

Destination Ca' Foscari

International Students on Mobility Recount their Experiences in Venice

edited by
David Newbold



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Destination Ca' Foscari

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International Students on Mobility Recount their Experiences in Venice

A volume to celebrate 150 years
of Ca' Foscari: a university open to the world

edited by David Newbold

Venezia

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Destination Ca' Foscari. International Students on Mobility Recount
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David Newbold (edited by)

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Foreword

Tiziana Lippiello

Vice Rector for International Relations, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy

In a misty morning at the beginning of a still warm autumn, on mobility to the beautiful Suzhou, deeply immersed in the flat countryside away from the metallic grey of Beijing: mobility is a key word when you happen to work or study at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Venice: the place where people from all over the world dream to be and stay for a while and where people at one point of their life dream to depart from. None of the students who recount their study experience at Ca' Foscari in this volume forgot to place at the center of their story the unique emotional experience in the magical *Serenissima*: "Coffee to go", "Wandering in Venice", "Rowing through Venice", "My love affair with Venice", "Me and my sentimental Venice"... and the study experience at Ca' Foscari University continues through the "*calli* of Venice", imbuing the senses with the magic atmosphere of the city, with "the colour of spritz", "the soft blue light of morning", "the soft swing of the boat", "sounds of water flapping against canal walls".

"I was exhausted but even more important - I was uninspired", writes a student from the University of Hamburg, when she arrives in Venice. And, on the first day of university, Paolina Luisa Wandruszka writes that she "was sitting in an old church that is now a lecture hall at the Campo Santa Margherita", where she would then spend hours talking about cultural differences and language barriers. Ca' Foscari warmly welcomes students from all over the world, with lectures and conferences every day and the wonderful Cultural Flow Zone on the waterfront at the Zattere, one of the places where the students meet and speak "a mixture of Italian, Spanish, French and English".

Artem Chukharev, from Mohyla Black Sea State University, notes the way students and teachers interact, the high level of culture and

respect for the opinion of others during discussions in class. Communicating with people from many nationalities, religions and cultures provides an extraordinary opportunity to rethink one's background awareness of self.

In these stories there are no boundaries, no barriers, no prejudices whatsoever. The university and the city are intertwined and linked inextricably, with the results that students' study experiences become a cascade of emotions, passion, and desire to share and learn from one another, to be part of a unique intellectual and emotional experience. Most of the contributions in this volume, written by students from 28 countries, read like sentimental stories with ups and down and problems to solve in a life-enriching experience.

Ca' Foscari University of Venice has more than 700 mobility agreements across the world, in more than 120 countries. We currently receive about 600 students on mobility each year, participating in Erasmus or Overseas programs and, among the many programs, 20 are delivered entirely through the medium of English, adding to the attraction of Ca' Foscari as an international university. The Welcoming and Counseling Unit do a great job of making students feel at home, organizing welcome events, giving advice, putting international students in touch with local students who volunteer for Buddy programs.

I hope that through this mobility experience at Ca' Foscari University of Venice the students can find their future inner path, their destinations in life, and that emotions, skills and knowledge may all come together to fulfill their dreams.

I am very grateful to my colleague David Newbold and to our International Relations Office, in particular Ketti Borille and Krystina Stermole, who worked on this project and collected the wonderful dreams and testimonies of the international students who have studied at Ca' Foscari.

On a grey mobility from Peking to Suzhou
October 10, 2019

Preface

Ketti Borille

Counseling and Welcome Unit, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy

A Second Home Called Venice: The World and a Microphone

Looking back to when I was 5 years old, I remember holding a microphone while posing like a pop star and singing along to my favorite children's music contest. I insisted on singing in all of the languages of the world, mispronouncing the lyrics, of course, because I already felt a call to embrace the whole world and to develop an understanding of it as wide as possible.

I have been working in the international office for the past two years. I am currently in charge of supporting all the students who come to Venice thanks to a study mobility program, such as the popular Erasmus+, or through agreements between institutions, like the Overseas Program and the Swiss European Mobility Program.

Every time I hold the microphone to greet them during the Welcome Days and see their shimmering eyes, suddenly, I have a flashback that mirrors those days of my childhood, and I feel that I am experiencing the call myself.

I belong to a strong and broad-based team, the Counseling and Welcome Unit, whose goals are not limited to helping students to create their study plan for Ca' Foscari, but involve much more. I see myself as an older sister who leads them through the, sometimes, confused bureaucratic procedures. I am often their first contact via email and part of my 'mission' is to encourage and reassure them not only during, but especially before their journey to Ca' Foscari. I know very well that mix of feelings such as happiness, curiosity, but also anxiety and loneliness, which comes while living in a foreign country, considering that I was also an Erasmus+ intern when I was their age.

In the Welcome Unit, we have tried to focus on making the students' experiences at Ca' Foscari more pleasant but also easier and better organized. Because of the increasing number of incoming students, the original Welcome Day has split into three days according to the main study areas of the students (Languages, Science and Humanities, Economics). In cooperation with the Outreach and Recruiting Unit and the Erasmus Student Network, the Buddy System, a highly successful initiative which pairs incoming students with a friendly student from the home university, has been revised with the use of a specific app. Furthermore, the three main orientation days have been placed within the context of the wider Welcome Week, seven days full of educational and leisure activities, amongst them, a "Venetian crash course" and a close encounter with the traditional Dragon boat (which is the subject of one of the accounts in this volume).

We have also been able to help groups of students from specific countries who may feel particularly challenged by the intercultural demands of the mobility experience, with the aim of helping them to integrate and thereby reducing the dropout rate.

In support of our work, the University has invested in building new dorms and residences with accommodation reserved for international students. Moreover, a wider range of courses completely taught in English is now available for incoming international students.

In short, with my colleagues in the unit, we have tried to create an atmosphere of welcome and a supportive community in which all students have the opportunity to learn and grow.

As songwriter and poet Patty Smith puts it:

What matters is to know what you want and pursue it and understand that is going to be hard because life is really difficult. But on the other hand, you'll have the most beautiful experiences.

And, I would like to add, make the most of your time in Venice!

Introduction

David Newbold

Department of Linguistics and Comparative Cultural Studies, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy

International Mobility: the World Comes to Ca' Foscari

In 2018, to celebrate 150 years of being 'open to the world', Ca' Foscari organized a competition open to all students enrolled at the university who had spent a mobility semester abroad. Students were invited to write (in English) about the experience. Nearly a hundred students responded, recounting their impressions, insights, and moments of epiphany from different countries across the world, and testifying directly to the huge importance of student mobility programmes. The results can be found in the volume *My Mobility*, published by Edizioni Ca' Foscari.¹

This volume is the sequel to *My Mobility*. International students who have spent a study period at Ca' Foscari at some point during the last three years were invited to recount their time in Venice, focusing on a learning experience (not necessarily a formal one) which contributed to making their stay memorable. Seventy four students responded, from twenty eight countries, representing every continent except Antarctica. To a large degree, the themes are the same as those chosen by their Ca' Foscari counterparts in the previous volume: the overcoming of self doubt, and the universal values of friendship and tolerance. For all students, incoming as well as outgoing, the mobility experience is a voyage of self discovery.

¹ <https://edizionicafoscarini.unive.it/en/edizioni/libri/978-88-6969-301-4/>.

But with a difference: in this second volume, the destination is the same for everyone – Ca' Foscari. So the backdrop of Venice looms large on every page, and the uniqueness of the setting, and the personal relationship forged with the town, are a strong feature of many of the accounts. Of Venice perhaps more has been written than of any other town – certainly of any town of comparable size – and consequently the fear of the jury when they embarked on the evaluation process was that they would be faced with a stock-pile of tired clichés and worn out descriptions.

It was not to be. The often deeply personal nature of the close encounter with Venice provides an unfailing source of inspiration and creativity; each account in this collection vibrates with a different voice, and illuminates the *Serenissima* from a different perspective. In short, the quality of writing from students across the world – for most of whom English was a second or possibly third language – matches the levels shown by the (mostly) Italian students who authored the first volume.

As before, the jury (composed of Gregory Dowling and David Newbold from the Department of Linguistics and Comparative Cultural Studies, together with Ketti Borille and Krystina Stermole from the International Office) began with a holistic, subjective rating of each text. No fewer than thirty eight were judged to be at least 'good' by every member of the jury. This gave us a long list, from which a short list of twenty two was drawn up. A final, analytic stage in which texts were rated for originality of content, creativity, and use of language gave us the winners.

The first prize was awarded to Malgorzata Zacheja from the University of Warsaw for *The Butterfly Effect*, which shows how one small thing leads to another, and which culminates with a new role for the author as a public speaker when she joins the Ca' Foscari Model United Nations Debating Society. Penetrating insights into formative moments, a healthy dose of self irony, and an incisive use of language helped make this sophisticated account the outright winner.

The second prize, *Still Waters* by James Mustelier (City College New York), follows the night-long wandering of the author through the streets of Venice with a mysterious student of philosophy by the name of Andrea, whom he meets in a bar and who plays Virgil to the author's Dante, or perhaps Boswell to Dr Johnson. The night ends whimsically with the smell of freshly baked bread wafting from an alley, tantalizingly unavailable, and "not a cruise ship in sight".

For third place the jury could not distinguish between two equally satisfying accounts. *The Unseen Encounter* by Vojtech Polasek (Masaryk University, Czech Republic) relates the start of a sentimental relationship, so often a part of the Erasmus experience. Only half way through the account do we realize that this is a relationship with a difference – the author is blind, and we are seeing the city

through the sharpened senses of sound (“water flapping against canal walls”) and smell (“sea water, engine oil and climbing jasmine”). *Coffee to go* by Paolina Luisa Wandruszka (University of Hamburg) ends with a learning moment. When the writer, used to northern European climes and lifestyles, asks a barman for a coffee to go – *un caffè da portare via* – she is told off. *Prendi il caffè con un po' di calma*, he says. Which Paolina realizes, with hindsight, are ‘astonishingly wise words’. These two contributions were awarded joint third prize.

But it was a close run thing between these winning entries and a number of the other contributions. Justine Flach’s highly sophisticated *Wandering in Venice*, Erika Tanaka’s monothematic account of dragonboat racing (a unique Ca’ Foscari experience) in *Rowing through Venice*, Irving Bustos’s reflections on discovering oneself in *Breaking down walls in Venice*, and Natasha Wilson’s bitter sweet relationship with the town recounted in *My love affair with Venice* are just some of the short listed entries which came close to winning.

In this volume you can find all 38 long listed entries. The authors come from Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Brazil, China, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands, Palestine, Poland, South Korea, Russia, the Ukraine, the UK, the USA, and Vietnam. But even those who did not make the long list, in the opinion of the jury, offered interesting and often valuable insights into the very special mobility experience afforded by Venice and Ca’ Foscari, and as such every participant in the competition is to be thanked for wanting to share that experience with the wider international community.

Venice and the Alchemy of Place

A recurring phrase to be found in *My Mobility* was *comfort zone*, the default anti-camera to the challenge for Cafoscarini to break free of familiar routines and experience the world at large. In this volume the phrase occurs less frequently. What we have instead are words which attempt to convey the otherness of Venice. Many are predictable: *fairytale, fable, fantasy, dream, life-changing, love story, magic, mystical, miracle*. Others point to the relativity of perception (*perspective, reflection, revelation*) and yet others to the boundless space of experience: *universe, infinity*. But what impressed the jury was the fact that, for these young writers, there are still fresh insights and new images which bring Venice to life as the real backdrop to their experience, in a battle against cliché to convey the personal, intimate, nature of the reminiscences.

Take, for example, the Venetian sunset: for Emma Blankwater (*Pictures to remember*), “the colour of spritz”. Or dawn in the “terracotta toned city”, (Claudia Keane, *A Venetian welcome*), where the “soft

blue light of morning... made the stone appear soft, as if it had been mixed with cream" (James Mustelier, *Still Waters*). Or the sensuality of water borne transport: "the soft swing of the boat comforted me" (Justine Flachs, *Wandering in Venice*). Such is the otherworldliness of the place that Fanny Abrieu (*Venice First Love*) concludes "Venice has been disconnecting me from reality for a year".

The relationship with Venice is intense and physical. Personification is a recurring feature. "When Venice and I first met" is the opening phrase in Ana Kasrashvili (*Me and my sentimental Venezia*), while Natasha Wilson (*My love affair with Venice*) prosaically puts it "I met her on the Internet" and then adds "I did feel underdressed however, she was so effortlessly chic".

For most writers Venice is female. Garance Boullenger (*From one summer to another*) muses: "As every international student, there is a question that I have difficulties to face: when will it be the time to leave? Is there even a right time to leave? As I developed an intimate relationship with Venice, leaving it feels like leaving *her*". But for Fanny Abrieu the experience is a full-blown love relationship, and Venice is a male lover:

Venice has a soul that can be released, at least in a part, to those who aspire to meet it. I searched for it, as if I had spent hours getting to know a man, and I fell in love. I discovered its small recesses. I felt the magic of the night in Venice. When I walked through the mystery of these little alleys with the moon for only lighting or when my view was entirely blurred by the fog at 7am in the *vaporetto*, a special pensiveness invaded me. The kind of tenderness that I could experience for a person.

Beyond the impact of place, these accounts get to the heart of the mobility experience – the cultural exchanges, the moments of discovery and awareness, and the sense of fulfilment in the discovery of shared values. For most writers there are new experiences awaiting them in the *Serenissima*, predictable discoveries such as spritz and experiments with Tiramisu, or the slightly less predictable ones of learning how to row a dragon boat or breaking into the Arsenale boatyard when it is closed to tourists. But always challenging, as Ariel Viola reminds us in *The Labyrinth of Wonders*, fittingly at *il Ponte degli Scalzi*: "I had to take off the shoes of the customs and social codes of my country, and walk towards a new culture, where everything was different".

Some students bring their own experiences with them and transmit them (not without difficulty) to new friends in Europe, such as Kayla Charleston (*The value of multiple perspectives*) from the US who introduces Massimo to skin lotion, or Ivana Budniewski from Argentina who, in the last days of her mobility manages at last to persuade her room mates to partake of the a glass of *mate* (*Something*

out of place). Yet others, such as Alexey Dodsworth from Brazil (*The night of shooting stars*), or Julia Rose from Australia (*Where are you from?*) have ancestral roots in Italy, and the mobility experience is thus a kind of return journey.

In keeping with the companion volume, *My Mobility*, as we mentioned above, not much is written in these pages about lessons and study programmes, which are the backbone and *raison d'être* of all mobility experiences. But if Venice is the backdrop, Ca' Foscari is at the forefront; there are reflections on the physical distribution of its parts across the town, the quality of the teaching, the welcome provided for international students. Perhaps those accounts which most closely captured the learning experience (which was, after all, intended to be the main focus) were those which underlined progression over time. The winning entry, *The Butterfly Effect*, is a perfect example of this. The writer, Malgorzata Zacheja, records how it all began:

I wondered whether to apply till the very last minute. On the list were three universities in Italy, one of which was Ca' Foscari in Venice. I thought, well, it might be a long shot, but let's apply.

and goes on to chart her progress, and the opportunities for self-realization which she finds when she joins the debating group, the Venice University Model United Nations. There is an afterword, too, as we learn that she is now working for a company where she uses Italian, and:

I still keep in touch with everyone I met in Venice – thank God for Whatsapp and voice messages. And I went back. It was wonderful. People were still shocked I'm not Italian and they asked where did I learn to speak it so well? Then, I always proudly say – Ca' Foscari.

The sophisticated use of language, the structure, and the single-mindedness of purpose made this account the outright winner. But it was run very close indeed by James Mustelier's *Still Waters*, the conclusion of which memorably expresses the peculiar nature of the symbiosis which will forever bind the town of Venice with the students who have spent their mobility period there:

Every space is an alchemy of the physical realities and our personal projections. Modern cities are machines. Their parts wear down and are replaced, experiences are gained and then lost. Venice is more like a body. It is dying, and it is precisely that death, the creep of water, and age, and the accumulation of experiences that sets it apart. Venice remembers, and those of us who spent a semester there will remember as well. We will project our interior landscape onto the elegant canvas of a city that exists only in our minds. The sheep and their shepherd will walk alongside us, not a cruise ship in sight.

English, the Challenge of the Lingua Franca

Like *My Mobility* before it, *Destination Ca' Foscari* was a competition of creative writing in English. For most participants, coming from across the world, English is not their mother tongue (or, to use a term preferred in the Applied Linguistics literature, their first language/L1). For these writers, as for most users of English in the world today, English is a *lingua franca*, a means of communication between people who do not share the same L1. We can imagine that most readers of these accounts will fall into the same category.

The emergence of English as a lingua Franca (ELF) has accelerated over the last couple of decades. ELF has become dominant in tourism, business, sport, medicine, technology and science, musical culture and academia (to mention only some of the fields of use); and it has contributed greatly to the internationalization of the universities, facilitating international student mobility. In its written form, it is the main language of the Internet, the language of academic publications, and, increasingly, the chosen medium for creative writers whose first language is not English.

We made it clear in the competition rules that, although we expected a minimum level of B2 on the Common European Framework, the main assessment criteria would be creativity and originality, rather than formal accuracy. For users of ELF, creativity and originality are part of the everyday challenge of using the language – and they can be seen as positively counteracting the more than occasional glitches in grammar. Words may need to be invented, or pushed to new frontiers of meaning; figurative language can be created which may sound strange to the L1 speaker. But the L1 speaker is not the ultimate arbiter when it comes to judging the success of ELF production; it is the interlocutor, or the reader. Back in the 1970s the ‘ownership of English’ debate was launched by Henry Widdowson, one of the pioneers of the so-called communicative revolution in English Language Teaching. Nearly half a century later, it is even more clear that English is no longer the exclusive domain of its native speakers. Several writers reflect on the role played by English as the lingua franca of their mobility experience. For Emma Blankwater, it is “what brought us together”; for Malgorzata Zacheja, English is a “safety net”.

Destination Ca' Foscari offers its readers a selection of accounts, some of which are the work of L1 writers, most of which are not. In actual fact, it was not easy for the judges to decide which were written by native speakers, nor was it their job to do so. Not all of the L1 writers made it to the long list, although most did (we think) because they are experienced and motivated creative writers, rather than simply English L1 speakers. In contrast, you will find some accounts in this collection which would not meet the standards required by a demanding teacher of English as a foreign language. Lack of agree-

ment, wrong tenses, and (a perennial problem) use of the article are just a few examples of shortcomings. But if these accounts have made it to the long list (or better) it is because the content shines through the pages. It is the intrinsic interest of the subject matter, coupled perhaps with a creative approach to some of the challenges posed by ELF, that have made us decide to keep them.

Which brings us to the editorial choice: we have not changed or 'corrected' anything in the accounts, beyond a couple of obvious typos. What you see is what we got, and it is entirely the work of the writers. The alternative, to have them read and revised by an L1 copy editor, would have undermined one of the main purposes of this volume, which is to show just how effective communication in English can be without the mediation of a native speaker gatekeeper. It is for you the reader to judge if the authors have succeeded in this effort; and, as you do so, we hope you enjoy what they have written as much as we did.

Prizewinning Entries

1st Prize

The Butterfly Effect

Malgorzata Zacheja

University of Warsaw, Poland

The writer overcomes anxiety, self doubt and panic and ends up representing the US in the Venice Model United Nations Debate.

Have you ever heard about the butterfly effect? It is a theory that even a small, insignificant action can lead to some life-changing event. Well, meet my butterfly.

Chapter 1: The language-learning opportunity.

I like learning languages. A lot. Ever since I was little, I was surrounded by foreign languages and through traveling with my family - different cultures. When I entered University of Warsaw, I already knew Polish, English, French, and Spanish, and decided it might be interesting to try something new. Enter Mandarin Chinese. Fantastic language, but that's a story for another time. However, it will make a short feature later in my story. My second year at university, I saw an opportunity for an EU-sponsored language course in Italian. I thought: why not? I already speak a few languages from the same family, it might be useful to know another. Thus, started my year of learning Italian. And what a beautiful language it is. The melody brought me back to Rome - Italian caf  s and previously foreign conversations that lasted for hours. They always fascinated me.

