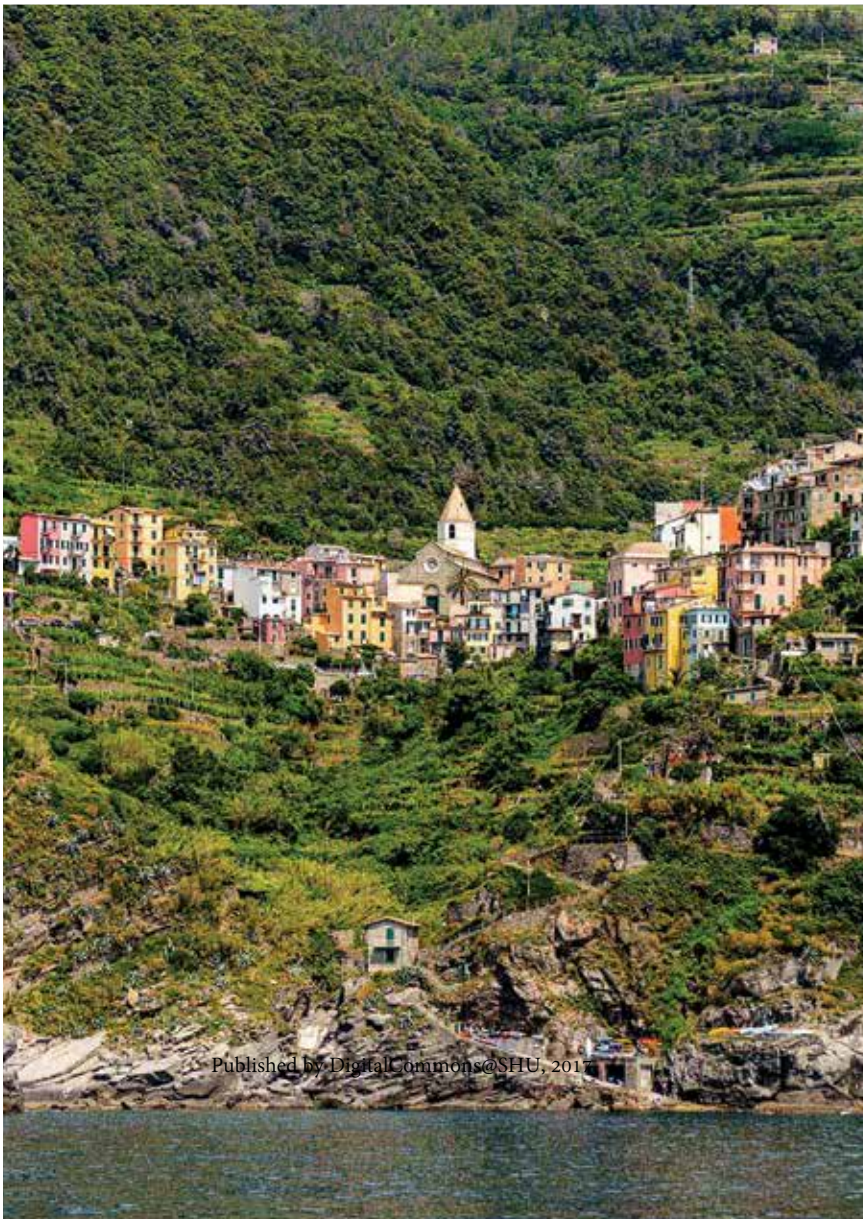
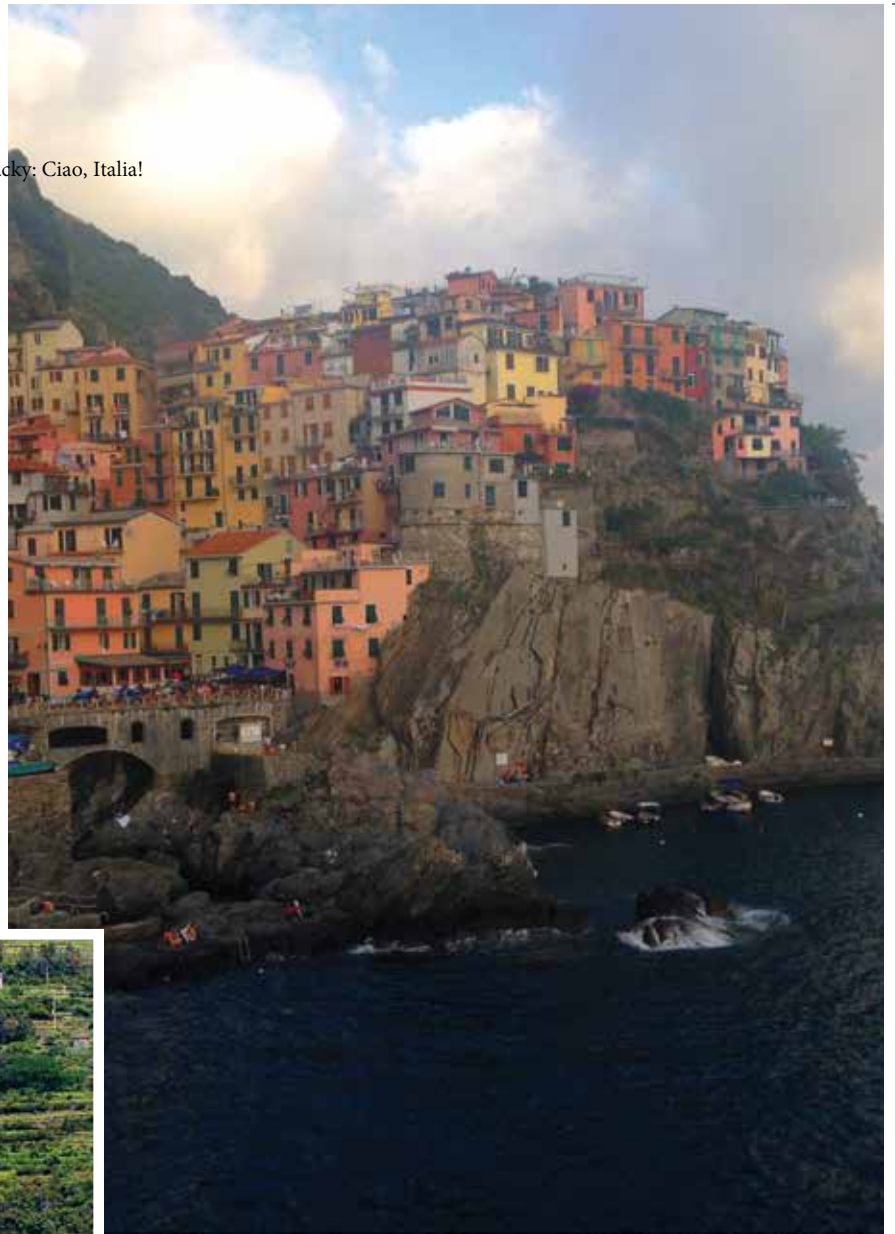
If you’re into seafood, order a fish dish at a restaurant; Riomaggiore is a fishing town, so your most likely dining on a fish that was swimming the waters beside you hours ago. Pasta in La Cinque Terre is also a good choice. The region incorporates pesto into a lot of its pasta dishes, so if you like basil, make sure you try it.



Manarola

The oldest and second smallest town of La Cinque Terre, Manarola is a popular town to visit. One of the town's main attractions is the San Lorenzo church and its accompanying square, where people gather to talk and gather after mass. Also surrounded by vineyards, Manarola has a popular swimming hole where visitors and locals can jump from rocks and small cliffs into crystal-clear, deep-blue water.

