



Lauren
From Georgetown
to Italy

You are Never Alone on Exchange

Ciao tutti!

When you think of Italy, the first thing you think of is food - am I right? Gelato, pasta, pizza, candies, cakes, cheese, salami ... The list goes on forever. Here are a few quick facts about Italian food while you get your snacks ready for reading my beavertail. (Trust me, you will need them!)

1. The average North American eats 15.5lbs of pasta a year, while the average Italian eats 51lbs per year.
2. The average Lauren Rock eats more pasta per year than both these 2 combined.
3. There are over 600 shapes of pasta (and I am planning on conquering

them all ... At least once)

4. The average Italian eats 1/2 a pound of bread DAILY (I am considered an "average Italian" by this definition)

5. Itallians eat spaghetti only using a fork

6. Lauren Rock is not capable of this yet (Don't worry - I don't use my hands, I am always seen twirling my spaghetti fork in right, spoon in left and the "How Canadian of you" comments are never too far way)

7. In the 13th century, the Pope set standards for pasta

8. In 2014 Lauren Rock approved these standards

(I hope I don't have to cite these, M.L.A. format...)

Ok, I know you are all probably thinking "BASTA(That's enough) with the food talk Lauren!" But that is the thing - In Italy, FOOD IS THE CULTURE! And so far, thinking back on my past two and a half months, every exchange memory I have , pretty much always involves food! Right from the start, while I was saying my farewells to my friends and family at the airport, and I remember thinking "I wonder what kind of food they will serve on the airplane?" (The answer is rice by the way).

I remember after that thought, realizing I had to go. I was really leaving all of these people for a year, and that was very hard for me to really grasp. It only really hit me on the day I left, after I went through my gate and could no longer see everyone "Oh my gosh I am really doing this". And it didn't take long before I was lost in YYZ unable to find my flight ,thinking "I'm alone". BUT I WAS WRONG. After my gate had changed for the fourth time, I had finally found the right one and what did I see? ANOTHER RED ROTARY JACKET! I ran up to him crying and hugged him without saying a word and just held onto the stranger for two minutes straight just crying about how I had thought I had missed my flight and I'd just left everything

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I know and how happy I was to see him. It took me the whole time I was hugging him and a strange look after I let go, to realize I wasn't wearing my blazer, and he had no idea who I was! (Haha, sorry Brendan!) Turns out we were going to the same district in Italy, and would be seeing each other many times for district gatherings! After meeting him, we also met a girl named Kate from America who was in our district too. It was so reassuring to meet other students feeling every emotion in the book, just the same as I was.

That is the amazing thing about Rotary Youth Exchange, you are NEVER ALONE. And that fact is still true today, and I am certain it will continue to be true for the rest of my exchange (and hey, probably even longer as we have so much more in common than just the exchange weight). I am happy to say, that through everything I have been through the first few months, the on top of the world feelings, the "troppo pasta" stomachaches, and the homesick moments, I have always had the strongest support system to help hold me up. Along with the other exchange students living in Cremona, my host family was always there to try and help make the adjustment easier, and it is quite an adjustment let me tell you.

Anyone who might know me personally (or maybe all of you after reading my introduction), know that I am very social and a bit of a jokester. An extravert would be an understatement. But for the first few weeks of being here, I was completely unable to communicate - my absolute nightmare! I was unable to understand the language, they were unable to understand the faces I would make to express how I felt (they saw my 'surprised/shocked' face as something to laugh about and try to imitate as a joke instead of as a way of communication), and my charades for "I like ice cream" were not exactly academy award worthy either.

Over time, this stage has become something that we all laugh about and can finally TALK ABOUT because after much studying and practicing, I am able to speak and understand a big handful of Italian *hip hip hooray for Google Translate!*

I learned the most Italian when I started school, not because of the teachers or lessons (because let me tell you, Italian sociology, psychology and history of art aren't exactly helping me ask "where is the bathroom"), but more because I have the absolute best class and fantastic friends there! I was lucky enough to be placed in a "communications" class here, so everyone is just as extraverted as I am! Over time, they helped me with grammar, pronunciation, important hand gestures, and the infinite list of "don't say these". I love going to school here, because it has become so much fun and I have really become a part of the class (and keep in mind, these guys have been together for four years already, and they never switch class, so it's not the easiest task). In school, I am very happy with the courses I am taking, even though my brain is like a little puddle by the end of the day. It is difficult enough learning Italian, but I am studying another three languages at school! English isn't too much of a strain, French takes a ton of brain power just to remember what I have learned in the past, and Spanish is tricky because it is so similar, yet so different to Italian. Needless to say, I will come home even chattier and in FOUR LANGUAGES (Sorry mom!).

In addition to my school routine, I also do some kind of exercise everyday. I've had so many opportunities to do sports and such here, I have tried new ones, and practiced old ones, but I ended up deciding to do rowing and basketball because I figure, I might as well do something I can't do in Georgetown. Rowing is everyday, but I usually go four days a week because the other

three days I can barely get out of bed, I am so sore, let alone go to a two hour practice! Basketball is a sport that originated in Cremona, which is basically basketball, but with able bodied and disabled people who all play on the same team together! It is a really interesting concept that I would love to explain to you all, but I am still working on understanding it myself. (But I promise, you will know as soon I do!)

ON TOP OF ALL OF THIS, I have also been lucky enough to go and see so many gorgeous places in Italy (*hint* every place in Italy is absolutely stunning - just getting out of bed and going outside everyday is a treat). But in addition to my stunning town Cremona, I have been to Piacenza with my rotary group the second week here, a little town an hour away, quite similar to ours. A town called Fagnano where all the inbounds in Italy met in a nunnery (which we were pretty convinced was 3749375 years old, and haunted) that was in stunning foothills just outside Tuscany - talk about a dream. I have been to the amazing Venice and words cannot describe how breathtaking every view around every corner is. And most recently, I wrote letters to Juliette and hiked up mountains in and around Verona!

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I am so excited to continue to experience the different cultures that all the Italian regions have, because they really are all so diverse, and all have what seems to be a million different things to offer.

So I am sure you have all run out of the snacks you grabbed earlier, so it is time to wrap this up. You are probably wondering how I have done so much in such a short period of time (and trust me this is the sparks notes version), and honestly I am thinking the same thing. The two and a half months has flown by, and having already finished 1/4 of my exchange, I am hoping I have even more to tell you all about in the next three months!

Allora parliamo presto, e grazie mille

Lauren A Rock in Italy