UNC Charlotte
Niner International
Country Guide

Learn more about where you’ll be living from a UNC Charlotte student who has already done it.
Which city and country did you live in abroad?

During my Spring Break 2018 program, I lived in Vicenza, Veneto, Italy. During the Summer, I lived in Recanati, Marche, Italy.

What is the climate like in that location?

(Describe the weather when you were there. What are some things students should take with them to prepare for the weather in this location?)

The climate is generally predictable with the given season - It's very hot in the summer, and very cold in the winter. When I attended my first study abroad program in March however it was unusually cold, so it's best to be prepared by packing things that can be layered. It is also very chilly during summer nights. Bring comfortable shoes, because a majority of the time you will be walking, and you'll probably be walking for several miles a day.

What was the city’s public transportation like?

(Describe how you got to and from the city center or the university day-to-day. Did they have a subway line, buses, could you walk most places? What were the costs of these transportation options? Were they easy to utilize? Did you have any challenges navigating through the city?)

Most residents in Italy use public transportation on a day-by-day basis. The main mode of transportation is the train, which has many options, such as long distance (between regions, generally with few stops) or short distance (between cities). Delays are common, however the train is extremely easy to use. The bus is more unpredictable, and delays are even more common, so it's best to be at the bus station earlier than you expect. Both of these options are fairly cheap, and you can purchase tickets at corner stores (for buses) or at the train station/online (for the train), or on the bus/train. You can also rent a taxi, however it's usually not recommended as it's often expensive. You can walk almost anywhere though - it's more common to see people walking during all seasons than seeing cars in the street. You're more likely to learn your way around more by familiar sights than by street signs (street signs are usually scarce and are not in fixed poles like in the U.S. - they are usually randomly on the sides of buildings).
Describe the types of food that are common in that city.
(What were the types of foods you could find at most restaurants? What were some delicacies of that city? What were your favorite or least favorite foods?)

Food is very cheap in Italy if you know the right places and go for local areas. Common foods are pasta and pizza, which are extremely diverse and customizable with different cheeses, fish, meats or seafood. There are often very good deals for students (this was the case during the summer - I was able to get a pastry and coffee for one Euro in Recanati as a student), and aperitivos are very regular - when you purchase a drink (usually alcoholic, but not necessarily), you have access to a wide range of appetizers that include meats, cheeses, bread, and different vegetables. Although not Italian, I had the best Baklava of my life in Recanati at a local shop, as well as the excellent salame Ciauscolo and Pecorino Romano cheese (my personal favorite). In Vicenza, I found my favorite wine - Sangue di Giuda (Blood of Judas), which is a miracle because I dislike alcohol. Almost every food in Italy is very good, and I highly recommend trying local dishes that are unique to the city or region. Be aware that food in Italy is not the same as food in Olive Garden. There are some subtle differences (for example, all pasta in Italy is cooked al dente), but the food can be very diverse and have many different flavors. There may be some unusual things and you won't like everything, but I encourage you to try something unique!

Are there any particular restaurants you would recommend students try if they are in that city?
(If possible, list the name of the restaurant and a link to the website)

Unfortunately, there are many restaurants that I either don’t know the name of or are local and don't have a website - In Recanati, Bar 13 and Cafe de la Paix is very good, and the chef of the hostel I stayed at in Vicenza is opening a restaurant in Padua named ZAS (all the food he cooked was very good).
Was it easy to travel to nearby cities and countries?
(If you traveled in your personal time, what modes of transportation did you use (e.g. bus, train, airplane, etc.). How did you book these travel plans? Online? Local bus station? Generally what was the cost of travelling in that region? Where did you stay (e.g. Airbnb, hostels, hotels) when you travelled?)

Traveling is very easy within Italy. Most people take the train or bus, including myself, which is relatively cheap (although it depends on which train you’re taking - which company, the distance, non-stop etc). For the bus, you can either purchase tickets in a corner store (tabaccheria), bookstore, and most common shops, or on the bus itself. For the train, you can purchase tickets online (this is how I purchased all of my tickets - the site can be accessed in English, you can purchase easily in advance and you can have the tickets on your phone or print them) or you can purchase them at the train station (either from the main desk or from a machine, however I find the machine unreliable). When I traveled during personal time in the summer and had traveled to Vicenza, I stayed at the local hostel, a cheap and reliable option that also serves breakfast and is very close to the town center. I also traveled to Bologna, where I was able to stay at an Airbnb.