Another nice feature of Manarola is that you can climb up the mountainside on a trail and look out over the ocean. From here, you get a perfect view of the town. At night, you can also see the twinkling lights of adjacent towns Riomaggiore and Corniglia. It's an unforgettable sight and a magnificent place to take pictures.



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Corniglia

Perhaps the most understated town of La Cinque Terre is Corniglia. What sets Corniglia apart from the other towns is its location on a hill instead of being situated directly on the sea. The town is surrounded on three sides by vineyards and terraces, since the town's major industry is farming, and the fourth overlooks the sea. To reach the town, you must climb the Lardarina, a steep set of 382 brick steps (this is especially difficult in the heat of the summer months, so be aware before you make the journey). If you are able to make the climb, consider doing a little extra hiking to reach the beautiful Church of San Pietro.

Vernazza

One of the most diverse and exciting towns of La Cinque is Vernazza, a town that prohibits the use of cars within it. Its colorful buildings lead down to a small beach where people can tan, swim, and dock their boats. A defining aspect of Vernazza is a small stone tower that used to search the sea for pirate ships. For four dollars a person, you can climb the steps (about 100 or so) of the small tower and you will be rewarded with one of the most stunning views of the town from above. Additionally, make sure to check out the Santa Margherita di Antiochia church, which delivers a look into what churches were like in the 1300's—definitely a must-see.

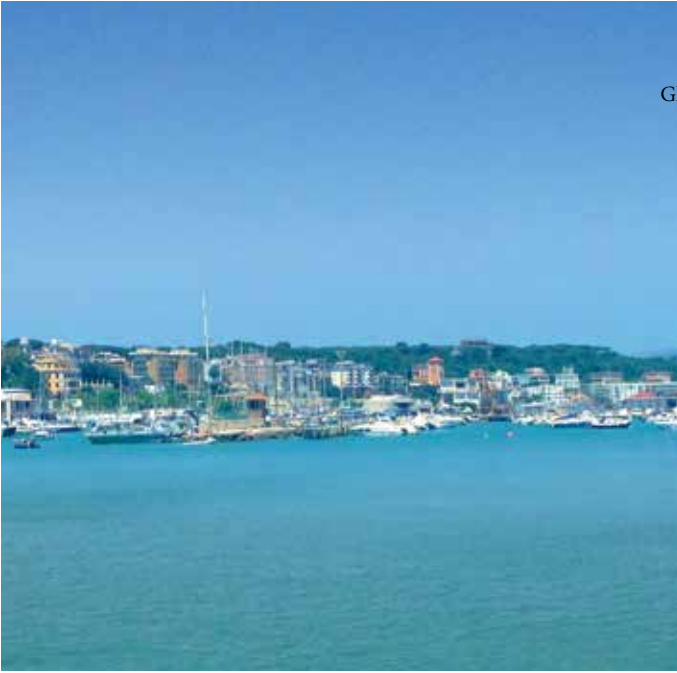


Monterosso

Monterosso, the last of the five towns, is one of— if not the most— popular towns in La Cinque Terre, due to its long stretch of beaches, restaurants, and shops. A beautiful boardwalk lines the shore of the Ligurian Sea, where you can get stunning views of the beach. Take a walk through Piazza Garibaldi and find a charming restaurant where you can enjoy lunch or a homemade gelato. If you need a break from the sun, consider resting on one of the benches under the trees.

A highlight that you absolutely cannot miss when visiting Monterosso is the Church of St. John the Baptist. Its iconic interior and exterior feature black-and-white striped walls and columns, adorned with decorative medallions and chandeliers. In 2011, massive mudslides hit La Cinque Terre, virtually destroying the church. Thousands of volunteers spent the last few years refurbishing and repairing both the inside and outside of the church to bring it back to its prior magnificence. Aside from its rich culture, astounding views, and interesting history, Monterosso is also famous for its lemon trees and production of white wines, grapes, and olives (olive oil makes the perfect souvenir.)

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Anzio

A hidden gem of a town that can compete with Italy's top beach destinations

As soon as you step off of the train at the Anzio train station, you walk down a small hill and feel as if you have been transported to a different country. At the foot of the hill, you stumble upon palm trees within the center of a rotunda with a sign that reads “Welcome to Anzio.” You question whether you are in Italy or on a tropical island.

Walking to the public beach may take around 20 minutes, but the trip is beautiful. On the way, you walk adjacent to the water, which is a beautiful, sparkling turquoise. The other side of the street is flanked with small restaurants, boutiques, and houses.

When you finally arrive at the beach, the sand is pillow-soft and perfect for lounging on. Vendors push carts of authentic “Italian Ices” and will manually shave the ice block and combine it with your choice of flavored syrup (or two.) It’s a definite must-try, and only costs about 2.50 euro.

Make sure to walk all the way down the perimeter of the beach to see some of the most magnificent bluffs for climbing. The views are incredible, and the spot is great for taking photographs. If you’re looking for a relaxing beach day that’s a two-day trip from Rome, Anzio is the perfect place to visit and explore.



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ROMA



The Wonders of Rome

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Some of the Eternal City's best ancient sites



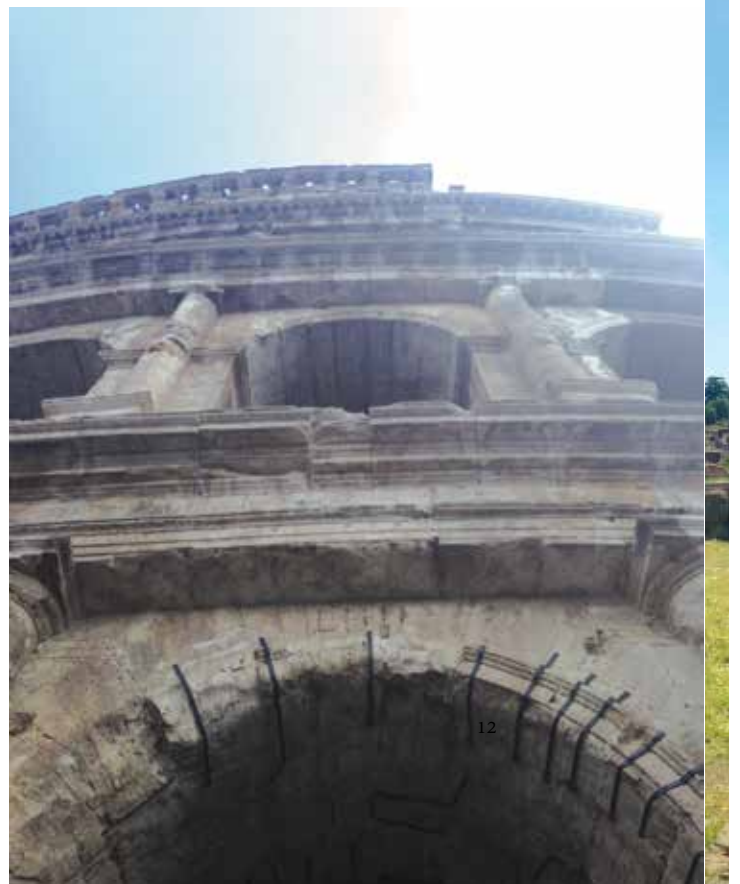
Above: An interior panorama of the Colosseum. Below: A detail of the arches on the Colosseum's exterior.

