

Giovanna Carlino - Age 11

On a hot August Friday, my babysitter drove us to bustling Newark airport. Soon I was to be leaving for my first trip to Italy. How exciting. The flight was long but Alitalia's tasty snacks, constant drink refills and entertaining movies made the ride a whole lot easier. Finally, after a long seven hour ride, we safely and smoothly reached land. I was actually in Italy. WOW!

In New Jersey it was 2:00 am, but not in Italy, where it was already 8:00 am. Eagerly we began walking around the ancient city of Rome. We saw spectacular churches and historic sights like the Colosseum. It is incredible to think that I was walking in the footprints of a gladiator who lived thousands of years ago. We saw the miraculous Vatican and climbed the 550-step cupola to see the stunning view of Rome. We were astounded by Michelangelo's amazing Sistine chapel and Raphael's awesome paintings. We went to the Pantheon and I questioned the large hole in the dome and wondered why rain doesn't flood the building. The answers and the architecture were both pretty cool. Just walking through the B.C dated cobblestone streets was something to marvel at. Rome was truly my favorite place in Italy, as it was filled with history and moving sights. After three days in Rome it was time to move onto our next adventure, Assisi.

We drove through beautiful countryside, with rolling hills, valleys sprinkled with small houses and farms. It was so pretty, very peaceful and quaint. We arrived in the small town of Assisi through winding mountain roads, and even in the dark I could tell that it was a beautiful city. The next morning we toured St. Francis' Basilica. I was impressed with the interesting art and how the different architecture and painting styles gave each level of the Church a different feel. Then we walked to St. Clare's church, saw St. Clare's tomb and then headed off to San Damiano to see the cross that spoke to St. Francis. It was all so beautiful and fantastic.

Our next stop was Abruzzo to meet my relatives for the first time. When we pulled up in front of my cousin Antonella's house, our Italian relatives were gathered together and were shouting "ciao". There was lots of hugging, crying, kissing and chatting with my mom and dad who speak Italian. Here I was meeting relatives for the first time in Italy. Whoa! They led us into their home and ushered us into the kitchen where there was a steaming plate of timbale and an enormous platter of Italian cold cuts, fried olives and other delicious treats. We ate, talked more with cousins and then ate some more. I was actually enjoying myself despite not speaking Italian. The next few days were spent at the beach playing with my cousins Felipe, Federico, Cecilia and Claudia. It was really cool to meet new cousins and play with them in the calm Adriatic Sea. Unfortunately, we had to leave our newfound friends. Goodbyes were said and emails exchanged. I would miss our Italian family, but I was excited for our next stop, Venice.

The moment we sailed into Venice I knew it was a special place. Although it smelled a little musty, I loved the water's breeze and the shady alleys leading to grand piazzas. We saw the bridge of sighs and explored some Islands. Glass is made on Murano. It was very cool to watch the people blow the glass and carefully shape it until it was just right. On another island lace is made. My family and I even got to watch how lace tablecloths are sewn. The last Island only had five people living on it. Whoa. In the evening we enjoyed a gondola ride through the canals. I really loved the ride; it was so relaxing and really fun. To finish the night we got some yummy gelato. The next day we set out for Sienna.

In Sienna we went to the church of St. Catherine's and saw her relics. The old city was so lovely. The next day we toured Pisa. Walking up the tilted tower was really cool, and the view was spectacular. Lastly, we saw pretty Florence with its colored marble Duomo and beautiful piazzas. There we visited the famous museums and marveled at the spectacular artwork.

Italy is an awesome place. The history, landscape, food, and artwork are unsurpassed. It was an amazing trip and I hope someday to go back.

