

FROM: 2007 Scholarship recipient Tam-Anh Nguyen
San Jose State University student

Every year, study abroad students come back to the states touting that the previous year of their life had been, "the best year of their life." I always thought this response was so cliché and wondered why no one had put in more eloquent words their life abroad. Now, after spending more than five months in Florence, I completely understand because this experience has simply been the greatest experience of my life. I've realized the response does not need to be over dramatized or romanticized. The most straight forward explanation I have is that of the same words thousands of other study abroad students have uttered before because it is the absolute truth.

It is difficult to summarize my experiences here because they are so grand and numerous, but overall, this year has been the biggest learning experience in both my academic and personal life. I have pushed myself to boundaries I did not think even existed. I've learned to quickly adapt, to respect the world's cultures, become socially aware, and how to travel smartly. Every moment I spend outside of the United States, I realize more and more how much of a global community we really are. I have now seen some of the world's greatest and proudest monuments and works of art and it humbles me to be in a city where Renaissance masters once walked the same street as I. I have matured immensely through this experience and have stories of good times and bad times to last me a lifetime, which is priceless.

My memories and experience here will continue to shape my life once I return to the states. My life here has also tested my relationships back home as I was also attempting to deal with adjusting to living in a completely foreign country. I have learned to prioritize, to budget, and most importantly, to not to sweat the small stuff. Whenever I find myself a little too stressed out, I sit back and think, "I'm living in Florence, Italy... things could be worse." I've learned to become a member of the international community and it feels great. I have caught the traveling bug and I know this experience has only opened the doors to me seeing the rest of the world.

Thanks again!

Tam-Anh Nguyen