Florida Man Goes to Italy

A Two Weeks in Italy Adventure

Derek Demeter
Emil Buehler Planetarium at Seminole State College of Florida

Prologue

Ciao! I am writing these words about one week after my return from the country of Italy and to this day I am still in awe of the experience. A whirlwind of adventure from ancient sites to meeting some of the warmest people I have ever met, it is a journey I wish everyone in the planetarium community can experience once in their life. I hope this report provides the inspiration you need to do such that. So? Where do we start? Well…I guess the beginning would make sense right? The American Planetarium Operator in Italy experience has been going strong since 1995 and I had the distinct honor to be its 30th winner of the program. The program provides a planetarian from the USA an experience to teach and connect with students and the public of various regions around the country of Italy. When I attended my first IPS conference in Baton Rouge from Susan Button, I knew I wanted to participate. For many years it was difficult to apply due to the timing of the program and then the recent pandemic made it difficult to pursue. In 2024, I finally made the decision to apply for the program. After working on the application for nearly a month and

submitting it, I eagerly waited to hear back. Then in mid-October I saw a message from Susan Button, who coordinates the "Week in a Country" programs for the International Planetarium Society, to contact her ASAP. I gave her a phone call and she was delighted to announce that I have been selected to participate in the program for 2025. I was elated and ecstatic! I was going to Italy! A place I have always wanted to visit and the home to my ancestors (my mother was fully Italian). It would be a few months later when I heard from Loris Ramponi who oversees the operations of the program and provided me the dates of my travel and general itinerary of the places I would visit and who would be hosting me. Communication was mostly done via email due to the time difference. In this report I will share my experiences and my insights during the program and hopefully when reading this, I encourage you to work with PLANit and IPS to partake in this unbelievable and enriching opportunity. Before I begin detailing the trip, I will share my lessons and why I chose them.

Preparation of Lessons for the Trip

When I was applying for the program, I was asked to create three lessons that I would present during my time in Italy. The lessons had to be appropriate for both the classroom and the planetarium. After much thought I decided on three: Galileo's Hammer and Feather Experiment, The Human HR Diagram, and an activity that connected Geology with the James Webb Space Telescope. Galileo has always been one of the most inspirational scientists in my life, and I felt it was important to share that sentiment with the students. His work developing the scientific method was crucial to moving us into the scientific revolution and I felt the hammer and feather experiment was a great way of demonstrating how a simple experiment could lead to a monumental discovery that would allow us to launch rockets to space and expand our knowledge of the cosmos. The human HR diagram was something my colleague Justin Cirillo developed for us at the planetarium, and we presented this demonstration both at the 2019 Southeastern Planetarium Association conference and the Live and Interactive Planetarium Symposium. Justin left the planetarium in 2021 but I wanted to honor his contribution to our programming by providing this lesson in Italy. The activity uses balloons of different colors and sizes to represent various types of stars and it is up to the students to figure out where their star lies on the diagram. The last activity was something I felt defined me in a unique way. I have both a passion for Geology and Astronomy and one of my favorite hobbies is collecting minerals from locations around the world. In 2023, I had the opportunity to summit Mt. Antero in Colorado and collected aquamarine, which is a gem quality form of the mineral beryl. Beryl is a crystal habit of the element Beryllium, the key component of the mirrors of the James Webb Space Telescope (JSWT). I brought several specimens of beryl with me to share with the students with the goal of connecting the importance of using beryllium to maintain the integrity of the mirrors. While these three lessons seem very different from each other, they all connect in a wonderful way. Galileo's findings allowed us to understand gravity which in turn enabled us to launch rockets. This led to us to launch the James Webb from Earth and placing it in the appropriate orbit around the Sun. The JSWT helps understand the evolution of stars in our universe which can be helped by using the HR diagram. The lessons could be done together or separately to the choosing of the host. Lastly since I was travelling abroad, I wanted to have lessons that could either be brought over easily or could be assembled using materials that the hosts had in Italy. I felt confident these

lessons could represent what I do here in the USA, and I was ready to bring them to Italy to share with everyone. It's time to pack our bags and begin our journey across the ocean! Are you ready?

