

**Elizabeth Beck
Food Tour in Italy
May 19-31 2010**

Thursday May 19th:

Today I arrived in Italy from an overnight flight from Washington DC. I was anxious and excited the entire flight and I couldn't sleep at all. After the entire group met at the airport, we traveled by bus from the Milan airport to the town of Torino. The architecture in the town was incredible and the tour of the city made my first night in Italy amazing!



Friday, May 21, 2010

This morning, my roommates and I grabbed an espresso and pastry at the corner Cafe before we hopped on the bus. Today's itinerary consisted of a trip to St. John's International University Campus. We received a brief meeting on Italian agriculture in the morning, and then we had a wonderful lunch. I had pasta with pesto sauce, and a glass of white wine. It was weird to order a drink because I am not 21, so I've never ordered a drink before in the United States. Ordering a meal was one of my first challenges. The menu was not in English and since I don't speak Italian, it was very hard to decipher. In the afternoon, I had the chance to go to Agri-Gelateria. This place was out in the country where houses were few and far between. The parking lot was packed though and the gelateria was full of happy customers. We were given a tour of the facility and even saw how gelato is made. At the end of the tour, we got to have our first taste of Italian gelato, and it was the best dessert I have ever had! For dinner, we ate in the town center of Torino at a great family-owned restaurant. I had fresh, home-made pasta with meat sauce. The food is my

favorite part of Italy so far.

Saturday, May 22, 2010

This morning we all went to an open air market to explore the different foods of Italy and to see how the average Italian family grocery shops. We all split up once we arrived and were given a few hours to explore on our own. A few friends and I walked around and saw all of the fresh fruits and vegetables. Then we went to the bakery area where we ate fresh baked cookies. We wandered some more and I ended up buying some oranges to eat for breakfast for the rest of the week. We had a free afternoon and a small group of us decided to visit an Egyptian museum in town. I love Egyptian history and it was amazing to see all of the artifacts. This museum had the second largest collection of Egyptian artifacts in the world! We spent hours inside the museum and finished the day with some gelato. Tonight a few of us went down to the Po river and took a moonlit walk.

Sunday, May 23, 2010

We got an early start to the day and took a long bus ride to the small town of Aosta that sits nestled in the side of the Alps. Here holds a small honey bee farm that doubles as a horticulture outreach center. This center focuses on educating young children so that they understand the need for plants and vegetables. The afternoon was given to stroll through town. After eating lunch as a group, we split up and saw the sights. I saw multiple castles that are throughout the town and I also explored an old church.



Once back in Torino, a couple of friends and I took a bus to the other side of town to visit the Olympic venue. It was really neat to see where the Olympics were held and to see the Olympic torch. It was a very relaxing Sunday.

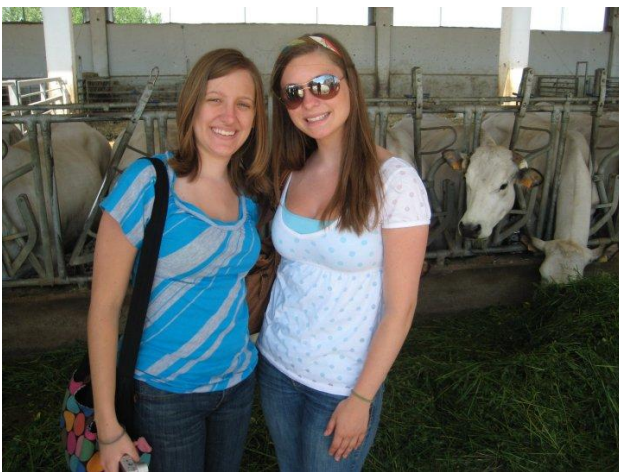
Monday, May 24, 2010

Today, we visited Eataly, an upscale food market that provides an experience by emphasizing the slow food movement. The slow food movement is based on the idea of sustaining high quality local food products that represent the culture the Italians are so proud of. Eataly was quite an experience for me. There were products from chocolates, to fresh fruits and vegetables, seafood and meats, books and lounge areas, cafés, and bakeries. It was a food market, café, winery, lounge, playroom, and Italian experience all in one. It took hours to walk through and made me very hungry seeing all the yummy food. After wandering through the store, we all ate lunch at one of the many cafés. I ordered something off the Italian menu that I didn't know what it was. I was pleasantly surprised when I got a salad with fresh tuna on the side. I had been eating pasta for almost every meal the entire trip, so it was refreshing to have something different. And the fresh tuna was fantastic! After our wonderful tour of Eataly, it was off to the rice farms for the afternoon. We were able to see the entire process from start to finish. We saw them flooding the crop land with water to induce growth all the way to the finished product at the processing and packaging plant. We were able to see all of the old processing equipment on the farm as well as all of the new farm equipment used to maintain and harvest the rice crop. We were then able to go down the road to the processing plant and view the new machinery cleaning and washing the rice. And in the end, we were each given a bag of rice to take home with us. It was a very memorable day on the farm because I had never seen a rice farm before and I had no idea what one looked like or how it worked. At the end of

the day, we were all pretty tired, but we managed to have a lovely aperitivo dinner just down the street from our hotel.