The Colosseum

The famous Roman Colosseum was erected in approximately 80 A.D. after a being built in ten years. Its purpose was to serve as an amphitheater where gladiator contests and other forms of entertainment could take place. Measuring 620 x 513 feet, the Colosseum was the largest amphitheater in Italy, and was atypical because it was a freestanding structure; all other previously constructed amphitheaters were dug into hillsides so that they could be well supported. The Colosseum was made of concrete and stone, contained arched entrances supported by cylindrical columns, and awnings on the topmost level. Additionally, it could seat more than 50,000 people.

Today, the Colosseum is one of the most visited sights in the world. Because of this, be prepared to wait on long lines. The earlier you arrive, the better. Most tour companies will try to take advantage of you by charging ridiculous prices for guided tours, so it's best to just purchase a two-day pass outside the Roman Forum. This pass allows you to visit the Colosseum, the Forum, and Palentine Hill within 48 hours of ticket purchase. Prepare to spend between two-and-a-half to three hours when visiting the Colosseum.

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The Forum

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The Roman Forum offers a look into what ancient Roman life was like, as this was the site of the most important happenings in the city. From important council and political meetings to shopping, the Forum was a place for people to interact, whether for work or leisure.

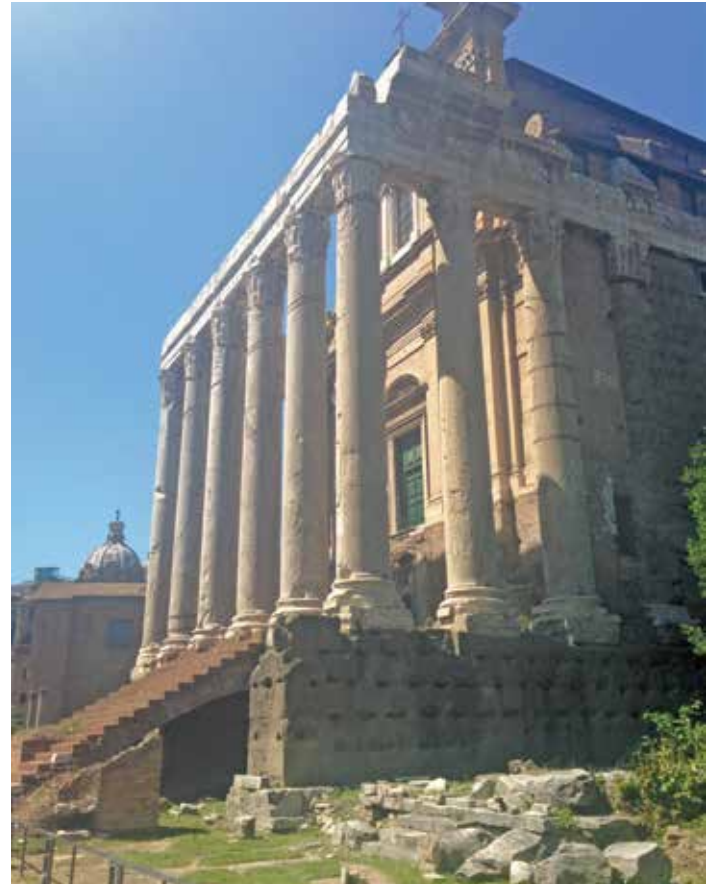
While some structures are better preserved than others, there are a variety of temples and ruins to explore. One of the most well-preserved monuments within the Forum is the Temple of Antoninus Pius and Faustina. Erected in A.D. 141, the temple was constructed to pay homage to Faustina, a deified empress. The temple features six cylindrical columns on its front side, which harbor a copper door. Presently, this door is the oldest surviving, functional door in all of Rome.

When walking through the Forum, it's basically impossible not to notice the three tall, freestanding columns in its center. These columns are all that remain of the Temple of Castor and Pollux, built in the first century A.D. There's not much to see, but it's still an imposing structure with great historical value.

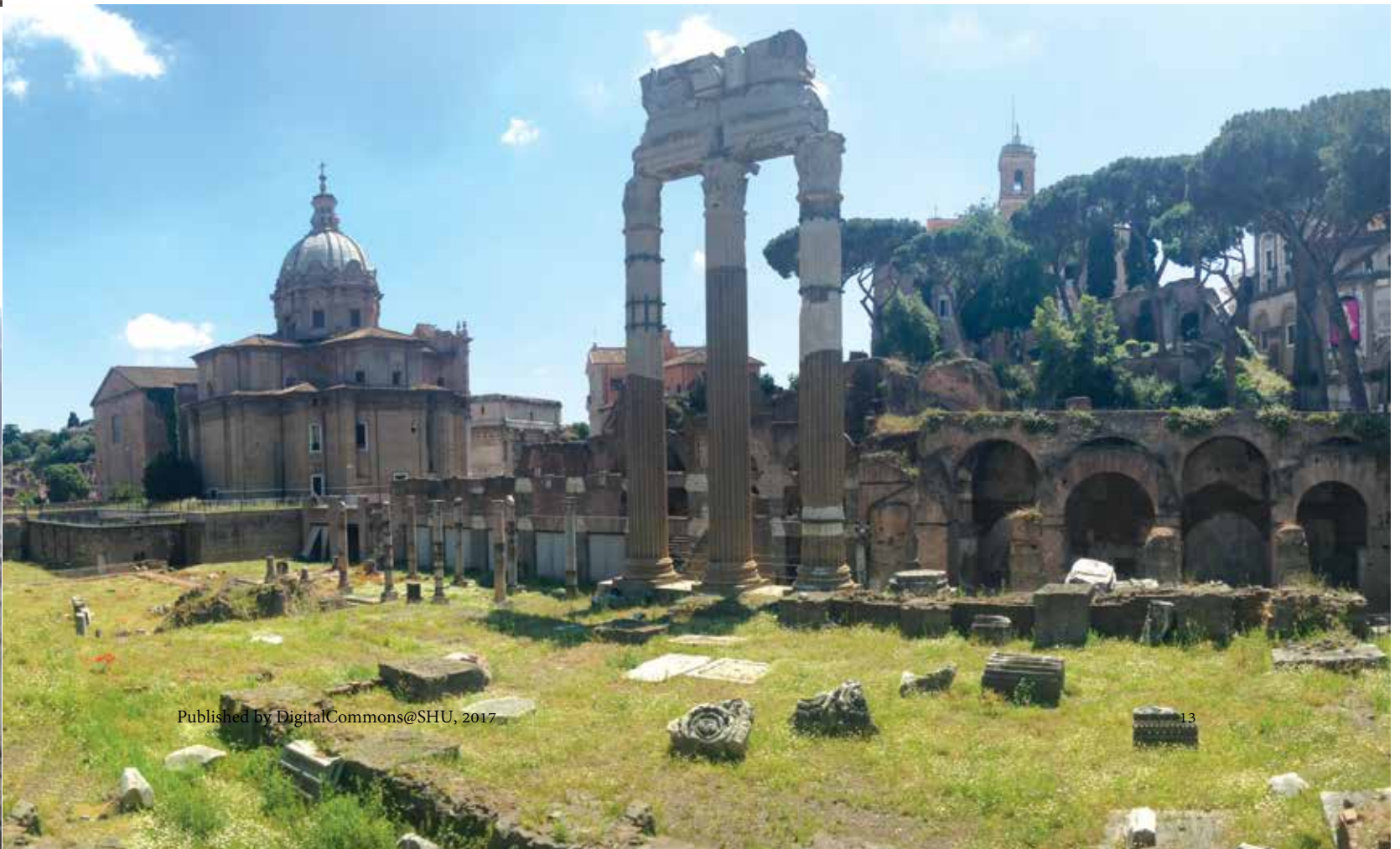
The Temple of Saturn was the first temple constructed in the Roman Forum. Not much of the temple remains today, but it still stands majestic with its eight round and iconic pillars.

