

# SMEAL International Programs Newsletter

Spring 2009 Vol.3 #1



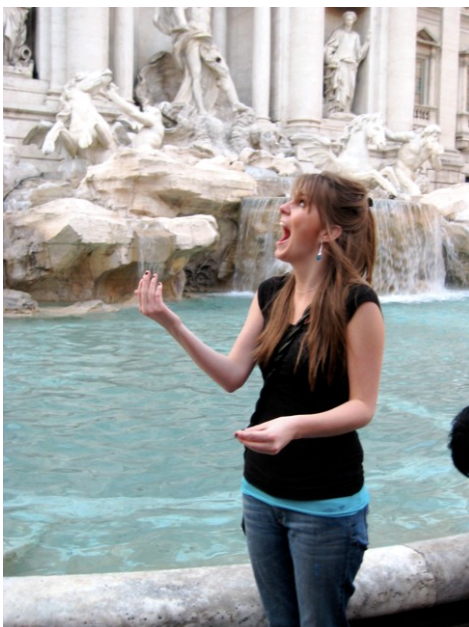
**Kerry Deutsch spent spring 2009 studying in Rome, Italy. Her blogs capture the immediacy of her experiences as she becomes acclimated to life in Italy.**

**Jan 23, 2009 --  
Hello Family and Friends and Greetings from Rome!!**

Arriving in Roma, I had quite a crazy beginning. After waiting around at the airport for the shuttle, we were taken (by a crazy Italian man who drove insanely!) to our apartments. Man oh man. My apartment is INCREDIBLE!!!! I live with 8 other girls (yes, there are 9 of us)... and our apartment is **huge**. We have an opening room, a family room, kitchen, five bedrooms and two bathrooms. My bedroom is about as big as my parents bedroom back home. When you walk into the room, I have 2 huge glass windows on the opposite wall that have long flowing curtains... that open up to a porch!!! We have porches off three of the bedrooms, and the kitchen. I am so blessed to have such a beautiful apartment, especially because real estate in Trastevere is quite expensive. Likewise, my roommate and I both have desks, side tables, beds and huge wardrobes. It's quite nice :)

**International Study  
Scholarship**  
<http://ugstudents.smeal.psu.edu/academics-advising/scholarships-and-awards>

**Making a wish at the  
Trevi Fountain, Rome.**



Our first night we decided to go out to dinner at a small restaurant near our house, where I assume they don't get very many tourists. We knew zero Italian, and let's just say we learned how to communicate in sign language to our server. It was quite a disaster. I had no idea what I was ordering and neither did the other girls. Flash forward to the next day: our first grocery shopping experience. Even more of a disaster!!!! There are only a few things

that are the same (we found Cheerios!) but other than that, Italians have their own brand names and lots of very different products. I don't even recognize 90 % of the stuff that's sold in the store...minus the pasta of course.

Thankfully, my Dad had given me an electronic dictionary, so we attempted to use that to type in words to find out what we were buying! I bought what I thought was goat cheese...and it turned out to be Brie. I thought I bought wheat crackers....nope! They were white. Plus, Italian supermarkets are tiny...because Italians buy their food day to day, and still go to places like the wine shop, butcher, cheese shop and etc. to buy food for the day. Plus, we have a mini refrigerator for 9 girls. So we really can't buy much at a time.

Other key things I've had to get used to: our shower. We don't have a



shower like back in the States... it is a knob, with a hose connected to the head of the shower, however showers don't connect to the wall. You have to use the shower head to hose yourself down... it's quite awkward. We also have a bidet. I doubt any of us will ever be brave enough to try that!

I also am having quite a time getting used to Italian mannerisms. You DON'T make eye contact with anyone on the street...especially men. Likewise, when you go into a store, you're not helping the store owners out by purchasing from them...Italians feel that they are doing you a favor. It is best to keep to yourself, and hold on to dear life to your purse and wallet. I also might be developing a strong reliance on coffee...not just any coffee, but espresso. I have been drinking it waaayyy too many times a day, already. Likewise, coffee shops here are called "bars." So Mom and Dad...if my credit card statement comes to the house... all those bar charges are actually for coffee....cough ;)

I did my first load of wash today, and have a huge drying rack in the room. Our machine is tiny- I could only fit 5 shirts, one pair of jeans and some socks and underwear inside. My clothes have been out "drying" for the past 15 hours, but are still extremely damp. It doesn't help that our apartment is freezing. Italians only turn their heat on for a few hours each morning, and a few hours each night. I am getting quite a lot of use out of my sweatshirt over here!

