

North West England's first Inspire international!

From July 24th to August 5th, our region held its very first Inspire international trip, which was inter-railing Italy. 20 18-to-30 year olds flew out as part of the 'core group'. Traveling from Milan via train to Florence, Rome and then onto Sorrento, with some day trips to other amazing sites along the way.

When I first found out about this trip last year I was so excited and instantly knew I wanted to book on. When the trip was presented in more detail, the trip leaders let those interested know that if all 20 spaces for the trip were filled, members could still join but travel in their own groups, who could then follow the core group and meet up with them along way - this is what Cumbria South decided to do! As there were 4 of us from the Cumbria South wanting to go, we decided to make this a county Inspire trip, but follow the 'core group's' plans and rough itinerary.

As an independent group away from the core group, we decided to fly out on the 21st and also add Venice to our itinerary, before meeting up with the core group in Milan on the 24th.

Here's what we got up to!

Venice, July 21st to 24th

Accommodation: Ostello Domus Civica

Upon landing at Venice airport, it was really easy to get into the city centre via a local bus. After arriving into the city and getting checked in we began exploring the city. Over the next couple of days we explored the city, wandering through all the streets and over the canals. We got to see St Mark's Square, Rialto Bridge, Doge's Palace and more!

On the 23rd, we booked a day trip to explore other local islands which included Torcello, Murano and Burano. We first visited Murano, famous for its glass making, where we got to watch a glass making demonstration, which discussed techniques used to create different products. After that we visited Burano, which is known for their brightly coloured houses and lace-making. We saw a lady making the most delicate, detailed lace patterns. Finally we visited Torcello, a historical island which is now mostly uninhabited.

On the 24th we traveled from Venice to Milan by train.

Milan, July 24th to 27th

Accommodation: Corte Milano

We arrived at our hotel fairly late on the 24th, as our hotel was about 45 minutes outside of the city via public transport, so we stayed in the hotel area and went for pizza!

On the 25th - We began our day exploring Milan cathedral, Duomo di Milano. The inside was absolutely stunning and we also had the chance to climb to the roof, which had stunning views and we got to see the architecture of the cathedral up close. Afterwards, we went to a fantastic chocolate/gelato shop before finishing the day with the core group, taking part in their scavenger hunt!

The 26th was our day trip to Lake Como with the Core group - our original plan was to head to the ferry terminal and travel onwards to the village of Bellagio, unfortunately the ferry queue was super long so we didn't end up going, but we did get the chance to explore Como a little and take in the scenery by the lake and have some Gelato. The 27th was then our travel day to Florence.

Florence, July 27th to 30th

Accommodation: Plus Florence

Upon arriving in Florence, we made our way to our accommodation, the Core group were also staying here, it was really lovely! This evening we wandered into the centre to take part in the Core groups city-wide game, which was a little bit like a scavenger hunt, we followed clues around the city centre.

On the 28th, we headed to Pisa (also with the Core group). We had an amazing tour around the grounds and the leaning tower, finding out about its history and some facts! After our tour we had free time, and a photography competition, organised by the Core group - Our photo won!! (We took a photo that looked like we were stealing the Leaning Tower) We also explored Pisa's botanic gardens before meeting up with the group and having a meal together and heading back to Florence.

The 29th was a day for exploring the city. We saw the famous David statue, had lunch at a fantastic food market called Mercato Centrale Firenze (absolutely recommend going if you find yourself in Florence!). We also saw the famous Ponte Vecchio bridge! It was also in Florence that we discovered our now-favourite Gelato shop, Venchi - the gelato from here is incredible!!

Rome, July 30th to August 2nd

Accommodation: Flower Guest House

Rome was my favourite destination on the trip! On arriving in the city, and after checking into our hotel, we walked down to the coliseum with the Core group. The coliseum was amazing to see in person and to see areas of its museum with original pieces still standing and graffiti, was stunning to see. Once we had finished exploring we visited the Spanish steps and Trevvi fountain.

On the 31st we visited the Vatican city, exploring St Peter's Basilica. This day was extremely warm so we bought tickets for a hop-on-hop-off bus tour to explore the rest of the city! In the evening we re-joined the Core group once again for an evening activity - A street food tour. We were taken around Rome's Trastevere neighbourhood, where we tried pizza, cheeses, Suppli and more!

The next day we decided to visit the Roman Forum and Palatine hill, which is next to the Coliseum. The Forum is filled with history and ancient ruins and Palatine hill houses the palace ruins, with great views of the city. In the evening we met up again with the Core group at their accommodation, Rome's Scout Centre, for a cooking class, we got to make pizza, which tasted really good!

On the 2nd it was time to head off to Naples!

Naples, August 2nd to 4th

Accommodation: Hostel in the Sun

Naples was also one of the highlights of this trip for me. We arrived on the 2nd and explored a little bit of the city, but our main reason for visiting took place on the 3rd. We were up super early on the 3rd to get a train to Pompeii, which was somewhere I had always wanted to visit. When we arrived we again met up with the Core group for a guided tour. On this tour we got to see highlights of Pompeii, from the old streets and stores to the old amphitheaters, leisure centres and the old Forum.

Our original plan was to continue to explore Pompeii for the rest of the afternoon, however our plans changed when the Core group told us they had some extra tickets to Mount Vesuvius. We ended up leaving Pompeii with the Core group and went off to the booking office to get a bus that stops on the mountain before climbing the rest of the way to the top of the volcano.

Although the climb was slightly harder, it was absolutely worth it – there were beautiful views from the top and you could see for miles over the sea and we got to see the volcanic crater! I'd recommend if you have the time and are ever visiting Pompeii to book tickets as it's an amazing experience to do!

On the 4th, it was time for Cumbria South to head home, the Core group stayed for an extra day to visit Sorrento – we had such a fantastic time exploring Italy and it's something we will all remember! If you can take part in an Inspire international, do it – you get to meet so many fantastic Girlguiding members you may not get the chance to meet otherwise and the trip leaders are absolutely amazing!

I asked Ellie, who organised the majority of our Cumbria South trip, to write about bit about our trip and her role in planning and organising everything:

"Hi, my name's Ellie and earlier this year I was asked if I would like to be the Inspire coordinator for Cumbria South, a role which I happily accepted. Since then I have been trying to think of activities for our Inspire members to do, the biggest of which has been planning the Cumbria South Italy trip. I planned the trip with lots of help from Danielle and some input from Caroline and Ellie (Who joined us on our trip) about the activities and locations they wanted to do and see. For the most part it was just the accommodation, and transportation I needed to plan, then we booked onto the activities that the core group were organising. The part of the trip we had to do the most for was the few days in Venice, as we visited the city in addition to the cities we visited alongside the core group. I planned the trip as part of my Queen's Guide Award as my outdoor challenge part two; an exploration into Italian architecture. This was for the old syllabus."

Elizabeth, who traveled as part of the main group added, " We really enjoyed meeting new Guiding friends from across the North West and exploring next places with them, as well as

trying new foods! Our favourite places were Pompeii, Mt Vesuvius as well as Pisa - We hired a bike to tour the town".

