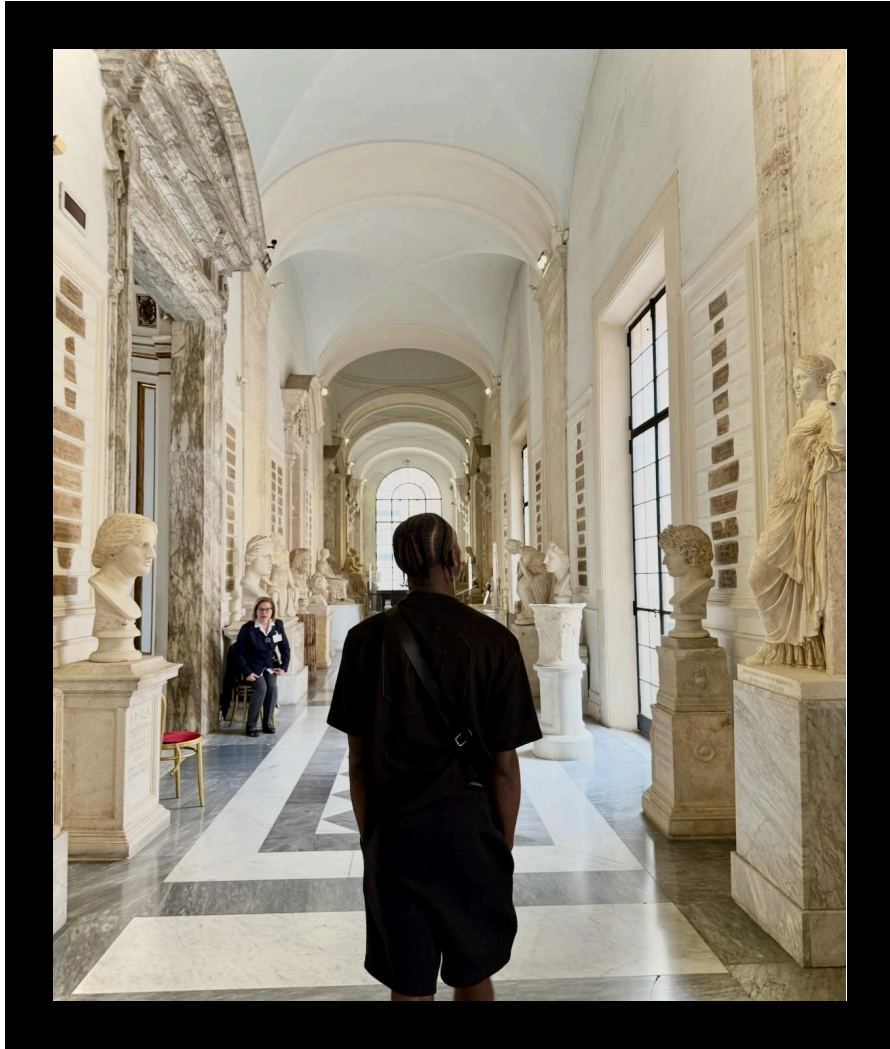


# HOW ITALY CHANGED MY SOUL



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PC IN ITALY: AMBITION AND BEAUTY IN THE ETERNAL CITY

Going to Italy wasn't just a school trip, it was something that hit my soul. I expected to see cool sites, eat good food, and take nice pictures. But I didn't expect to feel this changed. Day

by day, I got to slow down, see beauty differently, and just *be*. As a first-generation Haitian American and a student balancing a lot such as school, leadership, and work, this trip gave me space to breathe, reflect, and really feel. It made me proud of where I come from and excited about where I'm going. Each day gave me something whether peace, awe, laughter, or a reminder that I belong in this world too.

