

Italian Adventures with Jay Bonner: Fall 2024

Q: How did this concept arise?

Jay: As Anthony Sgro and I engaged in discussions about my new and ongoing external role, he suggested that our constituents would be well served in enjoying opportunities for international travel, and, given my thirty odd years of relationships at Asheville School, he proposed that I see about developing a program through this Spoleto, Italy opportunity—one we had planned to engage with our students as part of the Humanities curriculum and for the professional development of our Humanities colleagues. I had met the Mutis, Jill and Lorenzo, who spearhead programs for adults and students in Italy, with a palazzo in art-rich Spoleto as the home base.

Q: What does this experience offer Asheville School participants?

Jay: I've been on this trip three times before: once with a group of Ashley Hall students and twice now with members of the Asheville School family. Together, we've visited sights in Assisi and Siena and Rome and experienced the art in the churches and buildings, the architecture, the historical layers. Walking along a cobblestone street in Sienna, I saw a plaque quoting from Dante's *Inferno*. We have seen art works by Bernini and Raphael and Giotto. We have feasted on scrumptious local fare and been able to quaff remarkable regional wines. It's a sensory and educational experience that shouldn't be missed. In addition, Lorenzo grew up in Spoleto and was a singer in the arts festivals held annually in the town. What a guide to have: he's showing us around the streets of his neighborhood and he's a historical encyclopedia about every building. Finally, those who've been on the prior trips have bonded with one another and the connections have extended beyond our week in Italy: they've become Blues "bound together / by the mighty white and blue!"

Q: Anything else about this trip prospective Asheville School alumni and participants should know?

Jay: I have fallen in love with the small hill town of Spoleto. I think everyone who joins Lorenzo, me, and the other participants will feel blessed by the experience. And we're creating opportunities for immersive experiences and opportunities, through an online zoom discussion of readings about the region, to have a sense of what we'll enter and witness, from the light in the country to the art to the countryside. These conversations will forge connections among the participants in advance of our arrival in Rome and Spoleto and provide a bridge to the Italian wonders awaiting us.

In addition, Erica Mitchell Filidoro '95 lives in Tuscany, and she was the one to urge me to create this experience of Italy in the fall, when the olives are pressed for oil and the grapes for wine. She insisted that this time of year would be special for all who visited, and she will make a point to join us during our travel to Florence. Her experience as an Asheville School student and as someone who has experienced Italy as a student and then as her home will bring a remarkable flavor to our visit.

Finally, it will be our third Asheville School group to engage on this tour, so we will have a better sense of the time we need to accomplish our itinerary.

Whether it's a first trip or a return trip for participants, Lorenzo Muti will ensure that we enjoy each day and leave Italy with a deeper cultural and historical appreciation for so much of Western culture, from Roman times through the Renaissance to the pleasures of contemporary olive oil and wine making. I'm eager to share this experience with our extended Asheville School family members and friends!