Chapter 2: Erasmus announcement.

Fast forward two years, I am in my first year of MA program in American Studies, and there is a note on the Students' board say-

ing that the Erasmus interviews will be conducted in the next two weeks. I wondered whether to apply till the very last minute. On the list were three universities in Italy, one of which was Ca' Foscari in Venice. I thought, well, it might be a long shot, but let's apply. I didn't want to regret not even trying. I prepared the documents, sent everything in, and waited for the interview day. I might not have met all of the requirements, but I was prepared. The committee was impressed with my enthusiasm and knowledge of all things Ca' Foscari and three days later, I was accepted.

Chapter 3: Cut the panic, please.

Will I survive living in a foreign country? Do I know enough Italian? Have I made a mistake? I'm an over-analyzer and an over-preparer. Months went by as I tried to prepare myself for my Venetian adventure. I chose my courses, found my apartment, booked a flight, and went. Oh, and one month before my exchange began, I went to Beijing for a summer course and met my first cafoscarino who ensured me that I'd be ok. My Chinese course brought me to Beijing where I encountered a first harbinger of my exchange in Venice. Clearly that was a sign.

Chapter 4: I'm not Italian, but no one knows it.

I landed at Marco Polo on September 8, 2017. I was trying to find my landlord who said he'd pick me up. He didn't know any English. My brain started to panic. Madonna, Gosia, what have you done? He found me. Asked whether I've eaten already. I said no. He took me for pasta, wine, tiramisu, and coffee, and I realized, I would be ok. Over the next few weeks, I met a few Erasmus students and a few Italian girls who were shocked at me being Polish. I sound American when I speak English and I sound Italian when I speak Italian. But I still preferred English – it was always my safety net. I got used to being constantly lost at the labyrinth that was my new home. I must have looked self-assured in my lostness, because I was asked in Italian almost daily about directions. See, I was fitting in.

Chapter 5 Rules and procedures

About a month into my exchange, I saw a post that a VEUMUN (Venice Universities' Model United Nations) was being organized. I knew about the simulation before and always wanted to try.

However, I was too afraid to do it in high school. But, with my newly found bravado ("I have friends, I'm understood in Italian, and I haven't burned the house down with my cooking"), I decided to apply. Worst case scenario: I'm awful, but no one will remember this random Polish girl. Best case scenario: I learn something new and meet new Italian people to hang out with. Once again, I got in. I would be representing the U.S. at the UN Security Council (my American profes-

sors from my home university would be so proud.) I got to the workshops, and I realized I'm one of the very few foreigners. Of course, my name is forever difficult to pronounce. I met my simulation partner-in-crime and a few other people from my group. We spend very intense weeks learning, researching, and working together which culminates in the three-day simulation. It's hard, it's stressful, but God, it's so much fun. Thank you, Venice Diplomatic Society, for being the real MVPs of my exchange. I started feeling more comfortable speaking Italian. I made mistakes, but apparently "they're very cute". I left Venice with a wide grin on my face, not a single tear, because I knew that I'll be back and how could you cry over such a beautiful experience?

Chapter 6: The Afterword.

Fast forward to today, I work at a company where I use my Italian skills everyday. I still keep in touch with everyone I met in Venice – thank God for Whatsapp and voice messages. And I went back. It was wonderful. People were still shocked I'm not Italian and they asked where did I learn to speak it so well? Then, I always proudly say – Ca' Foscari.

My butterfly led me to meeting wonderful new friends, learning Italian, and to my second home – Venice.

Thank you, butterfly.

2nd Prize Still Waters

James Mustelier

City College New York, USA

The writer describes a night wandering through the streets of Venice with the mysterious Andrea, in search of a church which keeps eluding him.

When I dream of Venice, the glow of the streetlamps is reflected in rippling flame on the surface of the black canals as I walk from Campo Santa Margherita to Morion and back to Cannaregio. Since I've left, the city has existed in a state of unending darkness, a museum of shadow. But the moment that I first saw Venice clearly came at first light.

It was Friday night. I'd followed my friends to our final stop, Billiard. By three, everyone I'd come with had left but I refused to. I was returning to New York in two months and was already nostalgic for the present. I drifted into the smoking room and greeted a girl I'd met once before, Alessia. As I looked nervously around for something to say I noticed the man seated across from her. He had a head of luxuriant brown curls that cascaded over his back. I shook his hand and learned that his name was Andrea. Behind round wire frame glasses his light brown eyes sat patient, intense, and kind in equal measure.

When I learned he was a philosophy student I asked him what to read. He talked about Nietzsche and Derrida. I'd just read *Candide* and asked him about Voltaire. I was ignorant but fascinated. Eventually Alessia wandered off without either of us noticing.

I cannot reproduce the conversation in any meaningful way. The concepts were too complex and unfamiliar, and I'd been drinking Moretti since I'd met Marc and Vaita at Skilla bar eight hours earlier. But I remember the feeling of listening to him talk, the spell I fell under.

Around 5:30 in the morning he stood, "I'll go for a walk now if you would like to join me". Even as I'd sat listening, I'd feared the moment that we would leave and I would fall out of the trance his voice had lulled me into.

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We'd been inside the bar for so long that the sight of the morning light trickling down into the alleyway looked alien. The world had been reborn as we'd sat wreathed in smoke. The squalls of the sea-gulls sounded like the cries of a baby.

Now standing, I could see that Andrea was very tall and thin as a knife. "I feel very sorry for you", he said over his shoulder, he'd already walked ahead of me, "I walk very fast".

I'd never seen Venice in the first soft blue light of morning. Had never seen the way the light made the stone appear soft, as if it had been mixed with cream. I assumed he would comment on buildings, but instead we walked in silence. He'd done all the talking he wanted to do.

The streets were empty. I smelled salt. Heard the puttering of an engine, the sound of water lapping at the walls of the canal in its wake. I heard Andrea's footsteps echoing across the shimmering face of a tiled mosaic.

Half an hour passed without us speaking. He walked with long strides and I kept a fast pace behind him. I'd begun to fall into a state of hyper focus, staring with new eyes at the Scala Cantorini del Bovolo. I felt a chill run down my spine as we passed La Maddalena. Occasionally, Andrea stopped and looked at something of such precious beauty that his stoicism broke and he turned and smiled, and I was filled with affection for him.

As we approached San Marco he spoke. "I am looking for a church. I've searched for it many times, and many times it has hidden from me", He set off again. "Imagine, two hundred years ago this was grass, and there would have been shepherds leading their sheep down this path".

I let the concept wash over me. A maze of canals and tributaries knifing in and out of swampy marshes. Thatch roofed huts silent in the gloaming, except for the low croak of a Green Toad.

"Do you smell that?" He asked.

The smell of fresh baked bread had wafted into the alley. Through the window, we saw a slab of dough next to an old radio playing Mina's *Non Illuderti*. Andrea began to push on the bars of the window like a prisoner desperate to escape. He slid along the perimeter of the building, strangely transformed by desire. He found the door and began to bang on it. "Ciao" he said, "Can we have some bread?"

No one answered. Andrea move a hand to his stomach, "This bread is the bread of life. It's like philosophy, an idea", he looked longingly through the door, "and we cannot reach it".

§

I was tired and losing focus when we finally turned a corner and Andrea lifted his arms into the air. He looked up at the marble façade of Santa Maria dei Miracoli, “From here, I think she looks very shy”, he said. I squinted up at the building, trying to decide if I agreed.

We circled the church for a few minutes before walking back to the Ponte Papodopoli. Americans are so prone to maudlin displays of emotion, that I thought he might say something, but in the end, he shook my hand, squinted at me, and left. I got on a bus that would take me back to Mestre and felt tears at the corner of my eyes.

Every space is an alchemy of the physical realities and our personal projections. Modern cities are machines. Their parts wear down and are replaced, experiences are gained and then lost. Venice is more like a body. It is dying, and it is precisely that death, the creep of water, and age, and the accumulation of experiences that sets it apart. Venice remembers, and those of us who spent a semester there will remember as well. We will project our interior landscape onto the elegant canvas of a city that exists only in our minds. The sheep and their shepherd will walk alongside us, not a cruise ship in sight.

3rd Prize

The Unseen Encounter

Vojtech Polasek

Masaryk University, Czech Republic

For this writer, Venice offers challenges which most visitors do not have to worry about; but it offers a great satisfaction too.

I peak my head out of the window of the room overseeing a small side canal running through the Giudecca island. I breathe late march Venetian air; mixture of sea water, engine oil and climbing jasmine. Sounds of water flapping against canal walls, distant boats and sea-gulls reassure me that it is another day of my temporary stay in Venice. And also my first Easter spent away from Czech Republic. As I have discovered, most of my friends decided to spend this time in their home countries or to visit places all over Italy. But there are exceptions. For example that girl I met in the bar circa two weeks ago. It was actually a bit strange encounter. She appeared out of nowhere at our table and introduced herself. She looked bored and angry and her voice sounded like she was actually irritated by having to talk to us. Therefore, I was surprised when she expressed her wish to join us for a trip to Padova planned on the following day. Although we actually almost didn't talk to each other, something caught my eye. While browsing through various churches and other buildings, she was coming with interesting remarks and descriptions of surroundings. And I liked it. Especially because I couldn't get proper picture of buildings and piazzas on my own. No matter how much I would like to. I am blind. Although I am quite adventurous person, during past months I discovered that wandering alone through narrow streets and bridges of Venice is something that I can enjoy for few hours, but

not for the whole day. I got to know that she is staying in Venice during Easter and therefore I asked if she wouldn't mind to spend part of the day walking with a curious guy through Venice. She agreed. So I pick up my backpack, my white cane and my courage and set off into cloudy Venetian morning. I stop by to grab a quick cappuccino in the small bar just next to the Palanca stop. The barman already knows me and I always try to use my weak Italian to have a small, or rather tiny, conversation. I meet the girl at the Giardini Biennale stop, I have never been in this part of Venice alone. She doesn't look so irritated as the last time, but neither she looks particularly happy. We walk through Giardini. She is an artist. She paints, creates puppets, she is interested in photography. I am not sure what to expect because all these things are very visual. I used to draw during times when I still could see something, but I am afraid that I won't have anything to say. We talk about many things, but most of the time about Venice. She has already been here for more than one semester, and she knows a lot about history but also about contemporary peculiarities of this floating city. We sit down to eat a pizza, discovering an osteria with probably the highest coperto in Veneto region. We decide to continue our Easter Venice wandering through Canareggio, occasionally stopping to grab a glass of wine at a bar because it starts raining. The conversation flows very easily, everything is surprisingly natural. Like we were old friends who have just bumped into each other after several years. I find it as a new situation here because so far I have been always very nervous while spending time with girls here in Venice. Now I am not. I feel safe. The originally planned short walk stretched into twelve hours long tour through the city. And as it turned out it wasn't our last tour. We started meeting from time to time, having lunch, walking, talking and slowly getting under each other's skin. Later we visited Florence together for several days. And since that time we stopped meeting occasionally. We started spending most of our limited Italian time together. And fast forwarding the time one year ahead, we still do. We have already once returned to see Venice again, as it is a special place for us. Beside that we have explored Vienna, Prague, Brno, Wrocław and my home town; Rožnov. Although we are still living in different countries, we are thinking about moving together. And I can tell that she does not sound so irritated anymore.

3rd Prize Coffee to go

Paolina Wandruszka

University of Hamburg, Germany

The writer discovers the joys of Venice in January – and the importance of drinking coffee ‘con calma’.

When I came to Venice in January 2017 to start my semester abroad I was tired from the past academic year, exhausted from my job, my daily routine and the always gray German weather. Maybe that's not the first thing that comes in mind when thinking about spending a semester abroad but I think I mainly went because I needed a break from everything – the same university halls, the same professors for years, the same badly paid student jobs.

I was exhausted but even more important – I was uninspired. Especially as an Art History Student, going to Venice, to actually live in this surreal city where the sunsets mirrors in the canals and the golden canal mirrors in the windows of the palazzi, was a dream come true.

I arrived in Venice Ende of January, some days before the university began. In my memory the first days are a blur. I didn't know anyone in the city, I wandered the foggy tiny streets of Castello, I got lost a hundred times, but almost magically, just when I thought I would never find my way back home, I found myself in front of the *one* church tower I remembered or a vaporetto station that could get me back to lido, where I was living. Used to extreme cold and rainy weather the venetian winter was almost pleasant for me. On the boats I always sat outside, often alone, while the Venetians in their exaggerated duffle coats, hats and gloves sat inside probably wondering what was wrong with me.

After I got the Carta Venezia I often just got on the Vaporetto Linea 1 and went up and down the canal grande, unable to take my eyes off this beautiful city. I have always hated rain, I was born and raised in the north of Germany – what in my perception – must be the rainiest place on earth. But Venice in January was probably my favorite. Most of the souvenir shops are still closed, the lagoon changes its color after every little thunder and the Mediterranean Ocean brings all sorts of beautiful things on the beaches of Lido. I even found myself almost alone at piazza San Marco, where it was so foggy I could hardly see the horses of the basilica.

On the first day of university the „international welcome day“ I was sitting in an old church that is now a lecture hall at the Campo Santa Margherita. It was full of overly excited yet a bit socially awkward newcomers like me, who desperately wanted their adventure to start.

I didn't know then that I would have the most wonderful time in Venice, that I would spend hours sitting at this exact campo, eating Pizza Al Volo and talking about cultural differences, sunburn, misunderstandings due to language barriers, the wonderful art that was surrounding us in times of the Biennale and where we could get the cheapest Spritz.

I didn't know that I would learn so much in the lectures about art history and architecture and that there was an event at Ca' Foscari almost everyday from film screening to language cafes and book circles. I didn't know that I would spend the semester studying with a wonderful girl from Napoli in the cultural flow Zone at Zattere and a smart architecture student from France and his curious roommate from Australia who became my best friend – always speaking a mixture of Italian, Spanish, French and English between the four of us.

On one of my first days of class I was running a bit late and I stopped to get a coffee at a little cafe on my street. „Anche per potare via?“ I asked the old friendly looking guy behind the brown wooden bar if he also had coffee to go, not even sure if those were the right words. He smiled an almost teeth-less smile and said something like „ma ragazza, che vita fai? Prendi il caffè con un po' di calma“. The hurry I was in and the concept of coffee to go was strange to him and I thought about his words for a long time afterwards.

From time to time, when I am in a rush, when I feel the pressure of succeeding going to my head or when I am trying to handle too many things at once and nothing seems to work out, this man and his simple, yet astonishingly wise words come to my mind. Looking back now, I think this morning when I sat down and had my coffee „con un po' di calma“ was the Moment I had arrived in Italy. I understood that sometimes it's better to take things with calm, to take a deep breath and to step out of your routine, to give yourself ten minutes and have a coffee before rushing back into this wonderfully adventurous life.

Shortlisted Entries

Venice First Love

Fanny Abrieu

Sciences Po Paris, France

The love affair with Venice (sometimes a man, sometimes a woman) disconnects the writer from reality for a year

In September 2018, when I moved here, I found Venice beautiful. Not so surprising, right? The beauty of Venice is consensual. Now, in June 2019, I love Venice, as if it was my first love.

“ Why the first one? ” The first love story detains the power to make people discover the feeling of infinity. Love crosses for the first time the borders that the heart was putting to protect itself.

“ How is it original to love Venice? ”, you might wonder. Everyone loves Venice. But no. Not everyone knows how to appreciate Venice, how to be dazzled by a new angle at the bend of a *calle*, how to find each *campo* different. Not everyone feels like their heart is going to break when they will be coerced to leave this special place. Not everyone knows how to appreciate the double dimension that only Venice offers thanks to its reflections in the water. Even I surprised myself. Venice has been, as far as I am concerned, the only city in the world which has known how to fulfill me. This city has a particular aura that moved my heart, like a lover would have. As if in a relationship, I needed to approach it first. I learnt its history, I read its myths and I tried to go beyond its looks. Venice could be like a beautiful woman. Venice could be depicted like a handsome man. Its aesthetics attract people but then, it is up to each one of us to choose if we want to stop at the beauty the city shows in some worldly-known places. I was amazed by the Piazza San Marco, but I was not seduced by it. I felt like it did not belong to me. Venice has a soul that can be released, at least in a part, to those who aspire to meet it. I searched

for it, as if I had spent hours getting to know a man, and I fell in love. I discovered its small recesses. I felt the magic of the night in Venice. When I walked through the mystery of these little alleys with the moon for only lighting or when my view was entirely blurred by the fog at 7am in the *vaporetto*, a special pensiveness invaded me. The kind of tenderness that I could experience for a person. Philippe Solers, a French writer, wrote "*Love: here or there, only lasts what it lasts. Love in Venice lasts forever*". If love is not eternal, the exceptional Venice finds the way to make it last for eternity. The moments lived in this city remain "*per sempre*" in my heart. The love felt in and for this magical city is not ephemeral. A dawn at the Punta della Dogana makes the click of the clock tower stop for a while, the same cessation of time experienced during a kiss. But like a love story, despite our desire for it to be eternal, it will end. First, the reasonable part of me knows that I can not settle here my entire life. Then, if love for Venice is immortal, the city itself will wipe out. Venice is like an impossible love for me because this magical place may disappear. It will leave hearts broken by its extinction.

As far as I am concerned, Venice was a magnificent parenthesis for me. It has been disconnecting me from reality for a year. Only a heart in love could ever feel this disruption. But when we have fallen in love and it ended, we are afraid that we will never find this sentiment again. Hence, being so young, I am afraid I am never going to find again such attachment to a city. However, no matter where I live in a few years, I will always smile at the reassuring thought that there was a Venice in my life, and it is magic.

Tira mi su

Spirydon Anastasinis

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

A concerted international effort leads to the creation of a tasty if not authentic Tiramisu.

I cannot recall a lot of things from my Erasmus experience in Venice. I mean, I passed five wonderful months there; I had the luck to study in a perfectly organized university, to meet amazing people from all around the world, to learn Italian from zero and – the most important – to make friends. But when it comes to narrate stories, it is not easy. Living in Venice was like living inside a fairytale, it was like living inside a dream. And as it happens with dreams, when you wake up, you cannot describe everything in every exact detail, but you have that memory. That sweet memory. Speaking of sweet, one of the things I will never forget is that sweet tiramisu.

One day, while I was passing by a pastry shop I saw a sign saying: “The Venetian Tiramisu”. I did not know that tiramisu is Venetian, so I looked it up online and I found out that, indeed, it holds its origins from Veneto of Italy. In this way I came up with a challenge. I would invite my closest friends to my place, everyone would bring one of the ingredients and we would all together try to prepare this traditional Italian dessert.

My friends accepted the challenge. My two friends from Germany had to bring the marsala wine and the savoiardi biscuits. My two friends from France would offer the heavy cream and the espresso coffee. My two friends from Belgium had promised the sugar and the cocoa powder, and finally, me and my flatmate, the Greeks, we had to have bought the eggs and the mascarpone cheese. I know it might sound like a joke. Four pairs of people from different countries

bringing ingredients and preparing a tiramisu. But it is not a joke. It really happened.

Nevertheless, it was one of the funniest nights I had during the Erasmus. No one had previous experience in pastry so we were hilarious when we were trying to pretend the chefs. My role as the host was to organize the group. The Germans dipped the savoiardi in the mix of espresso and wine and lined the bottom of a square dish with them. They were exact in the lining, as they were true Germans. The French had to whip the heavy cream until stiff peaks. They did a great job as the chantilly's technique is running through their blood. Meanwhile, my flatmate and I, as Greeks, we had the most difficult task to do: the cream. We whisked the egg yolks with the sugar in a bowl set over a saucepan of simmering water for five minutes. The French informed us that this technique is called "bain-marie". Then, removing the bowl from heat, we beat in the mascarpone cheese until combined and then we did the same with the whipped cream.

Everything was almost ready but he had a tiny little problem. Our two Belgium friends had not showed up yet. The reason why I had assigned the sugar and the cocoa powder to them was because I was sure they would be late. I had already some sugar in my place, and I knew the cocoa powder would be needed for the finishing of the dessert. Thus, we put the tiramisu in the refrigerator and we were waiting for them, trying to guess the excuse they would come up with for their delay.

