

ALICE'S

TRAVEL

JOURNAL



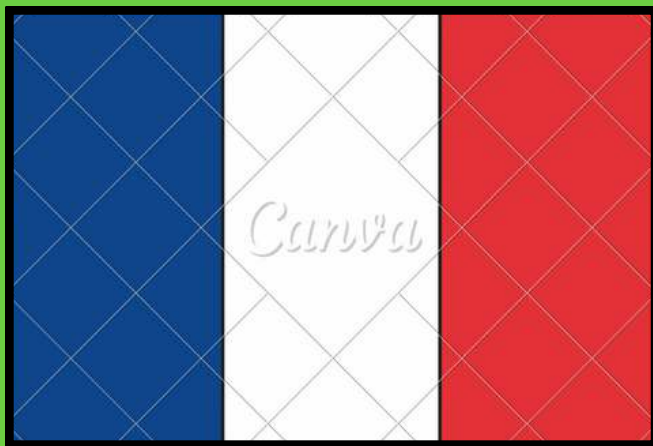
AN ERASMUS IN PISA



JAN-AUG 2025

AN ERASMUS IS NOT 6 MONTHS IN A
LIFE, IT'S A LIFE IN 6 MONTHS

FROM



TO

SUMMARY

1. ERASMUS CLASSES

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THE START OF A GREAT ADVENTURE



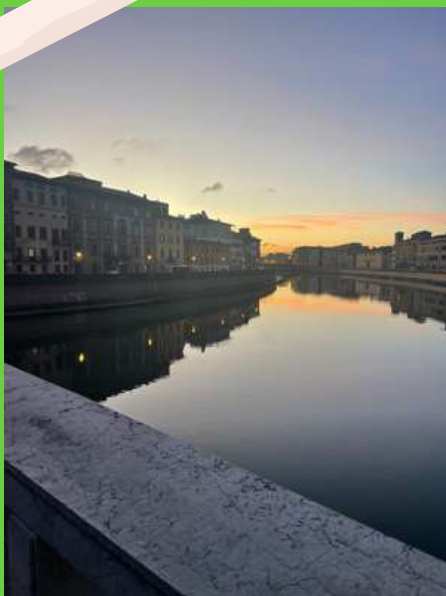
24 January 2025



Departures

I packed my bags, said goodbye to family and friends, and flew to Pisa, embarking on an incredible semester by combining Erasmus classes and research internship.

I arrived for an Eelisa mobility, ready to spend my time interning at UNIFI in Industrial Chemistry Department while studying at Scuola Superiore di Sant'Anna at Biological Department, an opportunity that promised not only professional and academic growth but also deep immersion in Italian culture.



A sunshine on the Arno



Flight
ORY → PSA



Sant'Anna
Scuola Universitaria Superiore Pisa

ERASMUS CLASSES



UNIVERSITÀ DI PISA

11 february 2025 - 4 june 2025

My Erasmus classes were one of the most enriching parts of the experience. Learning in a different academic environment taught me how much cultural background shapes the way we work, discuss, and collaborate.

I was a part of the MSc Molecular Biotechnology co-joined Sant'Anna and University of Pisa. The surprise on the first day was discovering that the classes were taught in Italian. So, I have got also Italian classes level A2 to learn the language in order to communicate with people in daily life and follow classes.

Sometimes I felt lost, especially when someone spoke too fast or when scientific vocabulary mixed with Italian slang (a terrifying combination). But every moment of confusion pushed me to learn more, to listen better, to participate even when my accent betrayed me or if I missed vocabulary. And every time I dared speak, even imperfectly, I felt a small victory.

In Italy, classes were surprisingly interactive: professors encouraged questions, debates, and team effort.