Both the Arches of Septimius Severus and Titus are beautifully preserved and incredibly famous in world history. Etched into each are intricate marble reliefs that depict important battles in Roman history.

The Forum is a massive site. Since there's so much to see, it's best to be prepared to devote an entire day to this visit. The site opens at 8:30 a.m., and closes at sunset, so there is ample time to see it all.



*Above: The Temple of Antoninus and Faustina
Bottom: A view of the Temple of Castor and Pollux*

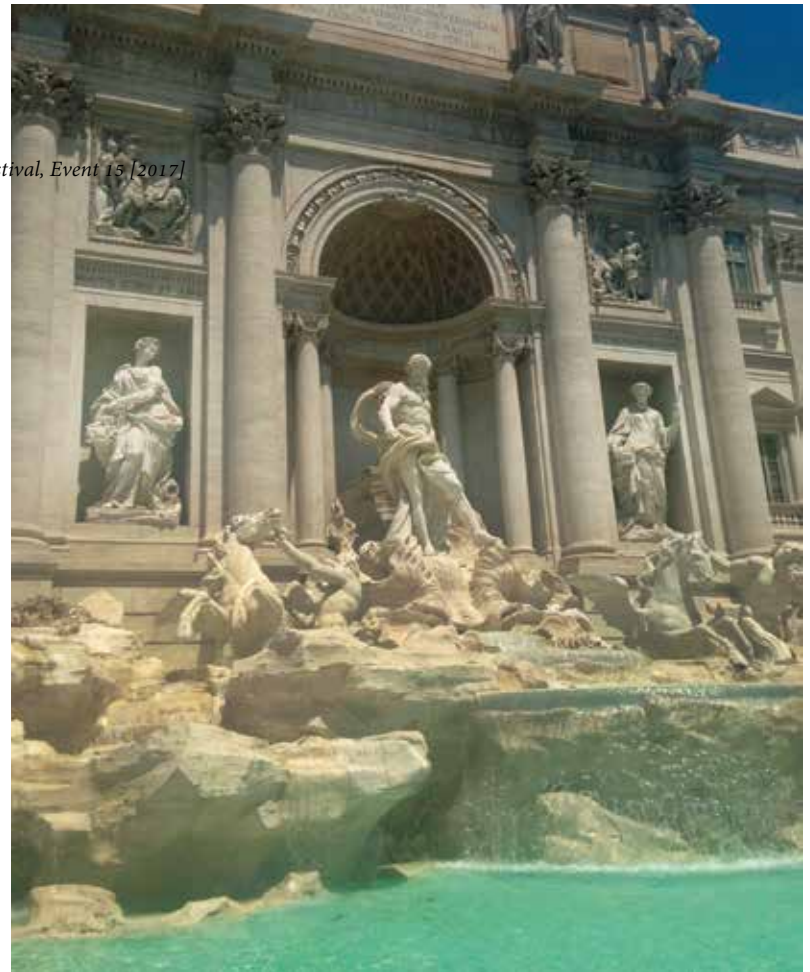


The Trevi Fountain

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La Fontana di Trevi is one of the most iconic fountains in the world. Constructed in 1762 by artist Nicola Salvi, the fountain stands 161 feet tall and 86 feet wide and is carved from Travertine stone. Legend says that if you throw a coin in your right hand and over your left shoulder into the fountain, you will return to Rome at some point in your life.

Due to its popularity all over the world, throngs of people usually surround the fountain. It is a must to see its detail in the daylight, so the earlier you arrive, the better. The fountain is also especially beautiful when illuminated at night, as well as significantly less crowded in the later hours, so it may be worth checking out as well.



Above: The Trevi Fountain. Below: A corner section of Circus Maximus.

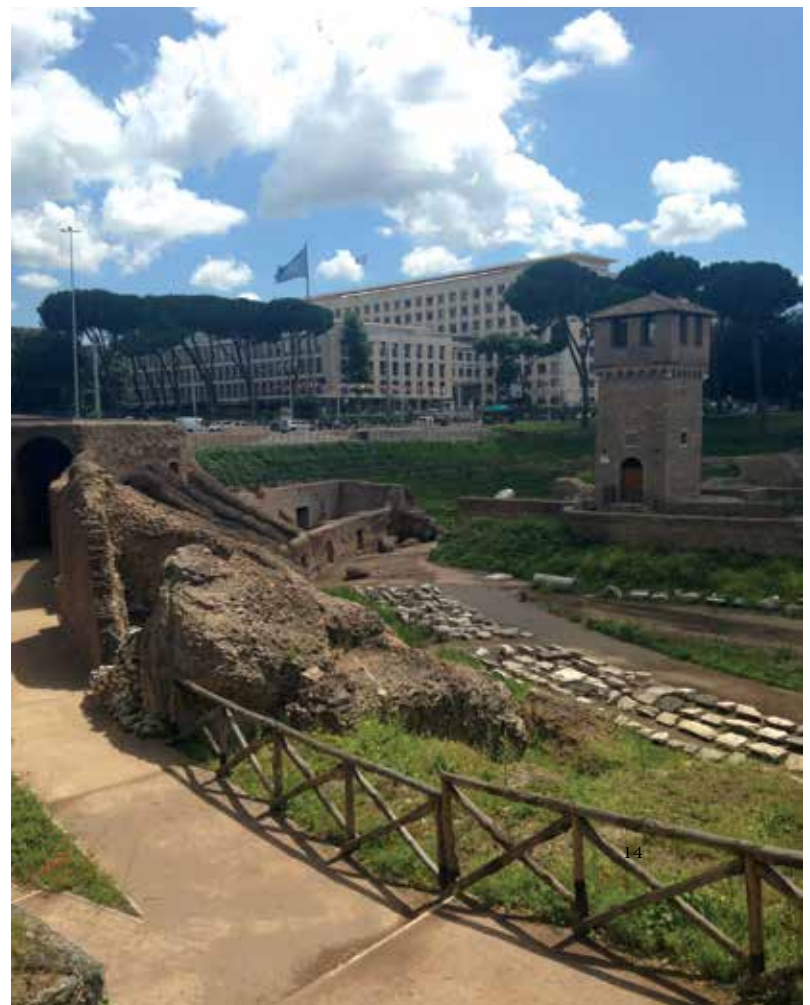
Circus Maximus

Although not much is left of it, Circus Maximus is still a sight to see. What was once Rome's greatest and first chariot racing track now is used as a public park, although its historical prominence and impact is still evident. Its oval shape is 2,037 feet long and 387 feet wide.

At the turn of the sixth century, however, the racetrack fell into disarray. People ravaged it for its materials for their own private use, and recurring flooding on the lowest levels of the venue allowed them to be covered with a layer of soil; the original track lays six meters below its current surface.

In the mid-eighteenth century, archaeologists began excavating the site in order to expose more of its seating levels and outer deck. Due to this, visitors can now see a full curved turn of the racetrack as well as most of the Circus' central barrier. The rest of the track remains either uncovered or in ruin.

Now, Circus Maximus hosts concerts, parades, and celebrations. Add it to your sightseeing list when you come to visit Rome.