We had opened a bottle of red wine and we were enjoying the night view of Venice, when suddenly the bell rung. The two Belgians were standing outside the door with two small packets in their hands. When the door opened they pretended they were exhausted and they said they just finished grinding the cocoa beans to make the powder. The rest of us could not stop laughing as it was the only excuse no one of us could guess. We let them sprinkle the dessert with their "handmade" product and serve every one of us in order to compensate for being late.

The final taste of the tiramisu was so delicious that none of us expected and we wondered how we did it. I came to the conclusion that in order to make a perfect dessert, you don't need neither the perfect recipe nor the most modern equipment. The only necessary ingredients are half a dozen of good friends and a big portion of laughter. Trust me and try the tiramisu challenge with friends. The experience will definitely "lift you up".

P.S. The recipe might not be the most necessary thing, as I said, but it is useful. That is why I am leaving it here just in case you are interested in following my advice.

Tiramisu Recipe
(For 8 servings)

120ml brewed espresso
60ml Marsala wine
20 savoiardi
200ml heavy cream
3 egg yolks
50gr granulated sugar
250gr mascarpone cheese
20gr cocoa powder, preferably “fresh grinded”

From one summer to another

Garance Boullenger

ESCP Europe, France

The writer thinks fondly of her relationship with Venice as 'she'; and now she has to leave her.

September, October, November. The first few months in Venice were hard. The gravity center of my world (friends and family, passions and interests) was in another country, too far to be lived in but not far enough to feel really unreachable. The amount of Venice's myths and legends seemed distant and dusty, not appealing enough to be worth to explore. I could not catch a glimpse of what Venice really was, I was not able to enter "the other world", the one of people who grow, live, study, smile, cry, laugh, here. Yes, Venice was beautiful (who could ever feel the contrary?) but I did not feel like being part of it.

December came, and what is often considered as the worst month of the year in my home country turned out to be the most beautiful lights, sunsets, colors I had ever seen. As if Venice could have heard me, she - I like to think about Venice as a she - sent me her most beautiful costumes to convince me I should reconsider my position. I remember a particular day at Giardini: red benches, pink light, green pine trees.

As January, February, March, passed by, I developed an intimate relationship with Venice. I got to learn her *calli*, *fondamente* and *cor-ti*. In a midst of coffee smell, orange sunsets, and gondolier's smooth yelling, the gravity center of my world definitely shifted to Venice and my perception of time changed. What mattered was living Venice, here and now, every ray of sun and every drop of rain, every second of venetian life deserving to be fully enjoyed.

April, May and June – the beginning of summer and of an even sweeter life in Venice. During warmer jasmine-scented nights, I could physically feel some roots growing, tying me to this city, this world that I had been building brick by brick for the past few months. I perceived a profound sense of attachment for this place and the persons who are part of it, sense of attachment for those places who are part of the people.

What I learned from Venice, from one summer to another, is patience. Patience for ideas to grow and patience for life to unfold. Patience for time to pass and for relationships to build. Patience for bodies and minds to adapt to time and space. The bridge does not link a place to another, it acts as a frontier and breaks with the frenetic world that exists in *terraferma*. It preserves Venice, an ecosystem in which land and water, time and space, colors and sounds, are intimately tied, from a life subject to time pressure and daily bustle. I was thirsty to know everything, go everywhere and meet everyone; Venice got me being and feeling what I already had. This ode to time can seem paradoxical when we know that over 52,000 of tourists per day visit the city, Venice being the ultimate symbol of mass tourism and places consumption. But Venice does not let itself be overwhelmed by old myths or oppressive tourism, the city lives, breathes, and creates around every corner, if we have the patience to let it. I learnt through those months that Venice should not be considered only as a place where people just pass through, for a day, a week, a month, or a year, as tourists or even students. It is a place that deserves to be lived, and by being lived, to be given back as much as she gives to the people who cross its path.

July – As every international student, there is a question that I have difficulties to face: when will it be the time to leave? Is there even a right time to leave? As I developed an intimate relationship with Venice, leaving it feels like leaving her. I am still looking for the right place for me to occupy in this city, and if it exists I might choose to never close this parenthesis that this exchange program offered me.

Breaking down walls in Venice

Vulnerability As the Foundation for Friendship

Irving Bustos

California State University of Long Beach, USA

The writer recounts how he overcomes an intense loneliness the night of a torrential downpour.

“From things that have happened and from things as they exist and from all things that you know and all those you cannot know, you make something through your invention that is not a representation but a whole new thing truer than anything true and alive, and you make it alive, and if you make it well enough, you give it immortality”.

- Ernest Hemingway

For a long time as the end of my time in Venice drew near, I contemplated how I would explain to my loved ones back home what it has been like to immerse myself in another culture. It was crucial that I impart what I have discovered in my endeavor to step beyond what I know, beyond my limited and narrow existence. This experience has been one of the most fascinating and challenging periods of my life. At times it felt unimaginably difficult. At other times it felt as if I held the universe in my palms with so many possibilities to shape myself and my future however I want. Everyone who has such an experience finds themselves in a similar situation: *what can I possibly say to people that will help them to understand what I've been through?* In writing this, I hope that I can answer this for myself, and perhaps

help put into words for others some of what they may have felt along the way as well.

My story begins with the context of my life: a first generation Mexican-American who for most of his life thought he would never accomplish going beyond poverty, let alone embark on a cross continental journey at the age of twenty one. Every part of this experience has been shaped by that fundamental component of my identity.

“Shallow men believe in luck or in circumstance. Strong men believe in cause and effect”.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

When I first left, I thought it was to get away from some of the issues in my family. I felt I depended too much on them and felt like a burden. For a long time in the beginning of my stay, it seemed that I had in fact needed their guidance. The first two months were extremely hard and disheartening. All my concerns about my ability to be on my own appeared to be true, and my family's discouragement against me going validated. I struggled immensely and my mental health felt compromised. I was miserable. I felt incredibly lonely.

One of the beautiful aspects about studying abroad is that you get to make friends who come from such different cultures and thus expand your mind. What many do not consider is that the friendships you form are all the more genuine for these differences in upbringing - if you can overcome those cultural divides, it is because you truly appreciate those people as human beings, not simply because you share a common existence and culture. That was my favorite aspect about meeting people and developing good friendships: all those little moments when you step back from a situation in your mind and look at the people in it with love in your heart for who they are. It is one of the most genuine forms of appreciation that we can have for one another that goes beyond superficial similarities.

For me, one such critical moment occurred the first night I went to the bar in Campo dell'orso near Rialto with the group of people who would go on to become my favorite people in Venice. We were in the same partner university of Venice International University and had gone to visit the Basilica di San Marco as part of a school sponsored trip. It began to rain as we were inside the church, and then when we came out we found that it was pouring heavily. Many students ran home. Others danced in the rain. I vividly recall seeing a music student sing opera as he danced and embraced the rain. Two friends and I sought shelter by a tiny negozio's entrance. We ran into a few others doing the same. We decided that it might be a good idea to go to a bar and wait out the rain. That wait turned into a few hours sitting at a table, talking like old friends who had known each other for years. The best part was we all failed in our mission

to escape the rain, finding it to be even worse when the bar finally kicked us out.

I remember sitting at that table, hearing everyone talk and smile, and how I stopped for a second to take a deep, slow look at our wet faces. We all came from different parts of the globe, we all looked different, spoke differently, and yet there we were, sharing a unique experience talking with one another and having an amazing time. Then, later, when we arrived to Rialto and separated to go home. I recall how we were all soaked from head to toe and could not even say a proper goodbye. We all had to run home as fast as we could. In that moment, running up the steps to the other side of Rialto, I felt immense appreciation in a way that I had not experienced since first leaving for Venice. It was electrifying to be in an entirely new continent and connect with people in such a strange and exciting way, and I felt so grateful for their company that night. It was the first night I did not feel lonely in Venice.

I chose to discuss this story of this night because those friends formed the foundation of my experience in Venice. They taught me responsibility, love, compassion, authenticity, kindness, and showed me how to deal with my emotions in a much more mature way. They taught me to confront my insecurities. Above all, they taught me to be vulnerable.

To those who are considering a mobility, know that by the end of it you will want to sue your program for emotional damages caused by the separation of incredible friends. This is normal. If you feel this way, you did it right.

I write earnestly and truthfully about my learning experience. It has been a wonderful time, and I have fallen in love with the city in profound ways. Truly, it has exceeded my expectations, and then some. Without a doubt in my mind, I know that I would do it all again: I would welcome the joy, friendships, changes, elation, laughter, wine, pizza, heartbreak, sadness, challenges, anger, frustration, and all the lost vaporetos once more.

The value of multiple perspectives

Kayla Charleston

Georgia State University, USA

The writer manages to convince her Venetian friend of the value of using skin lotion; but she in turn learns to see Venice from new perspectives.

I met Massimo during my first week in Venice. He called our friendship an exchange; similar to the exchange between Ca' Foscari and Georgia State, except instead of students we were exchanging cultural knowledge and practices. For as long as I look back on my time in Venice, it will be magical not only because the city itself has an almost otherworldly charm, but also because of the great significance of my time with Massimo.

One of my favorite moments between Massimo and I was when my curiosity led me to ask about lotion. I asked because another friend from Germany wanted me to explain why I used lotion often. Naturally, I was curious if my German friend's question was also relevant to Italians.

"Do you use lotion?" I asked Massimo one day.

"Use lotion for what?" My face lit up with surprise and amusement at his response.

"We put lotion on every day so our skin won't be dry", I explained about people back home.

"Really?" He seemed genuinely surprised and intrigued.

"Really! What do you do to keep your skin from being dry?"

"I think my skin does a good job of that on its own, actually".

"So if you don't use lotion every day then when do you use it?"

"Mainly after going to the beach and showering all the sand and salt off my body".

I pulled up a video of a comedian named Bill Burr. He was joking about the time a Black woman introduced him to using lotion. It mirrored the conversation I had just had with Massimo. Together we sat and laughed at the comedian making a fun of a very comical cultural exchange and it became a running joke between us.

That wasn't the only thing I shared with Massimo about different aspects of my culture. After he saw the waist beads I wore one day I taught him about what they meant and why I wore them. He once complimented my hair and said he'd never touched hair like mine so I explained the unique qualities of black hair, like shrinkage. We had conversations about racial tension that I experienced back home and about how my country could elect such a controversial president.

In return, Massimo taught me about Venice, Italian food culture and the value of viewing things from different perspectives. Some nights when all the tourists were gone we'd walk through Venice and he'd point out historical facts to me, like how the raised platforms around Venice were built where cemeteries used to be. He would cook for me and demonstrate the pride that many Italians take in understanding which ingredients to use in order to yield the delicious results Italian food is known for. But most importantly, he taught me the power of perspective.

Massimo had a small boat he shared with a friend. When I first came to Venice he promised he'd take me for a ride. He delivered on that promise near the end of my mobility. Before that day I thought I had already been enchanted by the city of Venice. I had even found a favorite bridge where the sun glittered across the canal water like something from a daydream. On days when I didn't have anywhere in particular to be I'd stop and stare, entranced.

I learned the day of the boat ride that I was wrong about already being fully in love with Venice. The boat ride was my first time in the canals and I saw the city with new eyes. Those same bridges I would walk over I was ducking under. Those canals that I would stop to admire I was gliding through. It was captivating and still feels like the perfect metaphor for what my friendship with Massimo provided me.

The differences in our perspectives even were pronounced by the fact that we had more similarities than we had originally thought. It was my last semester before finishing school so after I left Venice I would be figuring out my next steps in life. Massimo had been in Venice for seven years but was planning to go back to his hometown of Udine. He'd be leaving Venice shortly after I left to figure out his next steps also. We were both about to enter periods of transition. The uncertainty of it all was scary and caused anxiety for me. On the other hand, Massimo didn't see the need to worry because he knew things would work out for the both of us. Some days of our friendship were spent with him reassuring me that fear was only one perspective on uncertainty and not a particularly helpful one.

I am forever grateful for the Erasmus project; for the time it allowed me in Venice and with Massimo. Through my time there and experience with Massimo I learned the beauty in being exposed to perspectives outside of the ones I've grown accustomed to. It has been almost a year since I left. Massimo and I are still in touch, periodically sharing life updates and progress on our goals. I still carry with me the lessons I learned from him and he has since fallen in love with the softer skin he's acquired from using lotion daily. ☺

Venetian nights

Catherine Chincarini

University of Melbourne, Australia

To really appreciate Venice you have to wander around the streets by night.

My time on exchange in Venice was filled with magic and inspiration. For me, the city became synonymous with music, art, poetry, and history – be it through my attending orchestras and operas, visiting art galleries, finding tiny libraries down a hidden street, and admiring countless churches. I came to realise that the history of Venice is a lived experience in the present, not the past, and it was this glorious history that came through to me at night time. Mark Twain once said, “in the glare of the day there is little poetry about Venice, but under the charitable moon her stained palaces are white again”, and that is exactly how I experienced Venice. My formative moment that shaped all my experiences and love of the city comes down to one enchanting night in Piazza San Marco.

When I first arrived in Venice, I was staying in a hostel in San Marco, just a minute or two from the piazza. I was staying there for eighteen days until my permanent accommodation at We Crociferi in Canneregio opened. This was my first solo trip and the biggest leap I'd ever taken in my life – I had flown across the world from Australia to live alone in a country completely different from my own. It was September and Venice was still very hot and crowded with tourists. I was yet to figure out my way around or know where to start sight-seeing or where to eat. For about a week, my world was reduced to the streets immediately surrounding my hostel. There were times when I did not enjoy the packed streets of San Marco, being pushed and shoved by tourists who meandered through the city to the main attractions like slow-moving whirlwinds, marching to see the Rial-

to Bridge just because they've been told its something they have to see. I was feeling a bit lost, a bit unsure, and I did not quite understand Venice.

Then one warm night on the 14th September, two days before my twentieth birthday, I walked to Piazza San Marco after dinner. That night was my defining experience – it was the night I discovered the magic of Venice. The Piazza was lit up, the crowds were gone, and the violins at Café Florian sang throughout the warm air that seemed to carry the life and electricity of the square around me. The Basilica shone like gold and almost seemed super-imposed, the most unique structure I've ever seen that looks as though it belongs in a magical world in the clouds, rather than in front of me. Beneath the golden lights of the restaurant that reflected off the mosaics of the basilica, I truly felt the majesty of Venice.

After this, the night became my favourite time to wander and truly absorb my surroundings. There was a transformation with the setting of the sun and the changing of the seasons. In the remnants of summer, there was always music to be found in the squares at night. I remember coming across this band playing one warm night and it was just so joyful and spontaneous, with all kinds of people singing along and dancing with one another. Some winter evenings walking back from class over the Ponte dell'Accademia and through Campo San Stefano, I could hear soft melodies from the Conservatory of Music floating through the still, night air and down to where I passed. The little route I took back from class and evening activities became one of my favourite walks in the city. There was nothing more magical to me than the soft glow of the street lights in the campo that become hazy in the misty air that promised rain, and there was nothing more captivating than the reflections and stillness of the canal under Ponte dell'Accademia. It was in those late moments at night that Venice felt most alive to me. Its history became real and I truly experienced the city as La Serenissima. I could imagine the ships pulling into the docks, I could hear the music and bells and the din of the marketplace, I could see the merchants haggling and courtesans flirting, the artists brooding and inspired, the flow of notes from the minds of composers, the literature, the art, the decadence – it's all still there at night in Venice.

My experience of the Piazza flowed through every other night – there was always music like that of Florian's, there was always light like the kind reflected off the Basilica and lighting up the Procuratie, and I always felt as amazed and in love with the city as I did that night. I was told on orientation that Venice is the city where you'll fall in love. My time in Venice has led me to the conclusion that they didn't necessarily mean you'll fall in love with another person. You will fall in love with the city, its music, its art, its secrets, its peculiarity, and perhaps most importantly, yourself. There is so much

more to love here than another person. I think when you fall in love with Venice, and in doing so, you fall in love with life itself. Venice as a city is both real yet intangible, it embraces you yet remains mystical, but above all, it retains its majesty and grandeur as much as ever. My whole experience of exchange was defined for me by the way Venice presented itself to me that night in Piazza San Marco, and the way it wrapped me up in its light, music, history, and splendour. The way I felt that night carried through and defined all my Venetian experiences, and the romance and experience of La Serenissima will remain with me always.

Spacetrip

Artem Chukharev

Petro Mohyla Black Sea State University, Ukraine

Venice is 'outside the material universe' – so this is a space trip, which gives the writer a poignant new perspective on his home country.

You know, I, like most boys, probably dreamed of being an astronaut when I was a kid. It may sound banal and typical, but the spirit of adventure and obscurity was something I wanted to do. I wanted to go somewhere where time stopped, to see the incredible, unearthly beauty, to learn the secrets of the universe and return home a hero. It's incredible, but after years I managed to make my dream come true. And although I didn't need a spaceship to fly into my space, and I didn't wear a awkward suit, I still managed to go somewhere outside the material universe and see a place out of my dreams. And this place was Venice.

My exchange period ended 4 months ago, but the feelings that Venice gave birth to in my heart are still alive. Venice is an inexpressible, unique and absolutely beautiful emotion. When I first breathed in its brackish air, when I admired the sunset, when I saw the sun slowly hiding behind the horizon and dissolving in water, it was as if I felt with my heart and soul the closeness of a real miracle, a real magic.

Once in the first days of my exchange I was asked to describe my impressions of Venice, and the first thing that came to my mind was the "other universe". Another world that was completely different from what I had seen before. So I can say with certainty that my dream to go beyond the universe came true.

As pathetic as it may sound, but Venice and my general European experience opened my eyes to many problems, especially problems of my homeland. Everything I saw, everything I heard, inspired me

to do something really important, gave me hope and became an example to follow, because it was a real **revelation** to me.

The first thing that struck me was the learning process. The way students and teachers interact, the degree of intellectual freedom, the high level of culture, respect for the opinions of others, and the topics we discussed in the classroom. All this is very progressive, so correct and relevant that I keep telling my friends and teachers about it here at my home university.

Here in Ukraine, for the majority of people studying is just another boring stage in life, filled with boring lectures and teachers, who never accepted the collapse of the Soviet Union, which is why they could not evolve into people of the 21st century. It is very difficult to study here, because the state practically does not care about students and teachers, does not reform the education system, does not create infrastructure and exists only for the sake of corruption, and therefore many people drop out of school and do not receive education. After the first classes in Ca' Foscari, I realized what my dreams look like. The way how it **should** look like!

I have made a lot of cultural and linguistic discoveries about myself, I have lost many of the prejudices and phobias that people living in closed mono-cultural societies have for the rest of their lives, because I have had the opportunity to communicate with people of many nationalities, religions and cultural currents. I discussed art and Italian cinema with Italians, discussed history and politics with Estonians, listened to incredible stories from guys from Morocco, and a guy from Urbino even tried to teach me how to play their traditional card game. Venice has become a place of cultural, intellectual and spiritual rise for me, the most incredible and important experience in my life.

At some point in life, every young person goes through a stage of building a solid foundation for his or her worldview, where new identities will emerge in the future. And this foundation is the most important part of a person's personality. It is his education, his experience, his aspirations and his dreams. And I am infinitely grateful to Venice for becoming part of this foundation. After all, there is nothing better in a man than love for all the most beautiful, kind and beautiful things.

And nowhere in the world you will not be able to love this life more than in Venice.

Venice is really a different universe. It's a place where you come into contact with the invisible world, where you feel the things in a new way, where you can hear the voice of your soul.

I often see bright midnight above Venetian Lagoon in my dreams. I hear the magic

sound of waves, I count stars on the sky...

... And I'm absolutely sure, that I smile in my sleep at this time.

Wandering in Venice

Justine Flachs

EM Lyon Business School, France

A sophisticated account of an experience in which even the slightest everyday action has a special resonance, beautifully illustrated by the writer.

Last scene of Death in Venice. Gustav von Aschenbach is lying down on a chaise longue. Eyes half closed, staring at the Beauty. He is dying. This is the end in Lido, Venice.