One of my comical stories is my tale of messing up near Vatican City!!! Just after orientation, Nicolette, another girl from my apartment, and I decided that we were going to go exploring and find the Vatican. So, with a map in hand, we ventured off! Arriving in Vatican City, we found St. Peter's Basilica. After admiring it for quite some time, we decided we wanted to see the Vatican as well. We set off around the



**Kerry's feat of strength  
in Pisa, Italy.**

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[http://  
www.albinoblacksheep.com/  
flash/italy](http://www.albinoblacksheep.com/flash/italy)



**The Pantheon, Rome, Italy.**

edge of St. Peter's to go find the Vatican. Following a huge, stone wall as tall as an office building, we knew we would have to find the entrance somewhere! Arriving at the first entrance, we tried to walk in. However, we were denied entrance by some young men who asked something in Italian about us and novios (boyfriends). We quickly walked away and started following the wall yet again. We kept walking, and walking, and walking. We came upon an entrance to the Vatican Museum, however seeing that you have to pay to get in, we decided we would come back to the museum on another day (the last Sunday of every month its free!). Besides, we didn't want to see a museum, we wanted to see the Vatican. So we kept walking. And walking, and walking. All uphill. Finally, after we had been walking for over 30 minutes, we realized what the gray line was on the map. Vatican City is surrounded by a wall. A giant wall. The wall that we were following. The wall that only has an entrance through the Vatican Museum. The wall that was NEVER ENDING. We were never going to get in.

We had no choice but to keep walking. Turning back did not seem to be an option, especially because it seemed as though some small Italian woman was following us...she must have not realized the city was encased by a wall either! So we walked. Finally, in the distance, we saw it. St. Peter's dome. We had arrived back on the other side of the Basilica, having walked 3.2 km around the city. Let's just say we were laughing, but pretty exhausted as well. We felt extremely stupid and silly, however, it did make quite the story to tell our roommates later that night at dinner.

Needless to say, I have been having a great time so far! I start classes on Monday, and although my schedule is not 100 percent accurate yet, I am definitely taking classes in Italian, photography, a literature class on traveling, and possibly fresco painting (a technique Italians use to paint on ceilings!)

Lastly, if you feel like a laugh, watch this four minute video on Italians and Europeans. They showed us this at orientation to prepare us for how different Italy is from the rest of Europe- it got a big laugh from students and faculty alike. Enjoy :)  
<http://www.albinoblacksheep.com/flash/italy>

**February 3, 2009 --Buongiorno di Roma!  
(Good Morning from Roma!)**

Tomorrow it will have been exactly one month since my arrival in Europe- time is flying by. I can't believe I only have a few short months left abroad.

The last two and a half weeks have been quite the adjustment to the Italian lifestyle. While in my first email, I wrote of my excitement, and confusion about the changes I was experiencing, that emotion has worn off. I am becoming accustomed to the Italian way of life, and developing some good and bad habits. While I spoke in my first email about my

serious addiction to coffee... let's just say that it has gotten a bit worse. No longer do I wake up in the morning and think to myself, "Hmmm, should I get a cup of coffee today?" Instead, I wake up and can hardly pull myself together until I can locate the closest cup of coffee. I purchased a Moka Pot...which is a pot for making homemade espresso. I don't know why they're not sold in the United States; I think it's a ploy to get people to buy \$200 espresso machines. My little espresso pot only cost 5 Euros, and man does it do a good job of satisfying my cravings!!! Which can be 2 to 5 times a day...

I also have been teaching myself how to cook. Eating out in Italy means you get one of three food varieties, I have become quite tired of the same choices all the time. Also, Italians don't really eat many processed foods, I have been experimenting with the only identifiable things I can find at the grocery store, fresh vegetables, pasta, bread and cheese. Meals in a box that you can add water and cook on the stove? Unheard of. Thus, my cooking skills (which have been dormant until now) are coming to life! While my Mom frequently sticks her tongue out in disgust when I tell her what I concocted for myself, I can assure you that I've been creating some masterpieces in the kitchen. Masterpieces may actually be too strong a word, so I will say works of art. Art can be abstract...



I have been using my weekends for traveling, although I have yet to leave the country of Italy. Last weekend, I took a trip to Tivoli and Pienza in Tuscany. In Tivoli, we explored Hadrian's Villa, an extremely large summer escape that emperor Hadrian had built for himself in the early 2nd century. We also attempted to explore Villa D'Este, a beautiful estate of a cardinal in the 1500's that was built as a "new garden of Eden." I assume that it was beautiful, however considering that the God of Rain decided it was time for a wash down- our tour was cut short due to torrential downpours. The following day, I had a guided tour of Tuscany. We started off visiting the small town of Pienza, spent some time at a Wine/Cheese/Dessert tasting in an old Etruscan tomb (dating back to 200 BC), and then went to a feast (and when I say feast, I

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[http://ugstudents.smeal.psu.edu/  
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mean FEAST!) with the group. Our 5 course meal lasted 3 hours. This was not, however, three hours of continuous eating. It was just a long, drawn out meal... exactly how the Italians like it! That has been quite difficult to get used to compared to meals in America! In Italy, it is common for people to take 2 to 3 hours to eat a meal. Imagine scheduling that into a busy Saturday night.

