WHAT IS THE RATE OF SUCCESS FOR THE FSU FLORENCE PROGRAM AND HOW HAS THE PROGRAM IMPROVED?

Frank Nero, Program Director:

When Lucia and I started in this role in Fall 2016, there were 35 students enrolled in classes. This fall, there will be 90 students. I think the greatest success has been the staff and faculty’s ability to project a certain culture and identity that shows our students how invested we are. It took around three years to get this culture and identity to the point where we feel it’s ready to take off. When the students see that we’re invested, they become invested too. It can be from little details like putting FSU swag over the school, holding soccer tournaments and participating in volunteer projects, such as the t-shirts for AWA.

WHERE DO YOU SEE THE PROGRAM GOING IN THE NEAR FUTURE AND WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM THE NEW STUDY CENTER?

Lucia Cossari, Associate Director:

Frank and I had a vision of what we want. And I think what we have right now is already awesome, but with the new building we’re going to be the best program one hundred percent. We are thinking a lot in terms of investing, they become invested too. It can be from little details like putting FSU swag over the school, holding soccer tournaments and participating in volunteer projects, such as the t-shirts for AWA.

Nero:

From my point of view, it’s the duty and charge of the study center to establish a kind of open-minded identity and support self-discovery for students.

Not only is our vision of a study center, but we also envision it as a community center. We want to fight against this idea of the “ugly American” who is using the city’s resources and not really trying to understand the city and its people and its life. We hope to insert ourselves in this new neighborhood to take on a very proactive role of opening our doors to community residents and businesses. People who own businesses and live on Via dei Neri are proud of their identity. We want to participate side by side with them, fostering a sense of community and not being an enclosed “American enclave.”

Every year, Frank Nero, Director of the FSU Florence study center, never fails to evoke the courage of that 1966 cohort. He unfolds the defining story of ‘Giù l’angolo del fango’, the mud angels, the first FSU students in Italy who, after a unanimous vote, had decided to stay in Florence to help the city recover from an unprecedented flood. Nero underlines these students’ generosity, empathy and sense of community that pushed them to take to the city with wheelbarrows, buckets and shovels to sort through the grime to recover manuscripts and art pieces.

Today, that spirit serves as a model for all FSU students, explained Frank Nero and his Assistant Director Lucia Cossari. It truly became a foundational keystone for the Florence program at the 50th reunion of the 1966 class, rediscovering what it truly meant to be a Mud Angel.

“Their spirit of volunteerism and self-sacrifice when everything went wrong studying abroad is the model of behavior, for our students and also our staff and faculty,” Cossari said. Being part of that legacy means “taking care of something and taking care of it with devotion, constancy, and love.”

FSU Florence has worked to follow in that first group’s lead by instilling the same sense of giving back they exemplified.

“What I hope it means for each student who walks through our doors is that they are able to feel the same level of investment in our program’s role in the community that our first students felt in 1966,” Nero added. “We want them to take pride in their school’s history and heritage and tradition, and that this spirit is channeled into action, volunteering in the community.”

Since the flood, FSU Florence students have continued to volunteer each semester. A popular choice for current students is volunteering at the local women’s shelter, Casa San Paolino.

Sophie Maina, a current Program Assistant and FSU alumna, devoted her semester in Florence to bonding with refugee children.

“We would play, read with them, or help with their English homework,” Maina said. “I really love kids. To see how happy they were despite the fact that they were really struggling, it was really rewarding. You could give them some happy times and give the mums a break.”

Historically, FSU Florence students and staff have taken their duty to give back to heart. This year, through a partnership with Advancing Women Artists (AWA), a not-for-profit devoted to identifying and restoring artworks from women, students can contribute toward their Art Angels program.

“Yesterday there were our Mud Angels,” Cossari said. “Today, through our charity, we are Art Angels, and in the future, we will surely have many other initiatives all bound by a common denominator, which is the spirit embodied by FSU as a bridge that connects the present to the past and future.”

Ever since 1966, FSU students have had a passionate relationship with Florence and its citizens. Nero and Cossari want every new class of students to really understand that FSU students must carry on the spirit of the 1966 Mud Angels and demonstrate a respectful behavior that doesn’t prompt locals to immediately perceive each cohort as loud, disrespectful and historically uneducated.

“When you see injustice, don’t turn your head,” Nero said. “But dive in and pull up your fellow men and women, no matter what their ethnicity is, religion, economic circumstances, culture, gender, orientation and identity. Part of being a mud angel is getting down into the mud to pull others out from it into the light.”
Trips taken by the FSU IP program this summer included the Amalfi Coast, Verona, Sirmione and Fattoria Lavacchio vineyard.
Sarah Fioroni is the daughter of Amico Fioroni—one of three brothers who worked in the Tuscan hills as sharecroppers in the 1950s. Twenty years later, the brothers pooled their earnings to purchase the first piece of land that would become Fattoria Poggio Alloro, the Laurel Hill Farm. Following in her father’s footsteps, Sarah now runs the all-organic Fattoria with nearly four generations of other Fioroni’s. The family takes pride in their sizeable production of fine wines, olive oil, mixed produce, and even keeps a small herd of milky white Chianina cows. Visitors can book a stay in the small bed and breakfast on the property, participate in wine tasting tours, or take a cooking class like my classmates and I did. But you don’t have to travel to the Tuscan countryside to experience a 4-course Italian meal, simply follow the recipes included below.

**An Evening at FATTORIA POGGIO ALLORO**

*By Emma Moody
Photo Editor*

PASTA FATTA IN CASA

**Serves 8**

**Ingredients:**
2 cups semolina flour
2 cups all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon sea salt
6 eggs
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil, more as needed (alternatively, milk)
3 tablespoons salt

On a clean work surface, mix the semolina, all-purpose flour, and sea salt until homogenous. Form a well in the middle. Crack the eggs into the well and begin to beat with a fork. With each stroke, whisk more flour into the egg mixture.

When it can no longer be worked with a fork, knead the dough by hand until the rest of the flour has been incorporated and the dough is firm and elastic. If the dough seems dry, add more olive oil. If it is still too sticky, add more flour. Divide in half and allow to rest under a clean towel for 20 minutes.

On a lightly floured work surface, roll out one portion of dough into a paper-thin sheet. Lightly flour the dough and fold it over itself. Repeat with the other portion of dough.

For tagliatelle pasta, cut the dough into strips about the width of your pinky finger. Unroll the pasta, toss with a bit of flour, and let dry 1 hour.

Bring a large pot of heavily salted water to a rolling boil. Add the pasta and cook for about 5 minutes or until al dente. Drain well and toss with your choice of sauce.

TORTA DI MELE

**Makes one, 8-inch cake — Serves 8**

**Ingredients:**
3 eggs
1 cup white sugar
1 ½ cups unbleached all-purpose flour
½ cup whole milk
2 ½ teaspoons butter, melted
2 teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
3 medium golden delicious apples, peeled, cored, and cut into 1/8 in. slices
Powdered sugar and vanilla ice cream to top, if desired

Preheat the oven to 350º. Butter and flour an 8-inch springform pan. Tap the pan to release excess flour and discard. Set aside.

