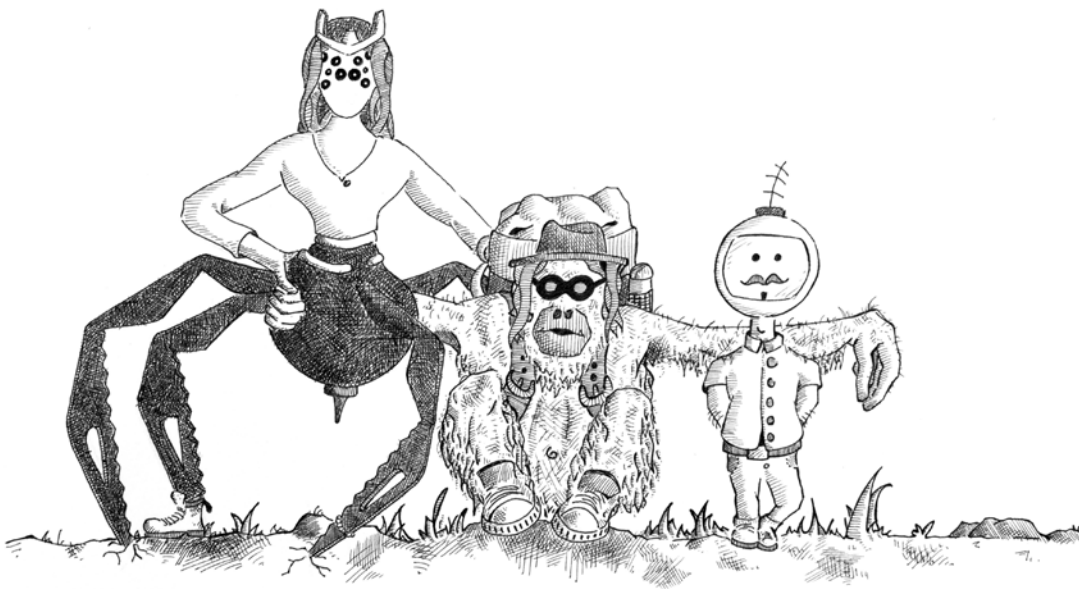


hitchhiker's guide to isia



*There once was a school
on top of a hill -
in the valley of
pizza, gelato and god's will.
You assumed it was fun
and thought you could chill;
no coming back now
since you paid the bill.
But to keep up there's a need
for any performance pill,
even though you know
they could get you killed.*

*Lucky enough,
you will have been,
once you hear our stories
and see the first unseen.
May you learn from others
the ways and the means
to survive this journey
from ISIA to the designer within.*

*Different beings from different galaxies,
at the edge of the universe shall share their stories:*

*An alien whose home's beyond the sun
trying to make a living while having fun.*

*A monkey from a far away land
only staying for a little bit and then must be banned.*

*An astronaut who travels every day from the moon and back
to go to the school that doesn't see the earth as flat.*

The Alien.

florence uninterrupted

AN ICECREAM MUST.

I have a sweet tooth. Thus when I first came in Italy, it was the first thing that made an impression on me. I know, the art, history, architecture are all amazing, but the ice cream... Fantastic. I'm from Cyprus, an island, so I am used to eating it all the time, but here, there's more to it than just another sweet, it's art.

I ate ice cream from all over Florence, and I mean ALL OVER, but I can say that my two favorite ice cream shops are Eduardo at Duomo for some funky combinations and Milkeria, 5 minutes from Duomo for ice cream 'come era una' volta for a pretty good quantity for about 2.50 euro.

BUSES.

Buses here are rarely on time, most of the time packed with people, usually because they're late, and only about 10% of the people pays for a ticket, because they are mad because the buses are late and packed...

However, buses in the city centre are so much worse that just late and packed. The drivers are anxious because they are late and eternally stuck in traffic and once in awhile when there is a small distance, barely enough to speed up from second gear, they go ahead and do it, even on turns. Momentarily you get the thrill of being on a rollercoaster and the worry of falling flat on your face. Funny, I'll admit, but could be harmful in the long term. Once this happens a few hundred times I mean. So be a few minutes early at your stop just in case, and hold on well.

