



EDUCATION ABROAD CENTER
SUMMER ABROAD
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Dear parent of a potential student in the UC Summer Abroad Program:

As you consider the serious choice of supporting your university student child's decision to go to Florence for the summer 2009, let me review some of the concerns that you might have.

First, I have been taking students to Florence in the summer for seven years. Besides being one of the richest architectural and artistic heritage cities in the world, it is a very safe city, much safer than any city in the United States. Of course, I emphasize to the students that they really want to have a full cultural experience and to see as much as possible, and safe as the city may be, the students must still be very careful, and always travel in groups, particularly at night. We want the students to get the fullest cultural experience and that does mean interacting with Italians in their age bracket. But still, they need to recognize that they are charged with each others' safety when they are out as a group.

Second, the Florence program is not as expensive as other European programs, and indeed I believe that it costs even less than the students tend to spend. Since the students live in apartments, they get the opportunity to live more like Italians, and indeed they should try to do that. Rather than going to eat out regularly, it's better to go to the market, to buy fresh vegetables, and to avoid seeking foods that they can find in the US. Italians are fairly conservative about food in the sense that the food, though very regional, is still almost always Italian. Eating and buying Italian will be much less expensive. Florence has two superb covered markets, and we are happy to help students learn to negotiate the open air markets. Also, in a city with hundreds of restaurants, there are many that are not expensive.

Finally, every year when I send another group of students home after a superb learning experience, I am reminded that having the opportunity to spend a month in Italy, and particularly in Florence, to walk the streets that Dante, Michelangelo, Machiavelli, and so many others walked, provides a quality of learning that makes concrete what in a classroom in the US remains strictly mental. I am repeatedly amazed at the sophistication with which students, after a month of being right next to the art works of Michelangelo, Brunelleschi, and Fra Angelico, or to buildings from the Middle Ages that are still in use, can speak about Italian Renaissance art, literature, and architecture.

If you would like more information or have questions, please contact me at bdschildgen@ucdavis.edu

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