For me, Lido and Venice were the beginning. Venice is where everything begins and where everything ends. "Venice, inexhaustible, has the shape of an 8, just like infinity" as Philippe Sollers said. That is exactly what I felt when I first came here.

I was afraid before coming to Venice. The night before taking the plane, I felt stressed, what was I going to do for 4 months in a city where people usually spend 4 days? Would I be bored? Would there be any kind of life or would it be an outside museum?

But, magically, all fears faded away when I stepped onto the vaporetto. The soft swing of the boat comforted me.

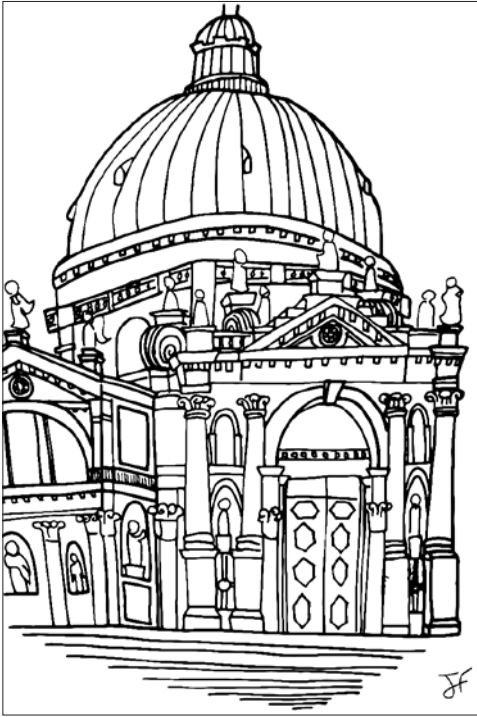
I remember during the first month thinking over and over "This city was made for me. I had been waiting to come here my whole life". Everything was stunning. Every time I went for a walk, I had to step back and stop. I had never seen a city like this before. Every building, every palace, every street, every canal was charming and beautiful. Nothing spoiled Venice, nothing.

Venice is the place where I experienced the strongest feelings. I lived in Lido. I would run three times a week aside the sea. It was pure joy and liberty. It seemed that Lido would never ends, that I could run - half flying - forever.



Venice is where I met so many great people, but it is also where I learnt to be alone. As Philippe Sollers (you may wonder, he is one of my favorite authors and a fanatic of Venice just like me) highlights “knowing how to be alone is the real great adventure today”. I would go for walks, alone, wanting to get lost in the little streets. Being alone was the way to really feel Venice. I would experience this unique atmosphere: a mix of beauty, melancholy and mystery. I would enter a church, sit there for a while, enjoying the fresh air. Then, I would drink a coffee, a very strong one, very quickly at the bar. I would stop to draw this particular window of this particular palace. One day, I sat and drew the canal aside my home in Lido. Another day, I spent hours drawing La Salute. Every time I had to leave Venice (for a week-end, to visit another city), I felt a little sad. It was like leaving a part of me behind. And then, how happy was I when I came back after a couple of days! It was like seeing the city for the first time. I had missed these yellow, orange, pink colors, these stones, these sunsets, these finely crafted door handles, these spritz, cicchetti and tramezzini.

What struck me the most in Venice was that every little daily action was amazing. In Venice, everything is an adventure. Walking in the street feels like being the romantic character of a painting or an old



movie. Finding a place to dance feels like being at the most underground party. Eating in an authentic restaurant feels like a huge privilege.

Venice is not the motionless, old city that one can imagine. Venice is in constant hustle and bustle. There is always a museum to visit, a palace to discover, an opera at the Fenice to attend or a biennale to experience. I attended a free classical concert of Debussy in a palace. Another week, I went three times to see over and over the amazing exposition Homo Faber.

Among all, I had three favorite places in Venice.

The Palazzo Grimani.

The first time I went there, it was at twilight. The night was blue. The palace was bathed in a mysterious darkness. I entered. No one. Then, I indistinctly heard some music. Following the song, I found myself in front of an orchestra rehearsing in a vast room. The rest of my visit was accompanied by this soft music, making the atmosphere unreal. I went from room to room, admiring beautiful ceilings: this one with the angel flying, this other one, so colorful, with these white figures moving in this orange, red and gold pattern.

The Laboratorioccupato Morion.

The one engaged place to go dancing. On Friday night, in Castello, this is where gathered students, families, No Grandi Navi activists and old Venetians. In this shed, live music is played. It is never the same. One Friday, it is reggae, next time this good old rock-and-roll, then funk and jazz. Behind the band, a screen shows videos to raise awareness about great issues of our world. On walls, there are No Grandi Navi flags, old anarchist and feminist posters. Here, I feel perfect, advocating for huge causes while dancing.

The Trattoria dalla Marisa.

One the smallest, most authentic restaurant of Venice. Right next to the Ca' Foscari economics building, is this little trattoria where we go to eat a primo. I always go there with two other girls. Every time we enter, it is only men eating and they all look at us. We don't really feel welcome in this gathering of Venetian workers, but the food is amazing. We fight a bit to have a table, then to grab our plate, but it is worth the pain.

On the vaporetto that was taking me away, I knew that I will come back to Venice, one day.

Me and my sentimental Venezia

Ana Kasrashvili

Tbilisi State University (Georgia)

In this introspective reflection the writer concludes that the answers to her questions about life came after her mobility and “my book of Venice is still yet to come”.

When Venice and I first met, the night was dark and the flickering lights were creating this cozy but mystic atmosphere. And I could not have known that this city would play the most prominent role in my existence and would be the beginning of such life changing events. It still remains to be a watershed of my life. Everything I thought I knew has drastically changed since then. I see things I did not or refused to see before. I remember the bliss and anxiety I felt about my upcoming journey when little did I knew I was already walking through the misty canals of the grand Venezia.

When we opened the door of our room, it was smaller than we expected and by smaller I mean much smaller. Suddenly I felt this fear of unknown and started crying so hard that I could barely stop, I felt that I was suffocating and there was no way out. However, the morning changed everything, Venice was glowing and shining, and filling my heart hope and anticipation. Everything was better than it was the day before, I started learning and adjusting and I drank red wine like a pill of glucose.

When I went to the lecture for the first time, my heart was pounding. And when the deeply respected professor started reading ‘Dafodils’, I felt proud, so very proud.

During my exchange program in Venice I acquired knowledge of things I couldn't have learnt elsewhere. Everything was new, interesting and refreshing. The wide range of offered courses has absolutely widened my scope of interests.

I am beyond grateful for all the lessons Venice has taught me, I will cherish them forever. For all those people who has supported me, who decided to share their very personal experiences and who willingly tried to walk on that path by my side. Venice has taught me understanding at its deepest level, how to be patient and how to feel strong when you are at your worst.

I miss those impressions that evolved through the times and exploring people from a very different angle. I love unexpected friendships and newly obtained sense of empathy towards new and unusual. I love feeling things I thought were impossible to feel. And I love those memories that make me smile, no matter what's going on in my life. Sometimes, you are you, within a particular setting and mindset. Then you meet someone, with its own setting and mindset. And you start sharing. Sharing knowledge, ideas, experiences and this bond magically starts to deepen. Then you realize, sometimes all it takes is a heartwarming smile.

Two days prior to our departure from Venice, my dearest Mariam and I went to a Halloween party organized by Italian students. They had obviously put much effort into the making of their costumes when we only had our masks on. And then we talked to each other and to others as well. Sometimes it was interesting, sometimes funny, sometimes just an attempt to socialize. But going back home, I realized that this was something I should have done more often. So, the special (but somehow not that special) part of my story, is that I failed. Maybe others do as well, but go out of their ways to admit it.

I was living in a city people dream of (and I assure you, it is as magical as you have imagined in your wildest dreams) and I took it for granted. I was so obsessed with the things I thought were important that in the end, I've lost a diamond in search of stones. Acknowledging it was the hardest and confessing that I failed was the bravest and the most liberating thing I have ever done.

The sad truth is, sometimes you lose. Probably you're never too good, or too smart or too mature to lose. It just happens when it needs to happen and all you have to do is to accept it, to embrace it.

Though the recognition of the importance of Venice came later, step by step. Leo Tolstoy said: 'Progress consists only in the greater clarification of answers to the basic questions of life'. My mom once told me that the Book of Venice would not be written in Venice and she was so right, all the answers to my basic questions about my life in this magical city came afterwards and my book of Venice is still yet to come.

A Venetian welcome

Claudia Keane

University of Limerick, Ireland

The writer describes in detail her third day in Venice, using an impressive range of illuminating images

I woke up on the 1st of February 2019 to the rumbling noise of feet outside my apartment window. The street below me was loud with the sound of people making their way through the Venetian streets. It was my third day in Venice, and I was already in love with it. Being from Ireland, where everything is spaced out between rolls of green spaces and hills, living in this built-up terracotta toned city separated by teal toned canals was a world away from the 'normal' that I had become accustomed to at home. My new 'normal' was taking boats instead of driving cars. It was buying fresh produce from friendly merchants. It was getting lost in the little avenues trying to find my way around.

I quickly got ready and dressed for the weather. It was high tide season, which meant rain and rain meant the possible flooding of the canals. I opted for a jacket (with a hood) and boots (very necessary) and made my way through the winding waves of smiling locals to university, it was my first day.

I walked into the beautiful main campus of Ca Foscari. I couldn't believe the architecture of the university as I sat in the main hall which was decorated like a theatre with hand-painted murals that wouldn't look out of place in the Sistine Chapel. This day served as a welcome day for international students. We were sat down and told the structure of the year academically. As I sat in this beautiful room, with dozens of unfamiliar faces, each an Erasmus or an Exchange student, I knew that this semester was going to be a memorable one.

The warm welcome was concluded with the end note of: “We hope you stay in Venice!”

Post-graduate students of Ca Foscari acted as our guides and gave us a tour of our relevant campuses depending on our disciplines. Due to the built-up layout of Venice, the campus is spread out through the Venetian lagoon, they simply don’t have the space to offer one single campus like my home country. I did like this aspect though, I felt like I was exploring the city as I made my way from building to building. I am an Economics student, so I was shown to San Giobbe campus by the railway station. I couldn’t believe how modern it looked compared to the hall I had just sat in; it was amazingly spaced out with its own library and several lecture halls and a café. We weaved our way through the corridors like frayed thread through a needle, all at once and then one at a time reality hitting each of us as we realized this wasn’t like any city, we had been in. Laughs were shared to break the ice until there was none there at all, it was as if the comfort of knowing we were all in the same position was enough to form a bond, linked together by the unfamiliarity of our surroundings. I met so many new friends that I knew I would be friends with for life.

The tour came to an end, we made our way back towards Ca Foscari’s main building, the staff of Ca Foscari were kind enough to throw us a mixer including free wine, prosecco, spritz’ and some typical Italian party foods. As we drank and danced and talked about our own home countries, there was a sense of foreboding in the air as if we all had the same idea, none of us knew what to expect but somehow, we knew that this experience would shape us all. We said our goodbyes after the long day of mingling and made our ways to our new homes, laughing through the built up terracotta toned city we all called our homes now.

I got into bed on the 1st of February 2019 to the quietening noise of feet outside my apartment window. The street below me was filled with the patter of people making their way home after a long day. It was my third day in Venice and it had ended, perfectly. I fell asleep recounting the day and reciting it back in my mind, excited for the five months to come. It was enticing and warm. A Venetian welcome.

Destination Ca' Foscari

International Students on Mobility Recount their Experiences in Venice
edited by David Newbold

Taking the time to be helpful

Jacqueline Philips

City College New York, USA

For a New Yorker, the first shock to overcome is the realization that a taxi on wheels at the airport is not going to be able to take her to her destination..

One sunny September afternoon in 2016, after a long flight from New York with a layover in Germany, I finally arrived at Marco Polo International Airport. Fearing I would be left without some essential, I had over packed. Laden with four pieces of luggage, I struggled to orient myself. My New York mentality meant there was no thought of leaving luggage to make inquiries. Instead wherever I went my burdens came with me. I trudged first to an information booth, where a woman who spoke perfect English, and likely several other languages, told me there were airport busses and taxis outside. She further informed me that transportation tickets could be purchased. Thanking her I headed off in search of the transportation kiosk. Years of travel gave me enough foresight to exchange currency in advance, so with English speaking agents, the purchase was simple. Where to go and how to get there, was fast becoming the next concern. Sure enough, outside there were airport busses and plenty of people who knew where they were going. The busses were clearly labeled in Italian, yet destinations meant nothing to me. Since this was my first trip to Venice, all I knew was what I had read. I had not read enough; I had only read about history. Slowly the recollection came to me; there were no roads or cars in Venice. A taxi from the airport would not get me to my destination in Venice. The thought of dragging those bags back to the information desk did not appeal to me, yet what choice had I? Maybe I could take a minute to gather myself before attempting the challenge. For all my previous travel, I stood in the busy airport feel-

ing slightly bewildered but not undone, contemplating my next move when a smiling young woman approached me.

“Are you Jacqueline?”

Who knew me here so far from home? I live alone. I travel alone. No one ever comes to meet me, yet there she was. Her name was Anna. Later she explained that she was part of the Welcome Unit the university had sent. Once I showed her the address of the hostel I would be seeking, she knew which bus we should take. Suddenly the burden of the bags had been halved. On the crowded bus to Venice, I embraced the start of the adventure before me. We left the bus at Piazzale Roma to board the vaporetto. After the rushed, crowded subterranean mode of travel I was used to at home, the leisure of gentle breezy movement through the sun kissed water of the Grand Canal, was a refreshing change.

Although I had known the residence would not be available for two weeks, I wanted to be in town for the “Discover Ca’ Foscari, Enjoy Venice” events, especially the regatta. It was for this reason that I found myself bound for a lack luster hovel, which had masqueraded as a hostel on the website. Even so, Anna knew where it was. Without her I would never have found it, hidden as it was behind what had been that morning’s fish market. It was only as we floated past the vacant market, with its naked stalls, that Anna realized we should have taken the other vaporetto. Instead we departed at Rialto. The Rialto Bridge, famed in the “Merchant of Venice”, high and majestic in its antiquity, with its hordes of tourists, on steep stone steps, waited to be mounted, crossed and descended. Undaunted Anna grabbed a bag and began the trek. Her presence was my first blessing in Venice...

Writing this account, I saw my initial taste of Italian culture had come through the Welcome Unit. It loomed as most important because of the way the same willingness to help repeated itself in countless instances at Ca’ Foscari. Over my time there, I came to realize that the slower pace, the innately leisurely way things were done in Italy, which sometimes baffled me, was exactly what made the consistent helpfulness possible. The Italians at Ca’ Foscari took time to be helpful because they took the time available.

Once the term began, Anna encouraged me to join the student organization, whose trips around Italy were made richer because of the same spirit of assistance. I thought of the time it must have taken to compile the vast information in the Welcome Guide, every time I used it. Even the convoluted “Stay Permit” procedure, with forms only for foreigners but all in Italian, was eased when the staff translated the forms. Of course the irony is that after all that back and forth bother, permission to stay would arrive only after departure. That did not diminish the help offered and gratefully received. Perhaps it is the incongruous experiences in a new country which allowed me to better appreciate the people.

Like a prevailing theme in a work of literature, the professors continued in the same vein. For the class on “American Literature”, Pia Massero chose novels I would have been unlikely to read. The blessing came in being exposed to an Italian view of modern American classics. David Newbold suggested novels I used to start my thesis. Everyone was eager to include students like me in cultural events in English around Venice. Valerio De Scarpis, who had taught Shakespeare’s “Julius Caesar” with copious details, introduced me to CIRCOLA ITALIO BRITANICO. Enrico Palandri, who had taught “History of Italian Culture and Literature” informed me of multi lingual readings he curated at Teatro di Palazzo Grassi. Claudia, who taught “Contemporary History of Venice”, took us on a field trip. Claudia’s careful directions helped me discover the area beyond the tram. The location of the immigration office was precious information for my first “Stay Permit” appointment.

All along through the mobility there was the same helpful energy. Being met by Anna was the first step on that journey.

Leaving Time

Josephina Richardt

Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, Germany

The two threads in the narrative contrast the moment of arrival in Venice with the day of departure.

I heave my two suitcases into the luggage compartment. The blue bag gets on the bus with me. I take a window seat in the last row. And there I am. Overlooking the so familiar contours of Tronchetto.

How is this possible, I just arrived yesterday...

It was hot. I'd never been at Tronchetto before. It seemed all so strange...

Still, I managed to carry my two huge, heavy suitcases – half my size and half my weight – and a blue big bag all the way from the bus stop onto vaporetto Nr 2. But when I wanted to get off the boat, there was this step. And of course, I couldn't lift them all up at once.

Fortunately, the marinaio helped me. Unfortunately, my luggage was heavier than he had expected. He almost fell back onto the deck, head first! But the strong, young man tried again. This time with success.

–Partly.

The bus leaves the station. After 3,5 months it will bring me back to Munich. In those last weeks, I have taken the bus so many times but never back to Germany. But now it is two days before Christmas. And my time in Venice is over.

My blue bag fell off the suitcase. My belongings ended up in the gap between vaporetto and mainland.

I picked up my pillow, water bottle, and some other stuff. But as I watched my Spezi bottle floating away, a shock ran through my veins. What about my phone?

-No matter how hysterically I checked my bag, how long I stared into the greenish water, it was gone. The lagoon swallowed it.

I didn't even have my new address. I had nothing.

I knew my new house was supposed to be somewhere on the right...

Benvenuto a Venezia!

I look at my bag. This time, all my stuff made it. Okay, almost. My ornament broke.

My first day started off patchy. So did my first week. It was a mixture of excitement and feeling unsettled. It was weird because I had waited so long for this experience. So it had to be awesome right?

We pass Mestre. I smirk. I know it all so well. And my heart aches to leave it behind. The first time was weird. And then it was coming home.

Exactly one week after my arrival, I lay in my bed and thought: Wow. I'm already going to miss this and the people so much.

From that moment on, I had really arrived. And every day in Venice was so much better than I could have ever imagined.

It is cold outside. Winter season. The afternoon is grey. I think of my new friends. I think of all of us, united in this experience, separated again by oceans.

I met my best "Venetian" friends on the first day. We traveled together, explored the city or hung out. Every day. And every day I strolled through the beautiful Venetian streets. I turned into a gondoliere for the Gender Workshop. I almost swam across Saint Mark's Square. -Yes, swam.

I made some cat-friends as well. And I moved during Acqua Alta. I lived a whole life and I truly fell in love with it.

I even found a topic for my bachelor's thesis. It makes me laugh. I wrote into my letter of motivation that I'm hoping to get one here. I thought it sounded good.

I am sad. So sad. At the same time, I am so happy and beyond grateful. Venice has given me so much. I was restless before living abroad. Now, I am at some inner peace. It may sound trite, but for me, it isn't.

I looked at the picture my friend had just taken of me. "I made it".

I will never forget this moment. I had waited so long to say these words. Venice gave me confidence and independence. It made me believe in my future. I had always wanted to go abroad because I knew it would be important to me. And I was right. I fulfilled my dream and now I know that I can fulfill all my dreams. I don't have to wait for anything; I can just do it.

We eat dinner, we chat, we laugh so hard. It is the night after the closing ceremony. I look at my friends. It will never be like this anymore. It is so special.

I find myself being excited for the next year. At first, I thought it will be boring. What could it possibly bring after this? But now I

know it will bring great things just because of Venice's gift. I learned that the most precious things are moments and the people you share them with. I realized who my true friends are and I let go of everything that wasn't good for me.

The bus leaves Italy. I open my laptop. Venice inspired new writing projects. It motivated me to finish old ones. Back home I will write my second novel. I will start writing English travel articles.

Venice gave me the courage to create my own blog (*With love, Josie*) on which I'm going to publish them and on which I will also launch *The Wordchain Project* for more kindness and peace in the world.

Being an exchange student in Venice was not one single outstanding experience. It was a journey.

So Venice, I forgive you that you stole my phone, that your "punch" is not the "Kinderpunsch" I expected, that your streets are sometimes so crowded that you literally get stuck in them, that it took 15 hours to get back from Switzerland because you're sometimes not the city *on* water but the city *under* water.

There is seriously nothing that I dislike about you. I had the time of my life.

