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EVERYTHING WILL BE ALRIGHT
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FSU International Programs – Florence

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A LETTER FROM
the editors
Rachel Corry & Emma Moody

Just over one year ago, you could find me wandering through the Mercato di Sant’Ambrogio, conversing in mixed Italian-English with local Florentine farmers and bakers. Of the many distinctly beautiful spaces in Florence, this was my favorite spot to begin the day. I gained energy from the sound of bustling vendors and eager customers’ requests. The delightful smells of pecorino cheese, freshly baked focaccia bread, olives, savory herbs, and sweet fruits flooded my senses.

After choosing my first meal of the day, I would begin weaving through crowds toward the Arno River, briefly stopping to admire the Basilica di Santa Croce. I would cross the Ponte Santa Trinita to reach my destination: the Oltrarno. A stop for a cappuccino at Libreria Cafe La Cite was inevitable during my stroll through this intriguing neighborhood south of the Arno. I enjoyed visiting the rightfully popular landmarks of the area, including the Boboli Gardens for a garden hike and Piazzale Michelangelo for a sunset picnic with my roommates.

What I enjoyed most, though, was simply exploring the Oltrarno on my own. During my first three weeks in Florence, I faithfully packed each day with a busy itinerary that prioritized seeing the city’s highlights. Always accompanied by the chatter and laughs of friends, always rushing to the next scheduled museum tour. I am thankful for that time period, and the opportunity to see Florentine landmarks that every visitor should experience. I am equally thankful for the period of independent travel that followed.

Without realizing it, this transition was something I had craved long before studying abroad in Florence. My time there taught me to appreciate moments of solitude and solo travel, and also to actively seek those moments. I understand now that a delicate balance exists for all of us between time spent socializing with loved ones, and time spent reflecting independently.

We have likely all struggled at some point in recent weeks to maintain that balance and adapt to new routines during the pandemic. Most of us are craving social interaction and longing for more adventures in Florence. This ItaliaNoles issue is a reminder that we can still learn about and interact with Florence from afar, both on our own and alongside others. Until it’s safe to travel again, I plan to practice my Italian so I can return to Mercato di Sant’Ambrogio for smoother conversations with familiar Florentine farmers and bakers.

- Rachel Corry
On one of my final mornings in Florence, my alarm went off at 4 a.m. I remember quickly shoving my phone under the pillow to silence it, afraid I would wake my roommates hours before they planned to rise. I rubbed my eyes and pulled the heavy curtains back to peer out of our apartment window. The Florence streets were empty and a blue-black sky blanketed the sleeping city in the last few moments of night. In the distance, the faint sound of rumbling thunder.

Challenged by my professor to find new and interesting ways to photograph the famous facade of the Duomo, I soon found myself navigating the winding cobblestone streets. Eventually making my way across the Arno River and up, towards Piazzale Michelangelo—a pilgrimage that I would repeat frequently during my time in Florence. When I arrived, I watched a storm system in the adjacent Tuscan hills roll over the Renaissance city. Purple clouds bruised the sky and peppered the landscape with bolts of white lightning every so often. I ended up walking over 15 miles that day. That day was easily the single most memorable of my time in Florence and the one that started my long-distance love affair with Florence.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed so much about our lives. I keep pinching myself, hoping that when I wake up from this dream I’ll find myself back in our Florentine apartment complete with a kitchen ceiling fresco. But the reality of our situation could not be more poignant and a plane ticket back across the Atlantic has been put on hold, indefinitely.

But all hope is not lost. Florence will always be there for us, beckoning us back with open arms when the time comes. When it does, you can find me in the shadow of the Duomo, camera in hand.

- Emma Moody
reflections
Whether students go abroad to sharpen their Italian, learn more about history, feast their eyes on art, or indulge in food and culture; they almost always walk away with more than they bargained for. Even when a semester is dismantled by a pandemic, what seems like the worst-case scenario can enrich students in unforeseen ways. In this case, resilience is exactly what some learned.

“To me, resilience means the ability to adapt and thrive during times of change and adversity,” Mila Talev said. It’s true; resilience is the perfect word to describe lessons gained from studying abroad. Adapting to a different culture and learning to travel independently within that new space builds resilience when things don’t go as anticipated.

“No matter how much I planned, I was always chasing a train, running through airports, or yelling at Hungarian taxi drivers that they are scamming me,” explained fellow Spring 2020 student, Ryan Lang. “Being able to adapt, attack, and overcome a challenge in front of you is probably the most important thing you can ever train yourself to do.”

