

MY BELLA GAP YEAR



THE highlight of my gap year, as I hope this journal reveals, was the John Hall Pre-University History of Art Course. We not only learned about art history but we had music lessons and were taught Italian. The course runs from January to March.

WEEK 1: LONDON

Arrived at the National Gallery this morning for our first meeting and was not entirely convinced. Didn't know a soul and was about to embark on an eight-week course with 60 complete strangers. Spent the week at a series of lectures in the National Gallery with trips to various art houses around the capital. The early-morning lectures, combined with pub lunches and late nights as we got to know each other, were exhausting—added to which was the 24-hour train journey to Venice on Saturday. The view as we trundled into Santa Lucia train station made it all worthwhile, though, and heightened our excitement. Our hotel is quaint and ideally situated, but sharing a room with four other girls is intimate to say the least.

WEEK 2: VENICE

First music lesson this morning and an introduction to *gelati* between lectures. Water levels rising alarmingly. Lucky for those whose mothers had remembered to pack wellies. After an incredible day in Ravenna admiring the mosaics, we headed for the Venetian-based artist Geoffrey Humphries' bohemian apartment with views across the Guidecca simply begging to be painted. Stunning food and drink.

WEEK 3: VENICE

Awoken in the early hours by Frank pounding on the hotel door, having taken an unexpected dip in the canal through over-imbibing! Our vaporetto passes getting a lot of use transporting us round the

Private tours of the Uffizi Gallery and the Vatican, celebrating *carnevale* in Venice and finding the world's best ice cream are just some of the highlights of an Italian art course for gap-year students, as GABRIELLA BONADDIO reveals in her journal.



(From left) Katie Milne, Gabriella Bonaddio, Miranda Boord and Alice Gippis with their portraits by Geoffrey Humphries

city—as easy as hopping on the number 74. In addition to the lectures, we are encouraged to watch films with an Italian link (*La Dolce Vita* tonight), and go to concerts (the candlelit concert in Chiesa San Bartolomeo was a highlight). Such a wonderful group of friends and many fun nights out in restaurants with numerous carafes of the *vino della casa*. Yet more pasta—waistlines are expanding! Our founder, John Hall, extended the hand of friendship this week, taking each of us in groups for a glass of vino in his favourite bar.

WEEK 4: VENICE

A birthday fell on Valentine's Day, taking the pressure off red envelopes burning a hole at reception. Stumbled across the tiniest mirrored nightclub, which soon turned in to a regular haunt. A special lecture on Keats and Shelley in Italy, which was simply amazing, followed by more wonderful art lessons across the Guidecca. Very much looking forward to

seeing my parents and brother, who are out for half term. Yummy dinner at Harry's Bar, shopping and a break from my bunk bed built into a cupboard—will be very sad to see my family go.

WEEK 5: VENICE

Carnevale and 'our' Venice overrun with tourists! Even the cashier at American Express in full 18th-century costume. Can't get anywhere without treading on someone's costume. Bellinis and painted faces the order of the day in San Marco. Photography classes in Burano and Torcello and a slide show to showcase all our talent! Hotel food showing no sign of improvement, although five in a room means there is never a dull moment. Pizza place by Accademia bridge overflowing with John Hallers in need of a table, and many a late night at the Corner Pub and Blue Bar.



The Duomo dominates the Florence skyline and is within a stone's throw of the student accommodation. Although the walk to the top is tortuous, it helps to work off the pasta

late night at the Corner Pub and Blue Bar.

WEEK 6: VENICE

It snowed today. Simply magical. Wonderful trips to the Guggenheim and the Accademia and a private evening trip to San Marco by candlelight, never to be forgotten. First bit of work this week—a presentation in groups of ten. It is to be done in front of everyone on aspects of Venice (we got Cannareggio) depicting paintings without the use of slides. Friends' parents out to visit and more amusing dinners in San Trovaso. Still find myself navigating tiny alleyways I've never seen before. Next stop: Florence.

WEEK 7: FLORENCE

Fantastic to see cars again and shops selling things other than glass ornaments. Woken each morning by Guido the builder, but never mind. The rooms are wonderful and we are a stone's throw from the Duomo. Had heard one had to queue for hours to get into the Uffizi, but we managed to waltz straight in for a private tour. After seeing countless famous works of art it was our turn to produce a masterpiece, at the important art school here, Charles H. Cecil Studios. A claustrophobic

climb to the top of the cathedral between the two 'skins' of the dome was rewarded by a visit to what is billed as the best ice-cream shop in the world, a little café tucked behind Santa Croce, called Vivoli.

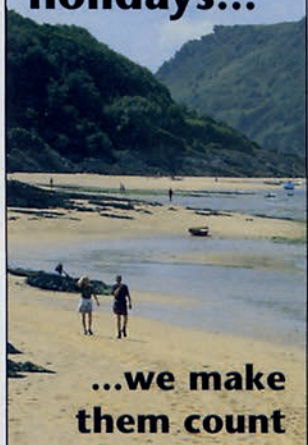
WEEK 8: ROME

If the traffic in Florence was a shock, the disregard for any road signals by the Romans makes it perilous just to cross the road. We have five days to see the whole of Rome. After official closing time at the Vatican, we are allowed in for a memorable private viewing. Having managed the city's other main attractions, it is almost time to return home. As our final get-together, John Hall lays on a superb lunch at the Ristorante Sibilla in Tivoli. Once the presents have been bought and bags are packed the time has come for tearful farewells. What an incredible trip.

PASS NOTES

Contact John Hall Pre-University Course, 12 Gainsborough Road, Ipswich IP4 2UR (01473 251223; www.johnhallpre-university.com), to learn about courses in 2005 and 2006.

Your holidays...



...we make them count

Let us help you choose from over 450 of the finest holiday homes in the wonderful West Country.

From luxurious country houses to traditional chocolate box cottages.

We help find the perfect one for you.



For a free 120 page colour brochure call:

Helpful
Holidays

01647 433535

or visit our website:

www.helpfulholidays.com