This past weekend, I went on an adventure with my roommate, Nicolette. We started off in Perugia, the home of the Baci Chocolate factory. Being the chocolate fiend that I am, I was extremely excited about going on the famous Italian chocolate tour of the Baci factory (Baci means kiss in Italian)! Our first mistake, we got off the train at the wrong stop. We hopped on another train, and eagerly got off in Perugia. Considering that Perugia is a small Italian city built into the side of the mountain, we realized we were going to get quite the workout when we saw the layout of the city: uphill. So we stopped to ask for directions, and after receiving many blank stares, we decided we would simply find the chocolate factory ourselves (there were no maps either). We started walking. Uphill. Up a mountain, actually. After searching high and low (and walking uphill for about 45 tiring minutes), we finally came to the conclusion that we were never going to find the factory.

Seeing an ancient church steeple not too far above us, we concluded that the steeple was probably the steeple to Perugia's famous church that we had read about in our little guidebook! (After all, it was the only steeple we could see on the mountain.) So we decided to simply go see the church so we could at least have seen something important in Perugia. So we started hiking up to the top of the mountain, up street after street, staircase after staircase... and finally got to the base of the church. Guess what we saw? A wall. Another GIANT wall surrounding the church. I should have taken this as a sign from God, but no... we started to follow it. While this wall was not quite as long, or high as the Vatican City wall, it was still a wall blocking us from our intended destination. Alas! We had finally reached the end of the wall!!! We turned the corner to see a gate, and a sign, and arrows pointing in various directions. "Principals Office --->" . Principals office? We had walked all the way up the mountain to see a school. A SCHOOL. A school surrounded by a wall, much less. Why oh why do these things have to happen to me! Let's just say we were pretty peeved, and were forced to accept defeat. We went to McDonalds for lunch (yes, McDonalds. The siestas in the afternoon cause everything to be closed between 2 and 4:30!!! Drives me crazy!) and headed back to the train station. We found out the next day that we had gotten off at the wrong Perugia train stop... hence why we were on a mountain instead of a bathing in Baci chocolate fountains like I had dreamed of....

We then headed to Florence for two nights where we had quite a wonderful time. As much as I love Rome, I think I might have liked Florence even more! It is such a beautiful city, smaller and easier to navigate than Rome, and full of art. We climbed to the top of the Duomo (which is the largest brick dome ever constructed...436 steps to the top!), went shopping on the Ponte Vecchio (a bridge that has been home to jewelry shops since the 15th century), explored the Uffizi Museum (home to works of art by Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Raphael and more), hiked up to the top of Piazza Michelangelo, and saw the statue of David. We were quite exhausted after covering all that history in a short two days, but it was well worth the exhaustion.

For our last stop, we headed over to Pisa to see the leaning tower. It was wild to see the tower in person... it actually looks like it is going to fall over! Pictures just don't do it justice. We spent a total of about an hour in Pisa, since the Leaning Tower is probably the only thing to do or see there. We headed back to Rome, where I can tell you that our train dropped us off at the station at 5:30, and we ended up taking the wrong bus, the wrong metro, and had to walk home from the other side of Roma, arriving back at my apartment at 8 pm, two and a half hours after being dropped off. I guess that just goes to show exactly how big Rome is!

So far this experience has been a series of ups and downs for me. Some days I wake up, super excited to be here and loving the history that lies around every corner of the city. Other days I wake up, frustrated because Italian culture is so different and confusing...and being home in the US where everything makes sense sounds so appealing to me. While I have adjusted to certain aspects, others simply frustrate me on a daily basis. While the "Ciao bella" is cute in the beginning, it gets very annoying having men shout out at you every day. However, some days I look around, amazed at what I am living amongst, and could not be happier. I think that is what is making this such a worthwhile experience... the fun, excitement, confusion, frustration, and anticipation of what is going to happen next. I am so glad that I studied abroad. I have learned more in the past month about life, and myself than I have learned in my 3 years at Penn State or in high school.



One last thing before I head to Painting class (my favorite class thus far!!) You know when you're young- your Mom or Grandma always tells the story "when I was a little girl I had to walk 2 miles to school everyday in the pouring rain..." I finally appreciate that story. I walk 4.5 miles every day to and from school. While I could hypothetically take public transportation, it is so random and unreliable that I have embraced the journey and enjoy my long strolls to school.

Arrivederci!