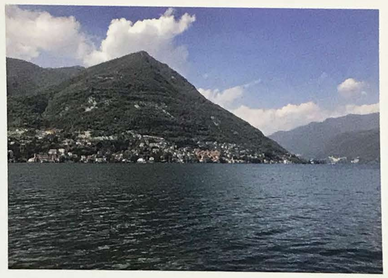
# *A European Art Adventure* IN FLORENCE AND BEYOND

Budapest

The Greek Islands

In the Swiss Alps



Lake Como in Italy

USC art major Chandler Bjork backpacked through 14 European countries after studying in Florence for four months. Known for its magnificent art galleries and as the home of Michelangelo's *David*, Florence is an artist's haven.

"One thing I really liked in Florence was there's an entire piazza that has all these sculptures that are under a porte-cochere, and they're free to go visit," Chandler said. "That's where the *David* used to be, but they have since put him in a museum and made a copy. But all the other sculptures under the porte-cochere are still originals. They're in the process of making copies of them, so they can go to a museum, but for the time being, it's the original Berninis and Giambolognas. It was very cool to see that in passing in day-to-day life."

While taking her full slate of art classes during the week, she and the rest of the students at her study-abroad school stayed at a local Florentine apartment complex, which provided a very inclusive experience. She noted that the locks on the door are in a different place and that no one has a dryer.

"Florence was a big walking city," she said. "That was something I wasn't used to because here in Dallas, I just drive everywhere. The Florentines walk everywhere; we definitely out-numbered the cars. I definitely got my walking legs from being over there."

She lived in a part of the city that was close to the central market, which she described as "grand." The market served as her spot to buy everything from fresh pasta to produce. "I ate Italian food for five months straight, and I still love it," Chandler said. "All the Italian food was great. I really loved Greek food when I went to Greece. That was probably the best away food that I had. Those are probably my two favorites."

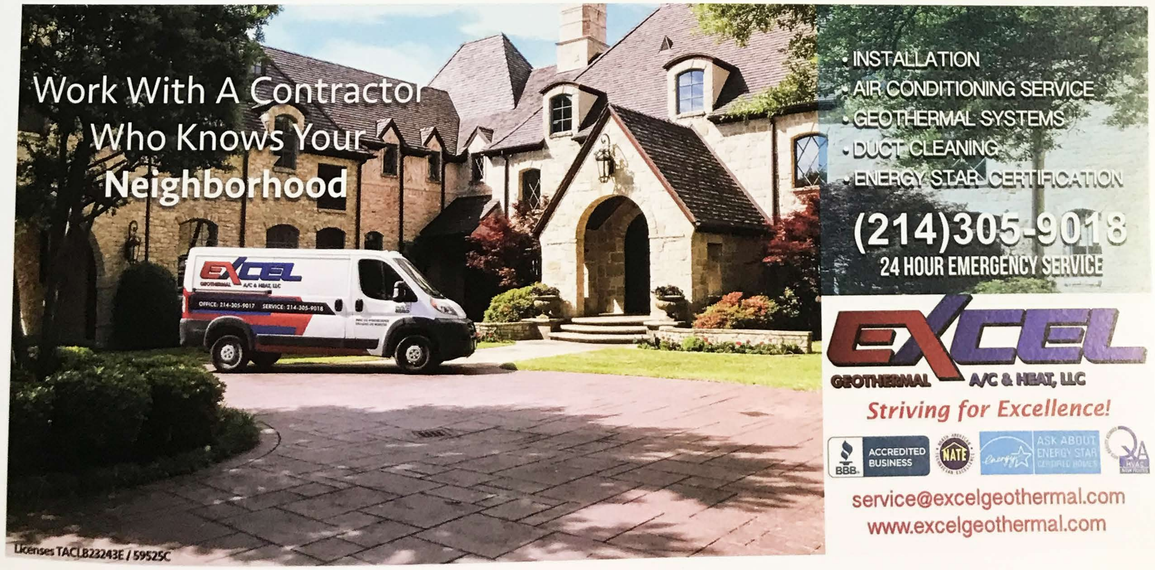
She also visited Naples, Venice and Rome, highlighted by the Vatican and the Colosseum. Although Chandler was able to do a lot of weekend travel – it only costs around €30 or roughly $35 to fly between countries – she completed the majority of her European tour while backpacking during the final month of her stay.

"I never really stayed more than two or three days at each place, so it was very rapid," she said. "I was living out of the backpack, going from trains and planes and buses and hostels. There was always something to do. I'd be in a city, and I'd by no means be able to see the whole city in two days, but I'd try to see as much of it as I could. It was always an early morning and a whole day of either walking or bus tours. It was very busy all the time. It was great to constantly have things to see that were just brand new.

Skydiving in Switzerland

A sunset from the top of the Duomo in Florence

Tulips in Amsterdam

"I'm a big nature lover, so I loved any time I was either near a beautiful coast or in the Swiss Alps. I went to a place called Lake Como, which is on the Italian side of the Switzerland-Italy border. I loved every piece of scenery that I saw. Nothing can compare to the blue of the Mediterranean or snow on top of the Alps."

She recommends a travel experience like this for everyone. "Do it! If anyone is debating whether they should or should not or whether they'll have enough time, you've just got to put your mind to it and do it because it will be the best experience of your life. I haven't known a single person who has gone and regretted any of it. Every second is a dream!"