La Normale



Sant'Anna





THE ITALIAN GRADUATION TRADITION – A CULTURAL DISCOVERY



One of the most touching traditions I discovered in Italy was the Master's graduation ceremony with the iconic laurel crown. I had the chance to attend several thesis defenses during my internship, and each time, I was surprised by how profoundly meaningful these ceremonies are for Italians. After the defense, the atmosphere transforms completely. The formal tension disappears replaced by joy,

applause, and an overwhelming sense of achievement. The student receives the laurea crown, a symbol rooted in Roman tradition, representing wisdom, honor, and academic success. Each department has a different color for the cord on the cap; in chemistry, it is blue.

What surprised me most was the celebration that follows. Students read aloud the acknowledgement section of their thesis surrounded by everyone who supported them through this. And then comes the most Italian part: they spend the entire day and evening walking around the city with their crown. People stop them in the streets to congratulate them, strangers smile, and Pisa becomes a giant family celebrating their success.

For them this day it is the most important one of their Master since they don't have a graduation ceremony as we do in December at Chimie Paristech



MY INTERNSHIP

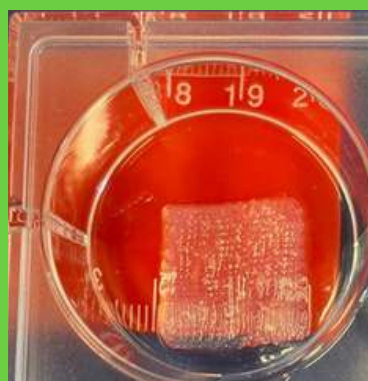
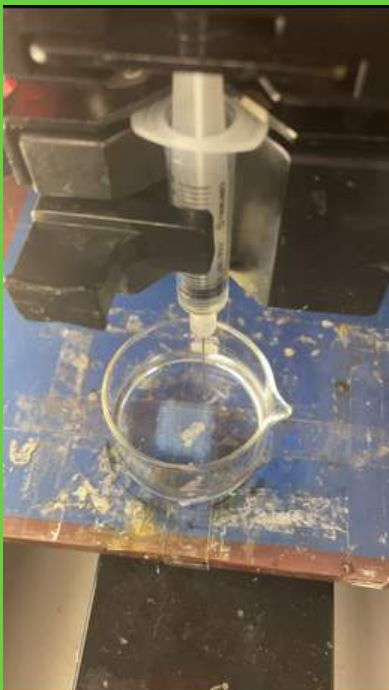


UNIPI

27 January 2025 - 1 August 2025

My internship was the core of my Erasmus experience – the place where everyday life, scientific curiosity, and cultural discovery came together. I worked on polymers for 3D printed wound dressings. Some days, everything went well: the scaffold printed beautifully, the viscosity felt right whereas other days... well, the machine bugged, the polymer behaved like rebellious jelly, and nothing worked. But even the failures taught me more than I expected. The lab atmosphere was one of the biggest surprises. In France, the lab can feel intense and sometimes stressful. In Italy, even during difficult experiments, people stayed positive. Someone always had a joke to make, a song playing low in the background, or a "Tranquilla!" ready to reassure me. My colleagues in Biolab took time to explain things slowly, switching between Italian and English so I could follow. Their patience and kindness made me feel part of the team very quickly. My personal victory with regard to the language was being able to understand their daily conversations at the end of the internship. Every morning started with a small ritual: coffee. These ten minutes were more than a break; they were

a cultural moment. It was a bonding moment because we drank the coffee even with the supervisors.



my bioactive scaffolds



SCIENCE

MY INTERNSHIP

our poster's presentation

During my internship in the chemistry department, I also had the chance to fully experience life of academic research. I attended several conferences, prepared a scientific poster, and even contributed to writing a research article, something completely unbelievable for me. I also collaborated with. This immersion allowed me to learn a lot, both scientifically and in terms of working collaboratively in a real research environment.



my Biolab's team

My tutor was Prof. Dario Puppi who is specialized in biomaterials. He was also my teacher at university in biomaterial sciences. As he loved to say, we were, him and me, the only 2 persons in the lab to be experts in medical devices :)))

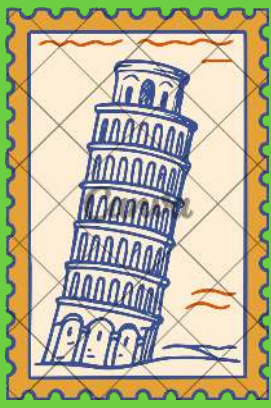
My supervisor was Doctoressa Simona Bracini who is specialized in biological assays and so could work with cells.