In a large bowl, crack the eggs and while whisking vigorously, slowly add the sugar. Beat for 5 minutes or until thick and pale-yellow in color. Whisk in the milk and butter until combined. Over a period of 3 minutes, whisk in the flour, being sure to scrape down the side of the bowl and combine well. Add the baking powder and vanilla and whisk for another 2 minutes.

Pour the batter into the prepared springform pan. Arrange the apple slices horizontally, core side down, in concentric circles on top of the batter starting at the outside edge, similar to a rose.

Bake for 50 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake comes out clean.

Let rest for 10 minutes before removing from the pan.
Florence at 4 a.m. transforms into a different city. As I wind my way south, towards the outskirts of the city, I realize the cooing pigeons pecking and scratching at the cobblestone are my only company. Crossing the muddy Arno River away from the city center and into the oltrarno district, I stop at the steps leading up to San Miniato Church and look up; the sky gradually fades from black to blue. Soon, golden light will bathe the city in a new day, finding first Brunelleschi’s famous dome atop the Cathedral of Santa Maria dei Fiore. The Duomo.

I’m still catching my breath as I arrive at Piazzale Michelangelo and look out over the sleeping city; a storm system moves from Ponte Vecchio towards Santa Croce Church. The faint rumble of thunder follows each strike of lighting emanating from the purple storm clouds that bruise the sky. One lucky long exposure captures a strike of lighting as it makes landfall in the Tuscan countryside, miles beyond the site of the cathedral in Florence’s city center. Other attempts at capturing the lightning are futile. So, I shift my focus.

I have a composition in mind, but without a specific location to go off of, I’m left to try and line up elements of the reference photo with what I see in real time. Finding the exact spot will prove more difficult than I first assumed, but will result in a worthwhile adventure nonetheless. I stop every few minutes to photograph the Duomo under the orangey-purple morning clouds, checking to see if I’ve achieved the right angle. Not yet.

It’s 7 a.m. now and I’m about to give up after two hours of walking, retracing my steps and taking photos to compare to the reference photo — a half hidden portrait of the Duomo published by Firenze Turismo. My calves protest as I trudge up the steps for the third time today. The clouds return with the second golden hour of the day, making for a hazy contrast between the sharp jigsaw puzzle of buildings and smooth sky punctuated by the Duomo.

I knew going into my Duomo day that finding interesting ways to photograph such a famous façade comes with challenges. However, by spending so much of my day just studying it through my viewfinder I learned that sometimes hiding part of the building or photographing it out of focus makes for more interesting compositions compared to pictures snapped head on.

At 8 a.m. Piazza del Duomo is already buzzing with tourists. I angle my lens upwards, struggling to keep selfie sticks and guide flags out of the frame. I let go of any hopes of photographing the cathedral head on days ago. I didn’t come to take the same photo everyone captures of the church, I came to find new ways to photograph the age-old façade. A healthy challenge for a budding photographer.

I stay in the Piazza past 10 a.m., circling the building like a vulture. Studying every curve through my viewfinder and releasing the shutter only when I’m sure I’ve targeted something worthwhile. Any remnants of this morning’s storm disappear as the Duomo flashes its red brick roof against the bright blue afternoon sky. Deciding that the best light for the morning has come and gone, I retire back to my apartment hoping for a few hours rest before I head back to the hills for sunset. I edit photos instead.

At 6 p.m. I start my second pilgrimage to Piazzale Michelangelo. My calves protest as I trudge up the steps for the third time today. The clouds return with the second golden hour of the day, making for a hazy contrast between the sharp jigsaw puzzle of buildings and smooth sky punctuated by the Duomo.

I also discovered that photos taken at different times of the day and, thus, in a variety of light tell new tales—even when taken from the same angle. I experimented with exposure times, shutter speed, and focus with each new composition, vowing not to take the same photo twice.

The day ended with another lonely walk down from the hills and back into the city. A final thirty-second exposure looking back at the lofty bell tower captures the taillights of a taxi speeding towards the plaza, reminding me that all roads lead back to the Duomo.
Angelica Filippini spends her days helping the injured and sick who wander into her pharmacy, but she never really knew their pain until an accident prevented her from working, walking, and isolated her from Florentine society. “All that kept me going was knowing that this was temporary… I feel terrible for those who come in and they are (disabled) forever,” she told me, a melancholy look on her face.

Many parts of Italian society have modernized. Florence’s ash-gray uneven cobblestone streets have not. To many they represent the city’s history and timelessness, to others it embodies a painful and seemingly never-ending battle for social acceptance.

Where do you eat, shop, or drink when every restaurant is open, but you cannot enter? How can you learn about the history and culture of a city if you are unable to reach their great masterpieces? How can you enjoy the novelty of cobblestone sidewalks, when every few feet you may fall? The lack of options for the disabled within the city came to my attention after my experience of trying to get around Florence with restricted mobility.

These questions are asked by an estimated five percent of the total Italian population, with disabilities. The region of Tuscany and the city of Florence have no official public disabled population count.

Anna Forconi, a quiet but passionate jewelry shop worker near the bustling Via Volta Disipierro explained that the city, its streets and its shops were all built very narrow making it difficult for people in wheelchairs to get around. She also said how it can be “easier for those in [wheel] chairs to see the museums and all these things because they are made to help them, but in town where life is, it is difficult.”

Whereas Eleonora, who works at Natalino’s panini café, expressed concern that every place has a step or two to get inside or to move between rooms. Workers do their best to assist customers by rearranging tables or helping them to their seats. But she also added, that “they only have about one (disabled customer) a month.”

“You need a car,” Forconi clarified, the government will give a parking pass to make it easier but driving takes more time than walking. There are some existing governmental regulations to help people with disabilities. However, regulations are known to be mostly enforced during new construction outside the city center, if at all.

Natalia, hostess at Blunotte Bed & Breakfast, explained that because of the historic building they must help disabled guests into the building. The entrance was difficult as the sidewalk has no ramp, there was a step to get in the door and a set of six or seven steps before you reach an elevator and the B&B’s front desk. Natalia said the owner is a bigger man who just schedules to be there when disabled guests are checking in, but this hasn’t been an issue as they haven’t had one wheelchair bound gust in the last five years.

If the general population does not know there is an accessibility issue because they rarely see disabled persons around parts of the city that they call home, then they will not feel motivated to accommodate. People with disabilities will not come to those parts of town they cannot easily navigate, thus creating a vicious cycle.
The beauty of Florence appears on almost every corner. A design, a fresco, religious artifacts, and plaques. You can't escape it, and it may be why many evoke the Stendhal syndrome, due to the overwhelming amount of art and history.

While visitors may be awestruck, experiencing an art-attack, locals have apparently grown accustomed to the presence of Renaissance marvels and became complacent in its need for upkeep and preservation to the point of ignoring their values and even using them as ash trays at times.

Art historian and artist, Professor Alan Pascuzzi, reflected on the conflict between Italians’ indifference to the history surrounding them and the world’s need to preserve it. He expressed that living with so much history can be a double-edged sword.

