Sicily, one of Italy’s twenty regions, is the largest of the Italian islands, surrounded by the Ionian, the Tyrrhenian, and the Mediterranean Seas. Like all Italians, Sicilians retain a very strong sense of regional pride; however, Sicily’s isolation from the mainland has contributed to a unique Sicilian culture and language and a stronger self-identity. In this section, Sam Carle (LA ’13) and Eric Halliday (LA ’16) speak of their different experiences in the Regione Siciliana.

I have only seen a few parts of Sicily, but I can’t wait to get back. Like Napoli, Sicily is more than worthy of exploration, to reflect on both its virtues and its vices. You will have unique experiences in Sicily. One of the most gorgeous places I have ever been is Erice, a funivia ride away from the ground-level city of Trapani. In Erice, you walk amongst the clouds, literally, as you explore ancient castles. At the same time, however, some of the most-worrying sights I have ever seen were in Sicily. A history of power struggle and oppression has led to problems on this island. I took a stroll one day a bit outside the center of the tourist-friendly city of Monreale to find piles of garbage with signs posted forbidding anyone from picking it up. Despite what one may think or hope, unfortunately the mafia is a reality of Sicilian life.

You can eat different and very, very delicious food in Sicily. Closer to the equator, the cuisine incorporates spicier foods, originally with the intention to kill off any heat-related bacteria. Dishes often include fish, eggplant, capers and tomatoes. Sicilian dolci are among the most famous in the world. I can’t choose a favorite, but one that’s definitely up there on the list is the underrated cassata. Behind the cassata is a very interesting story. The full name of this dessert is the Cassata of Saint Agatha, who hailed from Sicily. Strange as it seems, one of the ways in which Agatha was punished for her faith was an attempt to pull off her bosom. The cassata is the timeless ode to this special saint.
The summer after my junior year of high school, I entered an exchange student program that paired me with a boy my age in Italy. We were to spend the summer together as brothers: first he would come to live with me and my family in July, then I would go to Italy with him and stay with his family in August. I was thrilled to have the chance to spend a month in Italy, as I had taken Italian throughout high school and was eager to put my skills to use. Little did I know that, despite being within the geographic borders of Italy, I would spend most of my experience listening to anything but Italian.

My first clue that my host brother’s town was not an average Italian community was its name: Piana Degli Albanesi, or “Plain of the Albanians.” Wikipedia informed me that it was a tiny town in the mountains of Sicily, about 20 minutes away from the major port city of Palermo. It had been settled by Albanian refugees at the end of the 15th century; they had fled the Ottoman conquest of their homeland and had pled to the Pope – a powerful political entity at the time – for land to restart their lives. Not caring too much about the plight of Albanian refugees with no outstanding power or wealth, the Pope gave them some territory in the rocky mountains outside of Palermo, land that was safe from the Ottomans but hardly suitable for farming, thus making it relatively useless in the agrarian-centric society of the 15th century. The inhabitants had nevertheless flourished and their culture, known as Arbereshe, had been carefully preserved throughout the centuries.

While I was aware of the community’s cultural history, I thought it was exactly that: history. My great-grandparents were Jewish immigrants who fled Russia during the pogroms, but I didn’t share many cultural with a 19th century Russian peasant, and I assumed it was a similar story for the Arbereshe communities. My first clue to the contrary was when my host brother, Giuseppe, called his parents to let them know he was safe upon his arrival in America. I was in the room with him and was interested to see how much of the conversation I could understand as the first test of my Italian. To my great surprise, they spoke in a language that was as similar to Italian as Cantonese. After he hung up I asked him what they were speaking and he said “Arbereshe,” as if the answer was obvious. He nevertheless assured me that everyone in Piana was fluent in Italian, as they were obviously Italian citizens, and my fears were mistakenly relieved.

It was not until we landed in Palermo in August that I fully realized how integral the Arbereshe language was to the Piana community and to Giuseppe’s family. His family was waiting for us at the airport and joyously took turns shaking my hand and hugging Giuseppe. Yet, they spoke to him in Arbereshe, only using Italian when directly addressing me. As we drove to Piana I saw that the street signs were written in both Arbereshe and Italian, as were the signs for almost every business. It was if I had landed several hundred miles to the north and had walked into an Albanian town where everyone happened to speak Italian if necessary.

I spent much of that month perplexed by the linguistic diversity around me. I was not nearly fluent in Italian, so that alone would have been enough for my poor brain to process. Instead, the Piana residents spoke Arbereshe with each other, the Sicilian dialect when they interacted with locals in Palermo, and formal Italian only when the other two options weren’t possible, like whenever they spoke to me. I once asked Giuseppe if it would be possible for everyone to speak Italian around me, even if not directly to me, so that my comprehension would improve. He nodded sympathetically but informed me that Arbereshe was a proud component of their culture and my request would be impossible.