Learning resilience by overcoming day-to-day obstacles is something every FSU Florence alumni can relate to, but what about when disaster strikes? In 1966 the Arno River flooded to record heights and threatened valuable artifacts. The first cohort of FSU students in Florence chose to adapt, overcome, and embrace the situation. Now dubbed the “Mud Angels,” they immediately took to the streets to bring clean water and restore museums.

In the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic swept over Italy and abruptly ended FSU students’ semester. Ryan and Mila, who were at the time traveling for spring break at the time, were forced to make quick decisions and sacrifices.

“When plans began to change rapidly, I realized that we had essentially two options: to panic or to adapt; to sink or to swim...I feel that this ordeal was one of my greatest lessons in resilience,” said Mila. “Knowing what I know now, I wouldn’t have changed a thing. My two months in Florence were some of the greatest months of my life. Although I wish I could have had more time in Italy (who doesn’t?) I am so happy to be a part of the FSU Florence legacy.” Ryan took another lesson from the ordeal, admitting circumstances forced him to be the best version of himself and to live in the moment.

As the program came to a temporary close, the tremendous personal growth that came with facing COVID-19 brought a wave of pride and unity over FSU Florence. With strong roots and a supportive base, the program will continue building its legacy for years to come.
Many people consider it a cliché to claim their study abroad experience changed their life. However, it would not be stated so often if it were not true. I know my time abroad opened up the world to me and changed my perspective on my career and goals. I would go so far to say that my college experience would have been incomplete without it.

To explain the variety of experiences offered through the FSU Communication Program in Florence would take days. However, the impact it had was simple. This program gave me cultural experiences I will never forget, introduced me to people I am lucky to know, and showed me things I never would have found on my own. My summer abroad was life-changing and I hope everyone has a chance to experience that same transformation through travel as I did.

My family is Italian, so it was always important to me to someday travel to Italy and experience the culture firsthand. So, selecting the FSU Florence summer program became an easy decision for me, especially since it included a special section for communication majors. As I packed my bags, I thought I knew what to expect. I would visit iconic museums, eat the world’s most delicious food, and take photos in beautiful places. I certainly did all of this, but I also experienced so much more, thanks to FSU’s incredible faculty and program.

One of the most memorable moments was traveling to Verona and witnessing one of the greatest opera performers of our time, Placido Domingo, in one of the oldest Roman amphitheaters. We sat on century-old stones and enjoyed a performance that was once-in-a-lifetime. This experience was also within weeks of visiting the abandoned Abbey of San Galgano, where we enjoyed live music under the stars in the Tuscan countryside. Such magical moments!
From hidden caves and unexplored passages beneath palazzos, to icons like the David and the Duomo, I saw Italy from multiple unique angles. It is hard to explain how each moment impacted me, but I know the experience, as a whole, changed me for the better. I was given a chance to explore while refining passions and cultivating new interests. The independence I felt while exploring the city on my own and with new friends was exciting. Just walking down centuries-old roads filled me with a sense of adventure each day.

The cultural richness of my summer in Florence was perfectly complemented by the professional and educational experiences we were afforded. We met bloggers, visited agencies, and even helped manage social media for Florence’s tourism office, Firenze Turismo. Such experiences exceeded my expectations for learning through practice, and I am thankful that I received this valuable glimpse at the communication industry in Europe.

My time abroad gave me confidence to go out and explore. It gave me the courage to pursue my goals, even those that were far from home and people familiar to me. I knew with the involvement of FSU, I had gained the experience and determination to be a well-rounded, informed member of the world.

In several interviews since I returned from my trip, I found myself talking to potential employers about the beauty of Italy and the joys of travel. My time in Florence also brought new friendships, as I have bonded with others over similar trips they have taken. While each day feels unforgettable, our experiences shaped in Florence are not unique to any one traveler. Everyone’s perspective, focus, and takeaways are, however, unique. This is what makes travel abroad so special and essential for young people finding their place in the world. I am thankful for the unique perspective and confidence this program gave me. I only hope that others find their own adventure in Florence, too.
The COVID-19 pandemic has given traveling a makeover. Instead of strolling the streets of Florence, I find myself clicking arrows on Google Maps and taking in the panoramic view of the Duomo with my cursor. The “new normal” is causing travelers to unpack their suitcases, pause their plans, and pick up their laptops in an attempt to find innovative ways to travel in these unprecedented times.

However, this shouldn’t impact future plans to study abroad in Florence. In fact, it should inspire daydreams and plans for conquering the cobblestone streets once it is possible to safely do. It should pique curiosity to discover Florentine treasures virtually and embrace what awaits you in this majestic city. My study abroad experience with Florida State University has made it difficult for me to stay away from this dreamy city for too long; my limitless wanderlust has led me to “re-discover” this city that I once called home. I enjoy sharing with others the best resources to discover Florence.