1 August 2025

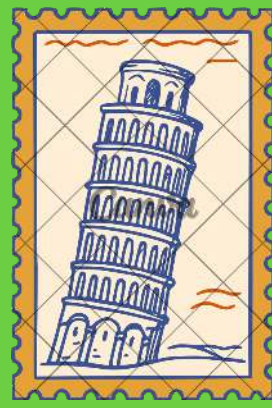
This day was the last day of my mobility program, because I sent my internship report to my supervisor and returned to France, all within just 3 hours. It was quite an intense day. My supervisors surprised me by organizing an aperitivo, I was very touched. Sharing those final moments with the team made me realize how much this experience had meant to me and how lucky I was to have met such kind and supportive people.

last Italian aperitivo





LIVE IN PISA



When I first arrived in Pisa, everything felt both exciting and confusing. The streets were narrow, full of bicycles and students, and the city seemed to live at a different rhythm but always with music. My first trip with my personal bike, yes I have bought one the first week to be a real Pisan, was chaotic through all the bikes, but as a Parisian I have managed the traffic.

The language barrier hit me earlier than expected. My first conversation in Italian was in a supermarket when the cashier asked me, "una borsa?" and I panicked and replied, "No, no", so I left without a bag and carried my groceries in my arms.

What surprised me most was how quickly the city felt familiar. The streets, the cafés, the small bakeries; everything had a comforting simplicity. Pisa wasn't spectacular; it was charming. And that charm worked on me immediately.

My first impression was clear: Pisa is small, warm, and unexpectedly alive. A place where time slows down

Piazza del Duomo



my street



FESTIVE MOMENTS : EMBRACING ITALIAN CULTURE

Jazz concerts - june 2025

From may to july, along the Arno river, a few barges docked in Pisa. we could go on each of them for free to watch a jazz concert, which changed every Friday. Pisa was a city filled with music every night, with its many bars, outdoor festivals and open stages. Music is the idendity of Pisa.

Jazz concert



Gioco del Ponte - 28 june 2025

A strange, almost surreal mix of history, competition, and theatrical intensity. The day strarts with men dressed in traditional costumes, drums echoing on the bridge, crowds cheering with passion. At the sunset, the 14 Pisa's neighborhoods compete to push a 1-ton board. The south ones won, including my neighborhood San Martino . It was loud, colorful, chaotic and absolutely unforgettable.



Pisa in Serie A - 10 may 2025

One of the craziest events was the day Pisa went up to Serie A. I didn't expect such a level of joy. People were dancing, shouting, running in the streets, waving flags. Strangers hugged me like we had known each other forever. That night, Pisa was one big family celebrating a shared victory. the football's team presented the trophy to the fans in the stadium and then paraded through the city with fireworks and music



Luminaria - 17 june 2025

I had seen photos, but nothing prepared me for the real thing. 100 thousand of candles hung around the windows of the buildings and glowed along the river, reflecting on the water like floating stars. One week of preparation for only one night of fusion. The air smelled like summer, and the city felt suspended in time. People walked slowly, families laughed, couples held hands : it was magical. We soent the night with our bikes visiting the city to see all the lights because each building has its own decoration and drawing.



