



Spring Break Program

The University of Illinois Gies Business School students arrived to Rome on a Sunday. They were here to experience “The Business and Culture of Food”, a customized spring break program that we had designed and organized in collaboration with the Gies Business school study abroad office.

They got right to it with a food tour in the historical center of Rome, where they learned about Italian coffee brewing practices at a historical bar. This was followed by a tasting at a family-run bakery where they tried one of the locals’ favorite snack, pizza bianca, a square of delicious, thick pizza topped only with olive oil and salt. Next, they explored a niche store of pepper and olive oil in the Jewish neighborhood and ended their tour with a tasting of traditional Sicilian pastry.

At dinner, students got introduced to Roman traditional cuisine while getting to know one other and our staff, as we led them through a discovery of the many Italian food traditions.

On Monday, the students began the day with a typical Italian breakfast consisting of ‘caffè e cornetti’, coffee and pastries, at a local, typical bar that has been run by the same family for generations.

In order for the students to be able to individually explore the city, they then headed to our headquarters at ‘Gustolab International’ for a Cultural and Safety Orientation, followed by a crash course survival Italian class at ‘Scuola Leonardo Da Vinci’. In the afternoon, the group got to take part in an Italian cooking class with Chef Gracian Daniele, learning the history and techniques behind a number of traditional Roman dishes from ‘antipasto’, the appetizer, to ‘dolce’, the dessert. Students got to experience creating famous Italian dishes, while also learning about Italian cooking culture and traditions.

Play Watch a short recap of the program!



The next day, students started the day by visiting Rome's best-known monument: the Colosseum with a guided tour that delved into the history, architecture and myths behind this magnificent landmark.

After the tour, we guided the group to a different neighborhood for the exploration of two different markets: Mercato Esquilino and Mercato Centrale. Mercato Esquilino is a colorful market full of all kinds of fresh and exotic foods and it is situated in a multicultural area. Mercato Centrale is a new market where food is prepared modern style. At Mercato Centrale the students got to taste samplings from a variety of food stalls and experience this new age concept. Our activities for the day wrapped up with a meeting with a variety of experts in start-ups related to food. First, with EnLuiss Labs for a presentation of two startups, followed by a visit to WorkEat, a restaurant which uses technology in an innovative way to serve its customers. The students were inspired by the focus, insight and collaboration behind these startups and felt that these meetings gave them an insight into the business of food in Rome.

On Wednesday, students continued their exploration of Rome in the historical neighborhood of Testaccio. We spent time at the Mercato Testaccio, analyzing old versus new traditions, Roman food history and tasting a variety of specialites. Afterwards, students had the opportunity to go to Eataly, a megastore of Italian food and beverages, that has opened stores all over the world. The students explored the various levels, noting regional specialites and different certifications such as Slow Food or Italian quality controls and trying different dishes. In the last part of the day, the group got to learn about the structure behind urban farming, including methods and techniques of growing, harvesting and sales at an urban farm in Rome.

Students spent day five outside of the city of Rome. We started at the farm that produces cheese. Students participated in a cheese-making workshop, and learned about the techniques, types and certifications of a variety of local Italian cheeses, as well as about the business of agritourisms and social farms. We also had a tour of the surrounding farm, including visits to the pigs and a detailed description of how they are raised and used on the farm. We then moved on to a nearby winery where students learned about the wine making process and had a wine tasting session.

On Friday, the students started the day off in another iconic spot situated in the center of Rome: the



Vatican Museums where they got to visit the Sistine Chapel and many other artistic wonders. Next, we visited a family-run liquor producer that has been creating a variety of liquors for generations. To wrap up our activities for the day, we went for a pizza dinner and got to meet the Michelin-starred chef, Chef Cristina Bowerman. The students learned about the history of pizza, techniques and styles of pizza, as well as a variety of different classic types, while getting to enjoy a pie themselves.

On their last day, students enjoyed an interactive tour at the Trajan's Column. We then walked through the Roman Forum area on our way to Monti for our Food Business tour. We stopped at a health conscious restaurant and garden center, as well as a local place which specializes in the classic rosette panini. We then enjoyed a delicious Roman farewell lunch before saying goodbye to this amazing group.