Altare della Patria

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“The Wedding Cake”



The Altare della Patria (altar of the Fatherland) is one of the most famous monuments in Rome. Commonly called “The Wedding Cake” due to its ornate style and difficult-to-remember name, the Altare della Patria honors Victor Emmanuel, the king responsible for unifying Italy. Standing between the Piazza Venezia and Capitoline Hill, the Altare della Patria features traditional Corinthian columns, a large staircase, fountains, and a large statue of Victor Emmanuel riding a horse. The monument measures 443 feet wide and 230 feet tall. At the base of the structure lies the Museum of Italian Unification. While not a famous or even popular museum in Rome (due to the various other and more famous museums

within the city), it offers interesting information about the history of Italy. Additionally, the structure houses a panoramic lift that allows visitors to ride to the top of the monument in order to see 360-degree panoramic views of Rome. Both the museum and the lift are certainly unique features for a monument to have.

Similar to The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington, D.C., The Altare della Patria holds its own Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. In 1921, the body of an unknown veteran was selected to be buried in the tomb in order to represent all of the fallen unknown soldiers in the First World War. The tomb is always guarded by members of the Italian military, and resides next to an eternal flame that is also protected by the soldiers.

It's not hard to miss the Wedding Cake, as its height, size, and distinct architecture can be seen from most of the heights of Rome's buildings, museums, and hills. While touring the Altare is certainly not an all-day affair, allow yourself about 40 minutes to an hour to climb the steps, look at the flame, and take a picture from the gorgeous monument. It's typically crowded during midday, so be aware of the fact that there will most likely be a throng of people you will have to push through to actually reach the steps of the monument.

If you don't want to prioritize this site on your trip, you will most likely see it down the road or across from you on the street as you walk to either the Colosseum, the Forum, or the Capitol Museum.

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The Pantheon

The Pantheon is one of Rome's most iconic, historic, and popular sites. Erected in approximately A.D. 126, the Pantheon used to serve as a temple, whereas now it functions as a Roman Catholic church.

The back of the building is circular and rests beneath a dome with an oculus, while the front of the building looks rectangular with columns. A rectangular piece that lies between the circular part and the porch of the building connects the two, forming an entryway into the interior rotunda of the building.

To this day, the Pantheon remains one of the most well-preserved ancient Roman buildings. Standing 142 feet tall, the dome has yet to be reinforced within the last two thousand years. One of the reasons why the Pantheon is so well-preserved is because it has been in use for hundreds of years. Therefore, proper upkeep was a must in order for it to continue its functionality. Today, masses are held on every Sunday and on holy days of obligation.

Just as magnificent as the exterior of the Pantheon is its interior. To start, both King Vittorio Emanuele II and King Umberto I are buried inside the building, and you are able to see their bodies displayed on two opposing sides of the inside of the rotunda.

One of the most beautiful aspects of the Pantheon's interior is its airy, bright, and spacious atmosphere. It's impressive to achieve this feeling when the only two natural light sources in the building result from the opening of the front door and the oculus on top of the dome (there are no windows at all throughout the building.)

The oculus is without a doubt the most impressive part of the Pantheon, due to its principle, function, and execution. Since Rome is notoriously hot during the summer months, the oculus proved to be a cooling system for the building. When it rained, the water would fall through the hole and onto the interior floor. A slanted floor with sets of tiny drains scattered throughout allowed the water to continuously flow into an underground drainage system so that the building would never flood. Such planning and thought illustrates how far ahead of the times the ancient Romans were.

Admission to the Pantheon is free, but since it is a popular site, lines can be long. It is open daily from 9 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., and is closed briefly on Sundays for the duration of the mass at noon.



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No matter where you go in Rome or what you eat off the menu, you will be sure to find food that tastes like nothing you have ever had before, and you will not find anything like it anywhere else.

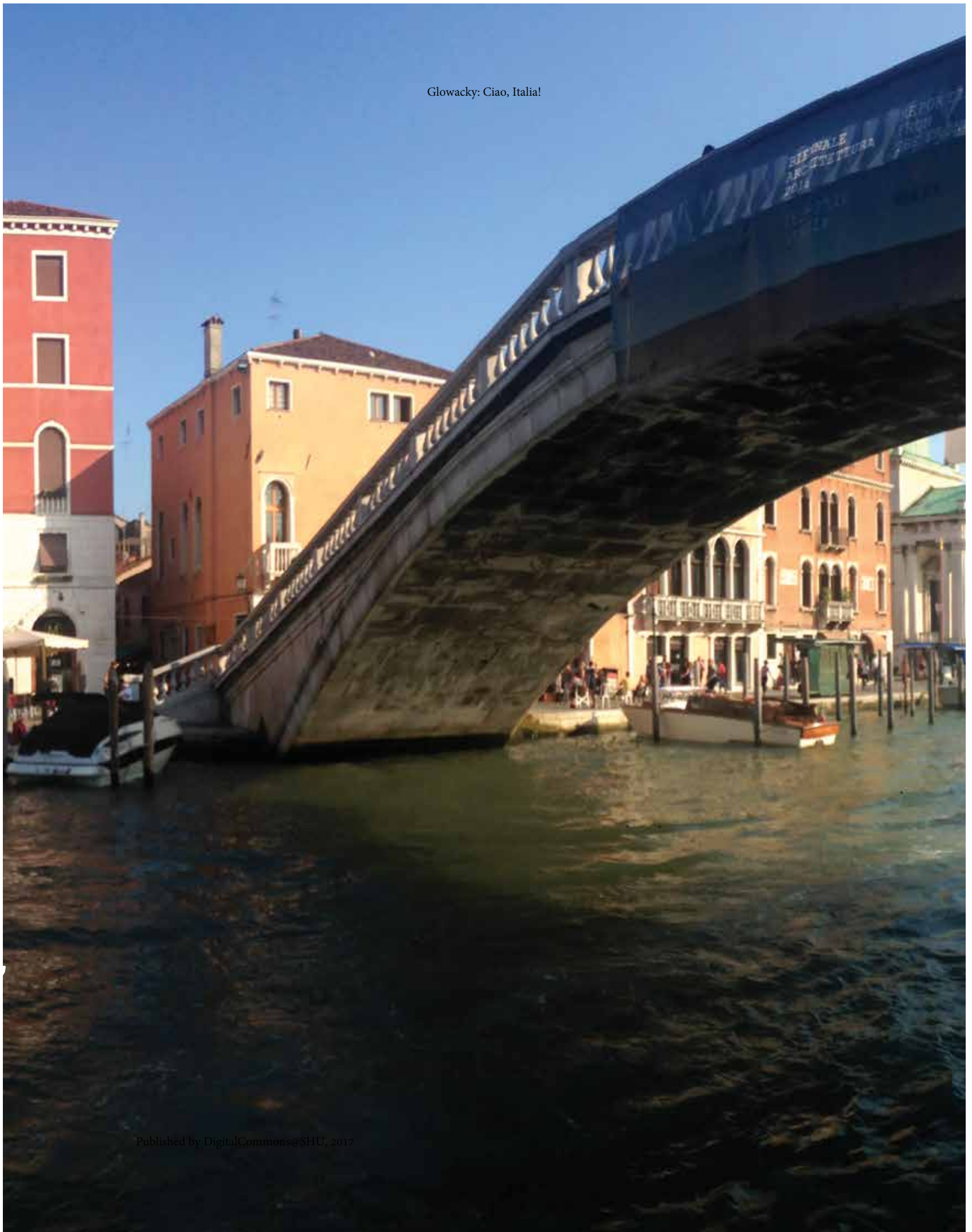


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Venezia

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Glowacky: Ciao, Italia! The Magic of Venice

Known for its picturesque scenery, eclectic cuisine, and rich culture and history, Venice is not a city that disappoints.