For instance, when in 1985, Piazza della Signoria was under construction the city uncovered the tops of buildings. As they kept digging, the center of the old Roman town was uncovered. Yet, “They just took pictures filled it over with sand and put the capstones on top,” Pascuzzi explained.

Arguably, it is hard to preserve new discoveries for research without making the entire country of Italy a UNESCO world heritage site. Italy already counts as 50 official UNESCO world heritage sites for cultural preservation.

Much of the time EU or UNESCO projects seem great on paper but either all the money set aside does not get distributed to where it was meant to go or the government will wait out the agreement’s deadline. This lets them get the good publicity, but not actually spend the money.

In fact, over the last twenty years, all the biggest restoration projects Professor Pascuzzi has witnessed or worked on were payed for by non-Italian institutions or entities. For example, the Sistine Chapel ceiling restoration was entirely funded by the Nippon Japanese TV company who now own it and the rights to all official merchandise.

If you go somewhere like Pompeii and the ruins are covered in graffiti without a custodian in sight, the separation “between the journalistic impact of saying these things and the implementation of the reality” of the situation is extensive according to Pascuzzi. Pompeii is one of the world’s most visited archeological sites, so how can it or other historic places be preserved while still open to educate tourists and Italians alike?

Money is not the only issue. Laws surrounding potential archeological findings that make construction workers pause and call in professionals to see what was discovered, often leading to cover-ups and people not reporting findings to the government. If they must stop working, they lose money and risk going bankrupt, so dumping artifacts off-site is a real issue. Most notably during the construction of a new subway in Rome for the 1990 World Cup, colleagues of Pascuzzi found catacombs and Roman vases in dumpsters or at dump sites around the city. Artifacts that could rewrite history were literally trashed, for convenience sake.

The complacency of locals, the depletion of Florentine or Italian funding and lack of trust of government management of priceless artifacts is leaving Italy’s physical history to decay or be purchased by the highest foreign bidder. Ideally everything should be conserved, but as Pascuzzi’s coworker told him: “we are just passing through, nothing is forever.”
Black-and-white photographs of early Florentine families line the walls alongside letters of gratitude from previous customers. Faded newspapers from over 60 years ago are displayed next to leather table stations that have served multiple artisans. This place is grounded in tradition.

Here, dedication to precision has been impeccably preserved. A young craftsman slices a clean cut of the brown belt that he is sizing for an impatient client. Nearby, customers admire a variety of handmade products ranging from pocket wallets to sophisticated purses and coats.

Founded in 1950 by the Franciscan friars of the Santa Croce monastery and Florentine artisans Marcello Gori and Silvano Casini, la Scuola del Cuoio di Firenze (the Leather School of Florence) has always maintained a strong commitment to leather-making. Even today under the leadership of Gori’s daughters Laura, Barbara and Francesca.

The school takes pride in continuing its legacy as a sustainable business offering excellent service and high quality products. Students are selected through a competitive application process and artisans are recruited to make products that are sold.

Leather crafting is a highly valued tradition in Italy and across the globe. Story has it that since President Eisenhower’s purchase of a leather set from Marcello Gori, many American presidents have also followed precedent by purchasing products from the school to furnish the Oval Office.

“Our school is one of the few in the world that teaches students how to handmake an entire item,” said Barbara Gori, CEO of the Scuola. “For example, they can create a handbag based on a customer’s sketch.”

Lucia Guasco, who took courses at la Scuola del Cuoio, currently assists Francesca Gori with producing unique handbag collections.

“Artisan quality is special because items are made with love,” Guasco said. “A bag from the Scuola del Cuoio is for life.”

Customers may pay more. Certo! Yet, they are guaranteed to receive an authentic product sourced from trusted, low-chemical tanneries. The school follows a specific process of disposal for excess production materials and encourages sustainable consumer spending.

Benedetta Panelli, an assistant at the school, enjoys interacting with students and artisans from numerous countries including Japan, Korea, Singapore, France and Italy.

“Being a multicultural team helps us to understand what each client wants,” Panelli said. “This further allows us to assure every client that we promise to be long-lasting and open-minded to their needs.”

Thus, a purchase from the leather school is a unique experience. If a product is damaged, the school provides restoration services. Initials can be pressed or stitched into handbags upon request. Belts are sized in front of each customer. These traditions of precision are prioritized in every purchase.

“When I started to work here, I saw my mom, Barbara Gori, and aunt Francesca every day, which strengthened my relationships with them,” Beatrice Gori said. “I feel very lucky to be working at the place that my grandfather founded.”
Sweaty tourists carrying oversized backpacks on their chests shuffle and shove around me. They loudly chat about the paintings, or often-unrelated topics. What should they have for lunch after this? Is it worth it to try and see the David? Did Jim remember to bring the camera?

When you enter a museum, this is not the stressful environment you expect. Quiet pondering is usually the norm, but not in the Uffizi.

I have always been involved in art, whether it was just an appreciation or experimentation in creating. I furthered this interest during my brief sabbatical, sophomore year of college, as a studio art major. During that semester and a half I cultivated my art knowledge, which included an entire course on Italian Renaissance art (which is now just a lot of fun facts).

I was incredibly excited about visiting the Uffizi, since it’s one of the things I’m not completely clueless about. However, I was pretty sorely disappointed.

As soon as we arrived the confusion and chaos began. The entrance ticket and security lines were really just one jumbled, senseless herd. I cast it off as just an annoyance, but really, it was a foreshadow.

Even at 10 A.M. on a Thursday it was uncomfortably crowded. It was hard to get close to the major works. When you did get close enough to get a good look, you felt so trapped by the swarming crowd around you that appreciating the art was difficult.

Besides being elbowed and squished, the main problem with the Uffizi was the noisiness. I have never been to a museum that loud before. The volume of everyone’s voices shocked me. I just assumed talking at an outside voice level was commonly known as something you just don’t do in a museum.

Worse even were all the attendants around us “shushing” entire rooms full of what felt like, screaming tourists. I heard the scolding shush about every five minutes for the two hours I was there.

No one should need to be told to be quiet while pondering art in a museum. They should have been quiet in the first place. There is no need to scream across the exhibit to the rest of your family identified by their matching t-shirts. Other than a lack of self-awareness, I guess.

If a museum attendant has to tell you to be quiet while surrounded by 15th century art, you should reevaluate your behavior. The disrespect for the culture, the art and the people around you oozes out with every word shouted in a museum.

The environment in the Uffizi was so distractingly rude; it was hard to focus on the actual purpose, the art. I was mainly focused on the man next to me aggressively telling his son to shove through the crowd waiting to see “The Birth of Venus.” Or the woman beside me exclaiming the just didn’t get “The Annunciation.”

Taking in the beauty of a painting or sculpture doesn’t require shouting. It goes against any museum etiquette I’ve ever known and ever want to know. How can you really appreciate the art and soak it in when you can’t even hear yourself think? The answer is you can’t.

