

Ciao, Bella! By Julia Sunde

Recipient: Summer 2010 Nowlin-Caldwell Endowed Study Abroad Scholarship

This past summer was life changing. I gained a great deal of life experience, confidence, and independence. I picked up a new, favorite hobby and made friendships that will last forever. All of this was accomplished by my decision to take an oil painting class in Florence, Italy for a month.

My adventure began in Rome. It was a great introduction to Italy; there is so much beauty and history in this bustling city. Then, the ISA group and I headed for Florence. We were all placed in our apartments scattered around the city. I stayed in a two wing flat with eight other girls. It was great because our space was so large that we were able to have many of the other ISA students meet up there before going on our day trips or going out at night. I was with a diverse group of students from Alaska, California, Colorado, Texas, Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Florida, Tennessee, Virginia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York.



Before I arrived in Italy, I was very eager to start my oil painting class at Florence University of the Arts. Even with my high hopes, the course still managed to exceed my expectations. I made several paintings of a variety of still lifes, clouds, flowers, and a landscape. What was great about my class was that it started at 9:00 AM and was over at 11:30 AM; this gave me an ample amount of time every day to explore Tuscany and other

neighboring regions. I went to Cinque Terre, Pisa, Siena, San Gimignano, Bologna, and several other cities. I went on many long hikes through the countryside, a bike ride through Chianti to Greve, and a couple of picnics in olive groves and vineyards. There were also a great number of excellent restaurants, osterias, and bars in Florence.



When my month was coming to an end, I was not ready to return to Mobile. Hence, I changed my flight and stayed two weeks longer. This gave me just enough time to make it back to USA for the fall semester. During the week, I stayed with my Italian friend, Elena, at her house near Lake Como. On the weekends, we went to her family's bakery, Pasta Fresca, in Madesimo, which is in the Alps, close to the Swiss-Italian boarder. This is where I made several Italian friends and went to Bellagio, Venice, Asolo, and other towns and cities. I was even able to book a flight to Norway and visit my grandmother in Hamar.



It was unforgettable to have an authentic Italian experience, helping out in a bakery and living with an Italian family and even getting to spend some time with my own family in Norway. I could not imagine a better way to end my summer.