Although everyone I met was friendly, the sights were incredible, and the food was delicious, my experience that summer was indelibly marked by my location. Although the odds were miniscule, I had somehow succeeded in spending the entirety of my exchange program in one of the rare communities in Italy that did not speak Italian as its primary language. I was implored several times by the locals to learn Arbereshe, but I declined as politely as possible, informing them that learning Italian was more than enough. I view my experience as a formative one, but one that I would not recommend for an Italian-language learner. The lesson from my story is, as obvious as it sounds, make sure that wherever you go in Italy, the inhabitants speak Italian.

PIANA DEGLI ALBANESI BY ERIC HALLIDAY

The summer after my junior year of high school, I entered an exchange student program that paired me with a boy my age in Italy. We were to spend the summer together as brothers: first he would come to live with me and my family in July, then I would go to Italy with him and stay with his family in August. I was thrilled to have the chance to spend a month in Italy, as I had taken Italian throughout high school and was eager to put my skills to use. Little did I know that, despite being within the geographic borders of Italy, I would spend most of my experience listening to anything but Italian.

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CARNEVALE by Victoria Ferrera

If you’ve got a friend studying abroad in Europe during spring semester, there’s an incredibly high chance that you will be seeing pictures on Facebook from his or her adventures in Venice during “Carnevale”. As I sit here writing this—it’s 16 February, only 2 days into the festival—I’ve already had at least three friends post pictures on Facebook from Carnevale happenings. Considering the 2 remaining weeks of the festival, I expect the number of Carnevale pics to increase dramatically.

You may be asking, though, what exactly is Carnevale? Technically, Carnevale is just another way of celebrating Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday. In simpler terms, it’s really the day before Lent, the forty days before Easter, begins. In the Catholic Church, the Lenten Season is a 40 day period of fasting, so many see Carnevale (or Fat Tuesday or Mardi Gras) as the last hurrah before this period of moderation.

The festival begins about two weeks before Fat Tuesday. This year, Fat Tuesday falls on 4 March, so Carnevale events begin on 15 February. St. Mark’s Square is the center of Carnevale activities, a hot spot for seeing Carnevale-goers dressed in extraordinary historical Venetian costumes and stunning Venetian masks. There are gondola and boat parades, mask parades, fireworks shows, and parties and masked balls in the evenings.

Today, Venice’s Carnevale is one of the most famous Mardi Gras celebrations in the world. What makes the Venetian celebration so unique is the history behind it. The first Venetian Carnevale took place in 1162 and was declared an official city wide event a hundred years after that. What makes Venice’s Carnevale so special is the presence of the masks. Historically, Venetian citizens wore masks during Carnevale in order to, well, mask their identity. The masks allowed citizens to behave wildly and to adopt alter egos, freeing them from the harsh, judging eyes of society. Today, Carnevale participants wear these beautifully designed masks more to honor the history of the celebration. It is true that the official, organized schedule of Carnevale has much to offer visitors; however, the most alluring aspect of the event is to simply wander the canals, observing the masked faces of other Carnevale-goers, leaving behind the present and reveling in the extravagance of days past.

LA VESPA by Enxhi Popa

When you see Vespas all over the street, then you know that you are in Italy. These scooter type bikes became popular in the 1950s in Italy because of their easy-to-use framework and cute designs. Vespas are now owned by the car company, Piaggio, and they have proven to be very successful. Although Vespas originated during a time when cars were booming, they have shown through time that they are far more cost-effective and environmentally friendly than cars.

Vespas are not as popular in the US and that is mainly due to the weather conditions here. On the East Coast specifically it is a lot harder to ride a scooter when it is snowing. Where as in Italy the winters don’t generally tend to be as cold. However, Vespas need to have a bigger presence in the US. They are so easy to use and much safer than bikes! Next time you go to Italy make sure that you go on a Vespa-ride in the city.
Beyond the Cappuccino by Victoria Ferrera

Italians love their coffee. Whether this love for coffee is greater or less than that of their American counterparts, I can’t say. I can say, though, that coffee culture in Italy is completely different than the coffee culture (thanks Starbucks!) we’ve cultivated here in the States. A bar menu in Italy is significantly different from a menu at a coffee shop in America. While you will find a cappuccino listed, don’t get your hopes up for a frap. Here are some types of coffee you can order at a bar in Italy:

Un caffè: this is by far the most ordered coffee drink in Italy. It is quite simply a shot of espresso. It is downed in one sip and is incredibly bitter. Definitely an acquired taste. If you want, you can add sugar, but drinking it straight is very, very Italian.

Un caffè ristretto: a shorter version of the regular caffè. If the regular caffè was too bitter for you, this is almost guaranteed to be even stronger.

Un caffè lungo: slightly more espresso than a regular caffè.

