

Studying abroad is an experience like no other. It is an adventure that makes you get out of your comfort zone and push you to your limits. I have learnt academically, socially, culturally and life-wise. I have understood how to interact and blend into other cultures. Moreover, I am culturally more aware of the diversity between countries, languages and people. But most importantly, what I first saw as a clash between cultures, now I see an opportunity to learn from others.



My exchange was very rich academically too. I had the opportunity to choose modules that were not provided in Surrey or that had a different perspective on certain topics. For example, studying politics I had never considered taking sociology modules. Nevertheless, in my exchange I discovered my passion for sociology and its different approaches to world issues. I also acquired skills such as public speaking and teamwork. The fact that many exams in Italy were oral assessments really increased my confidence when speaking to a large audience.



Although the cultural and academic sides were very significant, I believe the most valuable take away was the importance of adaptability and flexibility. Before my exchange I was very determined to achieve certain things, and when Covid came, my goals proved to be unviable. I had planned to do my year abroad in Asia and I had a really bad time when this exchange was cancelled. In the moment I saw it as tremendous bad news, nevertheless now I see it as one of the most important life lessons of my entire career. Covid has really taught me perseverance and positivity. I had to adapt to the pandemic and choose a country in Europe. Due to the fact that this was not my original choice, I went on my exchange with no expectations at all. The change of plans turned out to be a wonderful thing as everything was surprising, new and eye-opening. I learnt how to make the most of my experience and studied Italian, travelled all around the country, lived with both international and Italian students, and fell in love with the food. If I could recommend something to students planning on going abroad, it is to be flexible and adapt, you will be surprised how rich your experience will turn out to be.

Another challenge I faced was the cultural clash between the UK and Italy. In Italy I realized that everything was very bureaucratic. At first, I found myself lost, nevertheless I learnt how to deal with the situation. I understood I had to plan things in advance, thoroughly research and communicate with others in my same situation. A situation where this can be applied to, was the first time I had to get a Covid test in Italy. I remember I assumed it was an easy process and left it to the last minute. It turned out to be a long process where I had to go to a hospital, communicate in Italian, register with a GP, get a prescription, find a private laboratory, book a test and then take an hour bus to the place. It turned out just fine and I learnt how to adapt to the local processes. Now I feel I have a master in Italian bureaucracy. Although the situation became stressful at times, I learnt how to think like a local, inform myself properly, spot out reliable sources and plan in advance.



Lastly, if you are thinking of embarking in the same journey as me, I would really recommend sending a few emails to students who have already been to the countries you are considering. For me it was incredibly useful to ask other students about particular tips, recommendations and their overall experience.

All in all, I believe studying abroad gives you unlimited opportunities to develop your skills and increase your self-confidence. You get the chance to boost your CV and stand out while you are having fun. I can say that now I am more open-minded, determined and culturally aware. I believe this is an opportunity no student will ever regret.