HOUSE HUNTING.

Finding a house is always difficult. But here, in Italy, it's an endurance test. I was probably late, that I will admit. But my friend and I made a minimum of 100 phone calls in order to find some apartments still available, 2 of which turned out to be a scam.

So this is my advice: don't really trust websites until you've seen the apartment so you won't end up renting a garage or, even worse, A BIG FAT NOTHING. It could also be fun renting something in the centre, if lucky enough to find something affordable which is not a train and two buses away - it's going to be an interesting experience having everything a few minutes away whenever you feel like it. By everything I mean the 3 supermarkets nearby, the MILKERIA of course, whenever the sweet tooth kicks in, and a bunch of shops, restaurants and bars. It is not really fun when a drunk guy from one of the 3 bars downstairs keeps yelling for Paolo at 1am but you get the hang of it, or you buy earplugs for the sake of the rest of the pros.

PROS AND CONS OF A FLAT.

Living in a flat has its pros and cons.

a) Living on the fourth floor:

Pro: makes you a little less weary of burglaries.

Con: Not having an elevator is a pain in the butt when carrying up shopping from the supermarket or any other time when you have jelly for legs like me.

Pro: Makes jelly legs a bit firmer and helps with back problems. Seriously. Tested.

Pro: burglars would also get too tired to get up the stairs just to rob a 2 x 4 m apartment which ties in with the first pro.

b) Buzzer:

Con: Never works so you never hear the postal officer in order to let him/her in so you never get the book you ordered on time.

Con: Your roommate never hears it so can't help you when you're holding a truckload of things and struggling to find a finger to push the buzzer let alone find your keys.

Pro: Always works when the neighbours are locked out of their apartment and buzz your apartment to let them in.

c) Noise:

Con: Can hear everything from the apartment next door, eg. sick baby coughing all night and symphonies from their bathroom.

Con: Can hear the girls downstairs murdering Adele's 'Hello' for the 1385th time the same evening.

Pro: You can get back at the girls downstairs because your apartment is right on top of theirs by jumping up and down. Not on the same night of course. On a night you make sure they're very quiet. You know, according to the correct revenge way.

RENTING IN FLORENCE.

Renting an apartment in the centre of Florence immediately presupposes 2 characteristics: a) It's small and b) it's expensive. My apartment is 35m². We are 2 in the apartment and there is only one bedroom and a sofa-bed in the other room which is basically the kitchen. There is not much privacy, which is fine if you are close with the other person living with you. If you're not, then it is not a wise decision moving in with him/her.

The space is not enough for anything because in order to simply exist in one room a bunch of things are thrown in the other. The oven is a miniature of a normal sized oven BUT the good thing is that we have two extremely small verandas one looking at the street and the other used mainly for laying the laundry to dry and spying on the neighbours.

The apartment however is beautifully furnished, and being an aspiring designer I believe that the environment you are in contributes to your psychological well-being. Also, the mere fact that the apartment is located in the city centre which is full of life uplifts my mood. But that's just me. My advice would be to get an apartment which you will like living in, whatever that may be.

So COLD.

I am from a very warm country and so not used to very cold temperatures in the winter. The temperature of my winters so far ranged from 8-20 degrees Celsius. Thus, from October in Florence I started getting cold and needed flannel sheets. No flannel sheets in sight though. Florentians do not consider that winter is close until the beginning of November. You have been warned. So act accordingly. I slept with sweatshirts for a couple of weeks, I had my mother send me sheets from Cyprus and bought a quilt from IKEA.

POST OFFICE SYSTEM.

There is mystery in the ways the post office works in Italy. I am convinced nobody really knows how.

My roommate had some clothes sent from Cyprus. In the post office's defence the address was wrong. In my roommate's defence he went and asked for his packages 6 times in 4 different places until they had the epiphany to tell him that the address was wrong. Then it was a question of figuring out where the package was in order to correct the mistaken address. Until he discovered where the correct office was to ask this, it was too late. The package was sent back home.

So the moral of the story is, just don't make mistakes. If you do, it's over.

SUPERMARKETS.