Un caffè Americano: this is what you should order if you want your normal cup o’ joe. It’s the closest thing to drip coffee that you’ll find in Italy. Essentially, it is hot water added to espresso.

Un caffè macchiato: a shot of espresso “stained” with frothed milk. It’s kind of like a baby version of a cappuccino, but much much stronger (because there’s much less milk).

Un cappuccino: a shot of espresso infused with a lot more frothed milk than the macchiato. Warning: do not order un cappuccino after the clock strikes noon. Ordering one after lunch or dinner will instantly peg you as a tourist.

Un caffè latte: do not, I repeat, do not walk into a bar in Italy and ask for a latte. If you do, you will literally get a glass of milk. Ask for un caffè latte and you will receive everything you’ve ever dreamed of, a nice glass of hot milk mixed with espresso.

Un caffè corretto: the “correct” version of an espresso…if you order this, you will receive a shot of espresso with a few drops of Sambuca or grappa (or if you’re my nonno, a few drops of espresso with a shot of Sambuca or grappa).

Un caffè freddo: the closest thing you’ll find to iced coffee. It’s really just chilled espresso mixed with sugar.

Un caffè shakerato: the shakerato is made by combining espresso, sugar and ice and shaking it until a froth forms when poured. Some bars add a bit of chocolate syrup or cream to liven things up; some will even add some alcohol.

Pictured from top to bottom: un caffè, un caffè macchiato, un caffè latte.
FOR THE STATE-SIDE COFFEE LOVER

BY ENXHI POPA

For those of you who are espresso fanatics, then we have found heaven for you. Located on Newbury St, right across from the Boston Garden, “Nespresso Boutique” is a (fairly) new cafe that serves espressos from the portable Nespresso machines. Nespresso is a new brand, owned by Nestle which has created a whole new concept and has made espresso capsules that customers can use to make delicious cappuccinos at home. Customers can buy the machine and then replenish their coffee capsules. If you want to try what the coffee taste like then stop by the Cafe and try it! They offer a variety of espresso flavors and coffees. To learn about more cafes in Boston, make sure to follow @bostoncafes on Instagram.

LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH FILM

One of the best ways to learn a language is by listening. Listen as much as you can, get used to the sounds and rhythms of the new language, pick up on slang, figure out the dialect. This is easier said than done—unless you’re abroad, it can be hard to “listen” to Italian. One great resource for listening is watching Italian films. Check out the following Italian films on Netflix...I promise it’ll be a great listening experience!
SOMETHING TO MELT YOUR TONGUE...

The Italian word for tongue-twister, scioglilingua, literally means “melting tongue”. Just like we grew up sputtering “how much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood” and “Sally sells sea shells by the sea shore”, Italian kids have some of their own tongue melters. Try these out…you’ll find that they are just as ridiculous and make just as little sense as our own scioglilingua.

Sotta la panca la capra campa sopra la panca la capra crepa.
Under the bench the goat lives, on the bench the goat dies.

Per te il prete perse trenta denti dentro un antro.
For you the priest lost thirty three teeth inside a cave.

Trentatré trentini entrarono a Trento tutti e trentatré trotterellando.
Thirty three people from Trento entered the city, all thirty three waddling.

Apelle, figlio di Apollo, fece una palla di pelle di pollo i tutti i pesci vennero a galla, per vedere la palla di pelle di pollo fatta da Apelle, figlio di Apollo. Ma quella palla di pelle di pollo caduta del colle dentro una molla. Mo rott’ quella di pelle di pollo fatta d’Apelle, figlio d’Apollo.

Apelle, son of Apollo, made a ball of chicken skin and all the fish came to the surface to see the ball of chicken skin made by Apelle, son of Apollo, but that ball of chicken skin fell down the hill, into a spring. Now it is broken, that ball of chicken skin made by Apelle, son of Apollo.

ITALIAN LANGUAGE ODDITIES

aiuole (flower beds) is the shortest word with all five vowels.

funamboleschi (variation of funambolo, or tightrope walkers) is the longest word with no repeating letters.

indivisibilissimi (very unsplittable) has the most I’s (eight) and no other vowels.

effervescentemente (sparklingly) has the most E’s (seven).

precipitevolissimevolmente (as fast as you can) is considered the longest word, with 26 letters.

sovramagnificentissimamente (in a very, very, very magnificent way) is even longer, with 27 letters, was used by Dante in the 14th century; now, though, the word is out of use.

Chemical names and numbers, though, can be even longer…

444,444 = quattrocentoquarantaquattromilaquattrocentoquarantaquattro

We hope you enjoyed the second edition of Italianità, a creation of the Tufts Italian Society to promote the Italian culture and lifestyle on campus. If you’d like to contribute a photo or an article to upcoming issues, please contact us at:

Tufts.italianclub@gmail.com

Grazie mille to everyone who wrote for this issue!

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