There are many ways to virtually discover Florence, but the best place to start is through Renaissance art. Florence is the birthplace of the Renaissance, after all. The Uffizi Gallery, home to some of the most famous and inspiring Renaissance art in the world, makes it easy to view artwork and gain knowledge on what you’re
looking at, all through your computer screen. This shouldn’t replace plans to visit in person, as nothing compares to staring at the brilliant colors of Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, but there is nothing wrong with sparking excitement before you go.

There is something magnificent about walking the cobblestone streets of Florence, listening to lively conversations of locals, and smelling the sweet scent of freshly made waffle cones escaping from gelaterias. However, strolling past baroque architectural gems and discovering beauty at every corner is a possibility even before you can visit in person. There are so many ways to explore the stradas and piazzas, from first-person video walking tours, to clicking through picturesque Florentine alleyways on Google Maps.

For the thrill of viewing Italian life unfold as the day goes on, there are live cameras providing just that. Whether you’re interested in watching people stroll the famous *Ponte Vecchio* or marveling at the marble statues of *Piazza della Signoria*, this is as close as you can get to the action without stepping onto Italian soil.

Although the thought of travel seems like an impossible task right now, you don’t have to wait to begin discovering Florence. Preview your future study abroad adventure through your computer screen. Learn about the art you will marvel at, the streets you will aimlessly wander, and the mercados where you will pick fresh, in-season produce and Italian clothing to wear during your excursions. Then, when it is time to begin your adventure, Florence and Florida State University will be waiting patiently with welcoming arms.
showing support
When it comes to destinations, Florence, Italy is among the most desirable for travelers across the globe. I can attest to its rich culture, cuisine, and scenery that has attracted tourists for centuries after spending the summer of 2018 in the Renaissance city. As one can imagine, travel has a strong economic impact on the country. The tourism industry represented 13% of Italy’s gross domestic product in 2019.

In March 2020, when Italy became a global epicenter for the Covid-19 pandemic, Italians acted swiftly to flatten the curve. Countless trips to Florence were still postponed, causing economic hardships across a variety of industries.

Here are some ways to lift up Florentines as they endure these unprecedented times.

• Accept credit rather than requesting a refund. If you had to cancel your vacation, ask to receive credit for your bookings to redeem in the future. This will help vendors stay in business so they’re ready to use on post-Covid trips to come.

• Purchase travel vouchers from tour guides. These liaisons to the city’s ample history are heavily impacted by the lack of visitors. Support people like Alexandra Lawrence, Molly Mcilwrath, Elaine Ruffolo, Helen Bayley, and Fadi Bassil.

• Order made-in-Italy products from local artisans. You can enjoy fantastic leather goods, jewelry, olive oil and more from your own home. Florence Factory is a great resource to find high-quality products made by Florentine craftsmen.

• Join a food or wine club. What better way to experience Italy from afar than to indulge in its cuisine? Enoteca Pitti Gola e Cantina’s Wine Club and Curious Appetite’s Florentine Gourmet Club are some delicious options.

• Donate to your favorite travel bloggers. Georgette Jupe of Girl in Florence is an invaluable resource for the city’s visitors. Since you aren’t able to apply her travel tips just yet, consider donating to the upkeep of her blog.

These action items will empower Florence’s businesses and promote your own cultural enrichment—a true win-win. Plus, when the city is ready to safely welcome us again, we’ll have all the more reason to enjoy the vacation of our dreams. Let’s support our Florentine neighbors from home in the meantime.
These past few months were some of the most challenging many of us have faced in our lifetime. In this unprecedented year, some had to abruptly leave their residences in Florence and return to the U.S. Some saw trips they’d been dreaming of for years dissolve over the months, and many of us watched the city we were once a part of become overwhelmed with cases of COVID-19. Fortunately, there are ways to help our home away from home in Florence. Whether you studied abroad there in the past or plan to visit in the future, Florence has a special place in our hearts. Here are a few ways we can give back to the city that gave so much to us:

**Shop Local**

While not the same as meandering through San Lorenzo’s Market, many local Florentine artisans have put together an online marketplace to showcase and sell their goods. Creative People in Florence is a one-stop-shop for items that directly support small businesses in Firenze. Their Facebook and Instagram pages allow local merchants to post items and information about their businesses. You can also make a donation through their Patreon.

**Donate**

While COVID-19 may not dominate news coverage like it once did, that doesn’t mean it has disappeared. The Italian Red Cross is constantly in need of masks and other protective gear to help those in need. The Florentine branch, the Italian Red Cross-Florence Committee, is also in need of donations to implement their new delivery service. The service brings food and medicine to the elderly, immunosuppressed people and other high-risk individuals.