The gallery and the art inside is undeniably extraordinary, there’s no debating that. The people viewing the art’s behavior however, was less than extraordinary.
Traveling the world is an exciting thought for most people. The idea often conjures phenomenal images in our minds: walking around some of the world’s most beautiful cities, taking in all of the different cultures and experiencing the interesting sights the world has to offer. While the excitement of traveling is prevalent, many people worry about staying in shape while traveling, especially with all the amazing food other cultures have to offer. However, most world travelers find that each day of travel often leads to ample physical exertion in multiple capacities.

Sightseeing allows travelers to experience a country’s culture while staying active, instead of spending money on a gym membership abroad. Purchase tickets to all the famous sights of the world, and you’ll have the peace of mind that you are supporting the culture of the places you are visiting while still maintaining your physical health.

The average person takes around 7,000 steps a day. Yet, the American Heart Association recommends getting 10,000 steps a day (about five miles) to maintain an active and healthy lifestyle. For many people, this remains a daunting number to reach, especially abroad. Luckily, sightseeing while traveling the world challenges you to stay active — no gym membership required.

Sightseeing oftentimes includes more physically demanding means of getting to a particular destination during your travels. In recent weeks, my family traveled across Europe and, according to our Fitbit trackers, walked over 230 miles without even realizing it. We walked all over the cities to acquaint ourselves with the culture of the city and chose more active ways of sightseeing. For example, we hiked over five miles along the coast in Cinque Terre and hiked over two miles. In a typical day of walking around a city, tourists are likely to hit over 10,000 steps in any particular day.

Lindsay Ahmed and her family from Parkland, Florida recently visited London and Paris over the course of a week. They walked to various landmarks, churches, and museums totaling over 100,000 steps in just seven days according to her Fitbit tracker. This is a drastic contrast to the 49,000 steps the average person takes in a week as reported in The Guardian. Ahmed said that, by paying a ticket admission or making a donation, it made her “feel good about seeing and supporting each city’s sights” and she “never realized how many steps” she was taking along the way.

If you’re looking to sightsee in Florence while keeping your fitness in mind, there are a few approaches you can take. Take a day to just sightsee and walk all over the city to get an overview. Walk from Medici Chapel to Palazzo Vecchio. Maybe even take a walking tour of the city to get a better understanding of the history along the way. Another way of sightseeing in Florence while staying active is to think in terms of stairs. Make reservations to climb all 436 steps to the top of the Duomo or take a picnic up the stairs to Piazzale Michelangelo and watch the sunset as a reward for climbing all those steps. If you’re looking for a more traditional form of exercise in Florence without the gym, take a run or walk along the Arno and just take in all of Florence’s beauty.

Traveling allows you to choose active forms of sightseeing, whether you climb 400 steps for an incredible view of Siena or bike along the coast of Cinque Terre. If your goal is to see as much culture as the world has to offer while staying physically active along the way, sightseeing is the golden answer. Skip the gym membership — immerse yourself in the culture and see where it takes you. You may quickly find you’ve suddenly surpassed your daily step goal and much, much more.
Italy had 429 million tourists make overnight trips last year, which is up two percent from 2017. Visitors primarily flocked to Italy’s iconic cities, such as Rome, Venice, Milan and Naples, prioritizing the defining monuments and sites considered to be must-sees.

With large numbers of bodies passing through such small spaces — four million people visited the Uffizi Gallery this year — there is ample ground for something to go wrong.

Popular Italian sights are often overrun with travelers bunched up in concentrated tour groups. Other spots are flooded by lounging tourists who need rest for their feet after amassing tens of thousands of steps in a day. As tourism becomes continuously more abundant, it is clear that something must be done to maintain an understanding of respect among some of Italy’s most popular and sacred destinations.

Although the desire to see all of the iconic sights is understandable, the Italian Police have begun to address tourists’ disrespectful behavior by implementing fines. Finable offenses range from wearing a swimsuit in public (without a cover-up) to sitting on the ground. The charges assigned to tourists are no mere €10 charge, but rather have been reported to extend to €500.

In light of the increasing popularity of these tourist charges, it’s important to navigate overcrowded cities with respect. Regardless of aching legs, sitting down in a busy area can infringe on the experience of others. Despite weather that often climbs into the 40s, a bikini is not appropriate sightseeing apparel. According to The Express, the Italian police force is specifically targeting behavior considered to be inappropriate.

Florence is looking at ways to confront the problem beyond the more forceful approach of fining. The tourism campaign coined #EnjoyRespectFirenze is a way for the city to outline a standard for tourists, ensuring that visitors have a good time without compromising the pristine and historic nature of Florence.

The #EnjoyRespectFirenze campaign involves all aspects of travel - covering how to eat, shop, dress and even urinate while exploring the city. It also points travelers to info-points, recommended accommodations and events around the city that will allow visitors to explore the entire city without restriction.

No one wants to end their trip to Italy with memories of battling fines. To maintain the mutual respect between locals and non-locals, tourists must be aware of how their behavior can impact an otherwise pleasant experience. By simply stepping to the side when a local needs to pass, casting a smile to passersby or throwing waste in one of the many garbage bins along the streets, tourists may establish a good impression that may result in an extra scoop of gelato or free limoncello shot!

Eight hundred grueling hours of university classes a year followed by two exams monthly sounds extremely daunting to even the most dedicated scholar. Because it is. However, that’s exactly what one can expect when in the process of becoming a tour guide in the Renaissance City.

Tour guides provide travelers with a unique look at Florence, a city with over two thousand years of complex history. Therefore, it’s important that the history presented on each of these daily tours be accurate and informative to those listening. Becoming a licensed tour guide in Florence is so rigorous that the City of Florence records only one in ten applicants satisfied the examinations.

Amanda, a tour guide for Renaissance Tales Florence, even commented on the fact that the government of Florence does not even offer exams this year because there are already too many tour guides. Even if one is able to pass the rigorous exams and receive a tour guide license, a heavy fee should be expected to accompany the classes and certification process.

“To obtain the relevant qualifications required to be a tour guide…can cost around 2000 euro,” according to the Italian Ministry of University and Research.

Local tour guides invest so much time into earning their title, but also love interacting with people who are enthusiastic about learning more about Florence and everything the city has to offer —from history to food. If you find yourself looking to learn more about the historical city of Florence and all the culture the city provides, support a local tour guide. But if you think you have what it takes to overcome the rigor of a highly-weighted occupation, it might be time to get studying!
Finding Acceptance and Support in Florence

By Taylor Mackin
Staff Writer

Italy is a nation engulfed in tradition and culture that attracts millions of tourists each year. Historically the Tuscan Region and city of Florence is known as a safe-haven for minorities, however, for LGBTQIA+ individuals its conservative values can be seen as a threat.

The origins of today’s queer community in Florence began in the late 1970’s with exclusively gay, lesbian, and trans bars, which later became the home base for organizations focused on advocating for queer rights through education.

Until 1980, only gay, lesbian or trans-exclusive advocacy groups existed. This made it hard for groups to work together toward national change. Achigay, Italy’s first and largest national gay organization, focused on unifying the community by providing counseling and education.