Part One: All Roads Lead to Rome

My first stop was the City Eternal: Rome. My flight was overnight so when I arrived, I was pretty jet lagged and thankfully I had two days to recover before making my way to Perugia for my first set of lessons. When I arrived at the airport, I mainly stayed there until I got the notification that my lodging was ready, and I could check-in. I took the express train into the city and checked into my hotel and within fifteen minutes I was out and slept until the following morning.

Feeling completely refreshed I booked a 10-hour personal guide of Rome. His name was Luca and he runs a small personal guiding business in Rome. It wasn't the cheapest by any means, but the saying goes, "When in Rome!". It was wonderful and during my time I had the chance to see all the famous sites: Trevi Fountain, Pantheon, Forum, Circus Maximus, Coliseum, and we ventured outside of the city to walk the Apian Way which is the original road leading into Rome. I also got to visit the early Christian catacombs and see one of the largest remaining aqueducts in Italy. I captured 360 videos and photos of the whole experience so I could share them inside the planetarium for any courses that would be interested in them. The best part of a private tour is Luca took me to places where he knew I would be interested in and our last stop was a unassuming building. To most people, there would be nothing noteworthy about it, but to those who know, this site was the location of where Galileo Galilee was tried for heresy by the church for his writings and observations. This began a pilgrimage of sorts to see all the famous sites of Galileo throughout my trip. After the conclusion of the tour, Luca and I parted ways, and I finished my day eating at a small restaurant looking over the Coliseum. Not a bad way to end the day!

I had a partial day to explore Rome before heading on the train to Perugia, so I ventured out into the city to see some more off-the-beaten path sites. The first one was the crypt of the Capuchin friars. The site is home to thousands of bones of friars that have passed. Instead of burying their dead, they used the remains as art. It was both beautiful and creepy at the same time. On my way back I stopped at the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels and of the Martyrs where an impressive meridian can be found. A meridian is a marker of the Sun as it transits at local noon every day of year. It was a way to keep time and signify both religious and secular events throughout the year. In the Basilica there is a camera obscura that projects a disk of the Sun on the ground. Each day, the Sun projection along the floor where it intersects a line at the meridian at local noon each day. Unfortunately, I didn't have a chance to wait for local noon as I needed to catch my train, but I did get to see the disk of the Sun on the ground and see its movement in real time. A cool experience! After my visit I proceeded to the Roma Termini and find my train that would take me to my first official destination of the program: Perugia. All aboard!

Part Two: Perugia and Assisi

The train ride to Perugia was cramped. I was that silly person who packed way too much luggage, but I would be in Italy for over a month, and I had lots to bring. The train ride took me through spectacular canyons of the Apennine mountains, but it wouldn't be long until I saw Assisi off in the distance and then Perugia. When I debarked the train, a little lady dressed in a yellow jacket yelled my name. It was Simonetta Ercoli, my first host. What can I say about Simonetta, other than the embodiment of what Umbria is known for: kind, heartwarming, passionate, and full of energy. I know when I saw Simonetta and we started talking, we were going to get along very well. I loaded my things in her car, and we set off to her house. Her house is in the hills just outside of Perugia and what a view! We spent the afternoon getting to know each other and then for dinner we met with her friend Matteo and his family to a restaurant that served a local dish called torta al testo. My goodness was it good! It was essentially bread with a pocket of meat and cheese. What about that doesn't sound wonderful? Matteo works with Simonetta at the planetarium, which was currently closed and couldn't visit during my trip. Simonetta gave me a brief of what we would be doing for the next few days at the school, which included my lessons and a star party on one of the nights that looked the best.

