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At Mama Rosa's In Italy, Bed Bugs Do Bite

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Hoyas Abroad

One in a series of articles by Georgetown students abroad for study. This week Claire Zulkey, a junior in the College explains about part of her experience at Villa le Balze in Florence, Italy:

On our first free weekend of the first semester, the majority of the students at Villa le Balze in Florence decided to take a trip to le Cinqueterre, a group of resort towns on the coast of Italy. We were dying to get a tan, swim in the aqua water, drink wine during the sunset and see the topless girls ... well, the guys were, anyway. We had heard of a "perfect" hostel right by the train station called Mama Rosa's that was ideal for any student on a budget. How folksy and cute, we thought.

We did get a tan, we did swim, and we did see various people of the topless sort, not so much girls as older women and older men who looked like they needed a little support themselves.

We stayed at Mama Rosa's. That's where the drinking set in.

Perhaps we should have done a little more research on the joint. I suppose that Mama Rosa's could have been perfect if your definition of "perfect" includes an insane proprietess, her half-wit and hygiene-deficient son and cat pee, lots of cat pee.

For those of you who will be staying at Mama Rosa's student hostel in the near future, here is a helpful itinerary, just to save you some planning time:

1. Bring your own sheets.
2. Place your sheets over Mama Rosa's own "sheets."
3. Drink lots of alcohol until you have no choice but to pass out someplace.
4. Put on warm clothes and sleep in them on top of your own sheets. Try not to think about what is making that flapping noise above your head or why your legs itch so much.

If you are a weaker-sort such as myself, the fifth step would be to cut your trip a day short and run back to your own bed. No matter what, however, the essential and last step, aside from burning your now-contaminated sheets, is to go home and pretend that you had the absolutely most marvelous time in the history of

travel and let everyone know it.

Tell everyone that you can be spotted in the background of the idyllic beach scenes in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*.

Of course, as all of us student travelers have learned or will learn, it is impossible to have the perfect touring experience painted by our imaginations. The second best thing, however, is to pretend that you did and brag about it to somebody else, to the point where they want to run off and go somewhere else so they can do the same thing to some other poor sap.

This is true at the Villa, but I'm sure that it's true with any other study-abroad program: if somebody returns from a trip alive, they neglect to describe the inconveniences of the vacation, but try to give the impression that not only did they have the time of their lives but also that they are the expert on wherever they have just come from. Where to stay, what to do, what restaurant to go to, what to order, whose name to mention to the waiter to get that special touch and how much tip to leave.

Of course, the above-mentioned traveler also has to mention how cheaply he did it. "Didn't I tell you about how I went to London last semester on \$5? It was a special rate, and I don't think it's available anymore, so sorry."

Is this whole show obnoxious braggadocio or an earnest wish to share good experiences with others? I think it's a basic combination of both, with a little bit of self-esteem cushioning thrown in. It's a big emotional and monetary investment to travel by oneself, and of course, it's preferable to give the impression that you are a big enough kid to get yourself around, not to be a big fat failure and have your trip be a bust.

Okay, this is exaggerating a little bit, but in essence it's the case. It's a fine balance between painting your experiences in the best possible light but also accepting some failures to plan ahead as learning experiences (gasp, the "L" word).

So what, you went to Italy only to have your butt pinched seemingly by every old lecher on the street? You went to the Greek islands for spring break and got snow? Came down with a bad case of bronchitis in Amsterdam? Forgot to bring enough money to rent skis in Switzerland?

Come on, it wasn't that bad. If you're still alive - you did it, and you should be proud of yourself. You don't need to pretend that it was the time of your life if it really wasn't. Hey, I'll admit it, Mama Rosa's wasn't the Four Seasons, or even the Conference Center Marriott for that matter, but I had a good time, from what I can remember.