The resolution of Achigay in the late 90’s led to the establishment of IREOS (meaning lily in Greek) as Florence’s Queer Community Self-Service Center. According to one of the founders, Riccardo Pieralli, IREOS was formed and began in 1997 as a way of maintaining the services and support that Achigay beyond the organization’s end. IREOS’ goal is to bridge the gap between Italy’s queer community and the rest of the nation and its government.

Over the last 22 years, IREOS has provided the queer community with access to professional psychological counseling. Additionally, IREOS offers free access to its advisory center, its queer Library & Doc Center as well as safe-sex education and HIV testing. The organization also works with the local Tuscan government on a school education program called #Scuola, where they teach students about finding support and accepting diversity.

Organizations like IREOS have become increasingly important with rising tensions from the current political state of Italy. One of the events that built tension between the general public and the queer community was the 2018 “Family Day” conference, hosted by Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini in Verona. The conference, which emphasized traditional family values and encouraged the return of the death penalty for gays, saw no condemnation from Salvini. With this new regime, there have been several violent homophobic attacks reported in the name of their conservative policies.

IREOS’ choir director, Filippo Becattini, explained that even in the current turbulent times, Florence continues to welcome community members and supporters.

Throughout the city there are still many locations for members of the LGBTQIA+ community to socialize among each other. Piccolo Caffe & Queer Bar are well known LGBT+ inclusive spots, and Quelo and Crisco and Fabrik run as gay only bars. There are traditions of even secret monthly parties hosted by the LGBTQIA+ community, as noted by Becattini. Flog, the oldest one, takes place on the first Friday of every (non-summer) month and Burns is hosted by the IREOS.

Italy is still moving forward. In 2016, same-sex civil unions and unregistered cohabitation was legalized. Considering the worrisome lack of accurate and up to date information online Riccardo and Becattini, strive to reassure LGBTQIA+ persons Florence that it is safe. Like most developed nations, Italy’s queer policy is still on the road to improvement when it comes to legalizing marriage and same-sex couples’ adoption, but there is still a present community in most cities, for one’s support, assistance and education.
Janice Waugh, speaking on

But what about fear?

really comes from the simple act of actually doing it.

now finding more women traveling solo than men.

tour operator Wild Frontiers, informed

women traveling alone.

Although news recurrently documents terrorist attacks, assaults, hold you back.

seizing the moment. If you want something, do not let anyone

never ran into any problems. The value of this trip for me was

by myself,” she said. “So, my biggest fear was being stuck, but I

It was the first time that I traveled alone to a different country

er than she once thought.

19-year-old Tampa resident quickly realized she was much brav

fear should really not be a deterrent. She explained that women

there is something special about traveling by yourself and that

There is something special about traveling by yourself and that fear should really not be a deterrent. She explained that women are never truly alone. The author mentioned that when she travels, she often plans tours, takes a class, or builds things into her day to keep the rhythm swinging.

Waugh added that by traveling alone, women can find out what events they actually enjoy doing, meet random people on the train they would have never talked to, and even engage in the act of finding themselves on the journey itself.

Grace Hrenko agreed. “Throughout my experience, I noticed, that although I was nervous, I really never felt alone and lonely.

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so I go. No time to spare for I fear one miscalculation in timing could throw the rest of my itinerary off.

Pulling into Pisa Central station, I have only three minutes to

exit and I am engulfed in a battle with other tourists struggling to remove their bulky luggage from the overhead compartments. Was I going to make it off?

The denim jacket I had fastened around my waist is caught in

the automated closing doors, a fellow traveler having to yank it out for me. With a small “grazie” to the man, I set off for

The beginning of a new journey, one that I've never experienced before and one that I begin to question if I'm truly prepared for. I make sure I stuff all the essentials, and nothing more, for the next 68 hours into my North Face backpack, everything tucked into its own specific nook or cranny.

9:49

I walk with long, purposeful strides to Florence Santa Maria Novella while running all the plans for the weekend through my head over and over. Staring up at the bright letters in search of train 3117, a regional to Pisa, waiting for the platform number to appear, a slight cramp forms in my neck from the awkward position. Finally, Platform 2 appears and off I go. No time to spare for I fear one miscalculation in timing could throw the rest of my itinerary off.

10:49

Pulling into Pisa Central station, I have only three minutes to exit and I am engulfed in a battle with other tourists struggling to remove their bulky luggage from the overhead compartments. Was I going to make it off?

10:52

The denim jacket I had fastened around my waist is caught in the automated closing doors, a fellow traveler having to yank it out for me. With a small “grazie” to the man, I set off for the airport. Passing by a taxi stand I hesitate and think about waiting for one, but I only have a set number of euros with me for the entire weekend, and I don't want to risk running out.

11:21

Arriving at Pisa Airport, after navigating without the use of GPS on my phone, not wanting to run out of battery with the changing cord shoved so deeply in my backpack. I am corralled into the longer of the two maze-like lines for security. “Of course,” I think to myself, shuffled in with all the non-Italian citizens.

8:37

The beginning of a new journey, one that I've never experienced before and one that I begin to question if I'm truly prepared for. I make sure I stuff all the essentials, and nothing more, for the next 68 hours into my North Face backpack, everything tucked into its own specific nook or cranny.

12:06

Reuniting with my bag and struggling to put my sneakers on in a timely manner to get out of the security section, I am greeted with another departure board. The familiar feeling in my neck comes back as I waited for my gate. Finally, I see: “Flight HV5424 delayed.” I had spent the three previous night’s planning my time down to the minute knowing there was no room for error. Mamma mia! I am going to miss my taxi and museum reservations.

A one-hour delay, and a two-and-a-half-hour flight later.

16:45

I am walking fast through what seems to be the never-ending Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam. Sprinting out to the taxi stand I find my driver waiting for me, already running the clock, I am 15 minutes late. My wallet would be feeling the pain.

17:30

Making it to the Moco Museum I am told I can't wear my backpack in. What am I supposed to do with it? It is my life line this weekend. Convincing the man at the desk that I needed it on me, he finally settles to letting me wear it on the front of my body. Great, I now look like the lame tourists I had been making fun of back in Florence.

19:15

The sky has turned from a beautiful shade of baby blue to a noticeably darker grey. With no food since my on-the-go pastry at the train station that morning, my stomach protests.

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ITALY’S USE OF FOOD TO CONNECT WITH OTHERS

The longing for the immersion into Italy’s use of food to connect with others is profound. As expatriates and tourists flock to Italy, the proliferation of high-end international cuisine can mask the true nature of food as a tool for connection. Yet, for American students living in the Tuscan capital, does the exposure to Italian cuisine ever reach a saturation point? The answer, like Italian food itself, is a complex one. Food is more than just sustenance; it is a cultural expression that plays a deeper meaning and aspect of Italian culture. The Italian cuisine is not only a worldly presence, but a deep cultural value prominent within the hearts and stomachs of locals that surpasses the interest of other cultural cuisine. It is this kind of personalized environment offered by markets like Sant’Ambrogio that Nero credits as being one of the most friendly places in Florence, even during tourist high season.