The next day we woke up to cold, rainy, and windy conditions. Neither one of us wanted to be outside but we hopped into Simonetta's car and headed off to the school in Assisi. When we arrived Simonetta introduced me to Emanuele who was one of the teachers I would be working with. The lessons that I would do for the first day would be the hammer and feather and the James Webb program. In each class session, we would all work together to simulate the original Galileo experiment and report on our findings. I would also use the classes digital board to show the Apollo 15 hammer and feather experiment as well as a video done by Brian Cox inside the NASA's Space Power Facility in Ohio, USA. The students loved seeing the results of our experiments and enjoyed the interaction. The first day of classes were done and it was still not so nice outside, but we made the best of it.

Figure 1:Presenting the hammer and feather experiment

Simonetta decided it was best to explore Perugia for the rest of the day, so we left Assisi and headed to Perugia. After ascending the hills, we made it to the medieval center of town, and it was my first official taste of a classical walled medieval city in Italy. Perugia was beautiful and the highlight of the visit was exploring the underground ruins of the city that were open for the public to explore. The underground tunnels featured ruins as far back as the Etruscan times. We also saw the original wall of the city that dates to Etruscan times. After our visit we went back to Simonetta's house to have dinner and relax for day two.

Day two we continued to provide some morning lessons which were the same as day one. Upon completing the morning lessons, the weather greatly improved so we decided to enjoy time in Assisi, a UNESCO town famous for the home of St. Francis. We started at the Monastery of St. Francis, where paintings along the walls and ceiling describe the life of St. Francis. Photos or words can't really describe just how beautiful everything is, and you will hear this again and

again from me as I go on exploring other areas in Italy. We then had lunch and after we ventured up to the Castle at the top of the hill to get a great view of the town and the countryside. It was just breathtaking. After our exploration of the town, we decided to take a drive to the nearby Lago Trasimeno, a large inland lake. We watch the sunset and then enjoyed some lake codfish for dinner. Simonetta and I decided that the next day, the weather would be ideal for the star party, so this day was a chance to have a break and enjoy our time together.

Figure 2: Simonetta and I at the top of the Castle in Assisi

Day three and my final day in Umbria was full of sunshine, classes, and astronomy. The lesson done this day was the human HR diagram and the students really enjoyed doing this one. Each student got a balloon and had to decide where on the diagram their star would be. We went over the HR diagram on the digital screen before they got up to create their own version of the diagram. The students did a great job figuring it out and loved the connection with the balloons and their relationship with the stars. The students that chose to make supergiant red stars got the opportunity to pop their balloon to simulate a supernova. The first time we did it had one of the teachers run in to see if there was an explosion, but we comforted him by saying it was simply a balloon popping. After this lesson we went outside to observe the Sun using some solar eclipse glasses and a sun spotter. There were some great sunspots on the Sun and the students enjoyed seeing the Sun through the glasses. After the lessons were completed, I had a few hours free, so Simonetta took me up Monte Subasio to see the home of St. Francis when he climbed the mountain. We also summited the mountain, and I even found some calcite crystals at the top. For those who know me, I enjoy doing some rockhounding, so this was a huge treat! After an early dinner and some gelato, we headed back to the school to get ready for the star party. I brought my SeeStar S50 with me to Italy and it was exciting to share the night sky this way with the students. I also helped Simonetta setup her reflector telescope to observe the Moon and Jupiter. With the SeeStar we were able to observe the Orion Nebula, M51, M101, Leo Triplet of galaxies, and the Pleiades. The students huddled around me and the iPad to get a glimpse of the first images sent back from the SeeStar. The star party would be my favorite part of my time with the students in Umbria. They were so inquisitive, and the questions never seemed to stop. Several students told me they wish to continue to university to learn astronomy and astrophysics and this made me so happy to see their passion for this subject. We only had so much time with them during the star party, but I didn't want it to end. I will truly treasure that evening and seeing such excitement from the students. I am very glad Simonetta and the school decided to host this evening and we had clear skies to enjoy it. When we finished, we headed back home for the conclusion of the last day in Umbria. The next day I said my farewells to Simonetta and that we would one day get together again. We both have a passion for exploring Egypt and we hope that

one day we could explore there together and told her to come back one day to the USA to see me. Now onward to the Florence!