I have fond memories of reading The Florentine with my morning caffè. The magazine caters to an international community and helps students and travelers feel connected to the city. Published in English, The Florentine is an excellent resource for finding events, activities, and hidden gems within the city. The magazine is free to all; to keep it that way, consider a small donation so that future Noles can enjoy its work.

**Plan Your Trip**

I don’t recommend buying a flight or booking hotels just yet, but think of your favorite places that you visited in Florence or researched in preparation for your trip. Start to set aside money, make sure your passport is up-to-date, and create a list of places to patronize once you’re there. Florence relies heavily on tourism, and the city has taken a hit over these last
few months. Forgotten the name of your favorite restaurant or need recommendations? The fsu_florence Instagram page often highlights favorite spots among students.

If none of these options seem possible for you, there’s still another way to help: stay home. Flattening the curve is every individual’s way of protecting themselves and others to ensure that we eventually squash the curve and can return safely to our new normal. For more information on the latest COVID-19 precautions visit cdc.gov/coronavirus.
Against the background of the historic Tuscan town of San Gimignano, you’ll find an organic farm that has been run by generations of the Fioroni family. Fattoria Poggio Alloro offers authentic Italian hospitality through its agriturismo, farm, wine cellar, cooking classes, and products.

The farm was started by the three Fioroni brothers in 1972 with an idea of sharing genuine and organic products from food to wine. In 1991, the family expanded with agriturismo; they now have ten rooms and a small apartment to offer guests. The family farm also boasts a wine cellar, restaurant, tours, a pool, and breathtaking views of San Gimignano and rolling Tuscan hills.

Each year, the Fioroni’s agriturismo business is busiest between April and October. However, when COVID-19 rocked the world, everyone’s lives were affected, including the Fioroni’s.

“As Italy shut down, the tourism business was over,” said daughter, Sarah Fioroni. “Reservations cancelled, there were no business prospects, heavy business loans, and sleepless nights
thinking of our amazing 30 workers at home without work – it was a guilty and an uneasy feeling.”

The family knew they needed to forge on in the face of adversity. They turned to promoting their farm and organic products with special offers on social media to keep past and future guests updated. The farm and wine production standards have not changed. Recently, the restaurant and agriturismo reopened while adhering to new health precautions for the safety of employees and guests. Despite any setbacks, the Fioroni family remains optimistic and true to their roots.

“It will probably be harder to sell wine this year, but for generations we have always prided ourselves on producing and making organic, healthy food for our family and sharing that with others,” Fioroni said. “The business side always comes after.”

Fioroni says that her parents, both in their 80s, and her older family members involved with the farm motivate her to keep the business going. The family started as simple farmers who grew their daily work into a multi-generational family business.

“Their tranquility, calmness, and strength make me gain my confidence back. I ask myself, ‘Who am I to get lost now if they don’t?’”

Fattoria Poggio Alloro continues to work behind the scenes as they always have. The family and workers continue the tradition of working the fields and vineyards to produce organic products and take care of their animals. Their main goal is to share these
experiences with their guests, who recently have become more local as Italians turn to regional travel. “This pandemic has been and still is posing a hard time for Italy. But I think that as a country, there is willpower to hold on during such difficult times in order to be stronger in the future when everything returns to normal, especially with tourism, which is the sector that has been damaged the most.”

They also continue to maintain their online store to ship products all over the world – their olive oil and wine are especially delicious. Fattoria Poggio Alloro is now open again to visitors who wish to relax on the farm with good food, good wine, and great people while maintaining a safe environment for all.

During this unprecedented crisis, Fioroni says she has reflected on the words of Albert Einstein: “‘Without crises there are no challenges, without challenges life is a routine, a slow agony. Without crisis there is no merit. In crises emerges the best of each, because without crisis all winds are only mild breezes.’ So this crisis could be the opportunity for a change for the business to do even better and I force myself to look at the positive side of all of this mess.”
interviews
Based in Florence, Alice Cheron Marchi, a travel journalist for the Gallimard publishing group, is the founder of the digital platform Ali di Firenze where she discusses traveling in Italy and the unique Italian lifestyle as well as proposes her services for special face-to-face and/or digital events. She also launched on YouTube a special web series titled Dolce Follia focusing on the intricacies of her daily life in Italy.

Cheron Marchi recently added a novel concept for women empowerment through a project titled “Les Fugues Italiennes” (the Italian Escapes). Beyond organizing specific events for a group of women to help them discover who they really want to be, Cheron Marchi authored a book to be published in September 2020 by Editions Leducs.

