

Erasmus Broadening Horizons

Rosemary Burnham

Worked in Padua,
Italy.

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Translating in Italy: living like a local.

Erasmus gave language student Rosemary Burnham the opportunity to throw herself into life in northern Italy. She describes how her time working at a translation agency and language school in Padua shaped her ambitions.

My Erasmus experience was spent in the beautiful Northern Italian city of Padua. I arrived on a warm Sunday evening at Venice Airport, where I stood beside my two heavy bags and watched the last bus roll out of the airport to Padua. Thankfully, it got better from there, as I made it to the city after a couple of hours and met my new housemates – two other Erasmus girls, one from Münster and the other from Paris, and two Italian sisters from the Southern city of Bari, plus the elder sister’s baby girl, who was cutely just learning to speak. “Osie! ’Osie!” was soon repeated every time I walked into a room, with “Tao Tao!” or “Ciao ciao!” whenever I left – something that never got old!

I joined the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) group to meet new people – I wanted to get to know the Italians better to improve my language, and I heard they sold cheap bikes! ESN Padua, the local Erasmus association, are infamous in Italy for their organisation, and I soon found out why: there were fantastic parties, there were weekends away, there were cultural city tours and tandem evenings. They had a way of making sure that if you were willing to get involved, you would be put in contact with people from all over Europe, to learn about their cultures and share stories and lives.

English native speakers are sought after in Italy; there are loads of ‘Learn English’ classes and schools popping up around the place. My work placement was in a translation agency which had just set up an afterschool club for children to learn English. While my company were very keen for me to start both children’s classes and adult evening classes, I was less willing – I had never taught English formally before and it was very scary to be thrown in at the deep end!

For a few lessons, I followed an American girl to learn more about teaching, and started assisting in the children’s programmes, using games, songs and fun resources. Every couple of weeks we would change the theme of the lessons, meaning I would learn all the vocabulary for a certain festival. My favourite was definitely Halloween – I was singing about ‘five little pumpkins’ and calling everyone a ‘witch’ in Italian for weeks after!

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After December, I was given a project to do the marketing for the company, advertising for future interns and summer workers from the USA, UK and Australia. It was such a good experience: I was suddenly responsible for finding and interviewing interns for graduate roles. The project lasted about six weeks in total and by the end I was helping to interview future employees over Skype!

One of my more enjoyable targets outside of work was to wean myself off tea and finally enjoy coffee. The Veneto region of Italy is famous for coffee, so I had definitely chosen the right place, and I had some great friends who were always willing to come and drink one with me. I should have made my target to sample and review the traditional pizza toppings in Italy (no chicken allowed!), as within those four months, I must have tried every pizza from every pizzeria in Padua!

My bike certainly got well used, travelling between restaurants. At times, I found out the hard way about the attitudes of Italian drivers towards other road users – and picked up a few new words on the way...



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The Erasmus programme taught me so much, particularly that I love the puzzle of translating and that I really do not enjoy teaching children – something that I am glad I have found out sooner rather than later in my language career. I learned what my strengths are and what I need to improve.

The Erasmus placement allowed me to grow professionally, and the ESN Padua association helped me to enjoy my time to the maximum, and to learn the Italian language and the Italian way of life.

Since getting back, I have recommended doing Erasmus to everyone I have met. Every first year who has just started at the University of Salford has received a lecture on how much they would learn and enjoy the experience, and every fourth year friend has had to put up with constant storytelling and reminiscing about my months in Italy. And my mum has to tolerate my constant threat of moving back to Italy after graduation! I lived like a local in Padua and cannot wait to do so again.

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