Figure 3: The Human HR Diagram demonstration

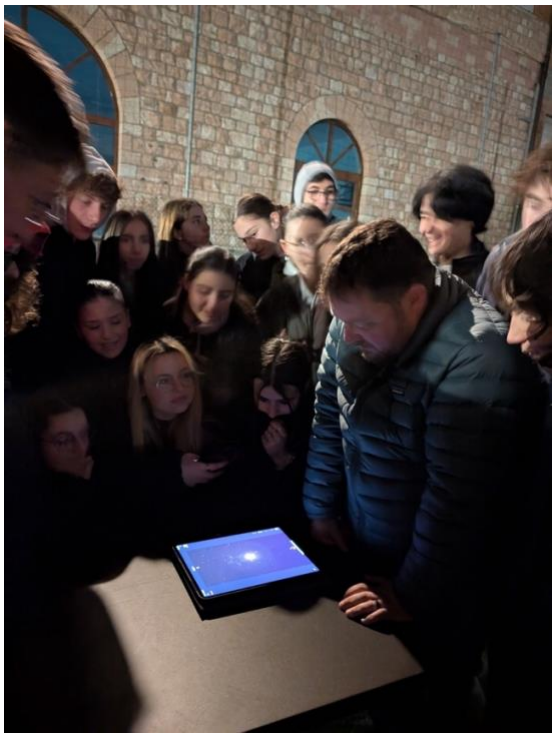

Figure 4: Students exploring the night sky with the SeeStar.

Part Three: Firenze and Galileo

From the mountains of Umbria to the bustling city of Firenze (Florence), I arrived and was greeted by Ruggero Stanga, who took me to the Planetarium at the Fondazione Scienza e Tecnica. We met with his students who assist him at the planetarium. Ruggero wanted me to talk about communicating science to audiences by using my lesson of the James Webb and the HR diagram. I quite enjoyed this one because it wasn't a simple lesson presentation but rather a dissection of the lesson and how it could be presented to several audiences. We had wonderful discussions and I even learned quite a bit from them and how they do their own presentations. They even offered me great recommendations on the HR diagram that I will use for the future. We toured the museum galleries which included an extensive collection of physics devices, fossils, and minerals. We finished the day with a tour of the planetarium and their Digistar 6 system.

Figure 5: Ruggero with his planetarium staff doing the HR diagram lesson.

My time in Florence was short and I deliberately kept the city a secret since my wife and I would return a few weeks later to enjoy the city, so I wanted to respect her and keep my first impressions of the city minimal until we visited together. However, there were two places that I could not resist and Ruggero and his team arranged what I believed to be one of the biggest highlights of the trip for me. I met up with Emmanuele, one of the student workers at the planetarium and we set course to visit the National Library of Florence for an unforgettable treat. Upon entering the library, we met up with one of the librarians who took us to his office and introduced us to the original writings of Galileo Galilei. Here it was, just lying there. I could not believe my eyes and the librarian said something that I thought I would never hear, "pick it up, look at it, smell the books". Yes, you heard me right, I smelled Galileo's books and both Emmanuele and I could not believe what we were doing. We got a chance to see the original handwritings of Galileo's discoveries. But what stood out to me the most was one book. It was an itemized receipt book of many of Galileo's purchases. The librarian moved to a page in the book that had all the items Galileo requested to purchase to produce his telescope. Within it, however, were common items like his favorite marmalade, sugar, beef tallow, and food. Here it was, the start of the scientific revolution but with a human touch to it, items that you and I would get. Who today is doing the same thing? Is there an Amazon list out there for someone who will be making a breakthrough discovery? There were moments during this time I teared up, knowing what a privilege this was and how thankful I am for having this experience. I captured the moment in 360 hoping I can share this

experience with so many others. This will remain one of the best moments of my life and Emmanuele and I could not stop talking about this experience for the rest of the day.

