Personal Information

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Practical Advice

Visa

The visa process can be a pain and you need to hope that the person behind the counter is in a good mood. Come in organized and prepared and be sure to have several copies of everything. Reference the sheet that Cornell provides as guidance as well as the Italian Consulate website. Make sure that when you make the appointment you give yourself enough time to be able to return to the Consulate in case you are missing something. When I arrived in Italy there was no problem with immigration. They saw the visa and asked what school I was attending and were very friendly.

Packing

When packing, make sure you have a small carry-on sized bag to carry with you as you travel on the budget airlines. There is no need to buy toiletries before leaving because they will only make your bag heavier. Only bring travel sized items that will last you at least one day which will hold you over until you can find a store. Also do not pack too many clothes because you will want to buy things while you are in Milan--or even around all the places you travel. Leave yourself some space and an extra bag to get home.

I wish I would have brought a Tupperware container and some seasoning because you will cook while there.

Resources

The Bocconi website is probably the best place to find out information on the school, although it can be very confusing at times. The dorm is one of the best places to find out what is going on in the evenings. There are also student groups that host parties for international students (ESEG and ESN Bocconi)

International office at Bocconi

During the first weeks at Bocconi everything is set up to assist the international students. They have booths and are around all the time to assist. I was offered a buddy but he did not contact me until much later into the semester. The people you meet around campus will be helpful. The school hosted some parties for the international students to attend as well as information sessions and campus tours.

Academics

The University

There was a centralized campus. However, it is not comparable in size to Cornell. The campus consists of about 5 buildings in the middle of the city. There is one dining hall where you can find students studying and spending time with each other before classes. There is one computer lab and a library but they all have assigned seating which can be frustrating at times.

Courses

The course enrollment process was very confusing and nothing like what we are used to at Cornell. Students are allowed to take classes that overlap and can choose to be an "attending" or "non-attending" student. Be sure to read the syllabus before choosing to see if it makes sense to choose the "non-attending" option because it can be a lot more work. All of my classes were taught by 2 professors who switched in the middle of the semester.

There was no homework and the whole class grade was based upon the final. Only one of my courses had a midterm and other one of my classes had one paper due. All grades were out of 30 points which makes the finals harder especially based upon how the teacher structures the test. I took 5 classes which amounted to 15 US credits. Bocconi has an exam schedule which is earlier for exchange students so that we can leave early--but be prepared to take tests up until the last day.
Life Abroad

Language

For the majority of Bocconi professors, English is not their first language and they tend to have strong Italian accents. However, in class it is fairly easy to understand what they are saying and slides are always posted online. During your time abroad you will learn how to use hand signals to get around and communicate with people. The Italian language crash course was helpful and was also a good way to meet other people in the program.

Banking

There is a need to open an Italian account. Near the Bocconi dorm, Arcobaleno, there is a great bank, Unicredito, and it has some of the best rates. Before leaving the States make sure that you contact your bank and understand the fees they will charge you for accessing your account from abroad. While abroad I only took out money from the ATM because the exchange rates at money changing places were overpriced.

Housing

The host university provided one option of housing which was a dorm. It was about 20 mins away from campus and you need to take a tram to get there. The people that did not opt to live in the dorm looked for housing when they came to Milan. Most stayed in a hostel for a couple days while they tried to find roommates and housing. The decision to go with the dorm housing versus hoping to find something in August really depends on personality. While the dorm might have been a little pricey, I valued certainty in knowing where I would be staying from before I got there. The school had a meal plan which was 10 meals for 40 euro. I didn't end up really using mine until finals week when I didn't have as much time to cook. One meal comes with 2 entrees, a water and dessert, definitely a lot of food.

Transportation

If you live in the dorm you will need to apply for a monthly "ATM" pass because you will be riding the tram every day and it is not worth getting caught ticketless by the controllers. Each ticket costs 1 euro and can be purchased at metro stops or at shops where you see the capital "T" sign. There is a monthly student pass for 17 euros.

Communication

I used the Google phone service which was free because my computer did recognize that I was in another country. I also skyped with my friends and family from home as well as friends I met in Milan. I sent a lot of postcards which were 85 euro cents each. It did take some mail a long time to arrive, especially if customs took it. It is necessary to have a cell phone because everyone buys one. The plans are cheap so it is worth it. Also the blackberry plans are cheaper in Italy so if you have an unlocked blackberry it can be used. Since my parents had one as well it made communication through bbm free. I had 3 months of unlimited data free and 9 euros a month after so I only spent 9 euros on data. I also got a call and text plan which was about 4 euro a month.

Social activities

I did hang out with some Italians, but also with people who lived in the dorm. As mentioned previously, there are Bocconi student groups that organize parties for the international students. Entrance to the nicer clubs is discounted and they also host trips for much cheaper. I went on two trips with the organizations. The first was Nice, Cannes and Monaco and the second trip was to Oktoberfest in Germany. They had other trips to Rome and skiing in the Alps.

Shopping

There was a very big supermarket near the dorm called Esselunga. Everything necessary can be found there. I recommend that you get the shoppers discount card which gives a lot of discounts and you can rack up points which can be redeemed for gifts at the end of your time abroad. In the supermarket and some shopping stores I used my credit and debit card, but for the most part I always had cash. In terms of pricing, some things like fresh produce were cheaper while some other products were more expensive. Most places are not open on Sundays although the supermarket does remain open a couple Sundays in a month.

Health and safety

Italy is pretty safe but like anywhere you should not walk alone. It is important to keep in mind that you probably don't look Italian and will be speaking English on the trams, so you stick out. Always remain aware for people trying to pickpocket you.

Travel

While I was abroad I went to Germany, Greece, Turkey, Spain (Barcelona and Madrid), Portugal, London, France, Switzerland and a lot of places within Italy. There are a
lot of great places in Italy so it is important not to forget about those cities although traveling within Italy can be more expensive than going to another country sometimes. I spent a good amount of money on traveling because although the budget airlines might be cheap, you still need pay for living, eating, and sightseeing expenses as well. Rick Steves was a helpful guide book.

**Overall exchange experience**

I definitely got to experience the Italian culture. I also learned a lot of new recipes by cooking at Italian friends’ houses. Schooling and universities are very different from the American campus that we are used to. Everyone will have different, but meaningful, experiences. I definitely brought back a different perspective on life and living.