

When Adventure Calls...

Molise Italian Studies

by Dominique Lillo

Tuscany, Umbria, Amalfi Coast, Rome, Milan, Venice... These are the normal tourist stops when visiting Italy, but as many Colorado Italians know, the region of Molise—home to many of our ancestors that immigrated to America—is the country's ultimate hidden gem. Just a three-hour car drive from Rome, it is a land full of history, tradition, spectacular festivals, wild lands, and untouched views stretching down mountains and beyond the sea. The region is full of rustic food, incredible craftsmanship, and hard-working people—but many visitors pass by completely (and unfortunately) unaware of its charms.

Molise Italian Studies—a company recently started by a husband-and-wife team, Scott and Meagan Holcomb—aims to help change that by enabling people of all ages to adventure and study abroad in the beautiful region where they can immerse themselves in Molise's deep history and incredible cultural heritage. Both former teachers by trade, Scott and Meagan wanted to enrich their four boys' educational experience through travel and service learning and—through those experiences—help them develop empathy while creating connections with people they wouldn't otherwise be able to encounter in their everyday lives.

The philosophy for the business followed suit and Molise Italian Studies, “operates from the premise that in order for humanity to survive and thrive on a global level, all individuals must be able to lead safe, fulfilling, and purposeful lives in mindful harmony and cooperation with those diverse backgrounds and experience.” Founded from that desire, and inspired by a 2019 CNN article about a grant program initiated by Molise's regional government to encourage the growth of population and business in its small villages, the idea of Molise Italian Studies came to full fruition.



Founders, Meagan & Scott Holcomb

While laying the groundwork for their company, the Holcombs spent last summer in Filignano, a village in Isernia, Molise of 650 residents with history dating back to 962 A.D. There, they experienced Molise's beautiful countryside firsthand, and were “overwhelmed by the generosity and welcoming spirit of the people” which prompted Scott and Meagan to think seriously about their travel-related future and how best to build Molise Italian Studies.

What they created with their team is a unique and comprehensive study abroad program of Intercultural Citizenship, education, authentic service learning, and linguistic and cultural immersion, in Molise for learners of all ages—complete with customized service placements, home-stays with pre-screened local families, programs for developing cultural awareness, and special excursions and community projects available to enhance the experience.

For traditional study abroad college or gap-year students, Molise Italian Studies has an accredited program through Northern Arizona University which includes an intensive 60-hour Italian course during the first three weeks of a student's on-site semester at the University of Molise's Language Centre. The course encourages students, (who have already completed some self-paced language preparation during the pre-departure semester), to understand and utilize the Italian language in their basic interactions with home-stay families and service placement supervisors and colleagues, setting them up for success.



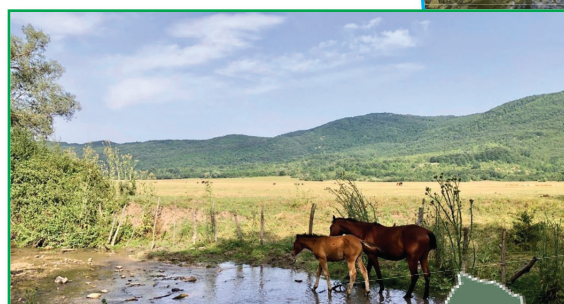
For retirees, adults looking to break away from the 9-to-5 routine of corporate culture, or just those simply looking for a life-changing journey, the Holcombs know that an “Adult Study Abroad” program can still provide non-traditional students opportunities to experience learning about a slower and more sustainable way of life, especially if they were not able to experience study abroad when they were younger. Customized programs of various lengths and intensities are available; designed to help facilitate immersion and exploration of Molise with lessons, workshops, and excursions through Molise's medieval cities, olive groves, beaches, wineries, natural wonders, and historic sites.

If travel to Italy is not an option, Molise Italian Studies and the Center for Intercultural Citizenship have also partnered with virtual internship company, Kambia, to create a course which utilizes the same comprehensive curriculum found in the immersive study abroad programs and offers the chance to make a global impact and develop authentic connections without leaving your home.

No matter the program, Molise Italian Studies also offers support beyond the trip to Italy. Pre-departure meetings emphasize concepts and skills vital to a successful to a semester abroad, while the program concludes with re-entry meetings in which participants can access further career training and apply their new experience to a collaborative action project.

The goal of Molise Italian Studies is to encourage participants to be curious, empathetic, resilient, and ready to bridge cultural differences to create positive change. The company challenges traditional study abroad models through their use of holistic education, individualized instruction, and support. The fact that participants are able to do all this through the region of Molise—beautiful and authentic; where one can reconnect with history, ancestors, or simply gain a better appreciation for one of Italy's hidden gems—promises the adventure of a lifetime. ■

If Molise is calling you... Visit Molise Italian Studies online to learn more about their mission and custom programs at:
www.moliseitalianstudies.com



Molise & Family Photos Courtesy The Holcomb Family