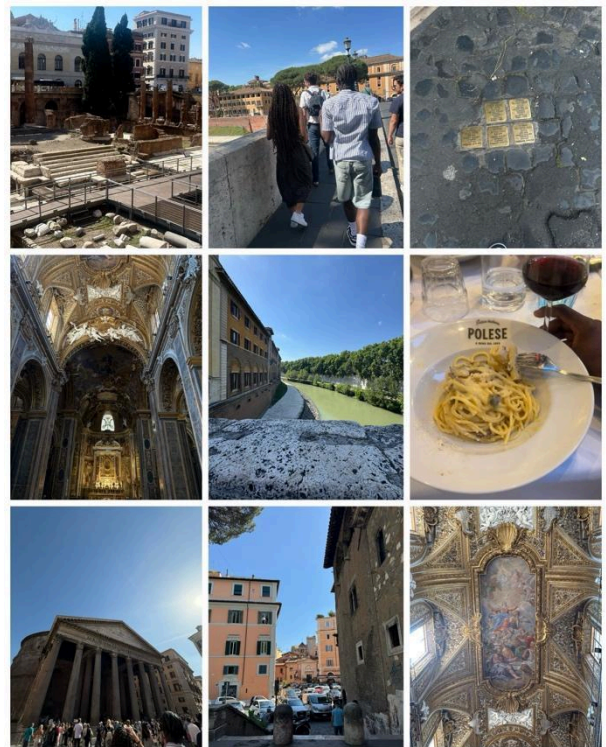
### Day 1 – Rome Begins

We kicked things off in the *Centro Storico*, and I immediately felt like I stepped into a living museum.

We saw ancient temples like the *Temple of Janus*, parts of the old Jewish neighborhood, and churches like *Santa Cecilia*. What hit me most was *Largo di Torre Argentina*, an ancient site that looked sunken but was actually ground level for ancient Rome.

New life just kept building on top of the old. That felt symbolic. Like even when things change, the past still stays with us. We had a grand dinner to really experience an Italian dinner! I was so excited,

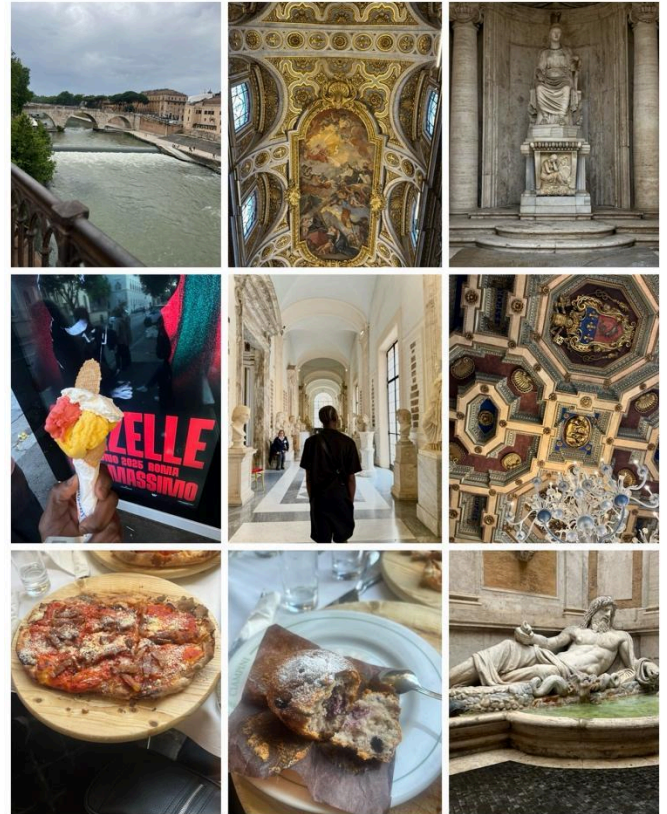
because I love food. In my culture we have a couple pasta dishes, so Italy had the most perfect menu for me! That night, I was just in awe. “I’m really in Italy,” I kept telling myself.



## Day 2 – Art That Made Me Feel

At *Musei Capitolini*, I was blown away by how different art styles carried emotion. The *Mosaic floors* were so clean and seamless, I couldn't believe how many small pieces created one big picture. I also noticed the difference between classical and Hellenistic art, the Hellenistic sculptures, especially the *drunken woman*, showed so much pain and real emotion. That statue stayed with me. She looked like she'd lived a hard life, frail, wrinkled, only two teeth. I didn't think she was drunk at first. I thought she was begging. Later, we saw *Caravaggio's* famous painting of *St. Matthew*, and the way the light cuts through the darkness really moved me. I took the city bus for

the first time with other students, and we got a little lost but laughed through it with a lot of gelato in our system.





