

Sicily, Italy



Early in April, my classmates and I, together with three of our teachers, traveled to Italy. In the summer of 2018, when one of the teachers told me that I had been chosen for the project, I was very excited about this extraordinary experience. The closer we were to our departure, the more I realized that this was actually happening. With the rehearsals coming and the preparation of our

presentations, I was becoming more and more worried.

It was not my first time travelling outside our country – Bulgaria, but it was my first time travelling by plane. I must confess I was a bit scared. Our teachers, however, took care of our comfort and convinced us that everything will be all right. I wasn't very confident in my language skills and I worried to talk freely with other people outside class. Later, I found out there was no reason for my concerns.

We arrived in Sicily and we were taken to our hotel. We had a late dinner and the doorman working a night shift opened the restaurant just for us. He was the first person we befriended upon our arrival. We even gave him a nickname "The Cheese" and he understood our sense of humour and had fun with us.

Right on the next day, we got up early in the morning and met the other teams from France, Turkey and Romania. After we had breakfast, we went to Salemi, where the school of the Italian team was located. All of them were really excited to see us again, because some teachers and students had taken part in the project in previous years. After that, we went to the hall where everyone was going to present their presentations. The school was pretty big, with spacious corridors. Enza, (the coordinator of the Italian team) greeted us and handed out a program for the week. After the Italian team, it was our turn. I was the first speaker of my team, the topic was categorization of hotels.

The second day we visited the Zingaro Reserve. At the entrance, the tour guide told us about how they had originally planned to make a pathway, but gave up on the idea because of all the beautiful nature that it was going to ruin. This reserve is famous for its beautiful views and beaches on the ocean coast. The water there is a mix of blue and green, and is very clean and clear. I was amazed; I had never seen something so mesmerizing before. There we visited different museums related to the culture of Sicilian people. They showed us how they knit

baskets, bags, bracelets and many other things made of palm leaves. They also explained how the drying out and the processing of the leaves happens. After that, we went to a cave that was given the name of a ship, because when years ago the level of the water was higher, many ships used to wreck there. That cave has also been a shelter and a place to hide for homeless people and shepherds during the wars. It took us a whole day to cross the reserve, it was definitely tiring but we also had a lot of fun and an opportunity to learn many new things.

After all the relaxation, it was time for work again, and that is why during the next couple of days we were once again presenting our presentations. This time it was the Romanian and French teams' turn. The French team had rated the most famous hotels in France, and told us something interesting about each of them. The Romanian team presented a short film, in which they acted out all the staff of a hotel. It was clear that they were admirers of comedy and that their biggest goal was to entertain the audience.

A day before we left, we got a tour of the hotel that we were staying at. The manager was kind enough to give us access to the material-technical base of the hotel and to show us the work that everybody had to do up close. She told us that the hotel was more active and booked during the summer and that they are about to do a renovation. She explained what each worker was supposed to be doing and that there was a great amount of people, whose main goal is to make the hotel as appealing for guests as possible. I took notice of the fact that everybody had respect for each other and that they are really fond of their culture and language.

During our visit, the weather wasn't too great, but that didn't stop us from having fun and experiencing many positive emotions with the new friends we had made. One evening the Turkish team showed us one of their traditional dances, and we showed them ours. We both shared the differences and similarities between our cultures. We sang, learned to play the piano in the hotel lobby, and one guy (a guest of the hotel) was kind enough to give us a small concert with some of his favorite songs. We were all amazed from his undeniable talent.

On our last day, we visited Palermo, where we also stayed for one night. I was stunned as I looked at the massive buildings, the authentic houses, and the small pretty streets but the cathedral was the most beautiful of them all. Its yard was made for people who pass by. They were sitting around doing all kinds of stuff – reading, listening to music or just relaxing. Some of them were even practicing their hobbies.

I almost forgot the food! When someone hears about spaghetti and pizza they usually say they can eat that for the rest of their lives. The pasta and pizza in Italy are very different from the ones that we are used to eating in Bulgaria. At first, the combination of fish and pasta didn't sound appetizing at all, but once I tried it I loved it. They gave us homegrown oranges, which were incredibly tasty. You could say that for Italians oranges are like apples for Bulgarians. You could

literally find orange trees on the side of the road. We also went to a gourmet restaurant.

The whole experience was worth it, not only because of the people and the beautiful places that we visited, but also because of the knowledge that we received from Italian people and their amazing hospitality.