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Going to Italy was definitely a milestone in my life, as it had been my goal for a long time. Since I was a kid, I was fascinated by Greco-Roman mythology. As I grew more interested in history and studied it in college, Italian history had always been my favorite—specifically Ancient Rome and Renaissance Italy. Therefore, it was a meaningful journey for me to stand in front of historical landmarks and pieces of art that I had read so much about before.

My favorite thing about the trip was that we were able to get a taste of everything. We saw the crowded cities of Rome and Florence, small towns like Asisi and San Gimignano, and the empty countryside (each of which had its own special appeal). Now that I think of it, my real favorite thing was the food. Food there is fresh and organic, without much sugar and grease. Because it’s not very fatty, all of us felt comfortable and energetic after a meal, rather than stuffed and lazy. This was a big change compared to American food that tended to be more mass-manufactured and greasy. The food I specifically miss is the pasta, pizza, pesto sauce, vegetables, fruits, pastries, and cheese. Once I got a taste of this, it was hard to transition back to American food without missing fresh Italian (not even the Italian restaurants here seemed authentic enough).

Another thing I loved about the trip was the balance that was scheduled between business-related events, tour guides, and our own free time. The fact that we had our own free time was especially valuable, since big groups and organized tours can often feel very limiting. This way, we used our limited time to see whatever we wanted to see, and shop wherever and for whatever we wanted, without being restricted to large groups and small time slots.

If I had to choose between Rome and Florence, I am surprised at myself for choosing Florence (since Rome had always been a fascination for me). Maybe because I went to Rome with such inflated expectations from my readings (especially concerning Ancient Rome), that encountering the real sites at their current states grounded my amazement. I was especially excited to see the Roman forum, Colosseum, Vatican, and Pantheon—and seeing them gave me a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment. I greatly appreciated the fact that I was standing at the same spots that so many other great figures and emperors in history once stood—but the dense crowds, noises, and traffic seemed to offset the experience at times. To the contrary, Florence was more beautiful than I had ever imagined, and seeing it only heightened my fascination. No matter how much I had read about Renaissance Florence, Florence Cathedral, the Signoria, and Florentine art—I never expected everything to be that amazing. I think my history books don’t give Florence enough of the justice it deserves.

If I had to choose between an Italian city and a small Italian town, I am surprised at myself for choosing the small town (since I’ve always been a city-person). Though I’ve always hated the countryside, the Italian countryside with plots of farmland and trees scattered everywhere was very inspiration. A castle surrounded by a town and old walls seemed to randomly prop out of the smooth hills. I would love to live in one of those quiet towns, living a simple life, and having a window view of a medieval castle and countryside.

Because of this unforgettable experience, I decided to make it a long-term goal for me to go back and live in Italy.