Maybe I sound like one of those girls that only rave about their time abroad. But I don't care. My time abroad has changed me.

I am not restless anymore.

Where are you from?

Julia Rose

University of Melbourne, Australia

The question 'Where are you from' takes the writer, half Australian and half Italian, on a voyage of self discovery.

The result of post-colonial Australia, a country founded upon convicts and immigrants, is a vast amount of people identifying not only as Australian, but also with their country of origin. When someone asks you your nationality in Australia, you do not simply answer with "Australian", as that would be stating the obvious, but rather "I'm Maltese on my Dad's side and Dutch on my Mum's side". Everyone knows their origins, as you never need to dig too far back on the family tree to discover where your ancestors originally came from.

I never had to resort to the family tree as I was born to an Italian mother (accent and all) and a British-Australian father. I have always felt a strong connection to my Italian side of the family, to the extent that when I was asked my nationality, I would simply reply with "Italian", completely ignoring my paternal side. I believe this has a lot to do with the fact that my sister and I were brought up bilingual. Unlike the post-Second World War Mediterranean immigrants who did their best to forget their mother tongue out of fear of being ostracised and bullied by their Australian peers, we were fortunate enough to grow up in a politically correct, middle class bubble. This meant that our ability to speak two languages was seen by our friends as a superpower rather than a vice. Being able to say that I was not only Italian but was also able to speak it fluently made me gush with pride. Growing up going on regular holidays to Italy and Europe further strengthened my connection with that side of the world so that

by the time I was sixteen, I knew that I would eventually live some, if not all, of my life over there.

The opportunity arose in my second year of university when I applied to study abroad and got accepted at Ca' Foscari University in Venice. I opted for a semester rather than a full year, due to a lack of confidence that made me question my decision to leave the safety and comfort of inner-city Melbourne quite often in the lead up to my departure. However, despite what my anxieties were telling me, I knew this was a challenge I had no choice but to undertake. Therefore, after two fabulous months of backpacking through Western Europe with a friend, I began my studies in Venice. It took only a couple of days before I realised the irrationality of my initial fears, and only a couple of weeks before I started the annoyingly bureaucratic, but definitely worthwhile process of extending my stay to the full year.

As you can imagine, a popular question asked between exchange students is: Where do you come from?

When asked, I would reply with "Australia". My answer would receive the same positive attention as that of saying I was Italian when back home. Yet this time instead of being asked "Can you say something in Italian?" or "Do you have any idea how lucky you are to have a European passport?" it was "Have you ever seen a kangaroo?" or "Is Christmas really in the summer?".

Although my fellow exchange students would never have guessed I was Italian because of the way I spoke English, it was quite the opposite when I was in lectures with my Italian classmates. When I spoke in Italian, they would not realise I wasn't actually Italian until I'd point it out. Their shocked expressions at my (almost) flawless Italian when I told them I had grown up in Australia, once again sent that Italian pride gushing through me. To them, I would say that I was half Italian in order to justify my language skills, but I would always place the most emphasis on my "Australianness".

It took me almost the whole year before I realised what I was doing. Why was it that in Australia I identified as Italian but in Italy I identified as Australian? Although reflecting upon it at great length, I was unable to pinpoint why. Maybe it was because I enjoyed the attention I receive from being different. Or perhaps it's because in Australia I don't feel particularly Australian but in Europe I don't feel particularly European. Having grown up being equally exposed to both cultures has put me in the unusual position of identifying a bit with both but fully with neither.

My time in Venice opened my eyes up to the importance of honouring both side of my heritage. From now on, I know that when the nationality question comes up, no matter where in the world I find myself, I know what my answer will be. I am half Italian and half Australian.

The Happenstance

Hamlet Simonyan

Yerevan State University, Armenia

Venice provides the setting for a chance meeting between an Armenian and a Turk of Armenian origin.

Dear Hamlet Simonyan, Ca' Foscari University of Venice is pleased to accept you as an international exchange student!

Exactly this sentence pointed out the beginning of my life-changing adventures in Venice. I knew I was heading to the most breathtaking city existing, but the true happiness and excitement came when I appeared in Venice. I had arrived in the city approximately a week before my lessons started, thus I had some free time to dive into the outstanding accomplishment of the city, revealing its hidden corners and deadlocks. During that week I managed to get lost a thousand times, find my way home which turned out to be different every single time, get confused and scared when experienced those dramatic pigeon leaps and eventually find some spots to fall in love with. I used to enjoy listening to the sounds my shoes made as I walked through the narrow streets trying to concentrate on the echoes which were interrupted with the famous exclamations “gondola, gondola” made by gondoliers.

I had never been in a foreign country for such a long period and knowing that I had to stay there for five months used to make me feel so wierd. I wouldn't describe this situation as a culture shock, but I somehow felt I flew in the infinity of time. Consequently, my soul was filled with controversial and unusual feelings when it was almost the Welcome Day. *“Dear student, the meeting point is Auditorium Santa Mar-*

gerita" - was mentioned in the e-mail we had previously got. Now everything seemed as real as never before! We were about to start. I mean this was to mark the start of one of my lifelong wishes, start of a self-development process. After the supposed presentations at the auditorium the organisers took us for a so-called excursion to see the different buildings of the university, the libraries and so on. It was such a hot day-no breeze, no freeze and although I was quite hungry and felt uncomfortable due to the humid weather I joined the group. We started to walk around the city time by time stopping near some buildings and listening to what the organisers told about them. Sometimes it was almost impossible to catch the speech as there were considerably lots of students and too much noise. After walking for about an hour a whisper was emerged that only two buildings were left to see. We were on a bridge and the group started to move.

Appearing near a building (later turned out to be called San Sebastiano) I heard somebody's voice asking "hay es?" which translated from Armenian (my mother language) means "Are you Armenian?". I was more than sure that there was no Armenian student amongst the exchange students of my department. Moreover, the voice of the guy sounded *in Armenian but not Armenian*. I turned out to see who there was. - Are you from Armenia?, - he continued.-Yes, I am. But you don't seem to be Armenian though you speak Armenian, - I answered looking at his face in a surprised way. - My name is Robin, I am from Turkey, but I am Armenian,- he said to me. As you may know, Armenia and Turkey haven't been in a good relationship for a long time in spite of the fact that we are neighbors. This situation has both its political and historical preconditions. The boy named Robin told me that he has grown up in Turkey but his grandparents are Armenian and that's why he manages to speak Armenian a bit. I continued asking him some questions in Armenian but noticing that he couldn't understand them properly we switched the language into English.

It was the first time I have met someone coming from the area my parents call enemy place and sharing the same nationality as me. Now it was challenging for me to get to know someone who shares same nationality but lives *on the other side*. We managed to talk a great deal during the tour and eventually decided to have lunch together, so we found a place to eat some pizza and talked even more. All this *happenstance* promised a beginning of a good friendship which was supposed to get developed in Venice, a city that somehow happened to be the meeting point of ours. After the lunch we joined the group at the university main building. Together with other students we enjoyed ourselves while partying, getting to know everybody around. It could sound strange but we even bought a box of cigarettes and each of us smoked the half of it because none of us was a heavy smoker.

*Dear student, unfortunately your period in Venice is going to end soon!
We hope you keep nice memories of this experience.*

Time flies so fast. Yes, really! The last e-mail pointed out that my time was almost over in Venice like it happens in Cinderella's story. Robin and me haven't seen each other since the Welcome Day, the day we met, ate our first Italian pizza, shared the same box of cigarettes...

Destination Ca' Foscari

International Students on Mobility Recount their Experiences in Venice
edited by David Newbold

Rowing through Venice

Erika Tanaka

Keio University, Japan

A student from Japan becomes the fastest oarswoman in the university dragonboat team which wins the national championship.

Having aperitivo with my Italian friends, enjoying a scenic view while taking the vaporetto to school everyday, traveling on the weekends to discover different sides of Italy. There are so many things that made my exchange year at Ca' Foscari memorable. However, above it all, becoming a rower for the university's Dragon Boat competitive team was the most valuable experience I have ever had.

Playing football competitively since 5 years old, I was looking for football teams to participate when I arrived. However, I found out that the university had a dragon boat team, internationally well known for winning many titles at national and international championships.

Although I wasn't familiar with water sports, I decided to push my boundaries since it was something that can only be done in an environment like Venice. Every year, the top 11 rowers are selected to represent Ca' Foscari in a World Championship held annually in China. My goal when I began was to "Go to China, represent Ca' Foscari at the World Championship and become champions".

The first training started out with how to use the paddle. Still learning Italian, I was one of the few exchange students who struggled understanding the instructions. However, I did not let a simple language barrier let me down, in fact, it gave me the drive to seek advice from the coaches and the experienced rowers and communicate until we fully understood each other. After the beginners course, the coach recruited me to the competitive team, acknowledging my strength and agilities.

The competitive team consisted of people who have been rowing for many years, yet, I was up for the challenge and was determined to be part of the first team. Our trainings were nothing like those of the beginners course; everyday it was intense to the point our bodies were quivering from the freezing weather and maxing out on our strength.

In March, on the day of the member selection test for the World Championship, I was slightly anxious. The test was also a determination of which team you will belong to for the rest of the season. For China, there was only one slot left, since the top experienced rowers have already secured a spot. When I finished my test, my coach was talking ecstatically saying “fortissima(very strong)”; a confirmation that I earned a ticket to China. To everyone’s amazement, my record time ended up being the fastest of the entire team.

After we came second at the Tosca Maderno race, our trainings increased and intensified. Learning from our previous errors, we were able to improve as a team, and be stronger by helping each other out. We won 1st place at the Italian National Championship 2000m and 1st place at the annual international university race, the Lion Cup.

When it was time to travel to China, we were all thrilled. For everyone, it was there 3rd or 4th time to fly to China to compete, hence, they were excited to reunite with their fellow opponents, touring around the city, and eating Chinese food.

On the day of the race, more than 50 teams gathered from around the world. In the semi-final round we were 1st place, however, our record was “7seconds” behind from the local Chinese team competing in another block. Everyone, suddenly had little hope that we will achieve what we have been aiming for. Victory right in front of our eyes, I knew we couldn’t afford to give our hopes up just yet, especially when we came this far. I talked with my teammates so to raise their motivation, to which they did.

In the lane next to us at the finals, there was the fastest local Chinese team. The gun signaling the start of the race, was shot in the air, and the race to victory finally began. We all put our focus to following each other. Seeing that our opponent was ahead of us, my will to win no matter what got stronger. Losing was not an option.

By the time we made it to the goal line our body was shaking, heads up and looking around to see where our opponents are. None of the teams were standing in the same line as us. In that moment we knew that we were the champions. We all started to cry and laugh in happiness, for the hard work that paid off, so much that the boat was starting to shake sideways.

After the World Championship in China, we returned to Venice to participate in the Voga Longa, a 34km rowing race around Venice. Additionally, the selected members and I competed in the Italian National Championship held in Milan, which would be my last race as

part of the Ca' Foscari crew. Giving our all, we became champions in the women's 200m and 500m division.

Stepping into the lagoon city, I never expected to have an experience that I had this past year. Dragon boat has taught me the importance of teamwork, to keep going even through rough times, and to always challenge yourself because you never know where it might take you. I want to thank all my teammates for welcoming me in, teaching me the way of Italian and Venetian life, and the great time together. Additionally, the coaches for believing in me, giving me advice, and allowing me to compete and contribute to the many wins of the university. I will cherish the times I have spent with my team, rowing our way through the highs and lows.

A bridge of friendship – Ponte dell'amicizia

Thanh Viet-An

Hanoi University, Vietnam

There is Rialto, Accademia, and the Bridge of Sighs, and there is the bridge of friendship too.

We all know that there is no other place like Venice, where the city life goes around the canals and bridges. To name a few, some of the most renowned are: Ponte di Rialto, Ponte dell'Academia or Ponte dei Sospiri. Nevertheless, there is another bridge that was built during my stay in this wonderful city, which I believe to be the most beautiful of them all – Ponte dell'amicizia (The bridge of friendship).

To be honest, coming to Europe is just like a fairytale for a Vietnamese student like me. I have always dreamt of setting my foot to Europe one day to see places that I have learned from books and stories. During my four-year studying in Hanoi University, I also worked as a free-tour guide to show the beauty of my city to travelers from around the world and heard a lot of great stories about Europe, which made me even more eager to justify them by myself. I nurtured this dream by studying and working hard and my efforts were eventually paid off when I received an opportunity to study at Ca' Foscari University of Venice for five months, that moment was just like becoming the champion of the world! (Campione del Mondo!)

Stepping out of Marco Polo airport, I knew the new chapter of my life has officially begun. Rather than sticking with home community as my parents' wish, I approached my journey differently by trying to learn about the Italian language and culture so that I could feel the breath of local life here. I learned from the simplest things like com-

prehending the train station (Venezia Santa Lucia) announcement on my way to San Giobbe campus every day to exotic things like cooking real Italian pasta with the instructions from my flat mates.

I hung out around Venice with my local friends after lectures to truly experience this wonderful place, not as a tourist but a local: wandering around the city's alleys, drinking Spritz, singing the "Dottore! Dottore!" song during one's graduation and supporting the football team of Venice... Also, since the locals know the bests, I received a lot of good tips to help myself around and re-shared to other international friends of mine in campus. Day after day, I felt completely harmonized with the rhythm of the life here.

Also, I traveled on my own to ten different cities to discover the beauty of this boot-shaped country: the magnificent history of Roman Empire in Rome, the great renaissance works in Florence or the dynamic and thriving business life in Milan... I literally lost my soul there!

Not only did I learn about the local specialties with the highest respect, I also shared with people I met about my country the same way I did as a local-guide in Hanoi (Vietnam). It is interesting that the more I discover, the more I see that Italy is just like Vietnam of Europe: both countries stretch from north to south with a great diversity of food and cultures; family-oriented life style and especially the great hospitality of local people to visitors. To me, more than advanced education experience, I consider myself as a bridge to bring Vietnam and Italy closer together, just like other bridges in Venice that connect people from different places around the world.

The time living in Italy has broadened my horizon tremendously. Previously, life to me was only about compliance with parents and others' wishes that considered to be the standard. I did not dare to do anything different with the fear of being odd from the rest of the family and society. But now, after the Erasmus experience, the biggest thing I have learnt from Italy is that I can live in my own way – "La dolce vita". Although sometimes there are hardships during the mobility period, I have learnt how to overcome those and became stronger and more confident to face other challenges in my life.

Moreover, experiencing long-distance relationship with my girlfriend this time also showed how strong our bond is, which was not easy to keep at all. I cannot express how sweet the moment was when I first hugged my girlfriend, who has been waiting for me at the airport in Hanoi for hours. That may be the warmest hug of my life.

After coming back to Vietnam, I miss Italy a lot and always do my best to keep the Italian rhythm in my mind: learning the Italian language, cooking Italian dishes, joining festival of Italian culture, telling great stories about Italy to my friends. And then, like a destiny, I was hired to work for Piaggio Vietnam – The subsidiary of Piaggio Group in Asia-Pacific region right after graduation.

Gracefully, not only focusing on profession, I also strengthen the bonds between my Vietnamese and Italian colleagues for better mutual understandings, which helps us accomplish fruitful business results together. As for me, every day, going to work and seeing Vespa running on the street makes me feel that Italy is just right here and will always be here with me. I hope that in the future, there will be more bridges like me to erase the distance and bring Vietnam and Italy closer than ever before.

Viva l'Italia!

The labyrinth of wonders

Ariel Viola

Universidad Nacional del Litoral, Argentina

This account reads like a catalogue of buildings and place names, underlining the exotic impact the city had on the writer.

When I was a child, my mother told me about a city where the streets were made of water, the roads had no cars and the buses were boats. My desire to study abroad, far from Argentina, could have happened in any corner of the planet. I never thought it would be in *Venezia*, the imaginary city of my childhood. I felt that I would live a surreal experience, a fable or a fantasy, like so many that inspired *La Serenissima*.

The day I had to go to *Ca' Foscari* for the first time, like in a Shakespeare's drama, I felt like a *Porcia's* suitor, who had to choose between the three chests... Which *calle*, *sotoportego*, *rio terà*, *ramo*, *corte*, *campiello* or *salizada* should take to find the portrait? Starting from *Via Garibaldi*, the great avenue where I lived at first, I opted for the yellow sign that pointed towards *Il Ponte dell'Accademia*. As in the stories, I find an imposing square. Besides, stood a very tall tower that escorted a large church. It was the weird temple I had never seen, a mix of cultural and aesthetic styles that make it unique: the *Basilica of San Marco*.

Anyway, i had to arrive on time at the *Welcome day*. I crossed along the *Piazza San Marco*, and immediately I came across the ostentatious *Palazzo Ducale*. *Venezia* was a labyrinth of wonders. At last, I discovered *la fermata del vaporetto*. The *cinque* would take me to my destination: *Campo Santa Margherita*, student land. To reach *Ca' Foscari* was the first odyssey of the many that I lived in the fish-shaped island.

Lezioni, *esami*, *insegnanti*, *mensa*, *permesso di soggiorno*, and many others were the most pronounced words of that afternoon,

more *Porcia's* chests! The labyrinth had multiplied. Then, I began to believe that *Venezia* could be *Smeraldina*, the city described by *Marco Polo* to the *Khan*, thinking on his native republic: "...città acquatica, a reticolo di canali e a reticolo di strade si sovrappongono e s'intersecano".¹ My mission was get to know the infinite and complex paths that would take me to reach the classrooms, located in beautiful palaces and modern university buildings: *Briati, Ca' Bernardo, San Basilio*. Getting lost in *Venezia* is the best thing that can happen to you. Looking for the points of my academic map I found fabulous places: *Pasticceria Tonolo, Caffé Rosso, Osteria da Filo, Basilica dei Frari*, many ice cream shops, *gondole* and bridges.

Yes, the labyrinth of wonders has many bridges, as many as the challenges involved in my mobility experience in *Ca' Foscari*. At the first one, *il Ponte della Costituzione*, I needed to learn Italian to be able to talk to the new people that I would meet: tutors, teachers, classmates, roommates. Above all, new friends.

Very close, *il Ponte degli Scalzi*, I had to take off the shoes of the customs and social codes of my country, and walk towards a new culture, where everything was different. I had to learn how to get books from the library, write papers in another language, administer unknown money, rent an apartment with girls and boys from all over the world, take trains and planes. No buses, because in *Venezia* there are no transport on wheels. The whole city, except *Piazza-le Roma*, is pedestrian.

The third was *il Ponte dell'Academia*, very important, because allowed me to arrive to the other side of knowledge: the meaning of studying in another city, the great and complete libraries of *Venezia*, the relationships with excellent teachers, the possibilities of expanding my area of study. Experiences that circulated through many channels, as *Venezia* itself!

Finally, above the *Grand Canal*, *il Ponte di Rialto*, the oldest: beautiful, majestic, cosmopolitan, magical, its picture is frozen in my memory. Walking that bridge was the most thrilling thing of all. Through *Rialto*, you truly connected with *Venezia*, its history, its people and its idiosyncrasy. There is where the carnival lives, with its strange costumes and masks, its exquisite *fritelle*, the delicious pizzas. You can enjoy the sun in the *giardini*, walk down by *strada nuova*, get excited by the fireworks on *Redentore's* Day, travel by *vaporetto* through the zigzagging canals, sunbathe in the Lido or wander through the *Giudecca* island.

The six months that I spent between February and July 2018 in *Venezia* were unforgettable. The city is fantastic, as I imagined it in

¹ Calvino, Italo. *Città Invisibili*. Letteratura Italiana Einaudi. Torino. 1972. Disponibile en http://smartness.it/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/citta_invisibili_calvino.pdf.

my childhood; the people I met, charming; the new things I learned, very interesting. At least but no last, I have learned italian, sensational! I can say that I succeded to cross the four bridges of *Venezia*. I returned to Santa Fe been a different person than before my mobility experience. I am convinced that I will return to take a *vaporetto*, drink an *ombra* at *Bacaro da Lele*, and buy a book from *Acqua Alta*, my favourite bookshop on the world.

Just like when I arrived, but fascinated, when I left, I said *ciao*.