Figure 6: Holding the original writings of Galileo Galilei

How do you follow such a monumental experience? By visiting more Galileo artifacts! We visited the Museo Galileo, and it was a treat to see so many historical artifacts such as globes, armillaries, telescopes, and event Galileo's middle finger! It was a wonderful time exploring the museum and Emmanuele and I parted ways, and I relaxed in the hotel until the next day where it was time to make my way to Ravenna.

Part 4: Ravenna

A hot late spring day in Florence was soon greeted with a cold, windy, and rainy day in the coastal town of Ravenna. What was a cold day was warmed up by the heartfelt Paolo Morini, the president of the local astronomy society in Ravenna and my main host. We hopped into Paolo's car and headed to the planetarium which was setting up for its Sunny Sunday event. Unfortunately, the Sun didn't get the invitation, but things would begin to change for the better. Upon arrival, I was greeted by the director of the planetarium, Marco Garoni who showed me the Zeiss star projector, which was the same model originally found in the planetarium in Florence. The event featured many activities such as a solar oven experiment, school projects about the Apollo space program, my talk on the hammer and feature experiment, and of course views of the Sun. About that, it finally cleared up and Marco and Paolo rushed to setup their solar telescope to view the Sun and I setup the SeeStar for a view of the Sun as well. Mission accomplished! It was a great time and the students, and their parents had a wonderful time. At the end of the event, we headed into the city center for a lovely dinner at Ca' de Vèn, a medieval wine shop now turned restaurant. I got to try a local type of bread called piadina, which is made with flour and lard. I think I could eat that forever.

Figure 7: Paolo, students, and I during the "Sunny Sunday" activity.

The next day Paolo took me to a local science high school where I would give a few morning talks on the James Webb Space Telescope. Most of the students were international or have studied English for a few years, so we were able to get into some great discussions about the observations James Webb has made and plans to make. The students had a lot of curiosity about exoplanets and the possibility of life and if we could one day contact another lifeform. The imagination and curiosity of the students made me very happy, and I can see many of them being astronomers or scientists that could one day help in making that possibility a reality. After my morning talks with the students, Paolo arranged a private guide to take me around to many of the early Christian churches in the area. Ravenna was the new capital of the Roman empire after the fall of Rome. Some of the most well-preserved paleo Christian churches in the world are found in Ravenna, featuring some of the most splendid mosaics ever created. My guide Roberta Merendi provided me with an amazing tour, telling the story of Theodoric conquering the city to the rise of the Byzantine period. One of the biggest highlights was seeing the mosaic of Justinian and Theodora in the Basilica of San Vitale and the mosaic of the three magi in the Sant'Apollinare Nuovo. I got a chance to take some 360 images for use in our Star of Bethlehem show in which we use a photo of this mosaic. After the tour, I met back up with Paolo, Marco, and fellow astronomy club member Fabio for a final dinner at a local seafood restaurant. Have I mentioned how good the

food is here? No? Well, the food is good here! We said our farewells and now it was time to hop on a train to head to Brescia.

Figure 8: Justinian mosaic at the Basilica of San Vitale

Figure 9: Magi mosaic at the Sant'Apollinare Nuovo.