The market is frequented by expats, tourists and locals—especially senior citizens. A mix of cultural demographics come together with a common purpose and mingle as a result. Sant’Ambrogio provides its community with fresh fruits and vegetables at an affordable price. Florentine blogger and expat Lauren Piccolo believes, “even better is the fact that the customers and vendors usually end such intense encounters at the market with a kiss on both cheeks, a wave, and a declaration that they’ll see each other soon.”

Child’s perspective sought to suggest that Italian food is a mix of simplicity and sophistication. Outsiders may be tempted to believe that Italian citizens are by rights required to make pasta sauce by hand and toss their own pizza dough before each meal. Yet, for anyone living in Florence, the influence they have on the Italian culinary scene does not even begin to shape the local food traditions. The Italian cuisine is not only a worldly presence, but a deep cultural value prominent within the hearts and stomachs of locals that surpasses the interest of other cultural cuisines. The Italian cuisine is not only a worldly presence, but a deep cultural value prominent within the hearts and stomachs of locals that surpasses the interest of other cultural cuisines.

Food is not just about satisfying hunger; it is the fabric of Italian culture. Outsiders may be tempted to believe that Italian food is predictable and ordinary. However, although food is a core aspect of Italian culture, it goes beyond satisfying a fundamental need. Market culture, in particular, plays a deeper meaning and aspect of Italian culture. Market culture is the secret element to any homemade Italian dish and displays a deeper meaning and aspect of Italian culture—food is a tool that is considered a good reason to connect with others and continue a shared experience.

When local Florentine and former Chilean native Constance Schürch pondered about the turnout of tourists and lack of locals at her Mexican restaurant, she remarked that “Italians are obsessed with Italian food.” The longing for the immersive experience that presents itself among each immaculately crafted meal creates a standard that many other cuisines cannot meet, at least in the eyes of Italians. What is even more remarkable than Schürch’s statement is the extent to which Italians love their own cuisine. Local Florentine influencer from France, Alice Cheron, added that, “when on vacation, Italians are thinking about the meal they are going to eat when they get back home.”

American study abroad student April Hooper gave her perspective on the Florentine food culture by describing her observations during her brief time here. “I have noticed that the customers at the Mexican and Chinese restaurants I have been to are not residents of Florence,” Hooper stated. “I have also noticed that the majority of the time, the employees of these restaurants are not even native to Florence.”

Despite the obvious presence of tourists and expatriates living in Florence, the influence they have on the Italian culture does not even begin to shape the local food traditions. The Italian cuisine is not only a worldly presence, but a deep cultural value prominent within the hearts and stomachs of locals that surpasses the interest of other cultural cuisines.
In the early hours of the morning, Italians passionately rush to La Loggia degli Albizzi, a local café in the street bearing its name. Some carry La Repubblica, a national newspaper, in their hand, others loudly answer their phones. 

*Prosto!* The bar presents a cacophony of noises only stopped by their firm orders of a cappuccino and a pastry for their first meal of the day.

2:00 p.m. The second rush comes when tourists drop by after having followed Yelp recommendations. “May I have an iced cappuccino with caramel and oat milk?” a FSU student asks.

The barista answers “only soy!”

“It is hopefully common knowledge by now that a cappuccino is not ordered past breakfast, with meals other than breakfast or after meals,” explains Coral Sisk, a blogger for Campus Appetite. “Why? Because the milk in cappuccino is considered a meal component.”

But what about ordering a cappuccino served with almond milk or soy milk? Would it make a difference, and would it be culturally acceptable?

At the Chocolatte café located in the Piazza Salvemini square, the door is always open, allowing the delightful homemade chocolate and coffee aroma to fill the street. Being one of the few spots in town that serves iced coffee, this hotspot quickly became a favorite among students studying abroad. According to Andreja Arandjelovic, a barista at Chocolatte, it is not a part of the Italian culture to order a coffee with cow’s milk in the afternoon, even with a non-dairy alternative. “Instead a local may order an espresso shot, or a black tea,” he said. Yet, La Milkeria, a café just a short walk from the Florida State University study center has FSU students lining up out the door for an afternoon cappuccino.

So, do they follow a different culture there? Has the culture developed a higher level of tolerance? Is it now trendy or culturally acceptable for an Italian to order a cappuccino after breakfast with an alternative milk?

“It is not a part of their customs and typically if they do, they have an espresso with lactose free milk only,” Arandjelovic explained. He also added he finds it unusual that Americans participate in drinking alternative milks throughout the day. In Italy, only children indulge in alternative milks after breakfast.

As tourism in Italy increases annually, cafés in Italy will continue selling milk-based caffeinated drinks during the operating business hours to accommodate tourists, even though it’s not a part of the Italian custom. Since tourists are given the option to order a cappuccino after breakfast, it is easy to differentiate a tourist when visiting Florentine cafes.
Among the younger generation, a new wave of combating global warming has surfaced in the form of adopting a plant-based diet. A 2018 study from the University of Oxford found that this lifestyle could reduce one's carbon footprint by 73 percent. It's no surprise that so many have decided to minimize or cut out meat altogether. Believe it or not, it's even possible to go vegan in Italy - the land of parmigiano reggiano and prosciutto.

Luckily, for those of us studying in Florence, there are a plethora of options spread throughout the city. Residents of Ciompi have one of my favorite spots right at their doorstep: Universo Vegano has an extensive menu full of Italian classics and American favorites. I highly recommend the smoked burger and the lasagna! To satisfy the sweet tooth, they have an array of delicious plain and filled croissants as well as a large selection of desserts. Their tiramisu was the best I've ever had and, trust me, I've had plenty (vegan and not).

Another all vegan joint is Giumella, a vegan deli with some of the best seitan (a meat substitute made of wheat gluten) I've ever had. They have a build-your-own plate style of ordering where customers get a little taste of everything. My recommendation is to do just that! I haven't met a dish at Giumella that I did not like. The authentic Tuscan flavors marry the vegan lifestyle with traditional Italian food. Be sure to finish off the meal with one of their homemade desserts. It's the only place I've found for vegan cannolis in Florence thus far.

For a slightly healthier option or for those dining with non-vegans, Shake Cafe is the place to go. Options include: acai bowls, chia pudding, wraps, salads, burritos and smoothies. They also have a stellar vegan pastry selection including my favorite chocolate croissant in all of Florence and a decadent chocolate chip banana bread.

The best marinara (cheeseless) pizza in the city goes to Gusta Pizza. While you can find vegan cheese pizzas at Universo Vegano, there’s nothing quite like the refreshing sauce and charred crust offered at this favorite spot among Florentines. They’ll even make it into the shape of a heart upon request. It will be love at first bite.

It’s not a proper day in Firenze without an overflowing cone of creamy gelato. My go-to spots are La Carraia and Eduardo. La Carraia has my favorite fondente (dark chocolate) of all time and a plethora of fruity flavors to pair it with (I recommend strawberry). Residing in the shadow of the Duomo is Eduardo, a natural gelato shop with the most vegan options I’ve ever seen in the city. Personal favorites include the Ed Sheeran (cinnamon, apple, ginger) and the chianti sorbet! The perfect addition to a stroll around Florence’s most famous landmark.