My love affair with Venice

Natasha Wilson

University of Sussex, UK

This is an account of a full blown love affair, complete with honeymoon, estrangement, and reconciliation.

It was love at first sight,

I arrived in Venice nervous and alone, a blind date, we'd never met (I found her on the internet) but she took me under her wing and made me feel at home. I did feel underdressed however, she was so effortlessly chic. The language barrier was a bit of an issue too, awkward initially, but I soon learnt a smile and hand gesture would suffice. We got to know each other for the first couple of weeks, with no data on my phone I had no distractions and I could focus entirely on her. I had to quickly learn my way around though. She encouraged me to push myself out of my comfort zone, I let myself get lost, flipping a coin in my head, which way to turn, left or right. I tried everything she had to offer: spritz after spritz, cicchetti after cicchetti – even hosting a cicchetti night of my own with new friends.

A fast-paced relationship, I was completely immersed in the 'honeymoon phase'; totally in love.

I introduced her to my brother, my sister, my parents; proudly gushing about my love for her. They said they could see how happy she made me. I experienced so much, so quickly. She taught me so much about myself: this new cultural and life experience brought out a confidence in me I never knew I had and I forged solid friendships with people from different countries. I also learnt how to enjoy being by myself while seeking out coffee shop after coffee shop, inhaling the smell of fresh croissants, a book for company. I learnt how to

live the Italian way: quickly developing an addiction to their morning espresso, sharing homemade 'Genovese' pesto with my Italian housemates and conversing animatedly with locals in the supermarkets, "Da dove sei?" they'd ask, "dall'Inghilterra...ma abito qui" I'd eagerly reply, lapping up their new-found respect for me.

In February she invited me on a special date: the famous Carnevale regatta. I raced to the secret 'locals' spot that she had shown me a few months before, ready to capture a glimpse of this traditional celebration that I had been dreaming of seeing for years - it didn't disappoint. During the days I walked across il ponte dell'Accademia to get to my classes, always letting my eyes linger on the beautiful view of the Santa Maria della Salute. Once the crowds dispersed, my journey home in the evenings consisted of walking across a lit-up Piazza San Marco, my heart singing to the sound of the musicians serenading the lucky passersby.

Then the problems started,

I can't tell you where it went wrong. I felt myself begin to get frustrated. I picked on her faults, her downfalls; too many people flocked to see her and I didn't want to share. She ignored me when I told her that many visitors weren't good for her. The novelty of the 'acqua alta' and the loud sirens that warned everyone wore off. I became bored of the food she offered me.

The spark had gone.

Venice seemed too small, I felt I'd done everything there was to do. I began to travel, desperate to get away: Bologna, Milan, Florence, even Ljubljana.

They say *distance makes the heart grow fonder* - They were right.

The further I got, the more desperate I was to return. Nothing compared. My heart yearned for the narrow streets, the singing of gondoliers, the sweet bitterness of an Aperol spritz whilst sat near Rialto Bridge; the list was endless. And suddenly, more than ever, I was conscious of our time together coming to an end

With that thought, the clock ticking, that *feeling of love and excitement returned*.

I threw myself wholeheartedly back into our relationship; feeling guilty for my brief unfaithfulness to her. She welcomed me back with open arms, as loving as ever. The Biennale of 2019 commenced, days were spent basking in the Italian sunshine on Lido beach and evenings watching the sunsets at Zattere with the life-long friends I had made in only a few months.

After a year together, I can truly say I understand why people say 'Venezia è unica'. We weren't meant to be together forever. Our paths will cross again in the future, maybe I'll bring my children here to be introduced to her. I was not the first, and I will not be the last, to be mesmerized by her charm.

To the next captivated soul,
Enjoy all the opportunities and valuable life lessons she will give you,
Respect her beauty that will surround you daily:
Venezia, la più bella città nel mondo.

Longlisted Entries

Pictures to remember

Emma Blankwater

University of Groningen, The Netherlands

The pictures to remember are snapshots of moments, such as the day the writer is taken unawares by the rising acqua alta.

The last picture taken in Venice at Marco Polo airport is a picture to remember. My packed-up suitcase, 2 extra bags, and a warm winter coat, taken by a very friendly Italian taxi driver, and in the background the fog above the water, with the slowly fading silhouette of Venice.

I still remember the first time we landed at Marco Polo airport. I was one of the lucky students who got to experience my semester abroad with two friends from my Home University. Leaving our cold home country, wearing a sweater and a jacket. The warm foggy air and temperature hit us (through our sweaters) once we came outside. When we took the escalator down to the taxi boats, I saw the first glimpse of the water of Venice, the fog rising above it and the reflection of the lights in the dark water. I felt that this would be an experience to remember. We arrived at Lido just before midnight, and the image of Venice was still a dim memory for me. The picture of us three at the airport, sweating and tired after the journey, but the sparkle of excitement in our faces for the upcoming experience.

There were five of us on the boat. Our afternoon spritz at Bar 9 on Lido had been too much fun. It all started after our lecture, the weather was perfect, and the color of the sunset on our ride home reminded us of spritz. 2 hours later we were still chatting, laughing and singing at the bar, whilst we ordered pizza's and dived into the real Venetian experience. Even though we all came from different countries, and had such different backgrounds, our stories and

laughs brought us together. We all met at different times and different places, but every student I met had something unique, their own story and motives to experience a semester abroad. What brought us together was the English language, the ambition to experience life as a student abroad and the drive to explore as much as possible. It was dark already and the boat took us into the grand canal, all of us were sitting on the front deck, in complete silence. The grand canal kept surprising me with its beautiful architecture and amazing views. The contrast between the laughter at the bar, and the calmness of everyone admiring the city, sitting outside the boat in the breezy air, showed what Venice brought us; friends, compassion and the solidarity for the beautiful city. I took my camera out and told everyone to smile. The genuine smiles of the five of us on this picture is something which I will not forget.

The picture shows the reflection of the water, and me piggyback riding to keep my ankles dry. We were studying for the exams of our first term at the library at Campo Santa Margherita. The idea of all the amazing food places at campo created a distraction for studying, which brought us to the square. The decision of where we were going to eat always seemed to be a big struggle since all places were great. The Lebanese restaurant with the amazing couscous, or the Italian place with the giant pizza slices. We ended up squeezed on one bench, the three of us, in one hand the couscous and the other hand the pizza slice. The break took too long, and we really had to get back to studying. We thought at that moment that we were experienced Venetians, who seemed to know a lot of details about this mystical city. As the water slowly entered my shoe, I realized I was not the experienced citizen I thought I was. The Aqua Alta seemed to surprise me. Luckily I had the best friends, who were more experienced Venetians than I was, and took me for a piggyback ride with their gummy boots through the streets on our way back to the library, battling against the water. The moment was too typical to miss out on a picture, on which you can still see the wet part of my shoe.

15 students, laughing, cheering and sharing pizza for the last time. It only took us a few months to discover the best pasta to go, to discover the best spritz places, and to discover the most beautiful hidden spots in Venice. And there we are, at our last party together. We have created such a beautiful group of friends and I am so happy to be one of them. Our last picture together on this journey shows joy, love and a wonderful international group of friends. If I would compare myself, but also my friends to where we are now, compared to the beginning of the semester I can see that everyone has grown. I became more mature, comfortable and I gained a lot of confidence. You don't have to look out for friends, you find them on the first day, in the second week and even in the last month you will meet many more lovely people.

There I am, my last boat ride in Venice. I am so happy to see my family, friends, and boyfriend again, and I am so artful for all the new friends I gained. For the last time, I am enjoying the boat ride starting at Lido, past Ca Foscari, where so many beautiful memories started, and then as the boat heads towards the airport, I catch the last detailed glimpse of the beautiful architecture, as the sun rises over the city. Once I arrive at the airport, I ask the taxi driver to take one last picture of me.

Something out of place

Ivana Budniewski

Universidad del Litoral, Argentina

The writer finds that her habit of drinking 'mate' doesn't really fit into her new surroundings... until the day she leaves.

Some people habitually tend to reflect on the nature of everyday things and also make an effort to understand everything they are going through. To be honest, I was always a bit like that and during my mobility experience I was inspired to look very differently on my particular customs, my daily rituals... And all of a sudden, my own things started to get really weird! I have done a lot of growing, being away. And this is a story about a thing of mine not fitting in its new surroundings...

People from Argentina may be lacking money, possessions, certainties of all types... but there is one and only one thing that you just cannot miss. Even though you may be far from your country, your days cannot pass appropriately or end happily if during the daytime you don't have a mate. For those of you who don't know: "Mate is a traditional drink in some countries in South America, especially in Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, and Brazil. The drink, which contains mateine (an analogue of caffeine), is made by an infusion of dried leaves of yerba mate (*Ilex paraguariensis*). It is usually drunk with friends and served in a hollow calabash gourd with a "Bombilla", a special metallic drinking straw".¹ I can say that it is something that we drink as a tradition, but it does make sense to go beyond that: in truth, "mate" means much more to us.

¹ "Mate (drink)", *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://simple.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Mate_\(drink\)&oldid=6202907](https://simple.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Mate_(drink)&oldid=6202907) (accessed June 29, 2019).

Scientific research would not endorse what I'm about to say, but I'm pretty sure that "mate" has become almost a particular component in our blood. We grow up seeing how everybody shares mate with others. From when we were kids, we felt our mom and dad breathe smelling of mate. One might say that mate gives a particular scent to our lives, but that's not all. It also teaches us to depend on people: technically, you can drink mate on your own, but in fact none of us would never, ever choose to drink it alone if there's somebody else to share it with. It creates closeness and confidence between us, under the general rule (not imposed but spontaneously adopted) that everybody drinks from the same straw, one after the other without any cleaning in between.

I arrived in Venice one January evening with my luggage full of clothes, some essential books, Argentine souvenirs for those who would become a precious part of my experience (and by that time, still unknown to me), and of course, what I found absolutely necessary: my mate kit.

The idea to study abroad had been in my thoughts for a long time, and as I see things now, it happened in a way that any expectation I might have was far and happily exceeded by reality. I soon got used to the new surroundings, and I was totally enraptured by the beauty of that unique city, Venice. Its canals, the bridges and their reflections in the water, the deep silence of its nights (Oh, how I loved it!) and the sound of still boats and gondolas swaying in the canals at night, resting after their busy days. As time went on, I bonded with university life: the unforgettable lessons devoted to Aristotle I attended to, the discussions about Aristotle's conceptions of "good" and "happiness" with my admired professor, the first times spent with my Italian classmates trying (and failing) to follow their conversations, the way to and from my apartment and the many times I got lost in Venice's winding paths... It all seemed like a dream, almost perfect... except for the little misfortunes of my beloved mate.

First of all, I quickly realized that getting the necessary hot water in public places was not going to be easy. It would have to suffice having mate at home. In addition, getting yerba mate in Europe is possible but quite expensive. It was all resulting in an anti-mate cocktail of events. To make it worse, when I offered a mate for the first time to my Italian roomie or to my classmates, they looked at it making funny faces and politely rejected my offer, promising they would try it later... ("Maybe in another lifetime", I could read on their faces). It looked like mate was not as appealing as I had assumed, maybe because of the need to share a single "cannuccia" (straw).

I felt myself sentenced to have mate on my own (and exceptionally with some Argentinian friends I met there), surrounded by Italians watching me follow my mate ritual and showing no interest in participating on it. After a while, I started to understand that "mate"

was outside its natural habitat, like something out of place. (Maybe like Venice in this world!)

Nevertheless, many other ways to bind myself to the place and the people I met there came easily. In time, it resulted that mate itself was not so important after all. The closer I got to the end of my stay in Venice, the more my heart shifted to the things I would surely miss when I left.

On my last days there, having lost any hope a long time ago, the miracle happened: my roomies spontaneously asked me to share a mate with them. Even though I know they didn't really like it, this was a sign of confidence and trust that I treasure in my heart, along with many other experiences that made my mobility unique.

To become venicised in half a year

Victoria Buyanovskaya

Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia

The town is framed as a defamiliarized exhibit in the Biennale – but gradually the writer steps into the picture and becomes ‘venetianized’.

Just as Venice contrasts and defamiliarizes modern art (even if it is defamiliarized a priori) and that way emphasis on it, which results in the celebrated Biennale, it does so with everything. It is the “other space”, intense, disturbing, transforming, erasing the boundaries between the “inside” and “outside”. It cannot but challenge the way you live, think and see (the latter should not be dismissed: so, according to the poet Joseph Brodsky, Venice “enhances the eye’s power of resolution to the point of microscopic precision” (“Watermark: An Essay on Venice”)).

All this, however, more or less could happen to a tourist; to study in Venice for half a year is quite a different story: it means to build a relationship. Not only because you go the entire city over and create your own paths mirroring in the same canals, so that you get used to your portrait in such a frame – not actually your new portrait, rather the portrait of the *new you*. But because the city which is the protagonist of the story you live during this period becomes also the scenery: you do not only explore and enjoy Venice, you *do* something there, that way exploring and enjoying the city at the new level, moreover, becoming a part of it. Since Venice is not only the open-air museum, it is still a crossroads of the world and *lives* million lives every day and you can *live in* and *with* it (exactly as the effective slogan “Bella, ma ci vivrei” (“Beautiful, but I would live here”) affirms).

Ca' Foscari is a great place to get a true-Venetian-experience-seeker involved, and not only because it is hospitable and gives you the sense of belonging. Just as the network of Ca' Foscari buildings runs across the city, its most authentic parts (and the main building faces the city's principal artery), the University lives its very intense life in the heart of the modern – and always keeping its history alive – Venice. The courses I had remarkably combined the traditions and the new approaches: so, e.g., here, at Ca' Foscari, I had an opportunity to reread from a completely new perspective which transcends the framework of literary studies one of the texts I read 3 times before (*"Madame Bovary"* by Gustave Flaubert), which I considered to be hardly possible. Then, when you go to an exam (to be taken in a historical palazzo) and have a long substantial dialogue with a professor (which is also a quite new exam experience for a foreign student), it is so pleasant to understand that you speak the same language – and not only because you succeed to pass it in Italian, but because you have become "venicized" also in the way you think.

You understand how deep affected by this experience you are exactly when you discover all of a sudden that now you do differently what you love and have done for a long time before. This is not only the case of studying and professional knowledge – in course of my exchange period I also started to communicate differently, which was quite predictable, because I met people that come from other continents and very distant cultures, but through our common Venetian experience have become much closer to me, much familiar – "venicized" as well, so that we feel each other from afar. But less predictably I also started, for example, to cook and dress in a new way, and not only because Italian culture is so "advanced" in these spheres. Maybe I have grown up a little and become a little freer.

To leave Venice after half a year makes you feel traumatized. As the tourists hurry up to take more souvenirs with them, you strive for preserving as much as possible inside and you wish to "venicize" your life outside Venice. You are afraid of losing all this, but deep inside you know: you will never be the same. You will seek for beauty and new experiences, you will be braver and happier, you will speak Italian only given the chance, you will love the "new you". And you will breathe in a distant megapolis (as Moscow, for example, is) as if the sea – or the Venetian canals – were nearby.

For Venice

Dieu Anh Dang

Hanoi University, Vietnam

For the writer, Venice wasn't love at first sight. It was 'a little spark of joy in the beginning and then grew into fireworks'.

I was so eager to be in Venice this time last year. I knew that I would be here from when I first got into college, but the excitement didn't kick in until a week before the flight. I was so afraid that if I said too much to everyone or got excited too much, I would jinx it.

When I think of Venice, the word "fate" comes to my mind. I believe that destiny brought Venice and me together. Back in high school I once did a project about Venice and that was when the fascination began and I thought to myself that one day I would travel to this beautiful city. And now, thinking back I couldn't believe that I predicted my own future (in some ways).

To me, Venice wasn't love at first sight like the first time I met Paris, Venice was the love that like a little spark of joy in the beginning and then grew into fireworks as you got to explore its layers. The more I got to know this city, the more breathtaking it became. I consider myself the luckiest girl in the world to have had the opportunity of a lifetime, to have lived the dream of millions, to have strolled along the streets of the most romantic city in the world everyday for the last 10 months. It was unbelievable, even to this day.

The non-Venetian Venetian club was what my boyfriend and I used to joke of being. Why you ask? Because we felt the pride in our hearts every time someone mentioned Venice or praised the floating city for its beauty. Because after countless trips around Europe, we still got excited to go back home to Venice. And because we fell so deeply in love with Venice that it was heartbreaking to leave, even though it

was our home (in Vietnam) that we had to return to, as we had left huge parts of our souls there. Some could say that it's ridiculous for a foreigner to call Venice her home but I still consider Venice my second home, as I had come to learn almost every corner of this magnificent island.

Venice to me was also a journey of growth. To be honest, this last year was nothing but self-growth and happiness. It's like a chemical thing, when 2 matching substances meet, they just become a perfect combination. When a flower finally meets the right environment fit to grow, it blossoms. Being able to travel to many countries, to be involved in different cultures and lifestyles, to meet different people from different countries, my horizon was broadened. There were so many things I didn't know, things that were so fascinating and surprising that you could only learn when you actually witness them with your own eyes. Venice was also the reason why I had to start taking responsibility for my life, start taking care of myself, cook more for myself and have time to bake like I used to, and learned that I can cook Vietnamese food surprisingly well. I guess years of "not listening" to mom teaching me how to cook were not useless after all. 10 months away from my parents' arms made me believe in myself 10 times more. Finally, now I know that I have what it takes.

The night of shooting stars

Alexey Dodsworth

Universidade di Sao Paolo, Brazil

The night of shooting stars sparks a memory of the Italian ancestors in the writer's (South American) family.

The year is 2016, and the month is August when I arrive in Venice, thanks to the Erasmus Mundus Programme. Venice is a unique city indeed, but its sky is... I think "astonishing" may be a proper adjective. The fabric of sky is deep dark at Venetian nights. The constellations spark brighter here than in most Brazilian cities. So, while I am looking skywards, out of the blue my eyes widen with hundreds of stars falling down. A gondolier smiles at me and exclaims: "San Lorenzo!", and I haven't the slightest idea of what it means. Out of a sudden, my inner astronomer remembers: the meteor shower of Perseids has just begun. The falling lights don't seem to have a destiny. They are just shot, going from dark to dark, and while I witness them, my mind also digresses. To tell you what Venice means to me, I am constrained to travel like the shooting stars. I have to invite you to go back in time with me just a little bit.

Throughout my life, I have interacted with people from three different centuries. The common point among us is Venice. I know it may sound weird, even hard to believe, but this is a story about unchangeable things that connect us across the ages. This story starts with my Calabrian great grandfather that was born in 1882, and came to Brazil in 1898. He lived between Brazil and Italy until 1931, when his son - father of my mother - was born. They left Italy, but Italy never left them. All their buildings and farms in Brazil were baptized with Italian names like Loreto, and Lombardia. I remember my great grandfather talking about Venice: "jewel among the jewels".

Pasquale was his name.

Thanks to his incredible longevity, we witnessed our mutual existence for seven years. His presence is crystal clear in my mind. My first language was Portuguese with a pinch of Calabrian dialect. In the nineties, thanks to my great-aunt Gina Magnavita Galeffi, who was known as “the first lady of Italian language in Brazil”, I studied Italian properly. It was Pasquale’s dream that his descendants never lose contact with their roots. And so it was. I perfectly remember when, in 2003, my great – aunt Gina was graced with the honorable title of *Cavaliere dell’Ordine Della Stella d’Italia*. I was 32, but until that year I had never put my feet on Italian soil. “You must go to Italy”, she said me several times. “You have to study philosophy”, she insisted since I was a teenager. That advice came true in 2005, ironically the same year in which Gina died. Well, if you think she died before seeing me getting started with my academic studies and making my first travel to Italy, you would be correct.