The moment you step out of the train station door and onto the street, you immediately notice that you are in a place that is like no other. There are (for the most part) no cars in Venice. Permanent residents of Venice get around in their own private boats, while tourists and visitors utilize water taxis.

Venice's architecture is particularly unique for Italy, too. You will not find the traditional Roman columns or the red roofs of Tuscany. Instead, Venice's style (known as Venetian Gothic) is a melding of Moorish and Byzantine influences. These stylistic nuances are most noticeable in the lanterns that adorn the domes atop of the buildings and the inflected arches of window facades. Both are examples of beautiful Islamic architecture.

If you are lucky enough to visit Venice during its Carnival celebration, you will have the experience of a lifetime. However, whenever you visit, there is an endless variety of activities to enjoy and experience. Make sure to visit the famous Saint Mark's Square, where you can tour the gorgeous Saint Mark's Basilica. If you choose not to go inside, simply admire its beauty from the piazza. At the beginning of every hour, the bell on top of the basilica rings, and you can watch the two statues actually hit the bell with their mallets; it's an entertaining sight.

Cruise down the Grand Canal to see the Rialto Bridge, the largest bridge in Venice.

Or, walk across the bridge and visit the little shops.

A nice day trip to take is to the island of Murano, the town that produces some of the best and most famous glass products in the world. The boat ride is a little under an hour, and it's a scenic ride (obviously, because it's Venice!). Glass shops line the streets, offering products ranging from little trinkets to expensive, one-of-a-kind pieces. The houses and shops are so colorful and bright, making it just another wonderful place to take photos.

Another must in Venice is taking a ride in a gondola. Yes, everyone is aware it's a tourist trap, but it's one of those things that you can't leave without doing. Rides typically cost about 100 euro, but are only 80 before five, and last between 30-40 minutes. If you have a small group and are short on cash, consider splitting the cost with another group you can share the gondola with.

Food in Venice is an absolute delicacy. Pasta dishes are delicious, with their robust red sauces embellished with either meat or fish. Lemon and poppyseed ravioli was one of my most memorable dishes. If you like fish, there is no shortage here. Paella (believe it or not) is easy to find, as well as a lot of strictly fish dishes, in addition to an array of pasta dishes with shellfish.

If you're looking for a quiet but close-to-the-action part of Venice, choose to stay in Costello, which is a five-minute walk to St. Mark's Square. It's quaint and charming, and is a nice getaway from the crowds that typically occupy Venice.

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Left page, top left: A corner side restaurant in Costello, Venice at sunset. Right: Lemon, poppyseed, and sage ravioli. Bottom: A view of Venetian buildings and gondolas on the Grand Canal. Right page (clockwise) A Venetian sausage pizza. A plate of roasted vegetables. A view atop of a bridge in Murano. A view from inside of a gondola on a side street in Venice.



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Firenze

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El Duomo

The Duomo is possibly Florence's greatest and most popular attraction. The Renaissance dome constructed by Filippo Brunelleschi during the 15th century stands as an icon around the world, with its red shingles and ivory structural supports. The cathedral it rests on, however, was erected two centuries prior by architect Arnolfo di Cambio. Otherwise known as The Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore, its beautiful exterior is made up of a combination of white, pink, and green marble in various shapes and patterns.

While the façade of the building is marvelous, the interior cathedral ceiling and the view from the top of The Duomo are particularly breathtaking. The 436-step climb to the top of the cupola is not for the faint of heart (especially in the summer, when navigating the small, tight corridors in the sweltering summer heat), the journey is incredibly rewarding. On the way

up, you will be able to stop and admire Giorgio Vasari's rendition of The Last Judgment. The fresco, located beneath Brunelleschi's dome, is apportioned into six rows. The scenes depict images of an angelic chorus, various saints and the elect, representations of gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the circles of hell, influenced by Dante's *Inferno*. It is a massive work of art, and the viewer is able to gain a complete and intricate perspective of the entire piece, due to its circular nature.

Continuing your journey to the top, the hallways will become smaller, more cramped, and angular, so be prepared. When you finally reach the last part of your ascent, you climb a small ladder and enter through a round opening to the top of the lantern. It's bound to be one of the best views of you will ever see.

The Bell Tower

Situated adjacent to the Basilica di Santa Maria is Giotto's Bell Tower at 85 meters tall. Although still not an easy feat, the climb to the top of the Bell Tower is a bit easier than the trek up to the lantern of the cupola. With 414 steps to the top, the Bell Tower's ascent takes you straight up to the top, unlike the curving and narrowing ceiling of the dome. Along the way, there are various terraces that allow you to rest, unlike when climbing the cupola. You also get the same panoramic view of the city of Florence and its surrounding countryside from up here.

Typically, lines are shorter at the Bell Tower. However, still try to make your way there as early as possible, not only to reduce your chances of standing on line, but also to avoid the blazing heat while you wait and climb. It's certainly nice to say that you have climbed both the Duomo and the Bell Tower, so if possible, you should try to climb both. Purchasing a ticket to either the Duomo or the Bell Tower costs 12 euro, and allows you to visit the Duomo, the Bell Tower, and the Duomo museum within a 48-hour period.

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A view from the top of the Duomo



The Baptistry

Academic Festival, Event 15 [2017]



Shraddha Desai

The Baptistery of San Giovanni sits right across from the Duomo and Bell Tower. Dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, the baptistery was constructed in 1059. Originally designed only for baptisms, it was also briefly used as a cathedral while the Basilica of Santa Maria della Fiore was being completed. The building was

fashioned in the shape of an octagon, which meets in a sectional dome at the top. The interior of the Baptistery features a large, open space with a decorated baptismal font. The mosaic dome ceiling is certainly the most stunning internal feature. It is divided into six horizontal sections that show different passages. The topmost section

shows the angelic hierarchies, followed by scenes from Genesis, scenes from the life of Joseph the Patriarch, scenes from the life of Christ, scenes from the life of Saint John the Baptist, and the *Last Judgment*, which is incredibly graphic. The building's exterior is just as spectacular as its interior. Made of white and green Prato marble, the Baptistery has beautiful striped and geometric

patterns on its exterior walls. Most notable, though, is the set of three gilded bronze doors. Andrea Pisano created the first door in 1330. It contained quatrefoil panels depicting scenarios from the life of Saint John the Baptist, and was finished in 1336. In 1424, Lorenzo Ghiberti erected a second door for the Baptistery, which housed 20 quatrefoil panels showcasing

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scenes from Jesus Christ's life, the four evangelists, and the doctors of the church. The response to Ghiberti's door was incredible. People were captivated by his ability to render such detail and naturalistic features of people and animals in bronze. As a result, he was asked to create the final door of the Baptistery, which is the most famous component of the entire building, titled "The Gates of Paradise."

"The Gates of Paradise" was divided into 10 sizable panels, delivering some of the most important scenes in the Old Testament, such as Adam and Eve in the Garden and Abraham and Isaac. The door was finished and in 1452. In 1943, it was removed in order to protect it from becoming a victim of the bombings in World War II. After the war, it were replaced.

In 1966, a devastating flood hit Florence and tore half of the panels off the door. As a result, the remaining panels were removed from the building so the damaged ones could be repaired. After restoration, the door was again placed in the Baptistery exterior for viewing.

Finally, in 1990, the door was removed for good, as new technology emerged that could thoroughly clean and safely repair microscopic and potentially lethal damage to the masterpiece. Ghiberti's door was replaced with a replica in order to restore and preserve the original. Now, all of the original doors have been removed and dwell in the museum behind the Duomo, protected behind thick glass and replaced with replicas on the Baptistery exterior.

