

Blogs from Abroad

Wondering what the Taranta - a native Southern Italian dance - is all about? Or where to get the most authentic Italian food from the Campania region? Then be sure to check out the blogs of Brad and Jaime Kuntz, Athena's first sibling bloggers! You'll find the answers to these questions and other great insider tips as they recount their adventures from Rome.

 **Brad Kuntz / Rome, Italy / Spring 2009**
Monday, March 2, 2009

Last Monday, Lorenzo de Medici sponsored a "Slow Down Day," in which the computers were turned off to Facebook, email, and the world wide web, and our minds were turned on to conservation, relaxation, and Italian culture... We then had the option of attending a micro-ecology lecture explaining ways in which the individual citizens of this planet can all do their part in saving natural ecosystems, planet earth, and the human race. When individuals reduce energy, oil, and oil byproduct (plastic) consumption and use alternative energy sources, the demand for oil is consequently reduced and the war over natural resources can be eliminated. In this way, one can do their part to promote world peace.

It's easy - Reduce, Reuse, Recycle - turning off lights and appliances, buying products from "green" companies, driving less and walking more. Reusing plastic bags (or reusable cloth bags) also helps reduce the demand for oil - and not to mention that plastics take years to biodegrade in soil. Recycling paper reduces the demand for trees and can save rainforests (and animals that live within). Of course, saving the world cannot be done by one person. This shift in awareness has to occur in one person at a time, each doing their part and helping their friends, family and neighbors.

The afternoon transformed into dusk as Sol drove his chariot of fire over the horizon. We were introduced in a lecture to the Puglia region of Italy - the heel of the boot, so to speak. Apparently, the whole Southern region is quite beautifully adorned with beaches, fascinating architecture, piazzas, and the Taranta - a native Southern Italian dance that began in the region as an interpretation of the way in which farmers bit by poisonous spiders could sweat the venom out of their bodies when harvesting the fields. Though, culturally, the dance is believed to have been a way for the sexually suppressed conservative rural women to enjoy some form of intimacy with the opposite sex.

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 **Jaime Kuntz / Rome, Italy / Spring 2009**
Monday, March 2, 2009

Thursday morning Brad and I did our routine 'scurry out the door' for our 9:20 am class. Little did we know that Rome's city transit system was on strike, so our professor had trouble getting to class...because of this strike, Brad and I had to walk to the main train station, Termini, to catch a train that afternoon to Naples-Napoli.

The walk isn't so bad, although it was one of the warmer days we've experienced in Rome and the trek is a constant incline the whole way. Needless to say, when we got to Roma Termini, we were hot, sweaty, and not too thrilled for the crowded train ride to Naples. Once we cooled off it was much more enjoyable, and the further we got from Rome, the more people that got off at all the stops between. Two-and-a-half hours later, we arrived in Naples and patiently awaited Laurie to find us by the station to take us to her home in Monte di Procida. Laurie and her husband John are very good friends of our family, who we have known for a long time, and are stationed with the Navy in Naples; however, they chose to live off of the base in the quaint town of Monte di Procida. We got a little lost in Naples driving, because it was rush hour and they turn some roads that are usually two way streets into one way so it got quite confusing, but there was great conversation and we got to see a lot in the city! After many sinuous turns up and down hills, we arrived to John and Laurie's beautiful villa in Monte di Procida. It has a gorgeous view of the Mediterranean Sea, Naples, other neighboring towns and is surrounded by seven grape vines, fig trees, lemon trees, olive trees, great people and seven farm cats (all with names and two meals a day).

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PHOTO CONTEST REMINDER

There's still time to enter Athena's Photo Contest: entries are being accepted through **April 15, 2009**. Email up to 3 of your favorite original photos to photos@athenaabroad.com for your chance to win an iPod Nano!

Also, be sure to participate in the on-line photo contest voting to help pick the winning picture - more details will be posted on the Athena website after April 15th!

AROUND TOWN

SYDNEY

Greek Festival of Sydney

28 March - late April 2009 (various events)

<http://www.greekfestivalofsydney.com.au>

Don't ignore the multitude of cultural influences present in your host city! Sydney embraces the Hellenic aspect of its multicultural society with arts, music, sports and other festivities every year during the Greek Festival of Sydney. From food to philosophy, ouzo to dancing, this event celebrates Greek identity and its influence on Australian culture. The festival opens on March 28 when Darling Harbour will come alive with the sounds, sights and tasting sensations of Greece. Munch on haloumi cheese, dolmades and skewers as you wander the harbour and take in the festivities!