What are some of the differences between U.S. culture and the host country culture?
(Are there any gestures or differences in communication style that is different from the US that you noticed? (Smiling, eye contact etc.) What was the typical style of clothing? Did they locals tend to dress-up, casual, modest?)

Although Italians don't do the passing smile that most Americans do, one thing I noticed is that if someone on the street is looking at you for whatever reason and you meet their gaze, they generally won't look away (unlike Americans). Italians are also famous for their use of elaborate hand gestures and expressive way of speaking. Italians are also very fashionable in all seasons. Young people wear all different things, however because Italy is a Catholic country I recommend wearing fairly modest clothing. This helps make a good impression (especially because you are a tourist), and is also required if you wish to enter a church (most require the shoulders being covered and pants that come down to at least the knees.) When you are in a restaurant, you are also left almost completely alone after you eat unless you call for a server (you can stay as long as you want - you are renting the table). If you do not finish all your food, the server will worry that you did not like the dish. These are mostly just small quirks though and the culture is fairly similar in terms of clothing, travel, etc).
Generally, how would you describe the locals in the host city?
(Were the locals friendly and helpful? Would you recommend approaching the locals for help?)

Both people in Vicenza and Recanati are very good, however the people in Recanati are my very favorite - they are extremely friendly and helpful, even if you don't speak the language. Many times, locals are very generous and you may even end up having a full conversation with them, they may show you how they do their craft (this is the case with a man who worked at a butchers shop), or may even give you things (this is the case with someone I know - the mother of someone a friend of mine met on the street gave her a book of her own poetry, and I've even heard of another person who received a jacket from a complete stranger because she didn't have one of her own). Both people in the north and the south are very approachable however, and I have never been turned down when asking for help or directions even if they don't speak English.

Are there any cultural events that you attended during your stay that you would recommend to students (e.g. festivals, holidays, etc.)?
(How did you find out about these events?)

During my stay in Vicenza, since my group would do day excursions and the trip was short, there were no festivals going on. However, there was International Women's Day, and I did witness a march (although according to university rules we were not allowed to be near it).

In Recanati, there were several festivals - one celebrating the patron saint of the city (I believe) for three days. There were many market stands and activities and fireworks, and on the third day, I was able to walk through the procession. On the last day of my stay the town celebrated the birthday of Giacomo Leopardi, a famous poet from the city, where they recited his work in the town square and ended with fireworks. These are local events and we were informed by the school.
Describe any culture shock that you experienced while abroad.
(If culture shock was present what would you recommend for future students to avoid or lessen the shock?)

For me, there was no culture shock and there were no problems. There is a different way of life in Italy than there is for America (for me, I find Italians are very social, honest/upfront i.e if you are a woman, expect to be catcalled (but the catcalling is really not a big deal), and laid back), however it wasn't anything too shocking. Although I didn't speak any Italian before my trip to Vicenza, it wasn't actually very much of a problem because many Italians can understand at least some English, or you're able to communicate through vague gestures (this is how I purchased my bus tickets).

Did you find it difficult to meet locals of the host city? Why or why not?
(In your experience, were the locals open and welcoming of tourists? Where and how did you befriend the locals during your stay?)

It isn't difficult at all to meet locals. I find that locals are extremely sociable and willing to help, and are generally friendly of tourists if you treat them with respect and courtesy. One of my very good friends is a man I met at the hostel during my stay in Vicenza, and I had no problem talking with people in shops or at the school I attended in Recanati. Even if you don't start a conversation, it's likely that you may have someone starting a conversation with you about politics, where you're from or why you’re in Italy.
What type of housing did you live in (e.g. homestay, dorm, apartment, etc.)?
(Why did you choose this style of housing? Did you have access to a kitchen? How often/what was the process for doing laundry (in house or local laundry mat?)?)

During my stay in Vicenza, I stayed at a local apartment-living situation facilitated by the local hostel. There was access to a communal kitchen, although it was generally not needed. A laundry mat was also not needed because the stay was short, although there was one at the hostel which I'm sure we could have used if needed.

During my stay in Recanati, I stayed in an apartment situation facilitated by the school I attended, which had a kitchen. Because my building was renovated very recently and the washers were not added until after the second week, I would use the laundry mat at the school, which was a walking distance away. However, this was generally pretty expensive (it could run up to 6 Euros per load of laundry, wash and dry together), so it was only done about once a week.