ItaliaNoles caught up with Alice earlier this summer.

Italy continues to move forward in trying to get back to normalcy. How do you feel about that at the moment?

If I used the confinement as a gift to spend time with my family, now it is a little more complicated. I need to resume my projects where I left them, adjust them, and also find the proper work-life balance again, all of that with two children at the house and still a limited desire to go outside. We are ultimately still living quite as if we were still confined.

You were confined for more than eight weeks. Yet, you still demonstrated a lot of creativity to stay connected with your audience. How did that process take place? Was it part of your communication strategy or to share some moments with others?

I have a hard time forcing myself to do something. My natural instinct traditionally takes over.

I quickly thought during confinement that the Italian life’s little pleasures, a central point in my approach, could help others, and me as well in the meantime. So, we reviewed the editorial ideas to tackle the central point of my philosophy: to share the magical appeal of Italy and integrate it in the daily life.

I put an end to the travel-themed content, all the events scheduled for April, May, and June, and concentrated instead on my presence on social networks with original content.

We were one of the first to develop Instagram live sessions with entertaining themes like cooking classes, listening to Italian music and interviewing passionate Italian
figures. To this day, several people continue to send me thank you notes about that.

At the same time, I was also able to work on a book project that I had left aside for too long, to move forward with my e-shop which is supposed to be relaunched in the fall, and to imagine a new format of paid digital events to share contents and create a community.

**How do you see the post-COVID-19 for your projects? The Italian Escapes for instance, a fantastic concept, already popular, how will that work?**

I had to cancel three Escapes and I am now cautiously planning the next one, hoping I can maintain the one in September and open the others as well. As my husband keeps reminding me, we need to be flexible, anticipate, adjust, and sometimes change even if need be. We don’t have a choice and we don’t control the context either. The last two months enabled us to move forward with our project of e-commerce and we could not have had that opportunity in normal times. We were able to think through our ideas, contact some suppliers, and do a lot of things totally new for us.

**Were you able to think of alternative ideas, other projects?**

Absolutely. It has been a passionate journey and quite strategic to say the least. I have built a trusted circle of women around my brand that allows me to move forward. During the COVID-19 confinement, two new people started to write about the Italian lifestyle with a personal touch that I highly cherish along with this entertaining approach slightly irreverent yet respectful of the Italian culture. I think this team will be fundamental for me to continue to grow.

For a long time, I thought I needed to choose, between the e-shop, special events, travel guides, and all. I am now persuaded that we can do it all providing the mission, goal and associated objectives are coherent.

**What has been the most challenging these past few weeks?**

To resume work. Even if that is my passion. But, I spent more than two wonderful months with my children, when I never had taken any maternity leaves before. I played, painted, looked for snails. It was wonderful. At the moment, I feel a terrible pressure, so much so that I have decided to talk with a business coach to clarify all of that and serenely move forward.

**The Italian culture is based on a social proximity at odds with social distancing. How does COVID-19 affect that?**

Obviously, people showed a lot of happiness when they could get back to having a
I think Italians stayed Italians at home – a shared loved for cooking, talks about anything – I am certain that our phones bills have all been tremendously high – a passion for the beautiful, nobody ever in pajamas but instead all neatly shaved and with the right perfume at 11:30 a.m.

Ever since we have known you, we have always loved your optimism and your ability to stay positive. What gives you hope today and allows you to stay positive?

I think what reassures me is that we have been able to create a vertical community quite trustworthy that understands what we do and follows us in our adventures. I bet on multiple concepts, including the web series and the Italian Escapes, and I think that if it works it is because we manage to have people trust us and understand our sincerity. All of that is due to social networks really. I spend more than three hours per day on these platforms. It is part of my job. It is also associated with the emotion that we manage to share through such digital platforms. If we need to put a stop to the Italian Escapes during a year, we will move towards something else until we can find these women at the end of the tunnel for new Italian adventures.

You ultimately work in strategic communication, do you think it is necessary to establish a clear editorial line to share with your audience?

Regardless of the scale of the project, small or large, you must have a clear and strategic editorial line. You need that spine that allows people to understand why you are doing what you are doing. If people can understand then they will follow regardless of the logic of the project.

What made you smile during these past weeks?

Doing Instagram live with my husband. We really shared crazy things.

Some onlookers have mentioned the idea of resilience. Do you think you are stronger today than you were before the confinement?

I don’t know whether I am stronger or not. I cried seven times this past week. But, I am probably more centered and certain about what I am doing. And that is a major change.
In 2020, being quarantined is now part of our daily lives. Yet, in the face of a global pandemic, we came together to stay apart and provide hope during these turbulent times. Italy was a true example of that, with videos of residents on balconies connecting through music going viral and bringing a little light. After being the first democratic country to go into lockdown since WWII, Italy began to gradually reopen in May and has managed to continue flattening the curve.

