

## **Isobel Gooder (MML) – Tuscany, Summer 2015**

This summer saw a three week trip to Italy for the duration of August. I am spending the first six months of my Year Abroad in Milan from mid-September, and decided therefore to brush up on my Italian language and hand gesturing skills.

The trip took the form of a mini road trip. I flew into Florence and took the train to Orvieto in Umbria. This was my first time in the province and it did not disappoint. The town is situated on the flat top of a steep hill with magnificent views of the surrounding valley.

Here the speciality is 'umbricelli', a type of thick spaghetti, which was perfect for my vegetarian tendencies. The weather was heavy and while the locals were very unhappy about the lack of sun, the relentless, fat rain and deafening thunderstorms delighted me no end.

After a week I took a two hour train to Lucca in Tuscany. Here, instead of hills there are huge, imposing but beautiful walls. Over the period of a week I spent a lot of time on the walls, cycling and busking with some English friends and decided that Lucca might just be my favourite Italian town. Here the wine and the olive oil are the most delectable Lucchese produce, being at the centre of Tuscany. Food wise they pride themselves on their 'tordelli'; a large equivalent of the ravioli.

Following this 'soggiorno' I made a few excursions to the surrounding area. First of was a marble river. This was an abandoned marble quarry that is now a secluded hangout for couples and the occasional Italian student, with a clear blue, freezing cold river running down from the Apuan alps. It is one of the most photogenic places I have ever been. Next, I visited the town of Forte dei Marmi which is the Saint Tropez of Italy. The beaches here are wonderful if a little crowded and the town is perfect for window shopping and Aperol Spritz.

For a calmer seaside experience I found a spit of land in the nature reserve of Massaciucoli. The sandbank here was bordered on one side by the River Serchio and on the other by the Mediterranean only 15 metres apart. Where the two meet at the end of the sand there is wonderful current that makes for hours of fun.

The only way to get here is either by swimming or by boat. As such the beach is only for the more hardy holiday-maker and the majority of beach dwellers are fisherman. I loved it so much here I visited twice.

Needless to say I was very loathe to leave Italy for London. Happily my year out in Milan is not far off!