

CET Siena, Spring 2026 | Olivia Avila

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Who are the intended audience(s) of your Perspective Piece? "LGBTQ students in Italy, students of color in Italy."

Why Being All Of Yourself Is Important

Studying abroad is one of the most enriching experiences I have ever had in my life. I learned so much about the world, food, and people. But most importantly, I learned so much about myself. Something that not everyone usually thinks about when deciding to study abroad, is "how is this experience going to challenge me?" This was a question that I didn't realize I would be answering, every day as I woke up in a foreign country.

As a queer, Latina woman, studying abroad in a foreign land seemed daunting. I didn't know how truly accepting or open minded the people in my new world would be. Would they accept me if I explained the cultural history of my family, or that I wasn't following hetero norms? Questions like these were always swirling in the back of my head, and I was anxious to find out the answer once I went abroad in Italy, a historically Catholic country.

However, as soon as I was introduced to the people of my program, my host family, and my professors, I realized that there was a new community waiting to welcome all of my being into theirs. Yes, at times it was challenging to not have many queer spaces to explore, or culturally diverse restaurants to try while in Italy, but it made me realize how special I am. It made me realize that my experiences, my diversity and identities are what inspires me to explore new space, and to introduce my identities to any new community that welcomes me.

Of course, sharing these quintessential parts of myself was tiring at times, and even saddening as it made me ache for the communities I left at home, but it was rewarding to teach others and create new bridges to different people that exist outside Italy. I will never forget talking about queer history with my professors, laughing about how to pronounce "cilantro" in Italian with my host nonna, and feeling proud of myself when I shared my person to the beautiful community of Siena, Italy.

If I were to give advice to those going abroad, I would say the following: Don't be afraid to be yourself. You must be a representative of where you come from, and share your upbringing to contribute to the international community and melting pot that is our world. You will be surprised with how open people really are, and how much joy can come from sharing your life with all the souls you meet while abroad. Now is an exciting time to go out into the world—teach, learn, and grow.