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Top: The mosaic ceiling of the Baptistery interior.

Left: A side view of the Baptistery

Bottom: Ghiberti's "The Gates of Paradise"



Must-See

Academic Festival Event 15 [2017]



With so many museums to choose from in Florence, it's easy to get overwhelmed. Of course, the more you are able to see the better. But, if you only have a short stay in Florence, make sure that these three museums are a part of your itinerary.

The Uffizi Gallery

The Uffizi Gallery houses some of the most famous and important Renaissance masterpieces. In fact, the building itself is a work of art, with its grandiose U-shape, designed by Giorgio Vasari. The royal Medici family ordered its construction in the year 1560 to house the administrative offices of the city. Just a few years after its completion, the Medici family sectioned off a particular area of the building and created a private gallery, which held various statues, paintings, and other private family pieces. Over many years, the Medici art collection grew to encompass a wide range of material. When the last of the Medici dynasty was dying, the state secured the art and declared it a public good. Today, a vast number of the pieces within the Uffizi were directly related to the Medici family.

Along with the Vatican Museums, the Uffizi Gallery is one of the two most visited museums in all of Italy. A majority of the works within the museum date back to the 12th and 17th centuries, and were created by many renowned Renaissance artists.

Due to its popularity, lines to enter the museum are incredibly long, so make sure to prepare for this. It is best to reserve tickets ahead of time, as it cuts down the wait time.

Also, because of the size of the museum, it can be easy to get overwhelmed and miss certain exhibits. It may be helpful to download an audio tour or sign up for a guided one (I used Rick Steve's free iPhone app.) Must-sees in this museum include Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus" and "La Primavera," Titian's "Venus of Urbino," Raphael's "Madonna of the Goldfinch," and Giotto's "The Ognissanti Madonna."

Give yourself about three to four hours to fully explore the museum. When you're done, visit one of the many adjacent piazzas to grab lunch or a snack.



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Starting from left page top left: Michelangelo's David in The Academy Bottom left: The National Bargello Museum courtyard, Top right: The Uffizi Gallery, Bottom right: Botticelli's The Birth of Venus at the Uffizi Gallery

Museums

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The Academy

Just like the Uffizi Gallery, the Accademia is another must when visiting Florence. Although it is really only known for housing Michelangelo's David, there are some other sights worth seeing in this museum, including Michelangelo's *Prisoners*, some of Botticelli's paintings, and other Renaissance paintings and sculptures.

Entertain the idea of downloading a free audio guide to the museum, as there are not many signs displayed by the pieces. This can make understanding and deciphering the subject matter of certain pieces confusing. Most of Michelangelo's works took awhile to create, and some remain unfinished (like various of his *Prisoners*). Downloading an audio guide will give you background information on significant pieces, as well as fun stories that accompany it. It's a nice touch, and if you get bored or distracted easily in museums, this will certainly be of help to you.

Additionally, if there is a sign placed next to the particular piece of art you are looking at, it's most likely written in Italian. If the sign is in English, it's most likely crowded with people.

You may also consider reserving and purchasing a ticket to a guided tour around the museum. Again, make sure to buy tickets well in advance, as there are always extremely long lines to enter the museum.



The Bargello Museum

While not as famous as The Uffizi Gallery or the Accademia, the National Bargello Museum is one of the most wonderful museums in Florence. The building itself is a piece of history and a work of art. Its castlelike structure and open courtyard are truly representative of Renaissance architecture and design. In the 16th century, the police chief of Florence lived in the building, and then in the 18th century, the building was used as a prison. By the turn of the 19th century, however, the Bargello became a national museum. Today, the Bargello Museum is the home of many iconic sculptures, such as Donatello's David, Michelangelo's earliest sculptures (including a relief of Madonna with Child and Brutus). Aside from housing magnificent sculptures and reliefs, the Bargello also has a room dedicated to terracotta pieces.

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Under the Tuscan Sun

Tuscany is a region that spans the northern and central part of Italy. Some of its most popular towns are Florence (its capital), Pisa, and Grosseto, to name a few. The region is known for its beautiful, rolling hills, production of Chianti wines, and birthplace of Renaissance art. No matter what your interests, Tuscany will have something to tickle your fancy.

There is nothing more relaxing or rejuvenating than sitting in a thermal bath. Thermal baths are natural hot springs that are heated from the Earth's mantle. The thermal baths contain many more minerals than cold water, such as calcium. When you bathe in the thermal baths, these minerals are absorbed through the skin. Hot springs are also said to help combat laryngitis, sinusitis, tonsillitis, ear infections, arthritis, other bone/joint diseases, and skin problems such as acne, seborrhea, eczema, psoriasis, and hives.

If this seems appealing to you, check out the Terme Antica Querciolaia in Siena. The facility houses seven thermal baths, each with its own unique temperature. In addition to offering the

thermal baths, the facility also acts as a full-service spa and hotel.

Plan to make a trip to a vineyard and a wine tasting a priority. Cortona is a wonderful place to do so, and is one of the oldest hillside villages in the Tuscany region (fun fact: it was the town featured in the book and movie *Under the Tuscan Sun*). When walking through the narrow, hilly streets and wandering from piazza to piazza, you truly feel as if you have been transported back into the medieval era.

While in Cortona, make sure to visit the Piazza della Repubblica. Its magnificent clock tower, flanked by a large stone staircase, is a picturesque place to stop, sit, and appreciate the surrounding views. Grab a drink or cappuccino from one of the piazza's many bars, restaurants, and coffee shops and enjoy the afternoon sun. Visit some of the region's most beautiful art galleries, jewelers, or shoemakers to find pieces unique to Cortona. Also, make sure to travel to the city's walls to take in a breathtaking view of the city's hillside. It's truly a sight that will last a lifetime.





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Terme Antica Querciolaia in Siena



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Gelato from Gelateria Dolce Vita Cortona



A Tuscan road

A Taste of Tuscany



Tuscan food is some of the most revered food in the entire country of Italy. The elements are kept simple, and the produce and meats are always fresh and locally grown and farmed. Most meals are hearty, and typically feature meat and cheese. One of the most delectable components of some Tuscan dishes are truffle mushrooms, or simply their oil. They grow in the Tuscan hills, and have a truly distinct and decadent taste that can enrich an already tasty dish.

A popular Tuscan appetizer is an assorted plate of meats and cheeses. Different types of salamis and prosciuttos are accompanied with goat cheese, mozzarella, or buratta, to name a few. These plates sometimes feature a tomato bruschetta or *crostini di fegato*, which is toasted bread topped with a chicken liver spread. Don't be fearful of the words chicken liver, because the taste is rich and flavorful. I encourage being adventurous here, as you will discover tastes that you can't experience outside Tuscany.

Steak is another Tuscan specialty. Typically a ribeye cut, the steaks are either cooked in a truffle and butter reduction or in a thick peppercorn sauce. They're perfectly marbled and delectable.

I also found the pizzas in Tuscany to be delicious. Whereas in Rome the crusts are usually thicker, Tuscan pizza has a thicker dough but with lighter toppings, sometimes without a sauce.

Regardless of what you choose to eat, Tuscan food will not disappoint. Even the pickiest eaters will find something to satisfy their palate.

MILAN

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My time in Milan was short, but I luckily saw its main attractions: the Duomo and Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*.