Part 5: Brescia and Lumezzane

I could have stayed a few more days in this area of Italy, being so close to the Alps, but sadly this was one of the quickest stops during my time in Italy. The train ride to this area was a scenic one, with mountain views of the Alps. Loris Ramponi and his colleague Ivan greeted me at the train station, and we stopped by a local castle to admire the limestone and the view of Brescia from the top. Due to the limited time, we had, sightseeing on this part of the trip was minimal so we got into the car and headed up into the foothills of the Alps to the town of Lumezzane to the library where I would give my presentation. The lesson that was requested was the hammer and feather and the talk on the James Webb Space Telescope. Unfortunately, I didn't have a hammer available to use during this lesson. Ivan found a stuffed Earth globe that I used during the lesson and the students found it quite amusing when I dropped the entire world along with a sheet of paper. One of the more unique aspects of this presentation was that I had one of the local politicians come to give a speech, thanking me and the work of Loris and Ivan in the local community. It was great to see a local politician come visit and support the work being done by Loris and Ivan, knowing they are vital asset to the local community. After my lessons were completed, I was gifted a wonderful thank you card and a light up galaxy globe as a token of appreciation from the students. The care and gratefulness from the students have been so wonderful to experience and it has been an absolute pleasure working with them and hearing their enthusiasm for astronomy.

Figure 10: Students presenting me with gifts and a thank you card.

When the lesson presentation concluded, we made our way up to the planetarium in Lumezzane and got a special demonstration of the star projector. The planetarium is called the “Museo of Constellations” and is run by the team at the Serafino Zani
Observatory. Seeing old optical/mechanical star projectors just brings me back to the times I visited planetariums with my father and how that inspired me to become the person I am today. The projector is controlled by a custom console that powers all the movements of the star ball. It was cool to see this thing in motion and you could tell Loris was very proud of the preservation of the machine. After the demonstration we got back into the car and headed higher uphill to the Serafino Zani Observatory. The observatory conducts many international research projects aimed at the detection of minor planets throughout the Solar System. It also hosts many public astronomical events throughout the year. While we didn’t get a chance to see the telescope in action, we watched a lovely sunset at the top and then headed down for what I believed to be one of the best pizzas I ever had! It was a short stay, and I enjoyed my company greatly and could have stayed longer, but it was time to finish my trip at the very far eastern border of Italy in Gorizia.