Industries across the board have taken hits from COVID-19, and I began to think of the businesses I came into contact with during my summer in Italy in 2018. One in particular came to mind: Firenze Turismo, the local tourism agency in Florence. I interviewed both Firenze Turismo and Toscana Promozione Turistica to understand of how tourism has been impacted, what the future of the industry is, and most importantly, how they plan to keep locals and tourists safe while traveling in their region.

Can you address the general importance of tourism to businesses in your region?

**Firenze Turismo (FT):** The productive structure of the region is evenly based on agriculture, industry and tourism. It is based on small and medium-sized enterprises and investment largely from capital of local origin, although in recent years foreign investment has increased due to both Tuscany’s widespread appeal, and targeted strategies implemented by the region.

The region’s connections and accessibility are ensured by different modes of transport. Pisa’s Galilei Airport handles national, international and intercontinental flights. Florence Airport (Amerigo Vespucci) also handles a significant volume of traffic, to which are added by other smaller airports, Grosseto (Corrado Baccarini) and the Island of Elba (Marina di Campo), which supplement services especially in high season.
Tourism in the cities of art is an important segment of the market that accounts for more than 15 million overnight stays, about 10 million in the city of Florence the neighboring municipalities.

**Toscana Promozione Turistica (TPT):** Tuscany and Florence are very well known all over the world and tourism is one of Tuscany’s main economic sectors. Many of the local food and wine productions are sold to tourists during the cellar visits or tastings. Tourism in Tuscany is strictly bound to the productive system. For example, there are a lot of little handcraft companies, many in the jewelries and fashion system, which are open to tourist visits, and produce and sell unique items just on request.

**How have these businesses been affected by COVID 19 and how did they manage to get by during the lockdown?**

**FT:** Since the end of February, tourists were distressed about the general situation, because the epidemic was growing. Every week [after going into lockdown], the Italian Government gave more severe rules to contain the epidemic. Hotels were empty and reservations cancelled. Some hotels were chosen as quarantine accommodations for people who had COVID-19 but could not be isolated in their homes. Soon restaurants owners and managers didn’t work, as people in Italy were forced to stay at home. Some of them turned their activity into delivery. Museums and public spaces such as libraries, theatres and
cinemas were closed as well. In this case, maintenance of the working activity was more difficult, even if a lot of talks and performances were organized on online platforms. Other groups, like tourist guides or travel agencies, were severely damaged by the disappearance of tourists and they are hoping for some recovery now.

**Starting June 3rd, Italy allowed unrestricted travel again. How has your region prepared for an influx of tourism?**

**TPT:** The government approved some protocols and the regional government enforced them with special regional activities. Now you can read the new measures [here](#). Our tourism operators are all open and working, mostly with Italian tourists, but we are now also starting to receive foreign travelers’ bookings for the summer and the autumn. The first German and French travelers have already arrived and, we have noticed a lot of interest and web research from the USA.

**What are some travel safety tips you would give tourists traveling in your region? What are some ways tourists can minimize the risk of catching or spreading COVID 19 while traveling?**

**FT:** Day by day, museums and tourist attractions reopen with the introduction of special measures for visitor safety. It is important to understand and follow these measures and not have crowded spaces indoors. Most public events are cancelled. As far as musical festivals and events, some are confirmed if the venues are suitable for maintaining social distance and fall within the guarantee parameters for the spectator. We have developed straightforward rules to help contain infection from Coronavirus.

**What would you say to someone who is considering traveling in the near future but is concerned due to COVID 19?**

**FT:** The situation is being constantly monitored by the local health authorities, which
guarantee sanitary control of Tuscany via the adoption of actions and measures specifically geared towards prevention. Daily disinfection of regional trains and all local public transport has been intensified. In Tuscany's airports, public spaces are being sanitized on a regular basis and handwash dispensers are available across the terminals.

**TPT:** Don’t be afraid to come to Tuscany, because it is safe. We are going towards the 0 new COVID-19 cases a day. Our healthcare system is operating all over the region with 45 hospitals, three university hospitals, and hundreds of medical guards. We have a very high quality public medical system that is free also for foreign tourists. The emergency care is free of charge [and] the medical staff of the health care centers speaks English.