### Day 3 – Colosseum and Wine Tasting

The *Colosseum* made me think: what did it really mean to be Roman? I noticed how the arches

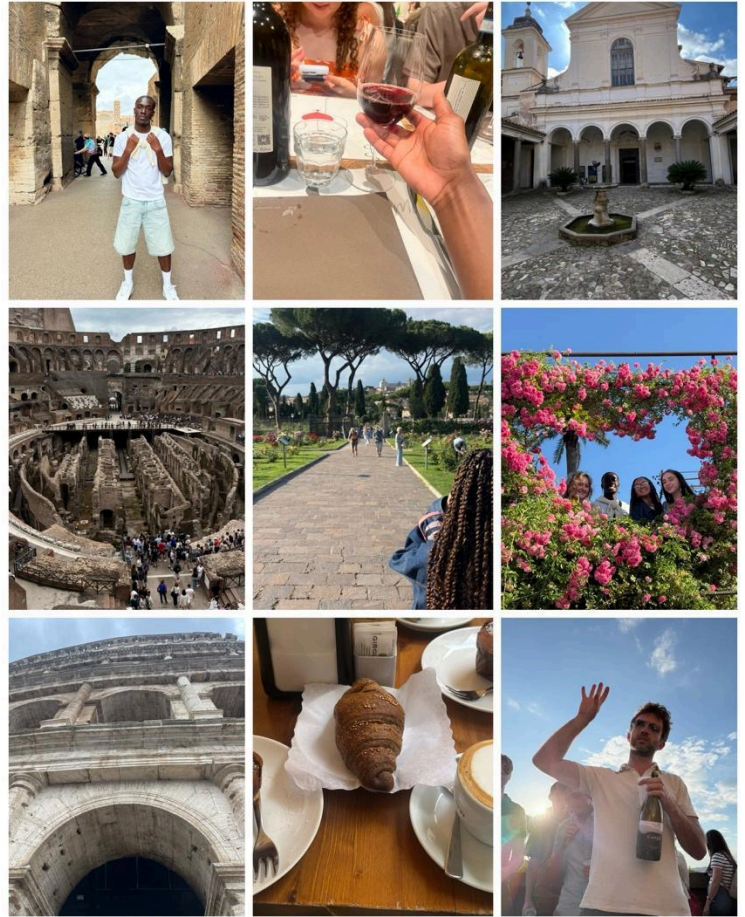
had sun-like designs above them, it made the whole place feel like a symbol of power. On one level, being Roman meant strength, order, and pride. But it also made me think about how power can become performance.

We also toured a church that had multiple layers from ancient Roman to Christian art.

There was even a depiction of Jesus and Mary that emphasized their bond. That relationship was shown so tenderly. Later

that day, we had a wine tasting: 4 reds, 3 whites. We tried sheep cheese, parmesan, olives, tomatoes, eggplant. I liked everything

except the wine (I'm not built for the bitter stuff), but the whole experience reminded me how beautiful life can be when you just slow down.



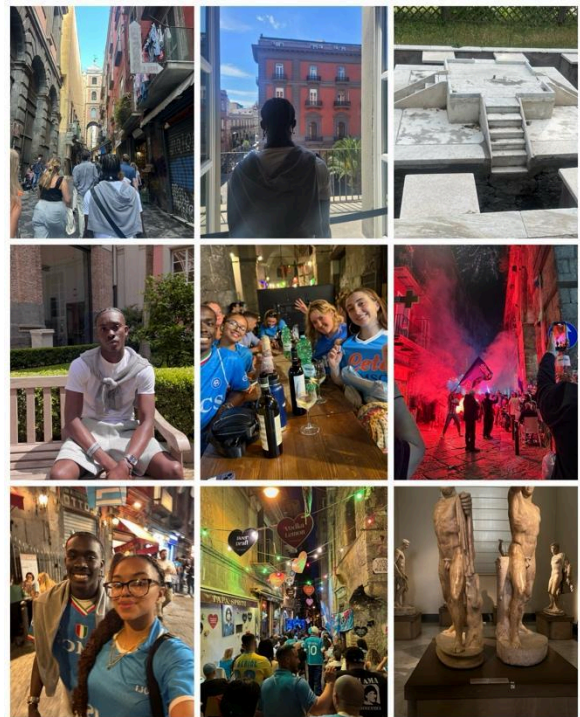
#### Day 4 – Walking Through History at the Forum

The *Roman Forum* showed me how real ancient Rome still is. We walked on the same paths where government officials once made decisions. I saw temples, arches, and broken columns, but it didn't feel like ruins, it felt like memory. You could feel that this was once a center of leadership and law. I felt a little proud walking through there, like I was touching something sacred. I kept thinking about legacy.



