



BY MATTHEW BRINGHAM

The US Embassy in Rome was impressive, with their headquarters previously being a castle for a Princess of Savoy. The representative was informative about the Italian and world affairs, most notably saying that Italy from North-Central-South is similar to Germany, Portugal, and Greece. Oddly enough, the average Italian has more net worth than the average German, which can be attributed to their high investment in low risk low return investments, such as real estate and art.

The security for entering the Bank of Italy was considerably lower. The representative held a Ph.D. in economics, who was more optimistic than most about the recovery of the Italian economy. I preferred the discussion with the previous day, since I am not too interested in monetary policy. In addition, we toured parts of the Vatican, including a 500+ step climb to the top of Saint Peter's. This was a great view, despite the work needed to reach the top.

The Business incubation center of Lazio was interesting, because I had never seen how a business began in Europe. Although the information was complex and in depth, the most interesting part was seeing the product pitches. The first one was a mini garden that hung from an apartment window, with a price tag of 40,000 euros. I do not believe that this will be successful, since Europe's economy is still sluggish, the cost is extremely high, and the fact that few people would see the worthwhile use in this. The second product pitch was in regard to simplifying casts. Instead of uncomfortable and costly casts, this man had the idea of creating software that could create a customized cast with 3D printing. I think that this has the potential for success. However, the fact that it takes 8 hours to print one is definitely a noteworthy setback.

We also visited Ostia Antica, which was the ancient port of Rome. It was interesting to see such an ancient city, and the ruins that the Romans lived in 2,000 years ago. Not only this, but it was much larger than I thought. We were only able to complete ½ of the city. Pompeii, the most famous ruins, is about 5x the size of this. Afterwards, we went to the beach, which was very relaxing.

In summary, I found Rome to be a very touristy city. Besides anything relating to tourism or government offices, I find their economy to be lesser developed than what I assume is in the North (i.e. Milan). The slower pace of life (akin to Portugal) makes it less desirable for doing business, and at times, difficult for tourists. Not only this, but the amount of graffiti and slums make it a place that people should visit, but possibly not the most ideal for living. However, the cost of living, in comparison to the North of the country, or that of Northern European countries, makes this more agreeable.

Florence Day 1 in Lopianno

On the first full day in Florence, we visited a small village called Lopiano.

There, we visited a group called the Focolare. The Focolare is a group that lives in harmony, with people all over the world. They believe in ideas such as environmentalism, tolerance, and sharing all profits with the workers (they mentioned that they are not Communists). In addition, they also have a small University, which offers programs in politics, philosophy, religion, and economics. At the end of the tour, they showed us their wine production operation, which included the vineyard, fermentation, and bottling areas.

On the second day, we toured the city of Florence. Some of what we saw included the chapel of the Medici family, the tombs of Machiavelli, Galileo, and Michelangelo. In addition, we saw inside the Duomo, which was painted on the inside in a similar manner to the Sistine Chapel. Afterwards, we visited Eataly, a food marketing company that includes a grocery store (similar to Whole Foods), in addition to their online retail operations. Interestingly enough, they have locations in Italy, the US, and Japan. Afterwards, we went for dinner with the Assumptionist priests, where they fed us a variety of Italian dishes at their convent.

On the third day, we visited a company that specializes in tourism in Florence. Their company does not compete with Priceline or Trip Advisor. Rather, they rent out apartments, and then act as a sub-lender to people, using their website and Expedia as platforms. Later, we visited, ate, and drank with students from James Madison University (Florence Campus). It was interesting to see the in-depth knowledge and analysis that they had in regards to affairs in Europe. ----