Even in a country that boasts of the finest meats and cheeses, students can do their part to lower their carbon footprint and make it a little easier on the planet at mealtimes. According to earthday.org, even starting with a simple “meatless Monday” can accumulate to the equivalent of reducing everyone’s daily showers by three minutes or taking a car off the road for five weeks. With all of these incredible vegan options in Florence, why not give one a try?

By Elyse Vernon
Editor-in-Chief
It was once rather easy to order Florentine food as a tourist. The main menu item to recall was “bistecca alla Fiorentina.” Yet in 2019, times have changed. Now visitors and merchants alike have had to familiarize themselves with new phrases like “vegano, soia e biologica,” (vegan, soy and organic).

Dining in the Tuscan capital reflects Italian cuisine as a whole: spaghetti bolognese, margherita pizza and gelato to name a few. However, according to the official tourism website, Visit Florence, it’s now adapted to provide more vegan-friendly alternatives. Their article on “Eating Vegan and Vegetarian in Florence” showcases several local spots to attract those who adhere to that lifestyle. Among the restaurants suggested is Giumella, a vegan deli near Piazza Alberti.

“In Tuscany there’s a lot of business and tradition around meat,” Owner and founder Lucia Salvadori said. “I started to think about elements that belong to the culture of Tuscany, so I source all of my ingredients locally from Tuscany.” Salvadori said she really wanted to give people access to nutritious food, pulling from her own roots and traditions and always basing her creations on Tuscan flavors.

Salvadori wasn’t sure if she saw the vegan movement taking off in Florence as much as it has in other parts of the world and explained that her customer base is about 50/50 tourists and locals with a vast majority of customers not even vegan themselves.

According to Statista.com, 0.9 percent of the Italian population identified as vegan in 2018 and in a study done by the FAIRR Initiative, an investor network that assesses the risks caused by extreme animal production, roughly half of Italian consumers say they are lowering their red meat intake.

“I hope we’ll get more [vegan] options here, because, in this moment for me, it’s not easy to go to a restaurant—I have one or two to choose from,” Salvadori said.

Even with a lack of plant-based establishments, the streets of Firenze are scattered with produce stands selling fresh, organic fruits and vegetables each morning. They offer a plethora of healthy options to elevate any vegan dish and bulk up any less-than-satisfying meal. What the city may lack in vegan restaurants, it more than makes up for in local markets and health food shops.

“In music you have just seven notes and you can do a lot of music with only those,” Salvadori said. The same can be true in the kitchen, she explained. “We have a lot of vegetables and I can do many different kinds of foods with those. With creativity you can make a lot of things out of a small number of options.”

Who knows how long it will be before the bistecca alla Fiorentina becomes a large block of marinated tofu, but for now, tourists and locals alike can enjoy a mix of both cuisines (vegan and not) without sacrificing the Florentine experience.

**Tofu Alla Fiorentina**

By Elysse Vernon
Editor-In-Chief
When one thinks of Florence, they often think of its historic allure and unparalleled beauty. However, Florence’s appearance is threatened due to the lack of environmental responsibility shown by both tourists and residents. Pollutants are prevalent in every city, but some of the most devastating contributors to environmental change are traditional automobiles emitting more than 75 percent of harmful greenhouse gases.

Tourism is another contributing factor to pollution. Increasing numbers of people creates a greater demand for taxis, only furthering the toxic gasses being emitted into the atmosphere.

As a result, the beloved city of Florence may eventually turn to a toxic wasteland of harmful gasses due to carbon pollution.

In answer to this growing problem, eco-friendly taxis are slowly being introduced into Florence’s streets. Today, travelers can find eco-friendly taxis with relative ease. In fact, a local taxi company, named “4390 Taxi Firenze”, became a member of the Italian Union Radio-Taxis, whose vision is to make Florence green one step at a time through the introduction of eco-taxis.

In 2007, 4930 Taxi Firenze became the first company in Tuscany to have an active electric taxi. According to the company’s website, “the construction of a new central office, which will be totally powered by a photovoltaic plant, was discussed and adopted. This involved an investment of almost two million Euros which clearly sets out this company’s willingness to look confidently into the future.”

Currently, 4390 Taxi Firenze is the only “radio taxi company in Europe, together with 3570 Roma, to be completely powered by clean energy, having solar energy storage systems and fast electric car charging systems.”

The 4390 Taxi Firenze company has single-handedly already made a huge difference to Florence’s environment. The company stated that 40% of their fleet was electric and had helped saved 76,68 kg of PM10 every year.

Lorenzo, a local Florentine, confirmed he had seen an increase in the presence of electric taxis since 2015. He added how much he enjoyed taking in electric taxis because he found there to be a cost efficiency in comparison to gas-fueled cars.

Although a problem as enormous as automobile pollution may seem unavoidable, companies like 4930 Taxi Firenze have been leading the city in the right direction - a direction that could preserve its culture, art and beauty.
Each country across the world champions environmental responsibility. In the U.S. it's plastic straws, in the U.K. plastic bags are vilified while other parts of the world consider plastic water bottles to be public enemy number one. After relocating to our residence for the summer semester in Florence, I began noticing locals doing their part to keep the streets clean; forgetful shoppers are being charged for extra plastic grocery bags, trash is meticulously divided into several categories and street-sweeping vehicles routinely patrol the city. However, one crucial area where the city falls behind is the lack of public drinking fountains. I began my travels abroad in the larger-than-life capital city of Rome. The daily trek was long, the heat was barely tolerable and the streets were busy, but luckily for me everywhere I turned there would be a drinking fountain to cool me down and keep me going. At home, I rarely buy plastic water bottles. In fact, I avoid it at all costs. The thought of spending money on something I can easily get for free and doing my part to increase the amount of plastic waste in the world makes my skin crawl, which is why I armed myself with a reusable water bottle before arriving in Rome. I'd carry it around the city and refill it a few times a day, if I found myself stuck in my Airbnb, I'd just fill it up with tap water from the sink as I was confident in the city's aqueducts. The Roman metropolitan area is equipped with 2,500 “nasoni,” or free public drinking fountains according to the website Explore Italian Culture. I assumed I'd have the same luck in Florence and boy, was I wrong. I've taken several long walks around the city, reusable bottle in hand, just to scope out these fountains that I had grown accustomed to So far, I have only stumbled across two. That's right, two! The first is conveniently placed along the Duomo and the other is just outside of the Uffizi Gallery. Some is definitely better than none, but I personally cringe at the thought of venturing through large swaths of tourists just to get a sip of water. I quickly accepted the fact that I would just be drinking tap water for the next month, however, when I poured myself a glass I immediately detected a strong metallic taste unlike any I've ever experienced before. Two strikes for attempting to be eco-friendly. When dining out, ordering tap water isn't a possibility either. Water for the table is often presented in large plastic bottles, making it even harder to cut down on waste. I turned my attention to the next place I was sure would aid me in my mission to be an environmentally responsible traveler: the Florida State University (FSU) study center. Once again, I was disappointed. Unless I maneuvered my water bottle into the exact position to fit under the faucet in the bathroom sink I was stuck with purchasing bottled water from a vending machine in the foyer. All hope was not lost, however, because FSU is nearing the end of constructing a newer, bigger and better study center. I reached out to Lucia Cossari, Associate Director FSU International Programs in Florence, who informed me that the study center will not be equipped with fountains due to the nature of the rental contract and the fact that the palace is an older private residence. All hope for FSU students may be lost, but Cossari did add that she hopes the mayor of the city will provide Florence with more public fountains. According to EuroNews.com, the equivalent of 563 plastic bottles are dumped into the Mediterranean Sea every second. Florence can and must do its part to reduce the pollution by following in Rome’s lead and significantly increasing the number of public drinking fountains in the city.
Piazza Santo Spirito is not just the home of Gustapanino. With ten to fifteen leafy trees towering over the eight centuries-old spot, an octagonal fountain relocated in 1812 and multiple trash and recycling bins, this Piazza may just be the most ecologically friendly place in the Tuscan capital.