Florence is expensive. There is no other way to view this. Blame the vendors, the taxes, the tourists and the landmarks who attract the tourists. It just is. However, there is a lot of consumption which means there must also be a lot of competitive pricing. Surely the presence of tourists means there are a lot of vendors that do not need to decrease prices: tourists come and go, they do not spread the word that prices are high at a specific shop. Nevertheless, there are shops which depend on the residents of Florence, who are also many.

After getting settled in Florence, my roommate and I started comparing prices, searching for new shops for groceries. The nice part is that we started exploring Florence without noticing it, and we found many places which were less expensive than the mini supermarkets in the centre, eg. Esselunga, Coop, San Lorenzo's market. The main point of comparison was tomato prices. Yes, we got a bit addicted in the end, but hey, why not?

THE SHOPPING ASSISTANT.

If you don't have a car here in Italy, there is one way to do supermarket shopping. THE SHOPPING TROLLEY! These are trolleys sold especially for carrying shopping, usually bought by people that cannot carry much weight. It is an extremely un-cool bag on wheels but offers amazing help. In this case the usefulness dominates over the need for the product to be aesthetically pleasing. In my view. If you're not a bodybuilder or gain pleasure in carrying a lot of weight all over the city, the shopping trolley is the way to go!

THEY ARE EVERYWHERE, JUST ACCEPT IT.

In Florence pigeons are everywhere. Pigeons in the street, pigeons in the veranda, pigeons on the roof, pigeons flying 2mm from your head; so you should get used to the Italian way, study the matrix and you'll be fine.

WHAT IS YOUR UMBRELLA STATUS?

When in Florence, get a good umbrella. It keeps on raining when you least expect it and there are always umbrella vendors in the street. So in order not to end up buying 6 umbrellas because you keep forgetting it at home, get a good one and have it with you. I got completely wet several times. I refused to get an umbrella from the street vendors and being a very picky person I delayed finding an umbrella. The ‘best’ part was that as soon as I bought my very meticulously chosen umbrella it stopped raining for a month. Can’t win.

MUST LOVE WINE.

I was not a very big fan of wine. I must admit, about a year before I came to Italy I started tasting different wines and found out that the type of wine I like is sweet. My friend, being a wine drinker, told me oh so wisely that I liked sweet wine because I was a beginner. She told me that everybody starts with sweet wines, then goes on to liking semi-sweet wines and then gradually all the way to dry wines. I have not changed my mind; maybe I am very slow with the standard progression. The point I am getting to is that whatever your type is for wine, you'll find it in Italy in so many different varieties that you will never get bored with the same type of wine. And even if you were not a fan before, there is a big chance of becoming one once in Italy.

TRAVELLING.

Italy is a very pretty and diverse country. Being here only about 5 months now I cannot complain, I travelled to quite a few places: Tropea - very picturesque and the beach is so nice; Scilla - I almost got lost in the small streets leading to the castle but the view from up there was worth it; Sicilia - Taormina's amphitheatre is inspiring and similar to ancient Greek architecture and Etna's volcano is a must just for the view from up there; Milan - having so many possibilities of things to do was exciting even for the one day I spent there. I am sure there are so many more interesting places to visit and the fact that Italy borders with France, Austria, Slovenia and Switzerland opens up a whole window for travelling abroad in Europe.

STUDYING IN ITALIAN.

I expected having difficulty with studying in Italian. I was not under any illusion. After all, I only studied Italian for less than 6 months. The workload is not light, and the teachers ask the best of you.

I was open to talking with my classmates, who were very forthcoming to my pleasant surprise, and asking for help, and I found some of the taught books in English. I also translate a lot of the material, cross my fingers and hope for the best. They say the first six to ten months are the most difficult. Let's see. Just know, future student, there was definitely someone before you in the position you are in now. Also, keep talking to the professors; they might have suggestions of other helpful books in English, they can explain the things you have not understood, and this way they will become aware that you are having some difficulty so they may help you in another way.

ITALIAN BANKING SYSTEM.

Opening a bank account in Italy was hell. In order to open a current account in Italy you need an Italian identity, in order to get an Italian identity you need to go to the municipality and apply and in order to get the application accepted the police needs to check your place of residence and the landlord needs to give confirmation.

