

## AHASoc: Placement guides

### *Cuneo (Italy)*



I spent my year abroad in Cuneo in the Piemonte region of Italy. Cuneo, with a population of about 56,000, is the largest town in the province which is also called Cuneo. I worked in the Liceo Scientifico 'G. Peano' which is located in the centre of the town, about a five minute walk from the train station.

#### **The school**

In Italy, there are various types of secondary schools which the pupils chose to attend depending on what they intend to do in the future. For example, those who want to work in the catering industry attend an alberghiero. I worked in a liceo scientifico where the main focus is on science and maths. However, every class also had to study English. The majority of the pupils had a very high level of English and were able to converse easily with me. However, in Italy the quality of teaching is not very tightly regulated and there were some teachers who were not very proficient. They could barely understand me and they taught all of their classes in Italian. In these classes, the level of English was slightly lower but the children were still very enthusiastic.

In the school, there are nine classes who chose to study both French and English. I worked with these classes every week and for the other three hours (I worked for 12 hours a week) I worked with various other teachers and classes in order to try and spend some time with every class in the school. This made my timetable very hectic as it changed every three to four weeks. Even with the classes I attended on a weekly basis, there would often be last minute changes or cancellations. Organisation does not really exist in Italy so you just have to get used to arriving at a class to find that the teacher is not there so the pupils are going home or that there is an assembly or class test. Initially, I worked for five days a week but after Christmas I asked to change to four days a week which made it easier for me to travel at the weekends. The pupils in the liceo were very hard working and most of them wanted to go to university. Cuneo is quite an affluent area and many of them were under pressure from their parents to succeed.

In Italy, it is technically illegal for the language assistants to be left alone with a class. However, this happened to me on a weekly basis. The teachers knew it was wrong and that if the head teacher found out they would be in trouble but this didn't seem to bother them. Sometimes I didn't mind being left alone as it wasn't always very easy working with the teachers but other times it was really hard as the pupils were just not interested in working. Some of the pupils in their final year were the same age as me which made it impossible to control them. They would just talk to me in Italian or ask to use Facebook.

The teachers often gave me very specific tasks to do with the children and provided me with articles which I had to use. Quite often both the children and I found these topics boring and repetitive and the pupils often asked me if we could do something else. When I was allowed to choose the work, I often opted to study songs or DVDs. In particular, I found that 'How to save a life' by The Fray was very successful. It was quite difficult for them but they loved the song and

there was plenty to talk about afterwards. I also showed them episodes of 'Friends' to highlight the differences between British and American English. I taught them the text message abbreviations and colloquialisms which they found really interesting. Games such as 'Stop the bus' (you give them six categories and a letter and they have to find a word for each category beginning with that letter) also proved popular.

The school allowed me to go on several trips with the pupils. I went to a few museums in Turin, to Liguria (which involved sitting on a beach all day) and to Monte Bianco, the highest mountain in the Alps. I would definitely recommend going on the school trips as normally you don't have to pay and you get to see some amazing places!

As regards pay, the secretary was not always so forward in giving me my pay cheque and I often had to ask her for it. I was given a piece of paper which I had to take to the local bank. They then gave me my wages in cash.

### **Cuneo**

Cuneo is lovely town with some amazing places to eat! I would recommend Caffè del Corso, Arione, Grom, Just Pasta and Pizza Express (not like the chain in Britain!). There are also a wide range of shops, a library and a variety of gyms. I joined the one in Piazza Europa as it was near to the school. The staff were very friendly and I would recommend it. At night time, however, there is not so much to for young people. I often went for pizzas and ice creams but other than that there was not much to do. If you have a car, you can go to some of the nearby towns where there are pubs and some clubs. Without a car, it is virtually impossible to go to these places as there are no buses at night and it isn't easy to get a taxi. I went to one club (discoteca) but I never went back as the majority of the people there were pupils from the school!!! No one checks ID. Beware of the difference between a 'club' and a 'discoteca'. A 'discoteca' is our equivalent of night club and a 'club' is our equivalent of a strip club! I spent a lot of my free time with a family I met. I lived with them for a month and I got on really well with them. I didn't meet a lot of people my own age but I did make really good friends with a girl I gave English lessons to. I gave two to three hours of private lessons a week. I was paid twenty euro an hour for these. I thought this seemed like too much but the families were insistent that I take it. I think the normal rate is about fifteen euro an hour.

Cuneo is very near to Turin which can be easily reached by train (when they are not cancelled and are running on time). In Turin there are loads of museums, cafes and shops. I would recommend going to the cinema museum and taking the lift up the tower. You get amazing views of the city. It is well worth it.

Cuneo is also very close to the French border and so it easy to travel to France by train. However, buy your return tickets in Italy as they are cheaper than in France (I have no idea why). I stayed in a place called Menton and I went to visit Nice and Monaco.

On Tuesday, there is a market in the main square, Piazza Galimberti. The clothes and household items were not of much interest to me but the food market is definitely worth visiting. There is also a small shop near the post office which sells amazing food from Naples!

## **Accommodation**

The teachers at my school helped me to find a flat. Living in the centre of Cuneo is very expensive and you can expect to pay 400euro a month to live a poky flat. However, I lived just outside of Cuneo in a frazione called Borgo San Giuseppe. It took me about twenty minutes to walk to Cuneo (there were buses but they weren't so reliable) and I was able to afford a much larger and more modern flat for the same money. I lived with the French assistant and so we shared the rent. If it is possible, I would recommend living with someone Italian. I stayed with a family for a month and I much preferred it.

## **Travelling**

I travelled as much as I could. I went to Florence and Venice twice, to Rome, Sorrento, Capri, Milan and Savona. If you search on [www.hotels.com](http://www.hotels.com) you can find lots of really cheap hotels. From Edinburgh, I always flew to Milan with Easyjet as the flights are very cheap. Turin was nearer to Cuneo but the flights were too expensive. The trains in Italy are very cheap but they are not reliable. There are often strikes or the trains are delayed. Once my train was delayed by an hour as there was no driver! You can buy monthly bus passes for the local buses for around 25euro although I just walked everywhere.

## **Other information**

Italian people are extremely friendly. I was often invited to eat at peoples' houses or invited to family events. I would say take every opportunity that you get. Italians can become quite offended if you decline their invitations. I met some of the nicest people I have ever come across in Italy and I can't wait to go back. The only thing that I think you need to watch is if you are a girl on your own. You will receive a lot of unwanted attention and it is best not to engage with these guys. Most of them are harmless but some are very persistent and their behaviour can become too much.