The Duomo in Milan, otherwise known as The Basilica of the Nativity of Saint Mary, is an awe-inspiring sight. Its Gothic architecture stands out amongst other buildings in Italy, and it sits among many modern buildings, something that is also atypical for Italy.

Inside resides the famous statue of *Saint Bartholomew Flayed* by Marco d'Agrate. It's an incredibly moving but also macabre sculpture that exhibits St. Bartholomew holding his flayed skin and draping it over his shoulder.

You simply can't leave Milan without seeing Leonardo's *The Last Supper*. The famous painting resides in the refectory of the Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie. In World War II, the church was almost all destroyed by an accidental bombing; the only surviving wall was the wall housing *The Last Supper*.

It's a miracle the piece has lasted this long, despite its many restoration efforts. Standing with your tour group of 20-30 people in front of one of the most famous paintings in existence is certainly a memory that will last a lifetime.



POMPEII & MOUNT V

Pompeii is of the most fascinating and historic places to visit in Italy. In addition, five miles away is Mount Vesuvius, the volcano that brought Pompeii its historical significance.

In A.D. 79, Mount Vesuvius erupted without warning, leaving the city of Pompeii covered in layers of volcanic ash. It was said that people only had about 10 seconds before the ash hit them, which did not leave much time to plan or execute an escape. If lava had flowed from the volcano onto the city, the chance of survival would have been much greater. Approximately 2,000 people died in the eruption that day.

Then, in 1748, a group of archaeologists stumbled upon the site. When digging through the ash, they found that it had acted as a method of preservation, because underneath the ash, the city remained intact. The combination of ash, pumice stone, and other rocks and gasses acted as a cast for what lay below them, and the lack of air and moisture is what allowed

the ruins to remain so well-preserved over thousands of years.

It is a misconception, however, when people say that actual human remains and skeletons are on display at present-day Pompeii, along with the other artifacts that were discovered. Over time, the bodies of those buried under the rubble had decayed. Instead, what is on display at the museum are *casts* of those trapped under the rubble. Archaeologists used an impressive technique to create these casts. They used a special machine that detects air within enclosed spaces. So, when the machine found an air pocket, archaeologists dug a tiny hole into that space and poured plaster into it. They allowed it to set for about a month, and then would use tools to extract it. When they did, they were left with an exact replica of the person who was enclosed in that space due to the formation of the ash that was created around their body.

Each year, about 2.5 million people visit Pompeii, and it is part of the

Vesuvius National Park. In 1997, it was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Today, only two-thirds of Pompeii remains uncovered. The rest will remain untouched as tribute to the fallen city.

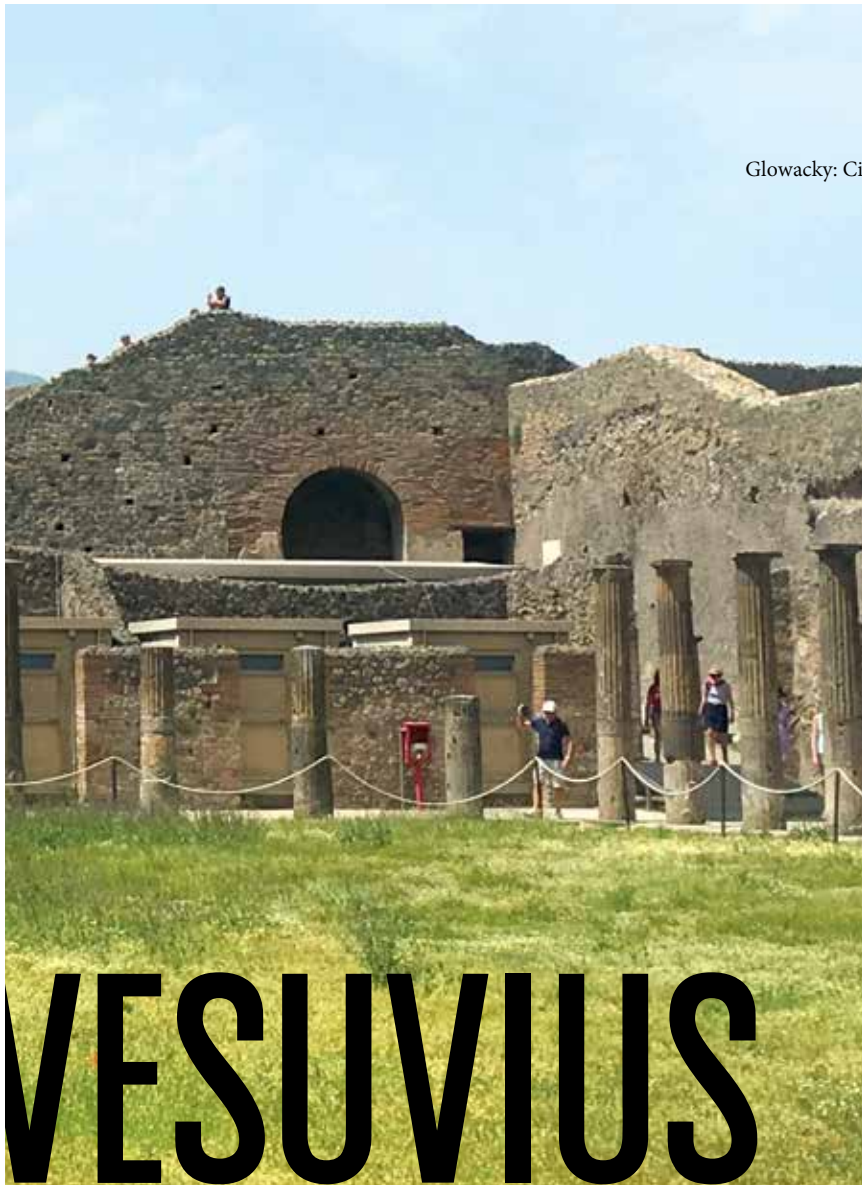
To visit Pompeii, you must purchase a ticket that costs 11 euro. Since the site is vast and there is a lot to see, plan on spending almost an entire day here, or at least four hours. Try to arrive as early as possible, or reserve tickets and a tour guide ahead of time to avoid long lines.

Hiking Mount Vesuvius is a great way to fully immerse yourself in the history of Pompeii, and also is a fun story to share. It only costs a few euro, and is close enough to visit if you are either visiting Pompeii or the Amalfi Coast.

The hike is not particularly difficult, but being in good shape definitely helps. Wear good sneakers that have a substantial amount of support and traction, because the dirt and dust that comprise the outside of the volcano can be pretty slippery.

Climbing to the top takes about a half

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hour. Initially, the hike is pretty steep, and you may slip or stumble a few times. It's a mile to the crater. When you finally get there, you have an amazing view of the surrounding town of Naples, as well as the inside of the volcano, where you can see steam rising from its center. The hiking path leads you very close to the rim of the volcano, which is scary and cool at the same time. Additionally, if needed, there's a snack bar and restroom at the top of the climb. There's also a place to buy souvenirs and postcards.

The descent takes about forty minutes, since it's easier to slip on the pumice and ash on the way down. It's best to go slower on these parts.

Above: A view from the main courtyard in Pompeii. Right from top: A cast of a person buried in the ash of the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. A shot of a house and its accompanying gardens at the entrance of Pompeii. A friend and I atop Mt. Vesuvius.



An aerial photograph showing several small boats in a body of blue water. In the foreground, a rocky shoreline is visible with several ropes tied to it. One rope is attached to a red inflatable boat, and another is attached to a white inflatable boat. Other boats, including a blue and white one, are further out in the water. The water is a deep blue with some ripples.

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