Unfortunately this was not made clear from before. All I wanted was to pay the bill for the internet and Vodafone would not just take my cash! This cost me 4 hours of my life and various trips back and forth between Vodafone and the banks, some of which did not have enough staff for opening an account, did not clarify from before that they needed two documents of identification, or just cost too much for opening an account.

The easiest, but not necessarily best choice turned out to be the post office, which cost 10 Euro per year and issued a prepaid card, not even a current account, which fortunately satisfied Vodafone. Just take a trip to your internet provider, make all questions you can think of for the payment of the account, then start searching for a bank and accept the fact that you will waste a lot of time. There is no other way.

ITALIAN DRIVING.

Italian driving is something out of a horror movie, formula 1 and a travesty of any regulatory system in place. The drivers speed, they do not in any way understand what a lane is, they follow unwritten rules about traffic lights, crossings and bumping onto one another while trying to squeeze into 1m by 1m parking spaces.

I must say though that I respect the fact that they rarely honk. I am impressed by the fact that about 90% of the drivers, in my experience, have impeccable reflexes, thus are able to speed so much, and I was shocked by the fact that once a driver actually thanked me for not crossing the street (while I were a pedestrian) and letting him pass. All in all, it's a new experience.

The Monkey.

a travel diary

DAY THIRTY-SEVEN.

The streets of Florence are very uneven. Every day I have several near-death-experiences, because I stumble like every five minutes. At university I already saved all the tripping hazards there in my head, so that I automatically take different kinds of steps on certain spots. But as soon as I have to walk at less familiar places, I start having problems again. Actually I'm just waiting for the moment, that I find myself bleeding on the ground, I guess it's just a matter of time.

DAY FORTY.

Today the pope was in town. He's been at the football stadium, I don't really know why, but I guess he did his speech there. I've also been in town, not to see the pope, but to buy myself kebab, which actually also tastes good in Italy. And for the first time since I'm in Florence, I took my camera with me and did some better quality photography instead of just taking pictures with the iPhone. On my way back home a girl walked towards me, started waving and talking to me and of course – in a typical Walter-moment – I didn't know who she was, so I just stood there grinning at her. She then told me, that has the same university courses as I do and I even knew her name from facebook but I was still asking myself how could I not have seen her for three weeks already. So I began acting very professionally, laughed and said »Haha, yeah, certo! Haha.. ha.« I really mastered that awkward situation. Let's see if I will recognize her at university the next time.

DAY FORTY-THREE.

Yesterday the rescheduled social anthropology lecture from monday took place in the university's library, because apparently there was no other room left big enough for the class. The library smelt quite old and dusty, probably because of the fact that it is old and dusty.

DAY FORTY-SIX.

I don't know exactly what it is about it, but there is a bus station, that the driver never stops at, even if you pressed the » stop « button in advance. Unfortunately it is the bus station, where I would like to hop off from time to time to get to my focaccia source in Florence. But because of the driver, I always have to walk more than it would actually be necessary.

In my art store of choice I today bought some sheets of paper which I wanted to be cut to smaller sizes. To my surprise they don't even have a cutting machine, instead the guy there folded each of the sheets and divided them with knives, which I think, were made for that exact purpose of cutting paper. I have to admit, that this was kind of cool, but that technique also felt really outdated at the same time.

DAY FORTY-SEVEN.

Florence is a city with loads of historical background in terms of art and culture, but sadly I don't feel like the same can be said about the city nowadays. Sure, there are plenty of museums with incredible paintings and sculptures, but I don't really see a new era of art here. Of course this could also be because of the fact that I'm doing product design for my Erasmus semester, so that I don't get in touch with free or decorative art and design. What I want to say is, that I expected to get inspired on every corner in Florence and always feel motivated. This is not the case so far.

During my lesson in the morning the dean came into the classroom, had a look at the heaters and noticed, that they weren't working, so he cancelled the upcoming lesson in the afternoon. Truth is, that it was freezing cold in that room and everybody sat on their chairs fully dressed. As a little side fact, it should maybe be mentioned, that the heaters weren't working since the beginning of the semester, so the dean's decision was a little surprising or sudden to me.

DAY FORTY-EIGHT.