**What do you see about the future of tourism in your region in the next 5 years? 10 years?**

**FT:** Statistics talk about the 1-year crisis for tourism in Italy – Tuscany – Florence. Everything is now restarting, however, we should wait until March 2021 to see a different and better situation of economic restart and renewal. Starting from that date doesn’t mean to come back to the 2019 level of tourist presences and income. It means coming back to 2001, after the Twin Towers tragedy. It means we must think of a new tourist management and promotion. We must project a new way to live in our cities, our territories, to join culture to outdoor experiences, art to slow travel itineraries, always pointing out our high level health public system, which lets us feel free and safe.

**TPT:** We are confident COVID-19 will change some critical issues of tourism and we’ll be back to a more conscious tourism, a quality tourism which prefers deep emotional experiences and mostly connected with Tuscan way of living. We imagine and hope to have the same last year's tourist flows as last year, but with different travelers. We are all different after this experience and ready to live a trip with another mood; ready to discover contemporary Tuscany and the unconventional and the unknown of a destination.
Human relationships with food are frequently driven by hurried schedules and unenthused choices. Fast food is familiar and accessible. Setting cost and convenience aside, however, the quality of ingredients, production methods, and environmental effects of what is on the table must be considered.

An alternative is Slow Food, a global grassroots organization founded in 1989 to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and counteract the tendency to rush through the experience of eating. It is a defense against the madness of the ‘fast life,’ instead championing prolonged enjoyment of every meal. A core component of the movement is to combat people’s dwindling interest in food, where it comes from, how it is transported, and how food choices affect our world.

The organization’s philosophy states: “We will start in the kitchen, with Slow Food. To escape the tediousness of fast food, let us rediscover the rich varieties and aromas of local cuisines. In the name of productivity, the ‘fast life’ has changed our lifestyle and now threatens our environment and our landscapes.”

Slow Food was founded in 1989 by Carlo Petrini and several fellow activists. Their initiative was motivated by the opening of a McDonald’s near the Spanish Steps in Rome, and a resulting concern that regional cuisine traditions were becoming endangered. Slow Food was intended to promote historical food and wine culture while protecting agricultural biodiversity and sustainable production. Now an international movement, Slow Food has reached millions of people in over 160 countries. For Slow Food members and leaders, food is inseparable from culture, politics, lifestyle and the environment.

With headquarters in Bra, Italy, a small town in the northwest region of Piedmont, Slow Food has offices in the U.S., France, Germany, Switzerland and Japan as well as ongoing activities in many additional countries. Local chapters of the organization are known as “condotte” or “convivia.” Each chapter organizes food and wine tastings, educational courses, dinners, and resources for people to learn more about good, clean and fair food. Slow Food Firenze is one of the largest and English-
Relationships with food are increasingly coming to the forefront of our lives. COVID-19 has altered nearly every realm of family life, work and social interaction. Impacts of the virus will continue to be felt for months as people continue to adapt and practice social distancing. Food is no exception. The virus has exposed major flaws in relying on a globalized food supply chain with a few dominant market players. Widespread adoption of Slow Food principles leads to a strengthened connection between producer and consumer. Commitment to sustainable production, distribution, and consumption systems benefits our own health and the health of our communities and our planet.

Thousands of projects and events are held by the Slow Food chapters. Examples include leading garden construction in African villages, establishing an international network of Earth markets (Mercati della terra) selling directly to consumers, building school vegetable gardens across European cities, advocating for migrants’ rights, offering a Master of Food program, and contributing to research on sustainable growing methods. There is a prime opportunity for more communities to adopt Slow Food practices right now, particularly with the importance of supporting smaller scale food networks and local farmers during the wake of COVID-19.

Whether it is months or years until international travel resumes regularly, keep these notes in mind when visiting Florence. Osterie d’Italia is an 840-page book with suggestions of places to eat across Italy, including casual osterias, more formal ristorantes, family-run trattorias and wine bar enotecas. Each spot faithfully represents local and traditional Italian ingredients, dining experiences and services. Florence is bursting with historically unique and fresh food traditions; the Slow Food commitment to slowing down to savor life and food is engrained in Florentine culture.

A snail was chosen as Slow Food’s patron and symbol to reflect a steady and content way of life. A snail symbol on a restaurant’s windows or doors indicates they are part of the Slow Food Program. So, at future meals, remember it’s not so bad to eat at a snail’s pace.
In the beginning was the ice, and the ice was in nature. As man learned to build a fire to warm up in winter, he must have dreamt of preserving ice to find relief in summer, but this required a technique that only advanced civilizations could have achieved. Ancient literary sources indicate the practice of using ice to prepare a refreshing fruit drink in summer was known to the Chinese, the Greeks, and, of course, the Romans. The Greek poet Simonides of Ceos, in the fifth century BC, left a testimony of this use: “The snow is buried alive, because alive it can be preserved to make the summer gentle.” While Pliny the Elder, in the first century AD, writes that during the banquets of the Roman aristocracy “some drink the snow, others the ice, thus transforming discomforts of the mountain into pleasures of the table.”

