

These are actual experiences from Amanda, who sent us several e-mails about her experiences in this program. Enjoy!

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**September 11, 2006**

Dear Family and Friends,

Greetings from Italy! I have only been here for a week and I am already having a wonderful time. The school that I am studying at is on the premise of an Italian Boarding School, located about 40 KM outside of Venice in the town of Paderno del Grappa. The town is absolutely beautiful; it looks like a scene straight out of a movie. It is up in the countryside.

The food here is great (no surprise). I have never tasted better pizza - the sausage and pepperoni is actually real meat, and very unlike everything that we have back at home. In all of the restaurants, they have wine on tap. The town here has its own sparkling wine that they produce, which tastes like a mixture of white wine mixed with Sprite, and is actually quite good. Wine is cheaper than bottled water, so I have been drinking my share of it with every meal.

Last week we had classes on Monday and Tuesday, and then the rest of the week was spent with orientation activities. We had a low ropes course activity which was a great way to get to know people and become comfortable around them. Some of the events included a trust fall (falling backwards off of a platform and then allowing the other people in your group to catch you) and climbing up a 12 foot wall.

Yesterday, Sunday, I went into Venice with a group of friends. It was amazing and even better than the pictures I have seen of it. The weather was beautiful as well. We walked through the city and had lunch along the way. We walked all the way until we reached St. Marc's Square. There were tons of people and lots of pigeons. After that, we took a water taxi down the Grand Canal and back to the main entrance.

This weekend I am going to Cinque Terre, also known as the Italian Riviera.

I am taking an introduction conversation Italian class, which so far has been great. It's helpful in the sense that we mainly just deal with the things I want to know, such as how to order a cup of coffee, ask for directions, etc.

Amanda

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**October 9, 2006**

Dear Family and Friends,

Things are going quite well over here in Europe! I had a week off last week, so I traveled to London, Dublin, Paris, and Brussels.

First stop was London. London was an amazing city. The only downfall is that it's about 1.87 US dollars to 1 British pound, so everything was pretty expensive. It rained almost every day (no surprise). The first day I went and saw Big Ben, St. Paul's Cathedral, The London Eye, and the Hard Rock Cafe. The Hard Rock in London is the original Hard Rock, so underneath the gift shop there is an entire museum. They had Jimi Hendrix's guitar and one of his couches. The guy running the tour let me sit on the couch and get a picture holding his guitar, so that definitely made my night. The next day, I went to Buckingham Palace and then at night to the Absolute Ice Bar. The entire bar is made out of ice - from the bar itself, to the seats, and the glasses. It was -5 C degrees in the bar. When we walked in, they give you capes and gloves to wear. I could only last in there about 40 minutes before I thought I would freeze, but it was definitely a fun trip.

The next day, I got up early and headed straight for Abbey Road. It was really neat. On the walls over in the area fans had written their love for the Beatles. I then walked around the shops for a while before catching a plane to Dublin.

We didn't arrive in Dublin until around dinner time, so first things first we went to a little pub and got some food. We had been there for about 15 minutes and all of a sudden an Irish bar fight broke out. After dinner, it was on to Temple Bar. Walking up and down the streets of Dublin was unreal; just hearing the bagpipes and Irish music was great.

The next day, we went and got a tour of the Guinness factory. It was a really interesting tour, they showed how the beer is made and you even get a pint of it at the end (I opted out and got a Sprite instead, I learned that I wasn't a huge fan of Guinness).

The following morning we had an early flight to Paris. I fell in love with Paris from the minute I set foot off the plane. I think part of it was because I had taken French in high school and it was just great to be able to use it and hear the language. The first afternoon I was there, I went and walked around the grounds of the Louvre, and then headed off to the Eiffel Tower. I know it's just a bunch of metal, but I was amazed by it. I must have taken about 60 pictures of it within my 4 day visit there. Every hour starting at 8 pm the lights on the tower sparkle - it was an amazing sight.

The next day, I went to the Louvre, Musee D'Orsay, Hotel Invalides, and L'Arc di Triomphe. The Louvre was really cool, especially after reading The DiVinci Code because I could actually picture where the beginning of the novel had taken place. The Mona Lisa was much smaller than I had imagined it to be, but the Wedding Feast which is across from it was just magnificent. Friday I spent the entire day doing what I do best...shopping. The shopping in Paris is nothing like I have ever seen..I stopped once I

ran out of hands for all of my bags. I can't even put into words how much I enjoyed this city...walking around, eating a baguette (It was the best bread I had ever eaten in my life) and just taking in the culture was such a great feeling. I spent quite a bit of time at all of the pastry shops. Let's just say that I indeed tasted just about every type of pastry that was made in Paris.

Brussels was a short trip...but I saw everything that I wanted to see in the short time we were there. The first thing I did when we arrived was get a Belgium waffle that was topped off with strawberries and chocolate...and it was to die for. After that, we went to a bar to test out some of the Belgium beer. To my surprise, I actually liked the flavored beers. They had flavors like peach, cherry, apple, etc. which made them taste like juice...their alcohol content is the same as wine though, so it didn't take too many to feel the effects.

Anyways, that's been my travels so far. School itself is going fine. I'm only taking 4 classes over here so I don't really have a full load. Italian class today was hard to adjust to, only because I had been speaking French for the past week...they spoke French in Brussels too so I got to use it there as well. I got an A on my first paper, so I'm off to a pretty good start.

I hope everything is going well back in the states, I miss you all!

Love always,

Amanda :)