Digressions finished, let’s talk about *La Serenissima*:

Since 2005, I visited Venice several times. The city called me like a favorite song that one repeats over and over. In 2016 I became a resident of Venice and, because of that, I found myself to be a part of the music. The difference between hearing a song and being a singer is the nearness that allows you to perceive details of the musical notes. I realized I was not more a hasty tourist taking furious pictures. Do not get me wrong, I do understand tourists: art is long, and life is short. But thanks to the opportunity open by Erasmus Mundus, I could lose myself in Venetian labyrinths with no concerns to leave on time. I could appreciate the subtleties of the buildings, admire the local accent, and discover real Venetian taste. It would be a one – year journey. But once I have dual citizenship, and I am fluent in Italian (thank you, aunt Gina!), my supervisor at Ca’ Foscari invited me to enroll in a dual-title PhD. The only possible answer was yes, and since then my sky is darker, cleaner and populated with stars. I’m becoming more and more a Calabrian-Brazilian-Venetian man, and I love it.

I told you this is a tale of three centuries. So, let’s return to my great grandfather’s life. He witnessed the First and the Second World War. He saw the rise of airplanes, the first step of humankind on the Moon. He saw our planet changing until almost everything became unrecognizable, sometimes for the best, sometimes for the worst. The world never remains the same. Even Venice has changed, and some transformations are welcome, but not all of them. Mass tourism is destroying the city, locals are giving up on living here, and predatory businesses are replacing small local stores. All these things I have witnessed since becoming a resident, but there is still hope. Every person that comes here is able to take responsibility for making

things better. To be a Venetian is not only a birth condition, it is also a lifestyle, which implores a defense of this beloved city. So, this is what I want you to learn:

Almost everything changes but the Venetian sky. It is the same since my great grandfather looked at it. This is a true that comforts me while I see my nephews and my niece growing up. Some of them were born in the 21th century. They have never been in Venice before. I want them to come here.

I want you to come here too, and witness the jewel among the jewels with your naked eyes, like I did. Like my great grandfather did. Please, don't come in a hurry. Venice is more than shots on exotic bridges, Venice is more than selfish selfies. Don't come in a hurry, and I assure you with sparks in my eyes:

You, who perhaps I'll never know, you'll look at the Venetian sky, and will see the shooting stars in the San Lorenzo's night.

My time in Venice

Kathryn Frels

San Diego State University, USA

This is a very focused account of the impact of new found friendships on the writer's life – and how she found 'the best part of her soul' in Venice.

There is a song, titled "Venice", written by Kris Allen, that I heard for the first time on a Vaporetto ride from my sweet room in Giudecca to San Marco Square. The line that stuck out to me most is in the bridge, and it says "how did she find the best part of her soul, in a place she had never been to before", and that to me exemplifies my experience in Venice. Prior to my arrival, I was incredibly lost and had very little idea of who I was as an individual. I was this hodge podge culmination of other people around me, taking pieces of them and trying to brush it off as myself. I had just gone through one of the most challenging years at University, both academically and personally, and I was longing for a change. I knew Venice would be good for me, but the extent to which it was I could not have dreamt up even if I tried.

It was a Tuesday, just after 12 pm, when an unknown Scottish boy asked to have lunch with me between our Social Media Marketing class and other afternoon classes. As we sat on the benches of the Ca' Foscari economics building, I didn't have a clue I was founding one of the most impactful and incredible friendships of my life. This friendship grew, rapidly, and he acted as the connection to the single-handed best group of people I have ever surrounded myself with. The eight of us quickly became inseparable, I mean we only had 3 months, so what real other option did we have than to hang on tight and depend on each other to get through everything life was about to throw our way in that period. The next months were filled with

Wednesday night dinners, singing throwback songs at the top of our lungs, trips to Campo to share a spritz, study days in Querini and more laughs and story exchanges than I can count. My friends know the good times we had together, they know the memories we have, but what they don't know, and what I am about to try to articulate, is the way in which they shaped me.

Each person in the group of people I knew had a massive impact on who I am today. These are the kind of people who listen to hear, who genuinely care, who lend a helping hand the second you need it. The type of people who believe in you when you don't believe in yourself, who make silence comfortable and conversation easy. People so amazing, self-assured and wonderful that you wonder how you got lucky enough to be in a room with them, much less be loved by them. I am who I am in large part due to the love they poured into me at that time.

The chaos of Maz, the heart of Clemmie, the kindness of Tash, the calamity of Jessie, the sass of Joe, the reassurance of Connor and the confidence of Polly. They are people of novels, and the way I came home, a different more improved version of myself, I accredited fully to them.

My time in Venice was beautiful and wonderful. I will never forget the cobblestone streets, the daily walks to University through the canals, the one-euro café Vero cappuccinos on campus, the travels I took to and from Marco Polo and Venezia Santa Lucia, or the sunsets I watched from Giardini. More than anything though, I will never forget my friends. Maybe I just got lucky, but in the deepest part of me, I believe Venice is magical. It whisks you away from reality just long enough to let you step back and take a look at not only who you are, but who you want to be. I am proud of who I am, and I know that is because of my time in Venice and the people I was so fortunate to meet. I found the best part of my soul there, and for that I will forever be grateful.

Stand on the corner of the dream and fight

Marah Hethnawi

An-najah National University, Palestine

For the writer, a Palestinian who has left her country for the first time, it feels as if she is “a bird flying over many countries without barriers after using to face checkpoints between each city”.

It was raining and fog began to spread, people were running away from the rain. Only one person preferred drowning in the sea, it was me, and was the first time I saw a sea in my life. Words did not help me then to express my feelings; just tears made me wet and sank me instead of the rain and sea!

It was the first time I traveled outside the State of Palestine, the first time I feel that I am a bird flying over many countries without barriers after using to face checkpoints between each city in my country. The first time one dream of my childhood became true, the first time being in the city of my dreams “Venice”.

I started my stay in Mestre before moving to Castello in Venice, where I preferred to buy the city map and walk on foot. A city like this should lead you to discover it, not to dictate where to go. My tour began from 8 am to 10 pm, during which I asked more than thirty people about my location after losing. I do not forget the smiles on their faces and their kindness during the answer, a few of them could not guide me because of their lack of proficiency in English, which prompted me to speed up to attend an Italian language course offered by the university, which I began to learn the basics before coming here, and that made me found out that why our Arabic word for pizza doesn't different from Italian or English. This is due to the nature

of the word “character” in Italian, which is pronounced as preceded by the letter T.

In Venice there is no ways for cars or bicycles because of the narrow streets and many bridges existence. This is what surprised me at first. If you want to move, either take the boat or walk on your feet. I remember when we came to the city we had difficulty to carry our luggage, but the help of city people whom we do not know made the issue easier. And I’m not the only one who was surprised, when I told my friends that I was going to my University “Ca Foscari University” on the boat they were also surprised, as well as the nature of group-oriented courses and student focusing group.

In the period of my stay, I knew why do we as an Arabs call the man who is in multi-relationship with women the nickname “Casanova”, the nickname was the name of an Italian man named Giacomo Casanova which has more than 500 relationships with women. I also went to the places where the most famous Arab singer Kathem AL-saher filmed their many songs in Venice and Rome. I no longer envy the girl who was with him anymore!

One of the greatest values I have learned is the value of respect the difference. My university allowed me to make many friendships with students from different countries and cultures. The opportunity to meet with them allowed me to correct their mistaken ideas and beliefs about my environment in which I grew up, and also allowed me to get to know the nature of their lives in their countries. We exchanged the most famous foods in each country through a group breakfast organized by the Italian language course. We went out together several times to drink the cappuccino, which was my favorite drink there.

I also had the opportunity to visit several European countries, cities and other Italian villages. I was introduced to an annual event in Italy called Carnival. It was as if I was living in a movie hall where most of the inhabitants wore masks and traditional costumes. The gathering was then in the square of the most dazzling churches of San Marco Square, where I went once a week to meditate on its fascinating details from afar. It was one of the most psychologically relaxing scenes.

On the last day of my stay, I recalled my memories of all the time I spent there, about the taste of pizza, lasagna and Italian pasta, the older women who took care of themselves as if they were young, the grandchildren eyes when they met their grandparents every weekend, even the dogs I was suffering from Phobia of them until they became friends of me, about times that I have been lost in this city, otherwise I would not have kept the city on the back of the unseen.

Two years since my return from Venice, I taught my family and friends about the most common Italian words that we using them when we talk to each other. Six months was enough to offer this city as the best tourist destination when someone asked for my advice to

place travel to. Six months was enough for me to come back to my country and have a passion for work and save money to visit it again. That was my wish when I threw the piece of cash in the fountain of Rome "Fontana di Trevi".

The first time I saw the announcement of the scholarship, I applied and did not receive a response, I did not despair and filled the application another time in the following semester, and it was accepted! After that we started in Visa procedures, unfortunately it was rejected and there was no time to apply for it again, however I applied my paper again to the embassy to issue the visa only one day before departure.

It was challenging the political and social conditions and society that prevented girls from traveling alone abroad. A visit to Venice taught me not to stop chasing my dreams and sticking to them.

I no longer call it Venezia; I call it my city, my passion and my renewed dream.

180 days in the city of love

Nanh Hoang

Hanoi University, Vietnam

The writer discovers love with a co-national in the city of love.

Have you ever thought about a love with a city? It is my love with Venice. Someone once said, loving somewhere is not because it has anything, but it is where there is someone. I met and loved Venice because Venice had 'him'.

Having chance to reach Venice through the Erasmus program, I could not help being happy and jumping up when I knew I was coming to Europe. Because as a dream I have never dared to dream now is becoming a reality, for a girl born and raised in a developing country like Vietnam. Preparing everything from the language to survival skills in a new country, I'm ready to hit the road.

Coming to Venice with my Vietnamese friends, I live in that small Vietnamese community. Then as a fate, I met 'him' – a Vietnamese international student in Venice. As friends, sharing ups and downs in daily life of living far from home, I quickly became sympathetic and wanted to get to know this person. And everything would have nothing to say if he was not the one who made me love Venice more than all the places I had arrived.

As everyone knows, Venice is a small island with no transportation allowed, only one way is to go with your own feet. Unfortunately, I am a person who has no sense of direction but very risky in trying new things. You can imagine that I went around Venice on the first day all alone and just finding my way back to the dormitory with Google Map when I found myself unable to lift my legs anymore. But do you know the compensation? As a gift from God, 'he' was a tour guide here for over a year. On the days of acquaintance, he took me around

every small alleys of Venice, showed me everything from culture, architecture to history and people here that made me admire Venice and also 'him' immensely. I don't know if girls out there are like me, but I truly appreciate educated and knowledgeable men. In Vietnam we have the phrase 'Talented boys, beautiful girls' which seems to have become the standard to start relationships in our awareness. So now you know a part of my reason...

Not long after the days, I felt like a daily person leading the way in those small corners actually found the way to my heart. We went on like that almost every day, discovering all the Pizzeria and Spaghetti bars, Cafeteria in Venice. And this would be the turning point, one afternoon, after leaving the classroom at Ca' Foscari Università - San Giobbe, a daily appointment, a new eatery as usual with delicious seafood Risotto, I was not preparing, he suddenly held my hand for the first time. Oh, beside the river and the bridges, on the spur of the moment I found everything was exactly perfect, as all things in Venice are only for us, I still can't forget the moment that I realized what people have told me is absolutely not wrong... It is said that: "Venice is a love city located in the country of love". And then I felt that miracle in this small island. Even though I did not know what was the exact moment we fell in love with each other, but that is the one I deeply love the place named Venice.

Venice is small though, there are a huge number of bridges. The most wonderful thing is that each bridge was once a promise of love spoken. I will never forget once on that Academia bridge, the bright, full moon, the lovely scenery with the Grand Canal flowing slowly and the flow of people gently passing by as if they were not tending to miss such a lyrical scene. We stood on the bridge, looking far away at the other end of the wave, he whispered to me: "It's great because we're here, right now and together..."

Later, I realize: "Cherish all the moments in that present because the future is so difficult to guess"... 6 months is not a long period, but it gave me the best lesson of "loving a city".

Ca' Foscari as a hidden treasure

Islam Ismael

An-najah National University, Palestine

A succinct account of what it means to be a Palestinian on mobility at Ca' Foscari; and what he can garner from the experience, to take back to his country.

The sun was shining birds were chirping when I woke up in the morning to find myself accepted to do an exchange semester during my master at Ca' Foscari University in Italy.

I live in a small and beautiful country called Palestine. I have had many difficulties and it was like an adventure to come from where I live to Italy. My adventures started in obtaining my visa since the Italian Embassy is located in Jerusalem and I do not have the necessary permission to travel from the Palestine (West Bank) to Israel. Moreover, we Palestinians don't have airport, so we have to travel to Jordan. To travel from Palestine to Jordan, we have to cross the Palestinian boarder, then the Israeli borders and finally the Jordanian. From there, I flew to France and then to Italy. My journey was long, arduous, and full of troubles, thus I forgot all these in the first moment I landed and saw the beauty of Venice!

I created many friends at the University of Ca' Foscari and participated in the events that are organized by the university for international students. I learned a lot about Italian cultures, customs and the nature of their lives. It was my ambition to use every minute in this amazing country, I got a degree in Italian language, and became aware of many things I did not understand in the past. More importantly, my future decisions are clearer now after I engulfed myself with people from all over the world at Ca' Foscari!

I want to talk about the educational system too. The university does not rely on the traditional system in their learning styles, it has

e-learning, libraries, theaters, halls for event and so many! My professor of the course organized several workshops with poets from around the world to discuss the books that have been issued recently.

I decided to hold a colloquium at my university in Palestine to talk about my scholarship to Ca' Foscari as it was my starting point to this world. Henceforth, a number of local radios and TVs conducted interviews with me to talk about student exchange and its importance in building the character of the student. Last but not least, I now become a reference for students who want to study in Italy.

To recapitulate short story: "To build a city where it is impossible to build a city is madness in itself, but to build there one of the most elegant and grandest of cities is the madness of genius".

Looking for a home

Grigoria Lazarou

University of Cyprus, Republic of Cyprus

The writer manages to solve a housing problem thanks to the help of an Italian buddy.

To be honest, studying abroad wasn't something new to me. I have taken summer courses in Russia before, and have done another Erasmus in Spain some years ago. When I got the news about being accepted to Ca' Foscari, I was truly pumped up and couldn't wait! I knew the first days were going to be rough until I find a home for my 5 months Venice experience, but since I had done this before, I was optimistic and confident.

I arrived in Venice by the end of January, right before the beginning of Carnival. At first, I had booked a hostel in Marghera until I found a place to stay. Every day, I would write emails to sites about housing, make phone calls, contact people on Facebook, anything to get in touch with someone providing me with a place to stay. Unfortunately, I didn't speak Italian so communication with locals was a bit challenging. Because I could speak Spanish, I would understand more or less what people were saying, though I couldn't respond. I had to learn Italian. So, in-between looking for a place, I started using the language learning platform provided by Erasmus, as a starting point to learn Italian.

The days were passing by, the carnival had started, and yet I had no place to settle, to unpack my suitcases, to cook, to study, to start enjoying my Erasmus experience in this marvelous city. Tourists were coming and going at the hostel and I was still there meeting and greeting them and sharing food and stories. My stay at the hostel was almost completed, and I started getting disappointed. When I talked with my hosts about extending my stay, they offered to help me in *my quest of home*.

Another week flew and a man appeared at the hostel, but this time he wasn't a tourist, but a local. My hosts have contacted some people and found me a place to stay! I was so relieved that I immediately said "yes, let's go check that place!". The house was okay, with a flexible contract, in case I found something better, since it was quite far from Venice. At first, I thought "This is it! This will be my home until the end of my *Venice experience*". I couldn't have been more wrong...Unfortunately, things didn't work out with the landlord. I was given a different room from the one we initially agreed upon hence a different price, the bus for Venice would come every 30 mins and took 20 mins until Venice, I wasn't allowed to have guests for the evening and I had to give in my keys if I was going away for the weekend. All in all, I wasn't happy there.

Luckily, my friends came to the rescue! I had been living in Venice for just a month, but I managed to befriend some really awesome people. At the Welcome party of Ca' Foscari I had met a lot of people, mostly mobility students, but also two Italians who were our buddies, in charge of showing us around that day. I remember standing awkwardly in the grand hall trying to spot someone from my field of studies, to seize people, to see in which group of people I could squeeze in and fit in, when a girl approached me. We started getting to know each other, eating and drinking, until she told me she had to go for a minute. When she came up, she showed up with a bunch of other people, including another Ca' Foscari buddy, a guy this time. We all introduced ourselves and left altogether to continue our night elsewhere. That night I met people from Japan, Russia, Georgia, Lithuania and of course Italy. I consider that night as an extremely successful night. Not only did I meet delightful people with whom I had tons of fun, but I also met two great friends.

After talking out my housing conditions with my new friends - the boy and girl student buddies -, I asked for their assistance in finding a new home and they most willingly accepted to do so, as much as they could. I started looking at advertisements again and they would help me with the language. By the end of February, I had found a suitable place, but it was only available for April-June. Despite that, we decided to go for it and my friend called the landlord and fixed me up with that place! However, March was still a question mark. Until my friend suggested staying with her! I have never felt so happy in my life! I had found a (two to be exact) place to stay and the most selfless person I could've asked for!

Long story short, I ended up having four homes (in total) in Venice. I spent most of my afternoons and nights with those two friends who then introduced me to their other friends and we would all spend time together, explore Venice, organize dinner parties, attend theatrical plays and concertos, celebrate birthdays and graduations together and they would teach me Italian (with a book this time) and even invite me to their hometowns to show me around!

I left Venice at the beginning of July, which meant being homeless again. But this time I looked no further. I stayed at the hostel where everything began. It felt right. I wanted to thank them again for all their help. For all those things I gained from the people I met in Italy. In the three different houses I stayed I had eight different roommates in total, all of which were extremely friendly and easy-going. At the hostel - my fourth home -, I cannot recall the number of roommates I had, but I can name the countries they came from; Argentina, Canada, France, Germany, India, Italy, Singapore, Spain, UK and USA.

All in all, I feel I left Venice full and incomplete. The whole experience is immeasurable. Though, I'd like to point out what mattered most to me. I learned Italian, ate homemade pasta, experienced Venice and Italian culture, and visited other cities all guided by the friends I made there. The moments I took home with me are so fulfilling, yet a part of me will always stay at *my home* in Venice; at the people who made any place in Venice seem like a home.

University life in the art of Venice

Kyejin Lee

Seoul National University, South Korea

This account offers some interesting insights into the experience of an Asian student enrolled in a history of art programme, rich with the symbols of Catholicism.

Every 12 minute the vaporetto Line 2 comes and goes on Giudecca island. "01, 13, 25, 37, 49..." are the minutes the vaporetto that connects Giudecca to main island arrives. Secluded from the touristic area of Venice, Giudecca island is where the dormitory was located. It takes only 8 minutes by boat to go to the main island from where I lived. Everyday taking on and off the boat, I not only felt like I was a traveler but also a real Venetian. From the moment I arrived, I could not help myself falling in love with Venice. Thanks to this amazing opportunity to study in Venice, I have enjoyed and learned life to the fullest.

Ca' Foscari University was located at the center of Venice and lots of souvenir shops were all around the university. Before coming to Venice, I enrolled 5 classes in Ca' Foscari University. Here are the classes I took: History of Korean Art, History of the Arts of Venice and the Veneto, Contemporary History of Venice, History of Italian Culture and Literature, and Italian for Foreigners Level A2.

History of Korean Art class gave me an unforgettable, precious experience. Professor Scerbo who received a master's degree in my home university welcomed me from the start of the class and taught history of Korean art from the prehistoric area to Joseon period. Among the Italian students in the class, I was the only Korean as well as Asian student. Since everyone (except me) preferred Italian, the whole class was taught in Italian. In addition, the contents

and the teaching methods were so different from Korea that it was hard to follow. To be more specific, from the Italian's point of view, the sculpture of Buddha in the temple was described in comparison with the Catholic icons in the church. These kinds of approach and perception were new to me since Catholic symbols were harder for me to understand.

While the history of Korean art class helped me deepen my understanding of my major, the history of the arts of Venice and Venice taught me new things. Before this class, I could not truly recognize the beautiful artworks of Venice. Only after the class, I began to appreciate the historic architectures and paintings all around the city. Indeed, Venice was full of art: San Giorgio Maggiore, Basilica San Marco, Ducal Palace, Santa Maria della Salute, and etc. Every weekend I have visited more than 10 churches by using the Chorus Card which was only 8 euros for students. (Yes, you have to pay in order to get inside the church in Venice!) In front of the churches, I draw and studied the characteristics of each monument that I have learned during the class and it was an effective way to appreciate arts in Venice.