6-MONTHS OF TRAVELS



**CITIES FOR THE
ROAD TRIP OF 1
WEEK**

**CITIES FOR
WEEK-END TRIP**

Florence

The city is wrapped in Renaissance elegance, and you feel it the moment you arrive. The Duomo dominates everything, like a giant guardian watching over the city. Climbing to the top of the tower of the duomo was exhausting, but the view over the terracotta rooftops makes you forget your burning legs instantly. The uffizi (like the Louvre for Italian people) was overwhelming in the best way possible. Standing in front of Botticelli's Birth of Venus felt surreal, like meeting a celebrity you've only seen in textbooks. Everywhere you turn, there's another masterpiece casually hanging on the wall as if it's no big deal.



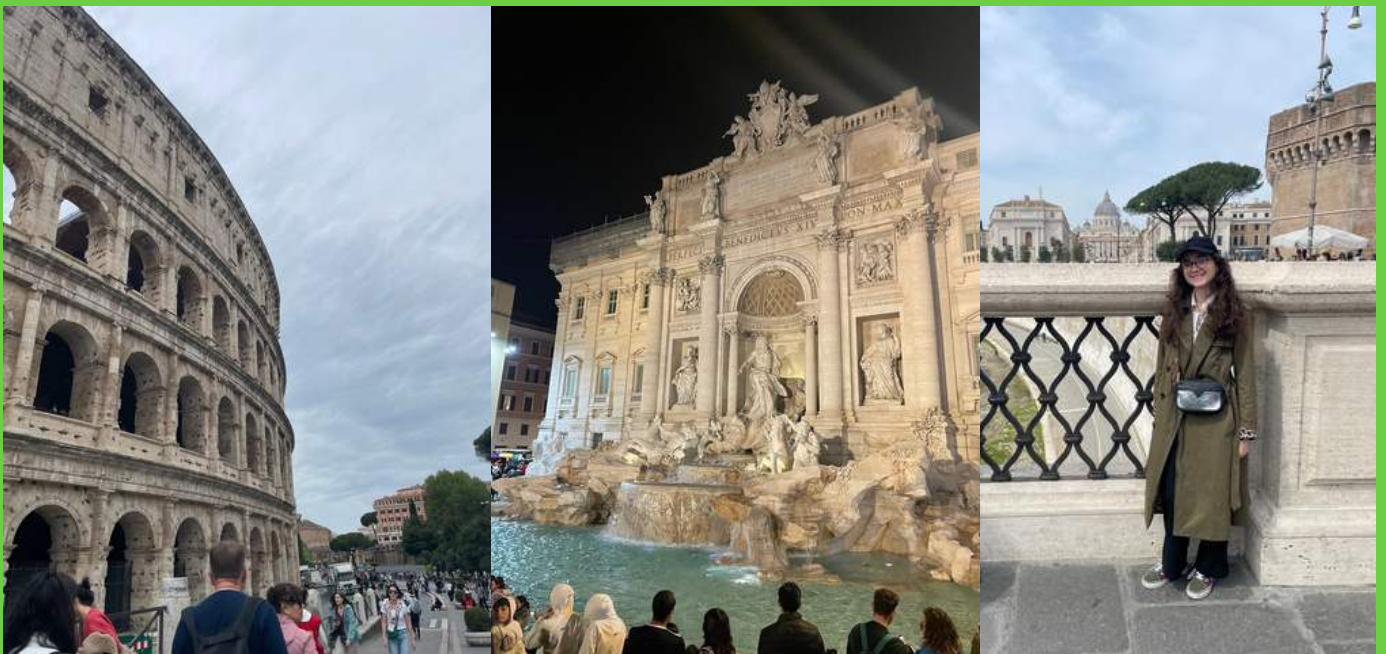
Elba Island

Elba was the final escape, blue water, quiet beaches, salty hair, and sunburns I still regret. We took the boat to go on this island. It is known as the Napoleon's island. We had a tony Airbnb on the cliff, perfect to spend time with international friends and do hiking.



Roma

Rome is a city that refuses to be summarized. It isn't just a place you visit, it's a place that overwhelms you. Every corner feels like a confrontation with history: ancient stones, monumental ruins, fountains older than some countries, and churches so beautifully decorated that you suddenly understand why people used to faint during religious ceremonies. Walking through Rome felt like time travel. One moment I was standing inside the Colosseum imagining the roar of ancient crowds, and the next I was eating gelato on a street that looked like it hadn't changed in centuries.



Train Trip during 1 week : Bologna, Modena, Parma and Verona

The trip was very special for me because it was the first time I was doing a solo road trip. I spent one week in trains, hostels and 4 beautiful cities.

- Bologna was one of the cities that surprised me the most, not with monuments or postcard views, but with its atmosphere. It felt like a living organism made of food and endless porticos stretching toward the horizon. You don't visit Bologna; you walk through it, sheltered under its arches as if the city itself is protecting you.
- It's impossible to think of Modena without thinking of balsamic vinegar, not the supermarket version, but the real one. In Modena, there's also Ferrari. Modena lives and breathes engines, speed, design, and passion. Even if you're not a car person, seeing the museum is like stepping into a temple dedicated to beauty and innovation.
- My trip to Parma was essentially a pilgrimage for two things: Parmigiano Reggiano and prosciutto di Parma. Tasting cheese aged 12, 24, and 36 months felt like traveling through time with each bite
- Verona felt instantly romantic, and not just because of Shakespeare with Romeo and Juliet.



Cinque Terre

Cinque Terre is all about colors and sweat. I've never climbed so many stairs in my life, it was 30km by walking in one day to finish the hikings between the villages. Cinque terre is compsoed of 5 villages : Monterosso al Mare, the beach place, Vernazza, the elegant one with pastel houses, Corniglia, the only village not directly on the sea because perched high on a cliff, Manarola, the romatic one on postcards and Riomaggiore, the famous one Instagram. Every village looked like a painting, little houses stacked on cliffs, fishermen fixing their nets, tourists trying not to slip into the sea.



Venice

Venice is the only place where getting lost feels like an achievement. Every turn reveals a tiny bridge, a dead end, or a postcard view. At one point we walked in circles for 20 minutes trying to find a vaporetto (a bus in Venice is a boat). I ate the best tiramisu of my life there, or maybe it just felt like the best because I was sitting next to a canal, watching gondolas float by like a movie. We have seen the biggest firewrok in the world, which lasted 45 min for the "Fiesta dep Redentore". we were also at Burano, the most colorful island in the world and it was beautifuk.



Milan and Lake Como

Milan felt like a different planet compared to Pisa, elegant, fast, polished, and buzzing with an energy more like Paris. I still remember stepping out of the train station and thinking, Wow, people here actually dress like the fashion magazines, even more because it was during the Milano's Fashion Week. We walked everywhere, from the Duomo to Navigli, getting lost in the most beautiful streets. Then Lake Como was the total opposite, quiet, magical, almost unreal. The mountains diving into the water, the tiny boats, the pastel villages.





ESN PISA : CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES



One of the most enriching aspects of my Erasmus experience was joining ESN Pisa, the local branch of the Erasmus Student Network. They organised an impressive range of cultural and social activities that genuinely shaped my daily life and helped me feel integrated from the very beginning. Every week, there were events such as karaoke nights, bachata lessons, and pizza dinners, which were always full of energy and gave us the chance to share simple but memorable moments with students from all around the world. Thanks to this association, we had lots of activities during the week. My favorite activity was the international dinner, where everyone brought a typical dish from their country, creating a space where food, culture, and personal stories blended naturally.

Beyond the fun, ESN Pisa offered a true sense of community. For many international students, arriving in a new country can be overwhelming, but this network made the transition smoother by encouraging us to socialise, discover Italian traditions, and explore the city together. Thanks to ESN, I met people from completely different cultural backgrounds, learned about their languages and customs, and started forming friendships that I know will last beyond my stay in Italy.

the international dinner with French crepes with my friends : Germany, Belgium, Denmark





ITALIAN CULTURE



Aperitivo became a sacred ritual: a spritz, some chips, and conversations that stretch for hours. I learned how to make a good spritz and some other Italian cocktails.