#### Day 5 – Chaos Turned to Unity in Naples

We took a day trip to *Naples*. The *Archaeological Museum* had so much that stood out. The *Farnese Collection*, mosaics from *Pompeii*, and even *Egyptian artifacts* showing old tools and ways of life. Some of the mosaics showed animals and even erotic art, giving us a full picture of what home life was like in ancient times. Then came the best part: the soccer celebration. We got Napoli jerseys, ate pizza, and partied with locals in the street. It felt wild, ash from fireworks was falling on us. That kind of national pride was contagious. It made me feel connected even as an outsider.





## Day 6 – Vatican Majesty

This day was unreal. We toured the *Vatican Museums*, and I was struck by how much religious art I actually recognized. I loved how the guide explained *Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling*. I felt like I understood it better because of my own faith. We also saw the *Gallery of Maps*, and I was amazed at how detailed everything was centuries ago. In the *Pinacoteca*, I remember a painting of *Jesus fishing with the disciples* and many of *Mary ascending to heaven*. It reminded me of all the church stories I grew up hearing. Except now, they were right in front of me. This day I really thought about how I've been observing so many Catholic paintings depicting stories in the bible. So many catholic practices were before me and I was able to understand the reasoning though all the traditions. I'm specifically Pentecostal Christian, so Catholic traditions are such a culture shock for me. I will always appreciate all the small conversations I had with Dr. Bernhoft and Dr. Im about the differences between the two and how we were respectful and open to learning about both sides.



## Day 7 – Orvieto: My Prince Moment

We went to *Orvieto* and it felt like a dream. Handmade goods lined the streets, and the *Duomo* had a grand exterior. Even though the inside wasn't as detailed as some others, the outside was jaw-dropping. The streets were calm, peaceful, no honking, just tight walkways. We found a park near the train station that looked like a castle. I took photos on the circular parts of the tower and joked, "I feel like a prince." But I kind of meant it. That day felt like I was in a storybook.



## Day 8 – Michelangelo's Spirit

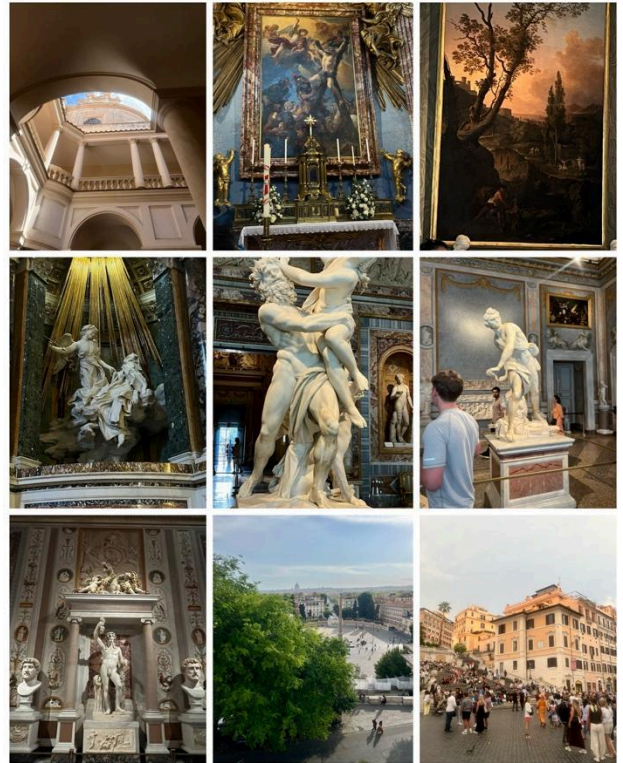
This day we did a full-on *Michelangelo church crawl*. From *St. Peter's Basilica* to *San Pietro in Vincoli*, I saw art that reflected faith, pain, and light. *The Altar of the Transfiguration*, the *Mosaic of St. Sebastian*, and even *La Luce di Michelangelo*, they weren't just decorations. They made me feel something. Later at *Galleria Nazionale Barberini*, I saw *The Cardsharps* by Michelangelo, which told a story through facial expressions and gesture. I wrote that day: "Art doesn't just show life. It shows feeling." That's how I felt.





