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Catania, Italy
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Pre-travel

Before travelling I was required to submit my Vaccination Card, Student record, Pharmfree document, CV and 4 motivation letters to my respective departments of choice. I was contacted by my CP, who was a local medical student and was kept constantly updated via WhatsApp/Facebook. The local committee also made a Facebook group inviting all the incomings and this gave us a platform to ask any questions regarding our exchange.

Arrival

Upon arrival my CP was waiting for me at the airport. He also brought along his friend who had a car and this made things a lot simpler in terms of transportation to the accommodation. The airport is relatively small and only about 30 minutes' drive from the city itself.

Accommodation

My accommodation was in a local student dormitory. I was allocated a double room, hence had to share with a roommate. We both had 2 single beds, wardrobe and study table each. There was one bathroom en suite for us to share but no kitchen. The room also came with an AC which was truly a lifesaver!

The location of the accommodation was about 15 min walk from the heart of the city, 20 min walk from the hospital and 20 min walk to the local beach. Since it was a dormitory, it provided all the necessary facilities such as washing rooms, weekly cleaning rotations and a canteen. There were also recreational rooms which contained table tennis, foosball and various music instruments.

City

The city of Catania is very beautiful with a classic Mediterranean feel about it. Although the size of city is relatively small it contained plenty of good restaurants and shops. The city is also surrounded by both rocky and sandy beaches, accessible by foot and a bus ride respectively.

The people of the Catania have a very outgoing personalities and lead a relaxed lifestyle. However this also has its downsides as all the shops are closes during afternoon and the whole day on Sunday. The nightlife in Catania is also decent, although there is not many clubs, there is plenty of alternatives such as lounge bars and open parties by the harbourside.

Food/Meals

The food in Sicily is generally pretty good however not much variety. Catania is famous for its "Arancino", "Granita", gelato (icecream) and horsemeat. The incomings were provided lunch everyday however honestly this was very unsatisfactory for me. We were provided with just 2 options of either a pizza slice or some pasta, which meant that I

often had to resort to going out to buy another lunch since I was still hungry. For dinner, usually we went out to different restaurants around town and the prices were reasonable, roughly 10 euros for a meal. Another cheaper alternative would be to eat from the canteen, where each meal costs 3.5 euros and the varieties + portion sizes are great.

Internship

The hospital where my internship took place was roughly a 20 minute walk from my accommodation. My internship was in the General Surgery Department under the supervision of Dr. Gastone Salvatore. I was placed with 3 other incomings. Initially I was given a placement in the Pediatrics department however due to some unexplained circumstance it was changed last minute by my LEO. During the internship, I was predominantly watching and observing different procedures and unfortunately was not able to gain any practical skills e.g. suturing or scrubbing in to assist the surgeons. The surgeons were very open and gave us a rundown of the upcoming procedures however their English was substandard and often struggled to explain in detail.

Social Program

The social program hosted by SISM is probably one of the best in the whole of IFMSA! Every weekend we visited different cities around Sicily, even the journey there on a bus with 50 other people was equally as fun. Whilst visiting different cities we also got the chance to meet other IFMSA incomings from the Messina and Palermo which was very enjoyable. SISM also organized other events for us during the exchange for example; Welcome/Goodbye parties, Toga party and National Food and Drink Party. The total cost for the social program was 250 euros.

Summary

In conclusion, I would highly recommend Catania as an exchange destination. The culture and lifestyle of the Sicilian people is very different to Northern/Central Europeans and this was very refreshing. Although the medical side of the internship is not great (especially if you chose Surgery specialties), the social side more than makes up for it. I personally got the chance to meet people from a range of different backgrounds and cultures and have since become good friends with a handful of them. If you are looking to create memories and have an adventure, Catania is the place to go.