



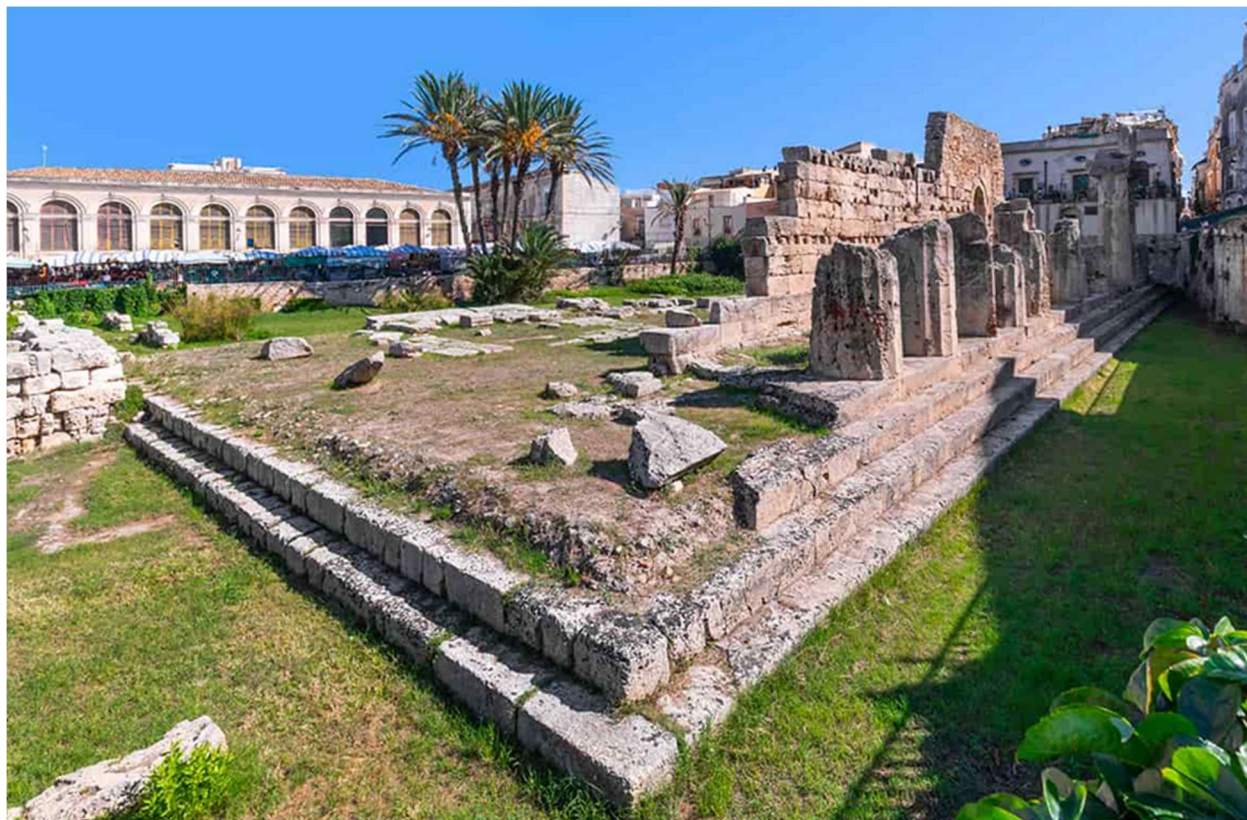
Keturah
from
Burlington and Burlington North
to
Italy

“Ciao Tutti”