If a student wants to understand a piece of art, it would be advisable to study the culture and history that surrounds it. In that sense, I enrolled in the History of Italian Culture and Literature class and Contemporary History of Venice class which opened my eyes on something I had never known. For many tourists, Venice is just an attractive, romantic city. But, in reality, Venice itself has a lot of political and environmental problems. For example, the Porto Marghera which is an industrial zone of Venice and massive cruises that cross Grand Canal cause serious environmental problem around Venice. All these kinds of information were new to me. On the surface, Venice looks perfect. But inside, Venice is suffering greatly and this became one of issues in Venice Architectural Biennale 2016. Only after learning the history of culture in Venice, I was able to encounter the real Venice.

To be honest, I learned so many things from the exchange period that I need hundreds of pages to describe all in detail. But here I will mention two things that were the most memorable. First one starts with friends I have met during the exchange period. Italian friends all did cheek-to-cheek kiss greeting and did not bow when greeting older people. In South Korea, people should bow to greet older people. Confused but determined, at least while in Venice, I tried to learn and follow their cultural system. However, from paying for the '*coperto*(tipping)' in the restaurant to wearing shoes inside the house, it was hard for me to get used to the new environment. But, in the end, I have become accustomed to the new culture and enjoyed the experience.

Second thing I learned is the power of art. In Venice, there is a famous art museum, Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia. With the stu-

dent card, I could enter the museum without any fee. For me, it was a heaven. Located only ten minutes away from the dormitory, the museum has a huge collection of Venetian art. Copying the masterpieces of Giorgione, Gentile Bellini, Giovanni Bellini, and etc., I not only studied their techniques, compositions, and style, but also understood the history of Venetian art which I learned during classes in Ca' Foscari University. It was a real education. I felt thankful for this invaluable experience.

My small advice for the future exchange student fellows is to make lots of friends in dormitory, classes, and through extracurricular activities. If I have visited Venice for the purpose of travelling, it would have been hard to become friends with Italian or international students. My exchange period gave me a chance to meet a lot of international friends whom I still keep in touch with. Studying one's major or enjoying local food is equally important but the most important thing is to experience various cultures through friends. Friends made my life in Venice much more memorable. Do not hesitate to talk to new people in new environment. I highly recommend future exchange students to get involved in different society and spend time together with new friends. Thanks so much.

Venezia Memories

Weiyang Li

Renmin University, China

The writer seizes her chance to go to Venice, because she understands that it is about to sink and disappear, and “if I didn’t go I might regret for my whole life”.

When I was told that I had a chance to study abroad for a semester, I was torn between Venice and Paris. For every young lady, Paris is the word for fashion, beauty and romance. Ernest Hemingway once wrote, “If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast”. But on the other hand, Venice has fatal attraction on me. I learned Venice from a very old Shakespeare play, *The Merchant of Venice* (2004), when I was a primary school student. It was so surprising to a mainland girl like me that people actually live on the water. Few years later, I read news about the risen sea level of Venice. It’s said that someday Venice would sink and disappear. If I didn’t go, I might regret for my whole life. Besides, there are so many splendid architectures, paintings and sculptures in Venice, I even can’t help imagining taking a gondola to classes every day. At last I chose Venice with feverish anticipation.

My dormitory was in Sam Toma area, which locates at a serene square but close to the center streets. Contrary to my expect, I didn’t need to go to school by boat every day. Instead, walking can satisfy almost all my daily travel needs. Deep, damp and tortuous alleys, colorful houses, balcony with beautiful flowers, small bars full of laughter, sweet bakery and espresso smell, old vintage stores, I can still remember every detail of my walking. One little careless turn-around might result in few hours detours. I was lonely and misera-

ble for the first few days, as I spoke very poor Italiano, my buddy was not in Italy, Google Maps sometimes didn't work and I had no friend here. But Lucky enough, a beautiful angel came to me.

That was my first class. I got lost in the deep alleys again. When I pushed the front door, there was no seat left. To stand for two hours or to sit on the floor? I hesitated and was so awkward that I even wanted to drop the class. At that moment, a girl with brown hair and brown eyes waved her hand to me and mouthed that there are some chairs behind me. That's how I met Ledia. After class, I thanked her so many times. She laughed: "Are you Chinese girls always so polite?" And then she asked me to study together. At first, we only talked about homework and went to library to study, then somehow we started to go to restaurants and bars, to traveling to Murano Island and Firenze, to kayaking, and to share our daily life.

Life brightened a lot after I made more friends from all over the world. Julia from German often studied with me and we discussed math problems together, Ryoko from Japan taught me how to make delicious pasta and took me to almost every desert shop in Venice, Marco from Italy travelled with us, and taught me how to compliment ladies in Italiano, which helped me get many discounts. We have different culture background and characteristics, but Venice and Ca' Foscari brought us together so that we had a chance to know each other and to break our stereotypes, which is almost impossible if we stayed in our own country and just watched TV.

After I came back to China, my friends kept asking me how does Venice look like. It is a very difficult question for me. Because Venice, now I call it Venezia, is not just a sightseeing place, or a hearsay island. Instead, it is where I saw the art and culture history in flesh, where I broke through my prejudices and made friends with people from so many different backgrounds. I am looking forward to coming back to Venezia and catching up with my old friends.

Time is still in Venice

Xiaomeng Liu

Nanjing University, China

This is a detailed account of the courses the writer attended, and the story of her gradual assimilation to a different temporal dimension.

Every time when I recalled the time of exchange in Venice, I only can sigh how time flies. From January to the end of spring semester, I had lived in Venice for four months, and the most obvious acquisition of this exchange was to learn how to deal with unfamiliar environment and various emergencies. In addition, I was also deeply touched by special life style in Venice and abundant art in Italy.

The traffic in Venice is probably the most special one. Venice is a city without cars and bicycles and traveling in Venice is all about boating and walking. No need worry about it, however, the main island of Venice is a small but fascinating island. It is very fun to walk through every lane on foot. Back the memory of it, I still missed these days when I listened to music, chatted with friends I met or just watched the sea surge on the rickety boat. It seemed that time had slowed down. The exchange semester is just like a simulation of life of studying abroad, in an environment where language is not familiar, with less friend, having more time to live alone. At first, it will be very lonely and anxious, but gradually in this completely strange environment, I learned how to arrange my time reasonably, forcing out of the comfort circle to communicate with international students from all over the world. At the same time, I also sorted out my thoughts while I was thinking alone, and learned to get along with myself, to face my anxiety, to plan for my future.

Regarding to the curriculum in Venice, Ca' Foscari University's electives are very free and the curriculum is various. In addition to

the excellent courses in anthropology, economics, eastern languages, and Eastern Asian culture, the university also offers special international student courses named SIE, which is taught in English and the content of these courses mainly about the culture, history and art of Italy and Venice. Italy is the place where the Renaissance began, so there are various buildings, sculptures and oil paintings with historical and artistic value. Learning these courses can also make you more understandable about Venice and the artistic atmosphere in Italy. In this semester, I chose three courses, "Contemporary History of Venice", "History of the Arts of Venice and the Veneto", "Italy Culture and Made in Italy". I also took part in several courses called "Professional English" in the Economics Faculty as an auditor. "Contemporary History of Venice" mainly talked about the history of Venice, through this course, finding that the churches, sculptures, and bridges which I used to pass every day have been hundreds of years old. I also understood more about Venice. Due to the potential crisis caused by the expansion of tourism, the interesting part of this course is that I gradually got used to observing the signs and architectures on the side of road, linking with the history of it learned in lessons, imagining the story that happened here in the nineteenth century. The course "History of the Arts of Venice and the Veneto" is more academic. Through the explanations by the professor in classes, I have a general understanding of European architecture, and I can distinguish whether a church is Roman, Gothic or Baroque architecture. I could also learn the works of many famous Italian artists, such as Michelangelo's *Genesis* and *David*, Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* and *Annunciation*, Antonio Canova's *The Graces*. And also in the process of constantly appreciating and discriminating large number of works of art, actually, I have actually felt the subversive influence of the Renaissance on Italian creation. In the past, these art works were only in the textbook, but nowadays, which presenting just before my eyes in the most vivid forms. The content of "Italy Culture and Made in Italy" focused on the development of Italian art design and industry during the period when the fascist government took power to the revival of Italy after World War II. The teacher is a very humorous Italian woman who had lived in the United States for five years. Her English is very fluent, and for students who don't understand Italian, this class doesn't listen so hard. "Professional English" I only went to several classes. The teacher is a super-humor and gentle British woman. She would teach many useful writing technical in document, such as CV, PS, and English interview skills etc. The level of it is also gradual and moderate. You will acquire the knowledge, at the same time, you will not feel that the process is very difficult or boring. All of the SIE classes I choose arranged trips or tours, followed by Italian teachers, and I have traveled to every corner of Venice with historical and artistic atmosphere. The assessment methods

of these three courses are using presentation and final oral test or essay. These courses will be very gainful. At the end of course, you will be surprised that your own knowledge about art and history increases gradually.

Italy is the cradle of the Renaissance, a country full of history and art, and Venice is a typical Italian city full of artistic atmosphere. When the masterpieces of Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael and Botticelli were in front of me, even if I am a person who is insensitive to art and paintings, I can feel the vitality that the Renaissance brought to these artists again. I also traveled to many other European countries in my spare time, and Rubens, Rembrandt, Goya, these names I saw in my book when I was a child closed to me. Though I have never learned art, I will be shocked by French Romanticism and Spanish abstraction. Venice is an extremely beautiful city, with long historical churches, Renaissance oil paintings. Everyday when sunset shines on the edge of the Venetian lagoon, the water of the canal beats the river bank slowly. People will drink and chat on the ground, accompanied by the songs of unknown source. The sunshine on their faces, filled with coziness. The Italians are warm and relaxed and their daily life rhythm is slow and leisure. In this environment, I have become more and more peaceful. Thanks to this opportunity, let me experience another culture totally and I can feel that time is still in Venice.

My memories

Tetiana Lobachova

Odessa I.I. Mechnikov National University, Ukraine

The writer reflects on the importance of the Erasmus programme.

My name is Tetiana Lobachova. I finished the fourth course Faculty of History and Philosophy of the Odessa I. I. Mechnikov National University.

I took part in the Erasmus + program after the second course from 07/09/2017 to 04/02/2018. It was a magical period in my life.

The Erasmus + exchange program gives a chance for a large number of students to compare different education systems in different countries. The opportunity for travelling and the exchange of experiences are contributing to the integration of the student into a more international environment.

I have always loved history. Italy has concentrated in itself all my favorite periods of history, from antiquity to modern times. The topic that I was studying in Italy was "Plague in Italy, 16th - 17th centuries: doctors, quarantine and medical events, social context". Because of my thirst for knowledge and this topic, I was allowed to participate in the exchange program. The presence of a wide archival material on my topic prepared me for high-quality thesis work. The admission to the libraries, which I received as a student at the University of Ca' Foscari, gave a fundamental literary base and introduced me to the work of European libraries in general.

The subjects I chose to study (for example, Codicology) were unique because in my native university there are no such subjects. With great pleasure, I went to classes, attended excursions and, above all, I was inspired by Venice.

I want to express a special thanks to the receiving party for the courses offered to international students. The courses provided an opportunity to dive deep into the Italian culture and get to know other foreign students. The organization of extracurricular activities for foreign students helped to strengthen international contacts.

In addition to studying, I traveled a lot in Italy. Rome, Verona, Milan, Bologna and this is not even the whole list of cities that I visited. Thanks to the student ID card, all travels were more comfortable. Italians amazed me with their kindness and generosity. The culture of Italy, and especially its cuisine, left pleasant memories. A visit to the Venice Carnival, which attracts thousands and thousands of people, was a pleasant addition to my stay in Italy.

The exchange program gave me a lot of new friends. Ca' Foscari University is the place to which you want to return. Still to this day, I remember every day spent in sunny Venice. All staff and students were responsive and helped if necessary.

Freedom of choice of subjects, attendance of lectures, evaluation of the work done – all this struck me as a foreign student.

When I returned to Ukraine, I realized that we need to improve the internal exchange system and improve the acceptance of foreign students. Progressively moving forward, the main idea that needs to be carried on to the young generation. Ca' Foscari University is an example of multicultural interaction to which it aspires.

I am grateful to the Erasmus + program and the Faculty of History and Philosophy of the Odessa I. I. Mechnikov National University, for the opportunity to visit some of the most beautiful universities in Italy, Ca' Foscari University.

Kindness, respect and responsibility

Phuong Linh Pham
Hanoi University, Vietnam

The writer is struck by the attention to the disabled in public transport and by the public at large.

I am an exchange student for one year in Venice; therefore, I have the beautiful long time to get the wonderful experiences in the European air, especially life and education in this beautiful city.

My major I studied in Ca' Foscari University is economics but what I gain more is not only the knowledge of my major but also the love of human beings, the kindness of people, and the infinitive responsibility of them.

The first lesson is love of human beings. What I want to share is not the love of couples or romantic Italian love; I just want to convey my meaningless experience I have witnessed in Venice: the love of people to the disabled. I feel that they are honor, caring to disabled people surrounding them. Even in bus, tram and water bus, they have big space for wheelchairs; it is so strange for me because in my country, the public transportation do not have this. Every time I go to school, I always go through the Santa Lucia - the main railway station in Venice, so I have seen a lot of disable people traveled with their family by trains, and when trains stop, staffs of railways support and give their hand to take them down from trains, and they have tools to lift the wheelchairs. About train, I do not remember that Vietnam has this or not but Venice in short and European in general, they did well, public transportation is great. It allows the disabled to move like normal ones, travel or do something they like by

themselves. This make I admire Venice, contrasting to my country, disabled people have some limitations to hang out, go outside, travel and so on. Moreover, I feel that the behaviors of people to the disabled are very wonderful with no line and discrimination in Venice. Obviously, today, people are open-minded and caring to social problem and human with human but there seem to have some avoidance, somewhere in the world, the disabled are avoided to get in touch without discrimination.

Secondly, I would like to point out the kindness. Some people told to me that when Asian people go to European country, some people are not treated well because we are different from them. However, I did not see any troubles or disappointing about European, even I also spent my free time travelling to 13 countries in Europe when studying at Ca' Foscari. They are so kind, nice and super friendly. I feel that they truly like me, and each country I visited, I have memorable experiences. One story about kindness I want to share is when I wore backpack and went to school by tram. This tram was very crowd and I felt something happened to me. One couple was gazing at me that freak me out. In my head, I tried to find the reason why they looked fixedly at me: "Did I see or flirt her boyfriend?" However, I detected that both of them were trying to talk to me but I did not understand Italian well. They pointed the guy standing near me. Therefore I knew, the man next to me was trying to rob something on my backpack. Unfortunately, my backpack is thief avoidance so it is difficult to open its zipper. Then I tried to turn back and smiled to convey to them "I knew I am alright, so do not worry" and acted normally in order to prevent the bad guy from doing harm to me if i know. When the tram stopped at the last stop, he stuck to me that I felt a bit of heavy on my back. I also saw that a couple was trying to reach to me with the face of worrying and would have been ready to hit the bad guys if they had robbed anything. After all, I was safe, the bag was not open. They told me that the guy tried to steal so I should be careful with backpack. I am greatly indebted to them for their kindness. Because I have read some newspapers that in Italy, when people see the robbery, they will ignore it in order to avoid something bad to them onwards.

Finally, from depth of my heart, I want to give the colorful and beautiful words to thank to the infinitive responsibility of Ca' Foscari University, especially welcome unit. Every time when I deal with some troubles, I always find help from Welcome unit of university by going directly to main buiding or sending emails and the ways they reply and answer my problems make me feel satisfied and superb. Personally, I always require perfection and carefulness; thus ranking the student services of welcome unit and university 5 stars - definitely satisfied demonstrates that they are wonderful. Besides, professors of the university are also responsible, caring students very

much. I love Venice not only its beauty but also the admirable education and service of Ca'foscari university. I do not know how many university has the excellent performance in the world, maybe a lot or be better than Ca' Foscari but I feel I am very lucky to study one year for exchange program so as to understand how European education is brilliant.

To sum up, I come back my country with the best experiences in Venice and bring along three valuable lessons which affect positive to my life now and then. My maturity in Venice is behaving how to be kind, be respected and be responsible. I will try to back Venice as soon as possible, come back Ca' Foscari university for Master program to become the full time student, not just exchanged student.

How to get inside the Arsenale

Mykhailo Samofatov

Odessa National University, Ukraine

The writer manages to visit the Arsenal by subterfuge – and lives to tell the tale.

It's 7th of October, and I am standing near the vaporetto stop "Arsenale". It's just 9 a.m., and today is Sunday – so normal people (like other Erasmus students from my country, which I've tried to convince to go with me) still lying at the bed. But I'm a historian, so my desire to explore the Venice is stronger than laziness.

I'm living in Venice for just one month but have already visited major part of local historical places. But Arsenale, for sure, occupies a special place in my mind. I came from the port city, so I know, how many sea could mean for the people. And Arsenale embodies in himself this link between people and sea, and moreover – Arsenale is the symbol of the power of Venetian republic, which dominated across the Mediterranean over the centuries. It's not difficult to imagine how strongly I want to get there.

Usually, Arsenale is closed for tourists. Fortunately, I didn't know earlier and realised it only on the place, when I tried to search the information how to get inside. "Alright" – I told to myself a little bit with disappointment – "but I can visit museum of navy, which is located very close. Let's wait 10 o'clock, when it will open". Anyway, I have a possibility to make the photo of the entrance to the Arsenale, especially of big blue clock, which attracted me. And then I go to the bench just to wait for 10 o'clock.

In a quarter to ten I notice a group of sailors (some are standing with the family) in front of Arsenale. They're listening an officer, who is telling something to them. As I am the curious person, I'm going to listen the officer as well (who can prohibit it?). The surprising fact is

that I understand quite big part of information – despite I study Italian for very short time. The officer speaks very clearly, without complicated words – so I understand him better than many guides who speaks in my native language. For example, right now the officer is speaking about Dante, who was inspired by Arsenale when he was writing about the hell in the “Divine comedy”.

Big clock on the wall shows 10, and the group begin to enter inside the Arsenal, past the guard. A second of doubts – and I go with them. From this moment I feel myself like a spy, but there’s no way back for me. So I continue to listen the excursion. I learn about the greatest Venetian doges, who were strongly connected with the development of Arsenale. Learn about the Napoleon, who burned the biggest ship of Venice on the Giudecca. Learn about the different types of ships in the Venetian fleet. And also I remember this words of the officer: “Why the names of doges Mocenigo, Morosini, Dandolo are famous in all the world? Because they put the interests of the Republic above their own. Can you imagine that modern politics would act in the same way?”.

On our way, we are passing through the old docks and berths, and finally we came to the huge submarine on the pedestal – a real submarine, which even took part in the 1 World War. And all the sailors (I realised, that all of them serve together) are going to make a group photo. The officer is searching for someone who can take a photo – and (I was afraid of it) his eyes fall on me. I realised even without words that he wants me to make a photo, but the problem is I don’t understand his words and couldn’t respond to him. So I said that I’m a foreigner. I was afraid that he will angry on me because I didn’t belong to their group and got inside. But the officer just said:

- Do you speak English?
- Yes!
- Could you make a photo of us?
- Sure, of course!

I made several photos and returned a phone to the officer. He even shook my hand. My mood immediately went up. All the way back to the entrance I was very, very happy. And I was going to tell to my lazy Erasmus friends, which opportunity to visit Arsenale they’ve missed.

This is a sequel to the volume *My Mobility*, published as part of the celebrations to mark the 150th anniversary of Ca' Foscari University of Venice. It contains 38 accounts by students from 21 different countries, who write about their experience in Venice and at Ca' Foscari. As well as being a celebration of the mobility experience itself, it testifies to the huge importance of international exchanges between universities, and how they can contribute to the promotion of tolerance, friendship, and mutual understanding.



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