I studied abroad in Italy and Bocconi University. I was abroad during the fall 2011 semester for approximately four months. This experience was incredibly rewarding and unbelievable. I highly recommend anyone who has a slight interest to go abroad to do it. Don’t worry about making friends or being away from your family, instead take in every experience as it comes and embrace it entirely. Let’s start from the beginning...

Visa

Before arriving, you must obtain a visa, this can be a very easy or difficult. If you listen to everything Christine says you will have a visa with plenty of time before you leave. For precautionary reasons I suggest telling the consulate that you are leaving earlier than you are because then they will make you an earlier appointment and if you do get denied you still have time to go back before you leave. Once you get to the consulate, if you go to the one in New York City, you will be waiting for an extensive amount of time, be patient and don’t use your cell phone, they’ll take it away from you, like they did to me. Make sure you have everything Christine told you to have and everything will run smoothly, otherwise they’ll make you come back. Listen to Christine she knows what she is talking about!

Packing

Don’t ship anything over to Italy, if you do this it will probably get there about a month after you arrive, instead just bring everything and by everything I mean clothes. You don’t need to bring towels, sheets, a fan and everything you would bring to college because you can definitely buy it there. What they don’t have is Starbucks, so if you are a Starbucks addict like myself I suggest bringing those VIA packets, they’re great! I had to pick a few packages up while I was in London because I forgot them. Also make sure you bring all your toiletries they don’t have the same brands in Italy so if you are particular about your moisturizers and face wash just bring it from home and pack enough for your entire stay.

Housing

A slight step back, before arriving to Milan you need to decide where you are going to live. Your options include living in a dorm or getting an apartment. If you want to live in a dorm I recommend you make this decision as soon as you are able to otherwise the choice will be made for you and you will have to get an apartment. I chose to live in Dubini, I lived in a quad in Dubini. Dubini is the nicest residence hall at Bocconi, if you are looking for nice amenities and a spacious apartment with your own room then Dubini is for you, however if you are looking for a “freshman year” college experience then Arcobaleno is the dorm for you. I will warn you though Arcobaleno is far from everything. I personally loved living in Dubini because I had great roommates, but if you don’t luck out with your roommates then Dubini might be tough because there isn’t a social scene there. However, Dubini does have a gym, the word gym is used loosely because it’s essentially one small treadmill, bike and a bowflex machine. Dubini is just outside the real center of Milan and I personally chose not to walk outside in the dark around Dubini, it isn’t safe so if you’re leaving in the evening walk in a group or take a cab.

If you are all about convenience and having your own space then Bocconi Residenza is your residence hall. Bocconi residence hall is right on the Bocconi campus, your walk to class is less than 5 minutes, whereas Dubini is about 15 minutes and Arcobaleno is a half hour walking and 15-20 minutes by tram. The Bocconi residence hall is very convenient however it is very lonely; the friends that I had who lived in Bocconi didn’t like it because it wasn’t social at all, each room is situated as a single and there are no common spaces. There is a cafeteria in the basement of Bocconi residence hall, but I wouldn’t suggest signing up for the meal plan, instead you should stop by Bocconi Guisti and enjoy the sfilatino of your choice; they are only three Euros and are amazing! My favorite was salame piccante!

Now that I’ve explained all the residence halls I can explain whether or not to get an apartment. If you are traveling abroad with a friend to Milan I suggest getting an apartment. Apartments are more flexible and you can choose a safe and populated location. The location of the residence halls aren’t the safest, Bocconi is the safest and most convenient of all three. Furthermore there are other residence halls other than these three but I don’t know anyone who lived in them so I don’t have much to say about them. If you are going abroad alone, like myself, then I definitely suggest trying to get a residence hall, scrambling to get an apartment once you get there can be hectic and stressful.
Language Course

So now we have a place to live and are in Milan! Get excited, it’s only the beginning. When you signed up for housing you have an option to take a language course. DO IT! I made most of my friends in my language course and it was so much fun.