FLORENCE

Irlanda in Festa

17-21 March 2009 (various events)

<http://www.saschall.it>

In celebration of the Feast of St. Patrick, Florence hosts the weeklong Irlanda in Festa, with "seminars" on Irish beer and food as well as lots of live Irish music. The event takes place in a huge tent at the Teatro Saschall and attracts thousands of visitors who avidly consume the Italian interpretation of Irish food and drink, including potato soup, beef in Guinness, smoked salmon and gallons of stout. Why celebrate Irish culture in Italy? Why not?! When you do, make note of any differences you observe in how Italy celebrates St. Patrick's Day vs. how it is celebrated in the U.S.

ROME

Maratona di Roma

22 March 2009 (9:00 AM)

http://www.maratonadiroma.it/eng/home_en.asp

Join tens of thousands Romans as they take to the streets of ancient Rome to cheer on world-class runners competing in the famous Rome Marathon. To really immerse yourself in the experience, participate in the The Roma Fun Run (Stracittadina), a non-competitive 4k race open to all which begins immediately following the marathon start. In 2008, more than 60,000 people joined in the Roma Fun Run!

PAROS ISLAND

Greek Independence Day

25 March 2009 (various events)

<http://paroslife.parosweb.com/story.html?story=2342>

Join locals as they celebrate Greek Independence Day on March 25. Parades, military marches and church celebrations take place throughout Greece to mark Greece's victory in the War of Independence over the Ottoman Empire in 1821. Not to miss: the children's parade – starting from the Ekatontapiliani – and the evening candle-lit procession.

Have your own favorite restaurant, site, shop, that you'd like to share with future study abroad participants? SUBMIT YOUR OWN AROUND TOWN SUGGESTIONS TO INFO@ATHENAABROAD.COM

Celebrate World Water Day on March 22!

6K: the average distance women in Africa and Asia walk to collect water

6K: the distance you can run/walk on March 22 to help bring safe & accessible water to all people

Join Blue Planet Run's global TEAM BLUE to provide safe drinking water to those in need worldwide.

Get active! Gather friends to cover 6K (3.7 miles) as a fun walk, jog or run in your study abroad city. Pledge just \$1 per kilometer. It's easy. Every 5 people who participate = \$30, the amount needed to provide one person with a lifetime of safe drinking water.

Water You Waiting For? Join Team Blue!

For more information & to sign up visit Blue Planet Run's website:
<http://blueplanetrun.org/wwd>



This Month's Featured Day Excursion: Ios, Greece

If you are studying on Paros Island this semester, why not take a day trip to the island of Ios? Considered the "Queen of Young Tourists" – due to its vivid nightlife – there is much to see & do on Ios during the day as well:

-Walk 20 minutes from the port to Ios Town (Chora) on the western side of the island – considered by many as one of the most beautiful towns in the entire Cyclades, it has many tavernas, fine jewelry, gift & souvenir shops, mini markets and more.

-Enjoy the breathtaking view from the church Panaghis Gremiotissa, built on the highest spot of Ios town – especially amazing during sunset.

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Brad

The dance is simple, with a few basic footsteps that are incorporated into a primitive passionate game of cat and mouse, coy and promiscuous... Our class all drank the Puglian region "Primitivo" wine and as we did, a sort of ethereal trance sparked inside of me. The class and other dancers lined the colorful lavishly decorated room's perimeter. When the guitar player's fickle fingers picked and plucked his stringed instrument, the tambourine man joined in the rhythm with a steady beat and alternated with a bongo. The resonating sound could have been that of a didgeridoo or electronically produced for that matter. Then the guitar player breathed in deeply, inflating his lungs and closed his eyes and passed air through his larynx whose powerful wind was vibrated by those longing and quivering vocal chords, and carried across the room to my eager ears and interpreted by my "Primitivo" entranced brain as the most beautiful audio experience I could have heard at that given moment.

