Partner university:

I had the privilege of attending Bocconi University this past fall. It was a very humbling experience to get to know the brightest minds in Europe. There were a lot of factors that guided my decision to choose Bocconi as my University for exchange.

Bocconi was located just a mere ten minutes tram ride from central Milan. Therefore, firstly, I wanted to experience the fashion industry first hand; I wanted to know how the marketing, strategy, and day to day operations of luxury fashion brands looked like. The goal is to apply what I learned from this back home in Bangladesh, which is the second-largest ready-made garment manufacturer in the world. Secondly, I wanted to go to do my exchange in Europe because as a child I have always been fascinated by European architecture and History. As a result, applying to Bocconi: one of Europe’s best business school was a no brainer.

Preparation:

My application for exchange was very last minute. The in-class presentations during two of my business classes made me go for it! One of the hardest parts of that decision was coming up with my study plan. Although I had very little time; using the Beedie exchange course database made it fairly easy. Considering my time constraint, I only opted to enroll only in courses that past exchange students from Beedie had taken. That guaranteed that applying for exchange credits later on would be a breeze.

After I’d received the nomination. I started thinking about what to pack for my 4-month long trip. I only had a 50-pound allowance for my flight. Therefore, I needed to be really efficient about what I brought. I tried to roll my clothes and keep my wardrobe to a minimum. I would recommend students to get a good idea of the facilities of the place they’re staying in had to offer e.g. do you have cutlery. What about pots and pans? I only booked my place a week prior to arriving on exchange which meant I was unable to get all the information I required. Therefore, I played it safe and packed pots, pans and cutlery, along with a few packs of spices for when I craved curry. I paid around 600 Euros for my room per month. Living standards were pretty sub-par and I was living with eight people with two shared bathrooms and one shared kitchen. The housemates were fortunately, all exchange students and we got along really well.

For booking my flight I went to a travel agent (Flight Centre) and booked a two-way ticket at a fairly reasonable price. I did my research and made sure that the timing was perfect, and I had time to do a bit of traveling before I headed back to Canada after exams.

I used my Scotiabank credit and debit cards for financial transactions while in Milan. Although I did have to carry a bit of cash on me at all times as not all shops would accept a card for purchases less than 5 Euros. There was usually a cash withdrawal charge from the ATM machines in Italy, therefore I would recommend getting a lard amount exchanged from a money exchange in Vancouver to avoid the ATM fees.
During Exchange:

I arrived in Milan a day before classes started. Hence, I missed the orientation and major events to get you acclimated to the campus and new environment. The hardest part of these four months was getting to my new place. I did not have service and therefore had to take screenshots of the route on google maps and ask locals to get to my flat. Which was 2 hours away from the airport with numerous subway and tram exchanges in between.

To find rooms near campus I would highly suggest websites like Uniplaces and SpotAHome. There is also a Facebook group called Bocconi Rents; which students use to rent rooms and flats.

Academic Details:

I found the learning experience at Bocconi very practical; marking was pretty lenient, and we had very in-depth presentations from industry leaders during class. The lecture format was very SFU-like. However, one downside was that classes overlapped frequently, and class schedules were subject to change almost every week. Therefore, we had to prioritize one class over the other and keep on top of sudden schedule changes.

Some Instructors had thick accents which made lectures a bit harder to understand. The classrooms were very crowded and in one instance I recall students having to sit on the floor to attend classes.

If you want to experience the Milanese nightlife along with other popular travel destinations, I would highly recommend joining the Erasmus group on WhatsApp. They are pretty active and host events frequently. Moreover, it’s always a good idea to make connections with other exchange students from around the globe.

Travelling was fairly cheap in Italy. You could literally go to Paris and Zurich with on a bus from Milan. If you want to save up money while you travel; use the FlixBus and TrainLine app to book trains and busses for your travels. The must-see destinations in Italy would be Rome, Venice, Florence, and if you have only a day or two(weekends); go visit Lake Como and The Dolomites. I would also recommend taking Fridays off, that way you could go to a mini vacation every weekend. I regret taking a class on Friday and could have been to numerous other destinations if I did.

Since you’re on exchange and this is quite literally the “experience of a lifetime” I would recommend going on at least one solo trip. Going through obstacles by yourself, having to plan everything out, and managing conflicts alone will help you to get to know yourself and assess yourself for the better. There is nothing like being independent and after you’ll realize a boost in self-confidence.
My exchange term in Milan has been a time of self-reflection and assessment. Over the past four months I’ve taken on challenges head-on and put myself out of my comfort zone; experienced a new culture in a way I never have before. I’ve met amazing individuals in the process and am stoked on the quality of connections I’ve made this semester.

Pretty glad I went for this journey rather than overthinking the variables. Super thankful to my parents for setting me up with the opportunity.

Pictures: