



Student Spotlight Nicole Martinez: My amazing trip to Italy this summer



Rome, Tivoli, Pompeii, Napoli, Florence, Pisa, Siena, Cinque Terre, and Venice



Nicole in Florence



The Ponte Vecchio in Florence

Nicole Martinez, a student in Chemistry and Biology and Honors Program at Florida International University, tells us a little bit about herself and the amazing experience she had in participating in the Honors Program Study Abroad Italy Grand Tour, and discovering 9 cities in Italy from May 8 to June 6, 2023 this Summer.

MFJMCE: Could you tell us in a few words who you are and what studies you are pursuing at FIU?

My name is Nicole Martinez, and I am a senior at FIU pursuing a major in Chemistry with a minor in Biology and a Certificate in European & Eurasian Studies.

MFJMCE: What did you initially expect from the program in Italy? How did it meet or exceed these expectations?

I was told several times before embarking on this trip that studying abroad would be an unforgettable experience, something that would mark me, change me, impact my life. Those who said this were completely right. Returning back home after studying in Italy for a month was one of the most difficult things I have ever had to do. I had no other choice, of course, but that just made it even harder to come back. I knew this experience would be meaningful, but I never understood just how much until I had lived it myself. I never expected there to be so many profound relationships born from it, so much personal growth, countless stories to tell. Every single moment from this trip is forever guarded in my memory, and I feel I will never forget anything about it.

MFJMCE: Did you have a favorite part of the program? If so, what was it?

Choosing a single part is nearly impossible for me, because every part was special in its own way. If I must pinpoint a moment, I would speak about Thursday, the 25 of May 2023, a night completely vivid in my mind and in my heart. Claudio Spadi, the artist who sings in the center of Ponte Vecchio every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, began his night as usual, playing his guitar in an energetically soft way as only he would know how to. Feeling inspired, I asked my friend to dance with me. Two hours go by, and every person on that bridge is dancing. I will be searching for that feeling for the rest of my life. It's so simple, yet extremely rare and difficult to find. How can something so simple be so beautiful?

MFJMCE: What was the place you visited or the activities you did that impacted you the most (that stood out to you the most)?

I fell in love, not only with the physical beauty of Firenze, but with what I felt as I walked through its streets, as I ran to Ponte Vecchio to watch every single sunset I could, as I listened to the vibrations of the city coming from music that makes everyone dance. It is the place where I have felt the most human in my life. It made me vulnerable, connected to other people - I experienced a sense of community that I am not able to feel anywhere else. I don't think I could ever fully express what I felt seeing Michelangelo's David in l'Accademia, the masterpiece by Brunelleschi that is the Duomo di Firenze, everything we did and everything I saw had meaning to it. I will miss going into museums and seeing works of art that I could only have imagined or seen through a computer screen



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Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence

before. I will miss taking the extremely packed metro to get across Roma, where you can't even move in the train because there is nowhere else to go, but it is impossible to not feel the presence of so many other humans there for the same reason. I will miss being lost in thought and suddenly hearing my name being called over to translate Italian. I will miss walking everywhere tremendously, particularly to my favorite place in the world every evening to watch the sunset and feel the humanity in the atmosphere. I will miss the passion for calcio ("soccer") that most, if not all, Italians share. I will miss the feeling of finally belonging somewhere. But I promise I will be back, and one day it will be to not have to leave again.

MFJMCE: Did this program change or impact your career goals?

I began this trip in love with Italy, its culture, its people, its music, its traditions... And I ended the trip with the same feelings, just so much more powerful than before. I had so many wonderful experiences that have become core memories for me – dancing on Ponte Vecchio with friends and even complete strangers, someone telling me my soul is Italian in a pizzeria in Pisa, countless small moments that are making me smile and tear up as I type this. In the end, my life is made up of these small moments, and I think that is where my happiness will come from—meaningful instants that when pieced together, make my life significant. This experience impacted every part of my life.

By Christine I. Caly-Sanchez

MFJMCE: Why do you think it is important to study abroad? (in Europe)

It is one thing to visit Europe alone or with family, and a completely different experience to study there, to be guided by a knowledgeable professor, and to immerse yourself entirely in the culture, alongside fellow students that become lifelong friends by the end of the journey guided by Professor John Bailly, who was a better leader that I could have possibly asked for.

Studying abroad is a once-in-a-lifetime experience that combines real education and extraordinary adventure in the most perfect balance, while having the tremendous advantage of safety and the fact that your security is always kept in mind. If you have the opportunity to study abroad, don't think - just say yes.

MFJMCE: Would you study abroad again? What would you recommend to a student who would like to study abroad?

If I had the opportunity to study abroad again, I would take it without thinking twice. This program gave me the best month of my life so far. If you are someone who is considering it, stop considering it and do it!

► For more information on the **Italy Grand Tour**, [click here](#)

► For pictures, [click here](#)
(Pictures courtesy of Nicole Martinez)



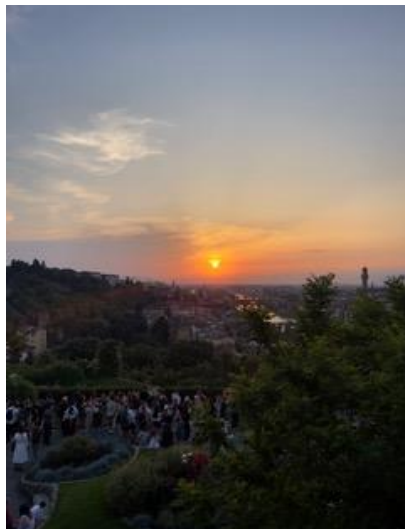
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At the Colosseum in Rome



Tivoli



Florence



Venice



Nicole with FIU Honors Program Students



Pisa