Tuesday, May 25, 2010

Today was dedicated to Piedmontese Beef cattle and wine. The morning was spent at an insemination and breeding research center. I learn all about double-muscle cattle and their benefits to the Italian meat industry. Piedmontese cattle provide a large amount of beef to the meat industry with their large muscle. Piedmontese cattle have a recessive gene that allows for their muscles to grow to twice their normal size while still providing tender meat. This research center pushed the importance of studying genes for selection through the process of genetic mapping. I took a meats class and lab back at school and we learned a little bit about Piedmontese cattle but seeing the animals in person was a totally different and fascinating experience. We then traveled to a ranch to see how an average dairy farmer raises these special cattle. The farmers that work with these types of animal are very proud of their cattle and are very aware of how special this type of animal is.



After a wonderful morning hanging out with cattle, it was time to go on an adventure to another region of Italy to explore the world of Italian wine. As we drove to the vineyard, the scenery we passed was truly breathtaking. There were rolling hills full of patchworks of grapes. We were given a tour of a vineyard by its estate manager and educated on the importance of the grape. We were taught how to tell when a

vine needs to be cut, how to spot disease, how to harvest the grapes properly, and how the grape affects the taste and quality of the wine. After strolling through the fields, we went to the production facility and learned how to turn grapes into wine. It is a long process that requires a lot of monitoring and patience. The result however, is very delicious. We tasted Barbera, Chardonnay, and a sparkling red wine called Lambrusco. I purchased a small bottle of Barbera to bring home for my parents to enjoy. I finished the night with some gelato from a nearby shop.

Wednesday, May 26, 2010

Today was a day of cheese and wine. Normally this is a wonderful combination, however, the stinky gorgonzola cheese was not very appetizing. The morning began with a long bus-ride to a cheese production facility. This facility specialized in gorgonzola cheese. The operations of making this cheese was quite interesting and watching the entire process really gave me a good sense on how much effort is put in to making a quality cheese. We then visited the other part of the plant where the cheeses are inoculated and aged. In this section of the facility, the cheese has a very pungent scent that was very overwhelming. I left the facility feeling a little overpowered by such a smell. We were able to eat lunch on the waterfront of a beautiful lake. However, the food we ate was not as wonderful as the view in front of us. It was a beautiful day outside and we had an amazing view to look at, so it was still a very pleasant lunch. After lunch, we traveled to a nearby cheese aging facility. When you first walk in, it just looks like a little Italian shop where you can buy eccentric cheeses. However, in the back, there is a stairwell into a cave-like basement where the entire aging of many different types of cheeses occurs. This cavern was fascinating and there were so many nooks and crannies to explore. I was amazed how so many different cheeses could age right next to each other without compromising the

integrity of the cheeses. After touring the basement, we went upstairs for some wine and good parmesano reginano cheese. It was a nice afternoon after a rough morning.

For our last night in Torino, we all went out to eat as a group to a great restaurant. I ordered risotto with truffles for dinner and a crepe for dessert. It was by far the best meal I ate in Torino and having the company of the entire group created an amazing atmosphere. I had an amazing time in Torino and I will be sad to leave it but excited for a new chapter in this Italian adventure!

Thursday, May 27, 2010

This morning consisted of a very long bus ride to Parmalat, the largest aseptic packaging facility in the world. This company provides Europe with a large amount of its fruit drinks and yogurts. The plant was enormous and by far the largest facility that I have ever seen. It was amazing to have a tour and see all of the lines running different products and to see the packaging warehouse where the robotic forklifts move the product around the warehouse floor. The building was so structured and moved along like a well-oiled machine. It was incredible to see such a large factory working so efficiently.

After our tour of the facility, we settled into our new home for the night in Parma. We had some free time in the evening before our scheduled dinner so we all went exploring throughout the town. We saw castles, and beautiful houses, and immaculate parks. The suburbs of Parma house some of the wealthiest families in the country. We ate a traditional regional dinner at a small local restaurant. We had two pasta courses followed by a meat course and then dessert and espresso. This dinner, like the last in Torino, was an incredible meal full of Italian tradition. The hand-made pastas were incredible. It really was a great day!

Friday, May 28, 2010

We all ate a great breakfast at the hotel to start the day, then we were off to a Parmigiano-Reggiano facility to see how that specific cheese is made. Parmigiano-Reggiano can only be made in this specific region of Italy and must be made following very specific rules and regulations. After that, we went to a Gorgonzola factory. And after a morning of cheese, we spent the afternoon eating prosciutto. It was a wonderful day full of yummy foods.

Saturday, May 29, 2010

Saturday was spent in Bologna where we went to a pasta making school. We learned how to make all different Italian pastas, and once all of the cooking was done, we ate the pasta for lunch. We spent the afternoon touring the city and seeing all of the wonderful sites of the beautiful college town. In the evening, we traveled to Milan to spend our final day in Italy.

Sunday, May 30, 2010

Today was the last day of our trip in Italy. We had the day free to ourselves. I actually have family that lives right outside of Milan and they picked me and a friend up to spend the day with them. We went to their restaurant where they cooked us a wonderful lunch. Then they took us around the city to see all of the sites. After dinner, they brought us back to the hotel and

stayed up until we had to leave for the airport at 3:30am.