Food, obviously, was its own religion. I learned that pasta must always be al dente, cappuccino after 11am is a crime, and cornetti are the emotional support food for students. I also learned that Italians truly love discussing food, sometimes more passionately than politics. In my lab we loved debating about cornetti and croissants, especially because here they put cream inside their croissants, a real sacrilege.

Culturally, Italians cherish community. They meet, celebrate, argue, laugh, always together. From the Luminarie to Easter traditions, from Pisa celebrating its football team's promotion to the madness of the Gioco del Ponte, I felt constantly surrounded by people who knew how to enjoy life in a way that felt contagious.

For me, Italian music is one of the most romantic genres. I discovered a band called *Modà*, and their songs feel like poetry. I am still listening to them even after coming back.



their
"croissants"

PEOPLE AND FRIENDSHIP

My interactions in Pisa shaped my whole experience. From classmates to labmates, from Erasmus students to strangers in cafés, I met people who expanded my world in unexpected ways. Some taught me Italian expressions, others showed me their favorite bars, others helped me during difficult days. I learned to connect quickly, to let people in, to appreciate the beauty of short but meaningful encounters.

What struck me the most was the kindness. People helped without expecting anything in return – whether it was directions, advice, or simply a smile.

This Erasmus experience allowed me to meet international students from all over Europe and talk with them about our lives, our studies, and our ambitions. What I appreciated the most was the opportunity to experiment with languages – trying out new vocabulary in English or even in German, a language I did not know at all before. This made me realise how essential languages are in both social and professional life.

my Erasmus' friends




PEOPLE AND FRIENDSHIP

Learning Italian in just seven months showed me how powerful language can be: the moment I could understand conversations in the lab, everything changed. After about two or three months, when I finally started speaking Italian more confidently, my relationships at work became much closer and more natural. Socially, the language became a bridge. Once I could truly express myself, friendships grew deeper, interactions became spontaneous, and I felt integrated in a way that would never have been possible otherwise. Professionally, speaking Italian earned me a genuine form of respect – people noticed the effort I was making, and it created trust and a stronger sense of connection. I understood instructions more quickly, communicated more clearly with my supervisors, and felt fully part of the team instead of a visiting student.

My Biolab's friends




CONCLUSION

 This journey transformed me far more than I ever expected. I arrived with hesitant Italian, a desire to discover a new culture, and the curiosity of experiencing life somewhere else. I am leaving with a new rhythm, precious friendships, a renewed sense of confidence, a lightness I had forgotten, and a feeling of belonging to a country that wasn't mine at the beginning.

Every moment – from the simplest to the most extraordinary – taught me something. I discovered that I could adapt, find my place, learn a language, work in a completely new environment, and even dance in the middle of the street for no particular reason.

Italy taught me to slow down, to enjoy, to celebrate, to breathe.

Pisa taught me how to live.

 Questo viaggio mi ha cambiata molto più di quanto immaginassi. Sono arrivata con un italiano incerto, il desiderio di scoprire una nuova cultura e la curiosità di vivere altrove. Riparto con un nuovo ritmo, amicizie preziose, più fiducia in me stessa e la sensazione di appartenere un po' a un paese che non era il mio.

Ogni momento – dal più semplice al più straordinario – mi ha insegnato qualcosa. Ho scoperto che posso adattarmi, trovare il mio posto, imparare una lingua, lavorare in un ambiente nuovo e persino ballare per strada senza un motivo particolare.

L'Italia mi ha insegnato a rallentare, a godermi la vita, a celebrare, a respirare.

Pisa mi ha insegnato a vivere.

ALICE