The buses in Florence don't make any sense at all, this I will probably say until my very last day here. The second door, in the middle of a bus, is only meant to hop off the bus again. The other two doors only open to get on it. This inevitably leads to a very tricky situation in the case, that you are either in the front or in the back of the bus and want to exit. you are then forced to punch your way free through all of the people, because you can be sure, that none of them will move any millimeter to make things easier for you. In Germany this problem doesn't exist, buses open all of their doors (because why not actually?) and people take a step to the side for you, when they see that you're about to exit. Also, I got the impression, that Italian people are very willing to argue in public and since I'm neither very good speaking Italian nor having an argument with someone, this sometimes becomes a problem.

DAY FIFTY-FOUR.

Today the dean came into our lecture again in order to test if they heaters were working (they weren't), so it was exactly the same situation as last week and I experienced a *déjà-vu*. I took the chance and whispered „molto freddo“ multiple times hoping this could subconsciously influence him to cancel our afternoon lesson again. I love playing these mind games, but today it didn't work out.

During lunch break I played football with some of the guys from the second year and I didn't even behave as stupidly as I remember myself from school's sports lessons.

On my way back home a Japanese girl got controlled on the bus and just because she wasn't quick enough buying a ticket on her phone, she had to pay 50€. I more and more get the feeling that ticket inspectors are cruel unhuman-beings, who were born like this or forced to what they are by their jobs. Unhuman, because they are lacking the ability to feel empathy, the one attribute, that makes humans human.

DAY SIXTY-THREE.

Monday evening, when everybody just wanted to go home, we had to find out, that the doors of our university's hill were closed and we couldn't pass. It should be mentioned, that it really wasn't possible to get by those doors, since they're like four meters tall and made of iron. Actually you imagine something like Hogwarts behind gates like those. Someone had to walk the hill back up and find some responsible person to open the gates, so we were finally able to leave. On Tuesday I didn't wear my glasses a couple of times and immediately every girl began raving of how beautiful my eyes are and as soon as they started to discuss what my eye colour is, I told them it's a mixture of smokey grey and mossy green. (My eyes truly are beautiful!) Wednesday I was told, I also have a pretty voice. Today, on Thursday, I'm a complete narcissistic prick because of all these compliments and with every new conversation, I expect another compliment.

The Astronaut.

a quick little guide

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: HOW TO ENJOY YOUR AN-HOUR-OR-LONGER TRAIN RIDE.

1. Imagine you're travelling to a new place you know nothing about, think of all the new experiences you can have, sights to smell and flowers to see (while listening to Alt-J).
2. Be in a rush: postpone some important to-dos you have little time to complete for the ride and it will be as quick as ever.
3. Don't be in a rush: try and fail to master the art of meditation while in a train full of people.
4. The obvious bring with you a good book (truly a life-saver, you'll wish for a longer ride).
5. Make small talk with someone on the train, try to learn something from them!

GOOD EXPERIENCE: WAKING TIME.

Waking up early because of your commuting is not as bad as you may fear. If you start fresh in the morning you'll feel better all day long.

BAD EXPERIENCE: LATE TRAINS.

Get fit, go jogging and workout with a backpack; sooner or later trains will be delayed and you will have to run, run a lot.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: THE ECONOMICS OF COMMUTING.

As I'm writing this down ISIA has just got a new home in Villa Strozzi, a lovely and idyllic place to be. There's just one (let's say one) problem: it takes 30 minutes on foot from the S.M.N. station and, if you are commuting, you must take it into consideration. I'm fully aware that you already spend too much money for the always-late trains, so let's try to find out the cheapest ways to reach ISIA from the station.

1. On foot: yes, yes, 30 minutes it's not so much if you get used to it and try to smoke some cigarettes less, but it's not a viable way if your train is late that morning; you need some backup plans.
2. By bus: choose the tram (same costs, tram is quicker).