Going to a country that speaks another language can definitely be intimidating, but relax, it’s fun. Bocconi has a huge exchange program there must have been at least 1,000 exchange students from all over the world and all of the exchange students are required to speak English. So if you were hoping to be fluent in Italian by the end of your abroad experience it may be harder than you think. Most of my friends while abroad were exchange students, because those were the students in my classes. The Italian students at Bocconi are very nice but they do speak Italian so at times it’s difficult to develop relationships with the full-time Bocconi students.

Do try and speak Italian as much as you can—’it’ll be more difficult than you think. Everyone I had met was very friendly and most of them wanted to work on their English so they will try to speak to you in English.

Communication

Make sure when you arrive to get a cell phone, I used Vodafone as my service provider and all I had to do was spend 300 Euros for my minutes. I bought a BlackBerry there, which cost 199 Euros. I highly recommend this because I was able to BBM my friends and family from home for free as well as BBM my friends in Italy that’s why I didn’t spend as much money on minutes. Most people get WIND, it is the cheaper service compared to Vodafone but over time it adds up because your minutes go away really quickly and I had friends that had trouble with their phones the entire time while they were abroad. I never wanted to be in a situation where I didn’t have a phone; hence I got a reliable service provider.

Residence Permits, banking, and special cards

One of the most important things you must do when you arrive in Milan, especially if you want to travel is get your permit of stay. It is vitally important that you get the receipt for the permit of stay. Just a warning make a copy of everything you brought with you to get your visa; you will need all of it when you get your permit of stay. I actually never received the physical card and most of my friends didn’t either, the important thing is that you get the receipt from the post office, carry this around with you when you travel and you will be able to return to Italy anytime.

If you are interested in opening a bank account while in Italy you will need a codice fiscal. I didn’t open up a bank account while I was in Italy the downside to this is you will be charged a number of fees every time you go to the bank. It’s really up to you whether or not you feel a bank account would be useful. Another benefit of getting a Codice Fiscale is you ability to buy soccer tickets in advance. A friend of mine got a Codice Fiscale was able to ticket to four different soccer games all for 80 Euros and one of the games was Barcelona vs. AC Milan. One thing that you most definitely something you should do is attend a soccer match. They are awesome I went to two while I was in Italy; it is a unique experience that you can’t experience here in the states. The last card that I suggest you get is your Metro card, this is another card that I did not get myself but I definitely believe could be useful. The Metro and tram system in Milan is like New York or London but it isn’t too bad. The tram is very hit or miss, you can ride the tram for free and hope you won’t get caught and have to pay a 50 Euro fine. That’s what I did all semester I don’t suggest you do this because the tickets for one tram ride only cost 1.50 Euros. If you would like to invest in a card head to the ATM below the Duomo it’s on the red line.

Exchange Student Events

Now that we have all the little boring things covered let’s get to what you do for fun in Italy. Once you arrive to Bocconi you will begin to get email from the IES. These emails will tell you about exchange events every day and night. These exchange events will happen until you leave Milan. GO TO THEM! They are so much fun and every exchange student at Bocconi goes. These events are held at a different club in Milan every night including Monday; yes as a Cornelian I was just as surprised as you are. Obviously you can’t go to every one but I highly suggest going to Old Fashion on Wednesday. Manage you time well and you will enjoy every bit of your abroad experience.

Classes

Bocconi is a city school so the campus itself is relatively small and coming from Cornell there really isn’t any campus experience at Bocconi. The campus is situated not too far from Navigli, which is a great place to go for Aperitivo when it’s warm. Remember that you are coming to Bocconi and it is a business school so they do not offer classes in painting or photography or “let’s look at architecture in Milan.” This is important to remember especially when finals approach. The classes you are taking are real classes that you will have to do work in. They are really great business classes I recommend Venture and Development Capital. This was one of the few classes that had quizzes throughout the semester, most classes at Bocconi are either 100% final with an option to take a partial midterm and a partial final and the average of those two will be your grade.

Final Thoughts

Overall, my abroad experience was unbelievable. I enjoyed every minute of it and tears were shed when everyone had to go home. I now have friends from all over the world and I really hope to see them again soon. That is something that is very special about Bocconi. The number of people you will
meet from all over the world is unbelievable. I have friends from Portugal, Australia, Japan and the UK—just to mention a few. Take advantage of the diversity in languages and cultures. This is what makes the experience so special and unique.