Forgotten during the Early Middle Ages, the practice was reintroduced by the Arabs during their occupation of Sicily in the 10th and 11th centuries, and later in Northern Italy by Venetian merchants returning from Constantinople. In fact, the word we use today to indicate a fruit-based ice made without dairy comes from the Turkish şerbet, which in turn derives from the Arab sharab, or sharabat, perhaps influenced by the Latin sorbère (to sip). A recipe to prepare sorbet appeared for the first time in a 1226 Arabic cookbook by Muhammad bin al-Baghdadi. In the Western world, it first appeared in the 1570 monumental work on the art of cookery by Bartolomeo Scappi, celebrity chef of the Italian Renaissance, who was in charge of the Vatican kitchen for two decades.

But when did ice become gelato, and start dwelling among us? As for the origin of other delights, such as coffee, cappuccino or hot chocolate, history and legend also intertwine. Nevertheless, there is a precise moment in which the long history of sweet ice sucking undergoes a sudden transformation, giving birth to a new era. We have many reasons to believe that the magical moment when the ingredients of the classic sorbet were replaced by a sweet concoction of dairy and eggs, took place in Florence at the end of the 16th century. And the credit for this gastronomic experiment giving way to a new cold dessert with a velvety texture, goes to Bernardo Timante Buonacorsi known as “Buontalenti.”

An artist with a thousand faces and passions, a truly ‘Renaissance man,’ Buontalenti began serving the Medici family at a young age, and continued in that role until his death in 1608. Mainly an architect and military engineer,
he was also a stage designer in charge of organizing court parties and banquets for the Medici. In addition, we have reliable information that he was an expert in the storage of ice and snow. In his book *On The Diet and Dining of the Ancients*, published in 1746, the Florentine historian Giuseppe Averani praises Buontalenti’s ingenuity and many wonderful finds, especially the fabrication of the first ice-preserving structures.

In 1595, Buontalenti was commissioned by Grand Duke Ferdinando I de’ Medici to set up the inaugural banquet of the San Giorgio Fortress in Florence (today’s Forte Belvedere), to which a high-ranking Spanish deputation had been invited. During the Renaissance, banqueting was an important diplomatic tool, to show the power and resources of a Prince, that ambassadors and guests would then celebrate in their reports. In this occasion, the Grand Duke instructed his trusted man that Spanish ambassadors “had to stand open-mouthed in front of so much splendor”. Buontalenti put his genius to work, and surprised the guests with a dessert he called crema fredda, literally cold cream.

In the ice cave beneath the Boboli Gardens, a cellar he had insulated with cork and wood, Buontalenti whipped up a kind of “zabaglione” (sweetened egg yolk and wine) mixed with milk churned over salted ice, then flavored with orange, lemon, and a touch of bergamot. Boom! After two thousand years of sipping sweetened ice, Buontalenti ultimately revolutionized the cold dessert, transforming ice into a creamy delicacy: no longer simply ice and fruit, but a new blend of milk, creams and other variable ingredients, that coagulate and transform under the freezing action of ice. From that day at Forte Belvedere, man’s palate and waistline would never be the same.

If modern gelato is a Florentine invention, the person who most contributed to its expatriation was the Sicilian Francesco Procopio dei Coltelli. In the 1660s, dei Coltelli headed to Paris in search of fortune, and in the French capital he opened the first Coffee house and gelateria beyond the Alps: the still-famous Café Procope located in Rue de l’Ancienne Comédie. In 1770, Genoese Giovanni Bosio opened the first ice cream shop in New York (others say the first cream shop in the Big Apple was opened by a British man in 1774). Thanks to many other entrepreneur artisans like them, gelato has spread across the globe, becoming perhaps the world’s most loved dessert.

Today, the “Buontalenti” cream is a popular flavor that can be found in most gelaterias across Florence, and the artist’s legacy is honored by many local artisans. One of the original interpreters of this flavor is Vetulio Bondi, a Florentine gelato master and a contributor to FSU-Florence “The Culture is in the Cuisine” class. For Bondi, ice cream making is a vital craft, a philosophy of life that he has recently illustrated in his book *Il gelato (non) è uguale per tutti* (*Ice cream is (not) the same for everyone*). “Gelato reveals who we are much more than many words” he writes. “Sometimes I like to observe my customers eating gelato, but the thing that gives me the most pleasure is watching the children. They have a unique expression, their eyes begin to shine and they seem to say: I want everything, I want everything! Here is the key: ice cream is happiness, and whoever eats it becomes a child again.”
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