

CET Florence, Summer 2025 | Anonymous Student

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Who are the intended audience(s) of your Perspective Piece? "Women and young students."

Summer in Italy as a Young College Student

This summer I had the amazing opportunity to go to Florence with CET. Truthfully the thought of leaving behind all my family and friends and going away for the entire summer frightened me. I was nervous about a plethora of things; if it was going to be too hot, did I pack the right clothes, were the people going to be nice, and many more doubts. Despite the anxiety I still managed to pack my overfilled Dakine duffel bag and board the plane. When I landed in Florence, I had to choose but to put all my worries behind me and adapt to the Italian summer.

Once in Italy the CET met me and some of the other students that had landed that day in the airport. Driving back from the airport felt surreal, every street was narrowed and met with cobblestones as buildings from the renaissance stood above. Finally, once we were brought to our apartment I got a first sense of the beauty of Italy. I lived on "via Belle Donne" located in the city center of Florence. Here the streets were filled with flowers pouring out people's windows, beautiful shops and the scent of cooking pasta filled the air. In my apartment I was going to live with one other girl, she had gone to my school, but I had never met her before. This kind of worried me but I was still excited to be in Florence. Being alone in a foreign country for the first time can be very scary and honestly frightened me at some points.

The academics were a major reason why I chose Florence and CET for my study abroad experience. I am currently getting a degree in history and wanted to go to a place where I could be a part of the living history of Italy. This led me to taking the *History of Food and Culture* taught by Giulio Bogani and *Renaissance Art and Architecture of the Renaissance* led by Silvia Giorgi. Before taking these classes I was extremely nervous about what I was getting myself into.

The history of culture class gave me a deep look into the intricacies of Italy's past in a way that was simple. Dr. Bogani taught the class in a way that kept us interested while teaching us the history and importance of food within the different regions of Italy. Being taught about this history was so rewarding to learn about and my love for the learning was only reinstated when we would do extracurricular activities such as an olive oil tasting or coffee visit.

How much I got to learn about Italy did not stop with my culture history class but continued within my renaissance art and art history class. Professor Giorgi toured us around museums and brought us into the world of art and architecture. Most people including myself had never taken an art history class before, so we were not sure what to expect. But we were pleasantly surprised as we learned how to tell a painting from the high renaissance from the mid. In this class my eyes

were opened to the rich details of Italian frescos, whether plastered on a century year church or perched on the walls of one of the world's greatest museums. I had the opportunity to experience them. Taking these classes was one of the best decisions I could have made. The academic experience with CET really allowed me to at least get a taste of the mass cultural richness Italy has to offer.

There are many challenges when it comes to being a woman and there were things I needed to change. One of the first issues that arose in my study abroad experience was dealing with strangers and people you have not met before. Meeting new people can be difficult and made me reconsider who I am and what I look for in others. For example, a lot of the other girls on my program were D3 college athletes. Now I am not a college athlete, so I had to work my way around and figure out how to connect with them. This was at first difficult because we didn't have that many shared interests or things in common. But I tried to remember who I was and how that can work with others instead of clashing.

While it can be difficult trying to make new friends and not stressing out about people's perception of you, I think Italy was the best place to try and fail. Honestly, I made some amazing close friends on my program but there were other people that did not become my friend. But instead of beating myself down I tried to relax and enjoy where I was. Remembering to center yourself and acknowledging where you are was one of the most positive things I could not.

Taking a moment to breathe and say everything is going to be ok to myself was one of the most successful ways I made my days brighter. While it can be hard to go into that childlike mindset that I am not good enough especially when you are alone, I think it is important to remember why you value yourself and others. One of the things that helped me the most when becoming friends with the people on my program is remembering that everything cannot go away, and it is not supposed to. When dealing with people it can be difficult and not everyone is meant to be your best friend. So, enjoy the conversations that you have and be ok if you don't enjoy every single one.

Connecting with others is one of the most beautiful things a person can do. But again, it can be frightening as a woman traveling alone. This is something I had to deal with when just myself or myself and friends and I would be out in public. We would either have people calling us from the streets or coming up to us in an uncomfortable way. Since I am a woman where I go, I found that in Italy catcalling is not as scary as it is in other places. At least in my opinion, I am usually not actually frightened that someone is going to come up and do something. But I do know that it is important to stay vigilant, try not to be alone, and be prepared.

That being said, I found myself alone at night and during the and had many times where there was such an issue. But a problem can always arise which causes me to be alert at all times. This just does not apply for out in public but also in the bars and clubs as well. There were many instances where I thought a man was being too forward or lingering a little too long around myself or my friend. Here it is most important to look out for your friends but also most importantly looking out for yourself. In the busy clubs and bars there are many chances for a

young vulnerable woman to be taken advantage of. Knowing this I stopped myself from getting too drunk or even too tired because you have to be aware. While you are aware you are a young American in a foreign country so is everyone else so you must be safe. In Florence there is so much to do and experience, go do it all but be safe.

I went to Florence to go experience a different part of the world and that is what I got to. While walking through the streets of Florence I got to connect with shop keepers as I tried on their gorgeous clothes or tried the delicious food from the valleys of Tuscany. Every day I wanted to try and see something new.

Even if no one wanted to go with me or it was a niche activity I listened to my gut and I have no regrets. For example, last week I wanted to go to the Pinocchio Museum and do the whole experience and my friends were at class, so I just went and had the best time. There were families of little kids there, but I enjoyed the giant rainbow bouncy balls and Pinocchio puppets. My biggest advice is that in Italy your gut will speak to you, and you must listen to it. It will tell you to go take that tour or maybe not go into that bar, but Italy and Florence have so much to offer and it's just waiting for you.