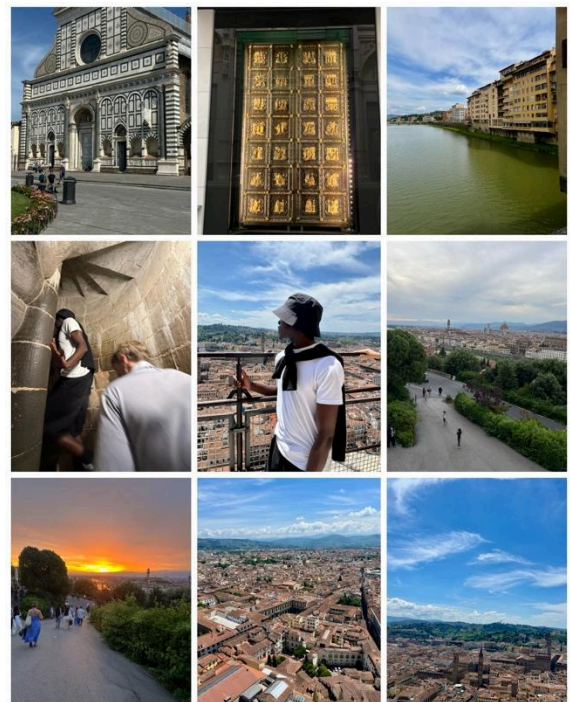
## Day 9 – Bernini’s Emotion

We visited the *Borghese Gallery*, and I was overwhelmed (in the best way). Bernini’s *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, *Apollo and Daphne*, *The Rape of Persephone*, and *David* these weren’t just sculptures. They were full-on moments of emotion frozen in marble. You could see Persephone’s thigh being gripped, feel Daphne turning into a tree, see David mid-swing. I also loved the *Madonna and Child with St. Anne*, and *Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius*. Bernini was the first sculptor to make me feel something. I left that gallery changed.



## Day 10 – Florence and Perspective

We took a trip to *Florence*, visited the *Museo dell’Opera del Duomo*, and climbed the *Piazza del Duomo tower*. The views were unbelievable, but the moment that hit me most was looking out over the city from *Piazzale Michelangelo*. Everything slowed down. I stood there, quiet, and just breathed. The train ride back was light, we played cards, laughed, relaxed. But I held onto that peaceful feeling.





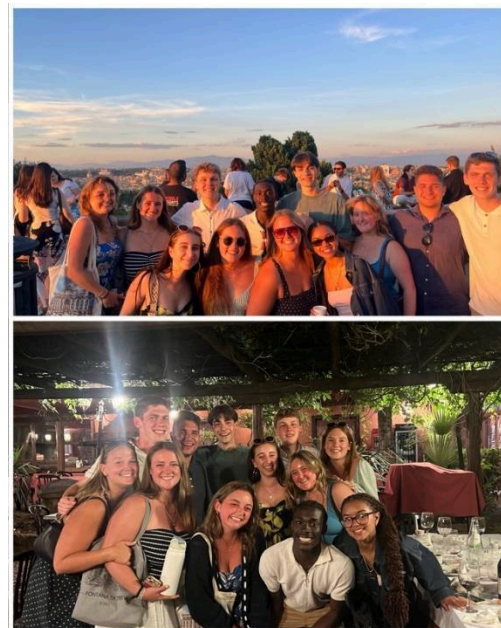


### Day 11 – Returning to the Beginning

We visited more churches and made our way back to the *Pantheon*. This time, I tried a new alcoholic drink and just sat inside. It wasn't about checking off a tourist spot, it was about soaking in what I had seen, how I had changed. The *Gallery of Maps*, the *church visits*, the whole trip had reached something deep in me. I felt a calm confidence. Like I didn't need to perform for anyone.

### Day 12 – Final Dinner, Full Heart

We had our last dinner, and I just kept thinking how far I had come. Not in miles, but in mindset. I came to Italy expecting to learn, but I left with something bigger which was perspective, peace, and passion. I used to feel like I had to always be “on,” always proving myself. But now I know that being still, being open, being present, that's growth too. My soul left Italy fuller, lighter, and more alive.



Italy gave my soul something I didn't even know it needed. It reminded me of beauty, silence, friendship, and emotion. I came back different, more grounded, more aware, and more thankful. I'll carry that with me for the rest of my life.



# VIVA ITALIA