3. By tram: one ticket is 1.20 euros and it can be the right choice, if only used once in a while; anyway other options, luckily, are available. You can get a student monthly ticket for around 20 euros if you wish, but even this one has its downsides: if you are so brave to come from very far and already pay 100 euros for you train monthly ticket, well, you should try to save at least those 20.
4. By bike: some folks from ISIA are trying this risky plan! Buy a cheap bike and leave it every day at the station (your new motto, then, must become “put on your bike as many locks as you can”) and hope for it not to get stolen. Let’s say you can find a working (more or less) bike for 50 euros: if you manage to make it last for three months you’ll have saved some money instead of paying for the tram tickets.

5. By skateboard: I still have to try this one, but it might be the best option! (Still has some downsides though). You can buy a decent “penny” - a small and more portable version of a skateboard - for 50–60 euros and skate all the way from the station to ISIA. Some fantastic pros: always with you, so can’t be stolen; supercool yo; no monthly expense; very quick mean of transport (it’s said to take 10 minutes from S.M.N to ISIA); you can have a lot of fun. Some (IMHO unimportant) downsides: might be risky on the streets because of cars; bumpy streets can’t be skated on; you’ll have to learn how to (but it should take more or less a week).
6. By rollerblades: if you do so, I’ll praise you as my new personal God.

In the end you’ll surely find some ways: you attend ISIA, I do no wrong when I assume you’re creative! Good luck and have fun :).

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: YOU'D BETTER GET ORGANIZED.

How much time do you spend travelling every day? 3 or 4 hours in total? Those cannot be left unused. ISIA will try to creep into every second of your life with stuff to do - if you waste any sacred minute you'll find yourself going bollocks during exams' time.

Start getting used to working on the train as soon as you can (obviously some rest is needed, but it may be better to find it in different situations/places so that your mind doesn't link train with sleeping).

GOOD EXPERIENCE: SLEEPOVER (CLUB).

Guys and gals from your course will probably have rented a house to set themselves in Florence and will happily host you for a night or two. Beers, cigarettes and late hours are included in the package.

BAD EXPERIENCE: STRESSFUL TIMES.

When the week is reaching its end and you are tired from the morning lecture and you have a lot to do and you can't get one freaking minute of mental breath from everything and everyone and your mind just isn't working anymore, stop.

Get the most out of your surrounding Villa: take a refreshing walk in the park, smoke if you wish, relax and realize you're having fun and everything can get done sooner or later. You are surrounded by beauty.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: CREATIVITY.

First year, first extra-curricular activity (probably, since it's organized by ISIA)!

Some suggestions if you decide to attend it (you should; you'll know the specifics when the right time will come): try to get into a group of older guys, maybe from the second year, and learn their creativity process and work methods; an average idea well documented (writings, sketches and illustrations) is better than a great idea you didn't have the time to think through, so budget and spend your time wisely; creativity work in group is tough if all the members are not on the same frequency and there's a lot to learn about it - keep an eye on all the different approaches, they'll come in handy!

BAD EXPERIENCE: HOMEWORKS.

It may be just my wondering self, but he finds it difficult to understand some exercises. It just ends in lost time since they must be done again or changed in some ways. The tip is: ask, before finishing your grave, where you should start digging.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: CHRISTMAS BREAK.

Christmas break is love. Christmas break is life. You need to get done as much as you can to survive the first semester's exams. Still, you can keep yourself busy without stressing too much and enjoy the time of year.

I know advice is difficult to take until you have lived these times through, but trust me, this is important.

GOOD EXPERIENCE: ISIA.

I do lack enough experience to tell you for sure, dear reader, what ISIA is truly like. I'll try to tell you my humble opinion, though.

ISIA is a little, uncommon, hidden island, all surrounded by the sea of life - so scary with those great waves. Sometimes they'll make you feel like drowning, sometimes you'll surf them. Luckily enough, on this little island, girls and boys like to play, talk, share, help, create! As long as you stay focused on your goals, fun and good times are certain. But, and this is a big but(t), there's no place for the doubtful, the unsure and the tired. You need the strength to enjoy bad, stressful times. And that's exactly the start of a great story - may it be yours.

*There once was a story about a challenging journey
it was both a hurdle race and a colourful party
obstacles you'll find there is no doubt about it
but you should admit it'll be fun - don't deny it.
You're not alone and that you will see
Hope our stories offer a hand in time of need
New adventures will come
And exams will pass ^(maybe)
And if help is needed just ask us.*

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