Describe your accommodations.
(Did you have access to hot water? Wifi? Did you live with roommates?)

For Vicenza - there was only a short time where the hot water in the shower worked, however it wasn't too bad. There was WiFi, however it was fairly unreliable. I had one room mate, and the rest of my group stayed in rooms nearby.

For Recanati - Because my building was new, there were a couple instances where the hot water had issues, however for a majority of my stay there wasn't really a problem and there was plenty of hot water. There was WiFi at the school, and after the second week or so WiFi was implemented in the apartment building. I had three room mates, and shared a room with one.
Where was your housing located in regards to the city center or host university?
(How long did it take, using public transportation or walking, to get to classes every day? How long did it take to travel to the center of the city or any other major locations in that city?)

For Vicenza - the city center is extremely close and is within walking distance. From the apartment we would walk to the hostel for meals, which was right across from the main city area.

For Recanati - the city center is also extremely close and within walking distance. It took about 15 minutes to walk to my classes each morning, and the city center was a bit before the school (about 10 minutes)

What was the cost of living like? What ways can you keep costs low in that city?
(Compared to the cost of living in the city of Charlotte was it more or less expensive in that city? Were there any student discounts you took advantage of?)

The apartment situations for both programs were included in the program fee. Food was also included in program fee during my stay in Vicenza. Generally, food is very inexpensive (unless you only eat at tourist-centered areas), however going to supermarkets or grocery stores and making your own food is generally a cheaper option. In Recanati, there were student discounts that were applied to many restaurants, bars and grocery stores. The apperativo hours also provided a cheap meal option, and I as well as my group of friends would go out for apperativos almost every evening because it was one of the best options.
Are you expected to tip servers or taxi drivers abroad?
(If so, what was the common tip rate? Was it the same rate as here in Charlotte (10-20%)?)

It is not expected to tip servers or taxi drivers in Italy.

How did you communicate when you were abroad?
(e.g. did you use your own phone, did you only communicate if there was access to Wi-Fi, did you purchase a phone abroad, etc.)? (Would you recommend any helpful apps? Maybe whatsapp or a currency exchange app?)

My cell phone plan allows me to have 2GB of data while abroad, so I was able to make phone calls or send texts freely. Many people I know who didn't have this plan were able to buy a SIM card at a local convenience store with a limited amount of minutes and data. Without WiFi, however, there is little hope to be able to load social media or any other kind of platforms. Whatsapp was extremely reliable however, where you can call, video chat, and send messages through WiFi, and I used it more than anything while abroad (and I still use it).
What would you recommend students bring to be able to charge their electronics?
(Describe the electrical outlets, tips to keep in mind, etc.).

You are able to use the chords you have at home, but you must bring a converter. The plug has two vertical circular holes. There are places you can purchase these while in Italy, however you can buy them in bulk online (I actually forgot my converter during my trip to Vicenza, however I was able to borrow one from one of the men at the hostel).

What do you know now about the location or program that you wish you would have known before going abroad?

This is less about the program itself but rather about traveling in general - when you are traveling by airplane, I highly recommend having someone on the other end that is able to help you if something goes wrong. Although I had no flight problems on my trip to and from Vicenza, I had a myriad of issues going to and returning from Recanati - When departing for Recanati, my flight was delayed so long that I had to reschedule my flight, and on the way back my flight was delayed even more so that I had to spend a night in Germany. Throughout this, my mother was able to make calls, reschedule my flights, and set up a hotel room for the night. Having someone who can do behind the scenes work is much easier than having to do it yourself while you are in the stressful environment of the airport.
## STUDY ABROAD ALUMNI INFORMATION

**What’s your first and last name?**
Bryn Philiotis

**Which semester and year did you go abroad (e.g. fall 2016, summer 2017, etc.)?**
Spring Break 2018, Summer 2018

**Which program did you participate in?**
Italy: Italian Culture in La Serenissima  
Direct Enrollment Program for Credit: Scuola Dante Alligheri - Recanati

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**What was your student level when you went abroad (e.g. freshman, sophomore, etc.)?**
Sophomore.

If you would be open to being contact by other UNC Charlotte students who are interested in your experience abroad, please provide your contact information (email, phone number, social medial, etc.)

Phone number: 708-515-5443 (can contact through text or whatsapp)  
Email: bphiliot@uncc.edu  
Can contact me on social media: Facebook - Bryn Marie Philiotis