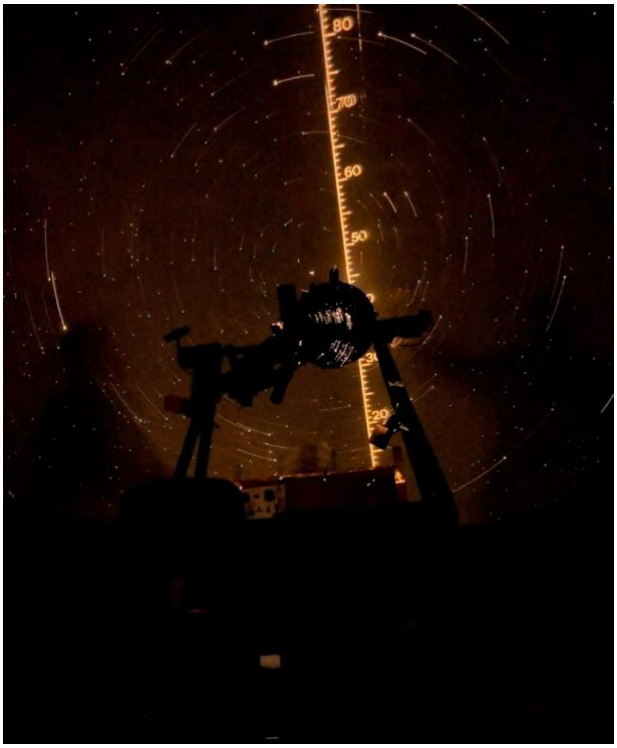

Figure 11: Museum of Constellations in Lumezzane

Part 6: Gorizia

The final stop on this grand adventure took me to the farthest east you can go in the country before heading into Slovenia. Upon arrival at the train station in Gorizia, I was greeted by Franco who I learned also was into fossils and minerals. I knew at that moment we would get along very well, and we both shared some great conversations along our journey to the observatory and planetarium which was located near a vineyard. The last visits were situation in cities and towns, but this location was out in the country, which was nice and quiet. I was then introduced to Enrico Pettarin, who is the president of the local astronomy association that operates the Farra d'Isonzo Observatory and Planetarium. Like the observatory in Lumezzane, the observatory studies and observes minor planets in our Solar System, as well as hosting star party events for the public. The first night we had a community gathering of people to the observatory and planetarium. I was asked to present my hammer and feather lesson and Enrico even setup a little area with a proper hammer and feather! After the lesson I proceeded to the planetarium where I gave a planetarium program. This was the first time during my time here where I gave an official planetarium presentation, and it was lovely. I got to share the night sky and tour the planets of the Solar System, and everyone enjoyed the live program. I was in my element. After the program we grabbed something for dinner and prepared for day two with students visiting from the local schools.

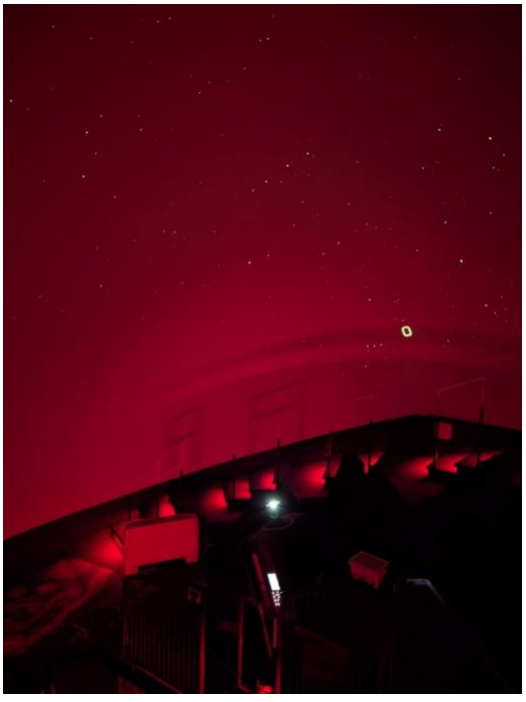

Figure 12: Farra d'Isonzo Planetarium.

Day two was a mix of lessons and epic adventures! The first half of the day consisted of giving my hammer and feather lesson, solar observing through the observatory's hydrogen alpha solar telescope and my SeeStar using the solar filter, and finally a planetarium presentation. Luciano Bittesini operated the planetarium today and was recovering from illness, but it was nice to meet him and share the planetarium together. I will miss teaching Italian students because almost all of them had wonderful questions and discussion after the show, we spent almost another hour inside the planetarium simply answering questions and chatting about the wonders of astronomy. It was a huge treat and we all gathered out front of the planetarium after the program to take a group picture. After the conclusion of the morning program, we got in Enrico's car and headed into the country of Slovenia to visit the Škocjan Caves. This area of Slovenia we visited was the birth of spelunking and the word karst comes from the Slovenian language for this region. Words could not describe just how epic these caves were. If you have read or seen the Lord of the Rings movies, the closest description was the Mines of Moria and the area where the fellowship crosses the bridge where Gandalf faced the Balrog.

Hundreds of meters in depth it was the most majestic cave I have ever been in, and I have explored many caves in the world. If you are ever visiting this region or the country of Slovenia, you MUST visit the Škocjan Caves. After our visit, we visited a local restaurant to enjoy some Slovenia food and after nightfall we headed back.

Figure 13: Solar viewing with the hydrogen alpha solar scope and SeeStar.

Figure 14: Me, Enrico, and Franco at the Škocjan Caves.