Then she appeared out of nowhere. She was short, with thick dark hair, an olive complexion that screamed southern Italy, and a dark dress that bloomed like an inverted black bellflower when she would spin. She and another man demonstrated the Taranta as we all watched and we were soon all invited to join in the dance. The song ended and the student dancers all retreated to the perimeter of the circle. This time, when the band struck up a song, the Italian man grabbed the hand of Erica, another student, and led her on to the dance floor. And as they stepped and twirled and chased, a pair of eyes below a frame of dark hair caught my gaze and bit me like a spider. The others had since stopped dancing, and the black-haired bella moved towards me, slowly, stepping, to the steady rhythm of the band and those eyes eagerly drew me out on the floor and the trance took over from there.

We danced the instinctual Taranta for what seemed like eternity, circling, stepping, chasing, engaging. She gestured me to hold my arms around her as though holding a giant invisible barrel, and move my arms up and down in opposite directions as though shaking the barrel from side to side which in turn caused her to twirl like a tornado, her black dress expanding outward. The dance ended as quickly as it began and we were all so exhilarated by this cultural experience that we decided it would be best that the night did not end there, but continue on at a jazz bar by Vatican City. And as we left, I turned and glimpsed the dancers and band members bundled up in their coats with their instruments all packed up, running giddily in the rain to wherever their life paths take them. I did not know her name and I will probably never see her again, but I will never forget my first time being bit by the Taranta.

Brad Kuntz is from Whitefish, Montana. He attends the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, California and is blogging about his study abroad experience in Rome, Italy.

Jaime

That evening we headed to the neighbor's house for a quick glass of wine and then we all walked down to a favorite restaurant La Taverna dei Sapori. It is a fabulous restaurant where one will probably eat the best and most authentic Italian food from the Campania region.

La Taverna dei Sapori is owned and run by Mariella and her husband Pepe. They are lovely people and their restaurant has a great ambiance and family feel to it. It is said in Italy, the best restaurants are the ones without menus, and this was certainly one of them. We ate many typical appetizers of this region such as fried mozzarella balls, calamari, oysters, and croquets... for our main course we ordered two big dishes of pasta. The first was a dish prepared fusilli, which is different from our fusilli of the states. It looks more like telephone chords prepared with pumpkin and sausage. The other dish was Paccheri alla Norma, which is a typical pasta shape of the area, which looks like a one-by-one inch square that is actually a tube, prepared with eggplant and smoked mozzarella. There wasn't any left to bring home.

It was a very relaxing weekend, and it almost felt as if we were back home. We also got to eat some typical Neapolitan-style pizza at a pizzeria owned by a man name Salvatore. It was definitely some of the best pizza I have ever had. It was so fresh and the crust was perfect. It was also very cool to see Italy from a small town perspective. Everything seemed a little more slowly paced. It is amazing how much history this little groupings of towns have! They are all surrounded by, or on the sides of, old volcanoes. You can find sunken Roman towns, Venus's temple, ancient Roman baths, castles, the island where Brutus plotted to kill Caesar, the lake in which Dante refers to as the entrance to hell, and much more in such a small area.

Jaime Kuntz is from Whitefish, Montana. She attends Chapman University in Orange, California and is blogging about her study abroad experience in Rome, Italy.

Read more of Brad & Jaime's blog on Athena's website at <http://www.athenaabroad.com/programs/blogs.php>.

Featured Excursion, cont'd from page 2

-Visit one of the restored whitewashed windmills on top of the mountain slope at Ios Town. Once used to produce energy to grind grains to feed the island inhabitants, they now stand as ornamental monuments. The windmills are an inseparable part of the island's history - every visitor should visit at least one.

-Attend an open-air play, music concert, or other performance at the Odysseas Elytis Amphitheatre. Named after the famous Noble Prize winning Greek poet, this amphitheatre stands just behind the 12 windmills at Ios Town.

-Take a step back in time – and enjoy the view – at the ruins of the Venetian castle on top of the island's highest hill (on the eastern part of Ios)

-Legend has it that the great poet Homer took his last breath on Ios and is buried at Plakoto in the northernmost part of the island. Make your way to Homer's Tomb to decide for yourself.

-Enjoy a traditional Greek coffee while listening to fine Greek music at the portside restaurant Enigma.