Cars are not welcome in this square. Since 1987, traffic exists only from pedestrians and bicyclists. Santo Spirito’s spatial layout helps to make it Florence’s greenest piazza.

“It’s difficult to find shade or water in the other piazas, so Santo Spirito is a refreshing sight,” David, a visitor from Australia, said.

Locally owned cafes and ristorante line the piazza’s bordering streets. Spots like Tamerò Pasta Bar, Caffè Richi, Gustapanino, Pop Café, Osteria Santo Spirito and Trattoria Borgo Antico are quaint and inviting. Customers often opt for an outdoor table, where they can engage in spirited conversation with friends or observe those passing by.

“I love this piazza because it’s so intimate,” said Sarah, a University of Toronto student completing her master’s degree in Florence. “It’s easier to see glimpses of everyday Italian life and how people in the community support one another.”

Piazza Santo Spirito also hosts a variety of markets and fairs that encourage sustainable business. Every third Sunday of the month is the monthly organic market, Fierucola di Santo Spirito.

Local farmers and artisans set up their stands to sell organic products ranging from fruits, vegetables, breads, honey, olive oil, cutting boards, bowls, candles and jewelry. Food is offered on a seasonal basis to guarantee farm-fresh quality.

At that morning’s market, a farmer places a container of plump blueberries and a slab of pecorino cheese in a waiting woman’s bright red reusable bag. They exchange a mutual “grazie, buongiorno!” before the customer strolls over to the homemade jelly stand. She passes by a couple sitting on a nearby stone bench, who are delighted at the basket of fresh bread they have just purchased.

“My favorite part of being in the Santo Spirito Square is the interaction between store men and customers. Knowing the baker, butcher and veggie market owners makes you feel less a consumer and more a contributor to the local economy,” said Eliza Druta, a Florentine private tour guide.

As a square thriving with ecologically responsibility and authenticity, Piazza Santo Spirito is a welcoming space for both local Italians and tourists.

“All tourists are welcome, but it’s still a very Florentine square with Florentine habits,” said Alice Cheron, a French blogger who lives in Florence. “The square is living with the rhythm of these habits of taking coffee, buying good food and the deep need of connecting with others through conversation.”

Piazza Santo Spirito exudes the city’s energy and creativity while maintaining an environmentally conscious presence.
Walking in an Italian city such as Florence can quickly feel as if one is disturbing a live fashion show, even under a severe heat wave with temperatures well above 35 Celsius.

The women of Florence embrace and respect their cultural traditions and customs through the way that they dress. What I want to know is, where are the athleisure clothes?

Is it culturally acceptable to walk the cobblestone streets of Florence in Adidas sneakers, Lululemon leggings and sport’s bras? Can a Chanel bag be traded in for a Nike duffle?

In Florence, women strategically break out their athleisure clothes.

According to Maria Michela Mattei, Communication and Fashion Merchandising professor at Florida State University in Florence: the presence of symmetry, hills in the countryside, works of art, architecture and the Duomo display an interesting balance of shapes and colors that influence how people dress.

“There is a sense of harmony and beauty that is transmitted into the consciousness of the people and they try to dress like what they are surrounded by,” Mattei said. “Another factor is the presence of great designers, long history of fashion and Vogue Italia,” she added.

Having a put-together outfit stands as a cultural norm in Italy; however, it is now more culturally acceptable to wear athleisure clothes. “But with always a sense of colorful balance and aesthetic,” Mattei quickly underlined. So, the acceptable norm seems to be packing a bag and changing once inside the gym simply because athletic clothes are specifically dedicated to workouts. Jenna Palmer, an American study abroad student and current member of Swan Gymnastic Center confirmed that wearing gym clothes out in public all day was not culturally acceptable. “I have observed the best way to fit in with the locals, while respecting their customs, is to pack a bag and change once I arrive,” Palmer said.

However, Sundays are an exception. “Especially in the morning, it is “allowed” to wear athletic clothes because it is a day dedicated to relaxing,” Mattei explained. “Monday through Friday you will see women dressed in elegant clothing and then Sunday a t-shirt, Bermuda’s and sneakers walking the dog, buying bread and La Repubblica,” she added.

Currently shoved into a gym bag or banned until Sunday, athletic clothes are nevertheless becoming more of a trend lately, especially in high fashion. It may soon be that Italians forget their traditional motto, “if it is comfortable, it is not fashionable.”
In 2018, nearly three-quarters of millennials currently expressed an interest in brands described as sustainable, supporting a movement towards more eco-friendly fashion trends.

In the same year, Livia Firth, Co-founder and Creative Director of Eco-Age who also founded the Green Carpet Challenge (GCC), implemented the idea of applying sustainability to fashion. She changed the red carpet in Hollywood to go more green by emphasizing the importance of environmentally clean clothing designs. Soon others were inspired by her call to action.

Implementing a safe environmentally friendly fashionable atmosphere is now a predominant presence on brands’ agendas.

Maria Michela Mattei, Fashion Professor at FSU in Florence, understands the effect environmentally-conscious production can have on brands. Customers want to wear something trendy, and affordable, but sometimes they have to pay the price of sustainability.

“You need to start from raw materials, like natural fibers, cultivating the clothing in a specific way, having regulations for the environment and for the workers,” Mattei said.

So, where can you find these eco-friendly stores in the Tuscan capital?

Two local Florentine brands that believe in the ethical necessity for ‘green’ fashion are Alta Rosa and Stile Biologico.

Alta Rosa, located in Via San Gallo, targets women who care about the environment and want to look stylish at the same time. The shop’s recent garments are made with certified natural fabrics such as organic cotton, line, silk, hemp fiber and other innovative materials.

At Pitti Palace, Stile Biologico is owned and operated by Giuditta Blandini. It is one of the first green fashion names in Italy aimed at high-quality Italian fashions using natural fabrics and organic materials. The clothes are made solely with certified biological materials and production is exclusively Made in Italy, a certified national label. Blandini personally designs the Stile Biologico knitwear collection and selects the best Italian eco-lines for the store’s customers.

In a city where history prevails, being “on trend” can now mean supporting eco-friendly brands.

“Fashion is a business, and when consumers care more about the act of sustainable clothes and are willing to even pay more for it, it is win-win situation,” Mattei concluded.