MY EXCHANGE SEMESTER
BOCCONI UNIVERSITY | MILAN, ITALY | BUSINESS | FEB-JUNE 2017 (SPRING 2017)

PREPARATION FOR EXCHANGE

Milan has always been my dream place to visit, especially with this trip being my first time in Europe. I’ve chosen Milan for its culture, food, financial district, and fashion week.

As preparation for my exchange semester, I first had to find suitable housing. I wanted my own flat and for a cheaper price than what Bocconi University offered so I found some pretty useful websites such as spotahome.com. One advise I would give people who are looking for housing is to anticipate the fact that your contract may not be enforceable in English (just like in Italy where English is not an official language). Proceed with caution and with the understanding of the risks involved.

When it comes to paper works, I found that a lot of what I need to know came from the Italian consul and my counsellors in SFU. In addition, it doesn’t hurt to reach out in the exchange group forum your host university may have prepared to pool all exchange students online. I posted a copy of my rental contract in Bocconi’s exchange group forum for verification purposes and that was how I met my closest buddies.

With regards to what one should bring, I advise that you should bring whatever that will lessen the need to buy anything while on exchange. Personally, I brought clothes (one for formal events, one for outdoors, one for rainy days, one for casual), hangers, my computer, my financial calculator, as much toiletries that I may need, my camera and tripod, medicines and vitamins (it can be really expensive in Italy), my water bottle, and my shoes (one pair of gym shoes, formal shoes, casual, and stylish). I also suggest picking an airline that allows more baggage allowance (so that crosses British Airways out). Overall, it should be way less than your weight allowance because I am pretty sure you will be shopping a lot of things during the semester.

I recommend booking the plane ticket the earliest you could before prices go higher. Since I knew exactly when I wanted to be back in Vancouver, I booked my return ticket right when I booked my departure to get it for lower prices.

Do not forget to compare the costs of living between your destination and Vancouver. Milan is generally more expensive than Vancouver, in my point of view, and so I had to budget everything even before I left. I prepared a detailed excel sheet for all my projected expenses and I adjusted them on the fly throughout my exchange. Travelling in Europe means always have cash. While it’s true that you will always have options where to buy things that accepts credit cards, some things (like food) are more authentic the more excluded they are. And so, this exclusion from touristy places means that they are less likely to accept credit cards for payment. Bring a reasonable amount of cash when you leave Vancouver because I paid a lot in cash advance interest and later conversion rates.

DURING EXCHANGE

My arrival was loaded with a bit of paperwork. I had to apply for some documentations like my Permit of Stay in Italy, my Italian tax code, and some official papers for my rent. I arrived a few days earlier than the start of my rental term and so I stayed for a few days in a place called Hotel Da Vinci in Milan. Bocconi’s orientation got me more excited for the upcoming semester than I already am. It was jam
packed. Over 700 students from around the world came to Bocconi for exchange. Bocconi did an excellent job hosting a lot of large and specialized events to familiarize students with the campus, its resources, the city, and with one another. I attended most of it and it set the tone right for my exchange.

I found that lectures in Bocconi were easier than in SFU in terms of content and the fact that I did not have as much pressure because it was only pass or fail for my assessment. The professors were very approachable. While they had strong accents in speaking English, they are kind enough to offer extended office hours to accommodate most students and their concerns. Scheduling and picking classes was like Beedie but the grading scheme was bizarre. Final marks are always out of 30 points and until now, I still don’t see its significance.

Milan’s weather in the spring is comparable to Vancouver but the main thing that keeps reminding me that I am in Europe already was the fact that the architecture is exquisitely rustic and gorgeous. The city of Milan and Italy in general is known for their fashion and the locals mirror that. I rarely saw anyone wearing sweatpants or lazy day outfits especially in Bocconi—something I found in contrast to SFU. There are also a lot of places to visit, not just in Milan but also across Italy. Throughout the semester, I’ve always travelled on weekends. I went to Venice, Florence, Pisa, Rome, Bergamo, Cinque Terre, Lecco, and Pescara in Italy. And since I was already in Europe, I had to maximize my chances and I visited neighbouring places like Budapest, Munich, St. Gallen, Barcelona, London, Paris, Colmar, and Santorini.

While on exchange in Bocconi, I decided to join the Bocconi Entrepreneurship Club where I became a project manager and helped organize an event called “Innovations in the HR Sector”. It was an event that brought start-ups to students for a night of demonstration and networking. These start-ups aim to make student recruitment for bigger firms easier for students. I was also fortunate to be a part of a delegation team sent by the club to St. Gallen, Switzerland, for a business conference. I met a lot of likeminded people there—all wanted to pursue or are already pursuing entrepreneurship. This conference, called the START Summit, lasted for the entire weekend and focused on technology and financial innovations. It also featured amazing speakers like the former VP IPod Division in Apple.

**REFLECTION AFTER EXCHANGE**

This exchange changed me as a person and it accelerated my maturity. From living by myself, to budgeting, to being smarter and quicker about availing deals and coupons for travelling and commodities, to even balancing my time wisely, this semester is an unforgettable one. Some of my biggest challenges are the language barrier (even though google translate and my friends helped a lot), and making sure my budget stays on balance. My biggest advice to you, who is going on exchange, is “plan to be flexible”—in every sense of the word. That means when you plan your finances, consider a contingency budget and add it to your expenses. It means that when making your travel plans, make way for unforeseen circumstances regarding the people you’re going with or the dates you planned. It also means to be literally flexible because dancing, as is the case in North American culture, is quite popular in Europe as well. I’ve tried dancing some classic Italian dances and some funkier European ones and it has been fun and joyful. Be flexible and be open. Meet people, help others in need, and just enjoy the opportunity to be in exchange!
Bocconi University Welcomes Exchange Students from Partner Schools