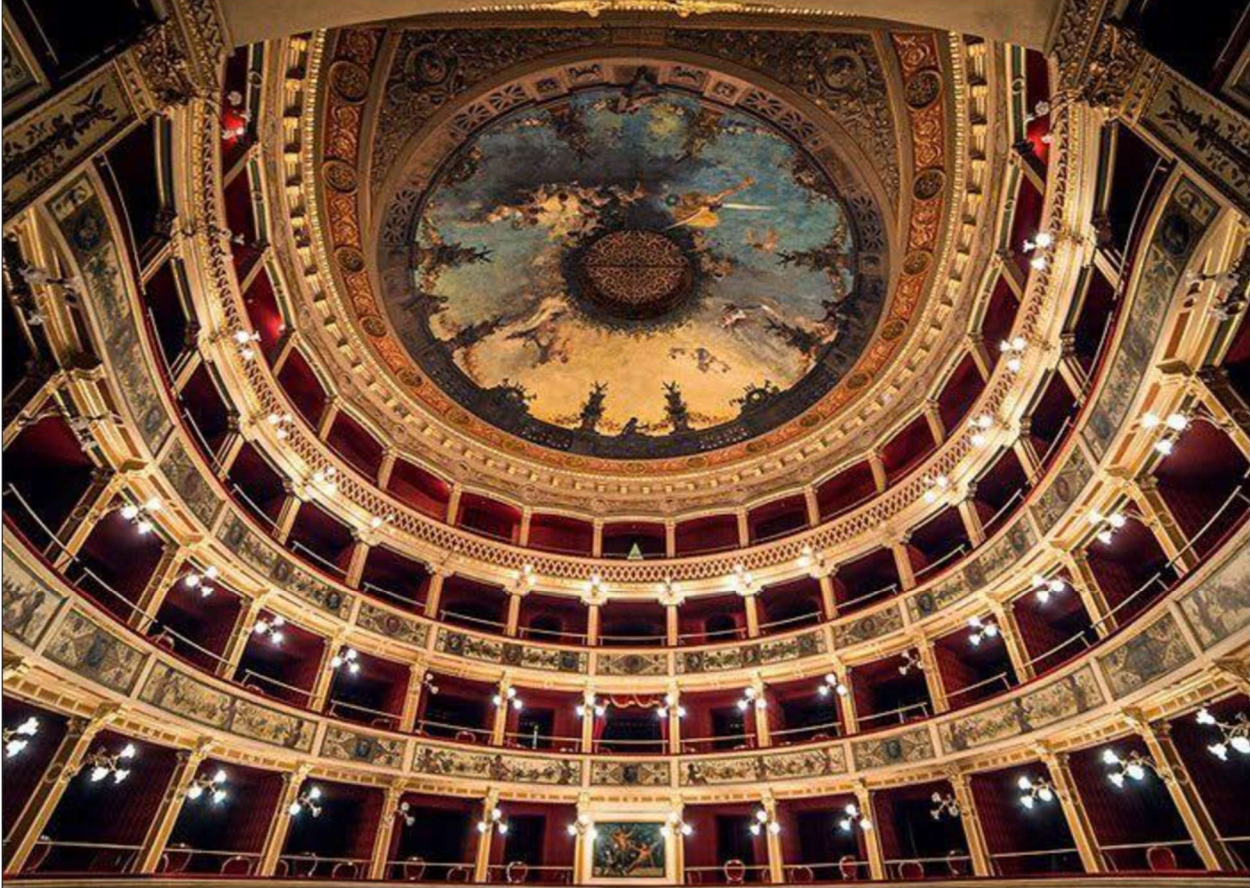


I'm Mwikali Muatha, writing from Siracusa, Italy. My two and a half months of exchange so far have contained wonderful things, but I have to say that my flights were not one of them. Thankfully, the warm welcome I received through my host family and a few of the other exchange students who had arrived before me warmed my heart, and the lovely beach I got to swim in the next day made me forget the chaos of my first time flying alone. My host family had a beautiful villa that was right on the beach which we stayed at for the first three weeks of to escape the heat, as the sea air made it just a few degrees cooler—thankfully, since every day back was between 25-35 degrees.

Thankfully, I and almost everyone else in my district only go to school five days a week, as some schools in Italy are open on Saturdays too. One thing about school here that's particularly different to schools in Canada is that students remain with the same classmates for all of high school, spending every day of class together. Therefore, classmates have strong friendships with one another, which can make school fun, as all of your classmates are pretty friendly with each other. I find many of my classes have a strong emphasis on history, but I guess that makes sense considering where I am, as Siracusa was founded some 2,700 years ago. It's still a bit surprising to me though, with even classes like English talking about English history, and likewise with French class. Near the entrance of the historic centre lie the ruins of a temple of Apollo.



One thing that I especially love about my city is its arts and culture. September hosted the Ortigia film festival, where I and the two other inbounds of my city went to watch some unique films and plays. A play I saw recently was based on the story of Archimedes, yes, *the* Archimedes who was born here in my city. The music and acting were incredible, and it was hosted in the *Elegantissimo* Teatro Massimo. One of the springs in the city, the Fountain of Arethusa, even has its own unique myth behind it. The story tells of a nymph called Arethusa, who was transformed into fresh water to escape a river god called Alpheus.



I am glad for the opportunity to explore new cities as well though, sometimes through my host family, and other times with the other exchange students of my district. There are about 15 of us inbound in my district, so it's a smaller but close circle of people as we've had multiple opportunities to stay all together. My host family, and more specifically my host mom, enjoy doing races, and so we've gone to a few towns in order to participate in these, and then sight see afterwards. They are all incredibly kind, including their little dog, who likes to steal my bed away from me in the mornings. Every once in a while we will drive down to visit the parents of my host dad as well, who make amazing food and give us fresh fruit when the trees in the backyard are ripe.



On the subject of food, I feel like I should mention that it's a wise idea to get a gym membership as soon as you settle in Italy as an exchange student, since everything is amazing. Though we don't typically eat much for breakfast here (some coffee or tea with a few biscuits usually suffice) lunch and dinner are always something to look forward to. I enjoy my family dinners with my host family a lot here, and it is extra special considering every meal we eat is made fresh. Of course, the restaurants are amazing too, though it was a bit of a shock the first time I ordered a pizza here and realized I was expected to eat the whole thing by myself, instead of sharing slices around. I particularly love the sweets here, including the typical Sicilian cannolo, but the small cakes and gelato take my heart.



Overall, you've got to enjoy everything, and I think part of that comes with just trying everything that you can.

In my exchange so far, I've seen some amazing things and overcome some tough challenges, but it's incredible to look back and see how far I've come and know I can look forward to what Italy has to offer in the future.

Ciao for now, Mwikali.