Day three saw a repeat of what I did on day two. We had another group of students come visit the observatory and planetarium and I gave my lesson on the hammer and feather and presented inside the planetarium. After the lesson Franco and Enrico and I headed to a unique village in the area, Aiello del Friuli or the Village of Sundials. Franco told us that is started out as a class activity with his students, but then overtime, the village created more and more sundials. Many of them were so elaborate and even had interactive components to it. Franco took us to the Sundial Museum which featured over 40 sundials. One of them included a geodesic soccer ball (football for the Europeans) that each area had its own sundial. A truly remarkable work of craftmanship! It was wonderful to just walk around and spot the sundials and see how they worked. I told Franco that he was the "Lord of the Sundials" for his achievement in starting this movement in his village. After our time at the Sundial Village, we headed back to the observatory and planetarium to present one final program for the community, which featured astronomical observations, a hammer and feather lesson, and a planetarium program. By the end of the night, I was exhausted, but it was a good exhausted, knowing you did great and wonderful fulfilling things.

Figure 15: Sundial Village Museum.

Figure 16: Sundial soccer (football).

My final day in Gorizia was a travel day but we still had time to do some more sightseeing before I headed to Venice. Enrico and Franco took me to the Roman port city of Aquileia. Throughout this city are ancient ruins featuring wonderful tile mosaics of sea life and images depicting daily life living by the sea. Ancient docks remained and I imagined people placing their boats on the docks and heading into the city to shop or conduct business. We also visited the Roman museum which featured amazing marble sculptures, jewelry, and pottery from ancient Roman times. I was having so much fun that day, that I decided to move my train ride to a later time so I could spend more time with my hosts. We then hopped into the car to head to the town of Grado, which was right off the Adriatic Sea. We enjoyed some amazing fresh seafood and gelato while walking alongside the sea. Before I knew it, it was time to head back to the train station in Gorizia and say my farewells. I can't believe that the time I had with everyone was ending! I took the train to Venice reminiscing about the incredible time I had the past two weeks and how fortunate and honored it was to be a part of this journey. While the Two Weeks in Italy program was ending, my

time in Italy was not. Soon my wife would join me in Venice, and we would spend another week in Tuscany, exploring medieval towns, mountainous environments, and beautiful rolling hills.

Figure 17: Reunited with my wife Lisa in Venice

Epilogue

What can I say? Should you participate in the Two Weeks in Italy program? Absolutely! One hundred percent! You will meet the most amazing and hospitable hosts in the world, who will take care of you and want you to have the greatest time of your life. I can't thank enough Simonetta, Ruggero and his team, Paolo and Marco, Loris and Ivan, and Enrico and Franco for all their time and energy in putting together such an amazing experience. I am very thankful to now call you all my friends and I look forward to seeing you all once more! This experience will forever be marked as one of the greatest experiences in my life. Was it all fun and games? No. You will be moving a lot and working a lot. You will have the greatest sleep of your life after those two weeks. The reward for your hard work will be that you have inspired and captivated many people throughout the country of Italy. They will get a chance to see a different way of teaching and while it will take a few moments for them to open up, be ready for a flood of questions and interest at a level you may have not seen before. Will you see some incredible sights? Oh yes! The amount of history is unbelievable and to see it firsthand is truly astonishing. I was also asked in my report to put some recommendations for improvement for the program. There are only a few recommendations because I feel this program is solid, but I feel what I will provide will only

strengthen already robust program. As IPS grows into a more international organization, while I was in Italy, I was thinking of several amazing planetarians that would benefit from this program, but they are not American. I would love to see if each alternate year, the program be offered to non-Americans. I think the students can benefit from learning from all of us around the globe and I strongly recommend the hosts to consider this an option for the future. My only other recommendation is to consider having more time in the planetarium for the lessons and that participants can use more digital opportunities. Gorizia was the only site where I got a chance to use the planetarium for my time here. Florence also has a digital dome and more planetarians are familiar with digital domes and their talents could be used more if there was a chance to operate digital domes during the program. As a planetarian that uses my dome primarily for teaching, I do believe the use for education should remain. To those reading this and interested in the program, I really recommend it and please don't feel intimidated by the application process. With proper time management it was not hard to put together and the reward for your hard work will pay off with one of greatest opportunities of your career. Italy calls for you!

– Derek Demeter