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1. Introduction

After the five days intense workshops in Valledolmo, we left the town for a grand tour of Sicilian architecture. Our journey began in Palermo, where we stayed for the first day.

This six-day excursion brought students and faculty members from different universities together, forming a diverse and dynamic group eager to start an adventure of Sicily's rich architectural heritage. Our journey centered on western Sicily, a region renowned for its historical significance and cultural treasures.

Here goes the itinerary of our journey:



- 9/16 FAVARA in AGRIGENTO
- 9/17 GIBELLINA / SALINE in TRAPANI
- 9/18 PALERMO
- 9/19 CEFALU in PALERMO
- 9/20 MONREALE in PALERMO
- 9/21 PALERMO



2. Hotel



During our seven-night stay in Palermo, we stayed in the same hotel while exploring different spots in Sicily each day. Nestled along the street right across the heart of Palermo, the intersection near our hotel served as a vibrant hub, teeming with energy and excitement every day even in the late hour. Stepping outside the hotel, we were greeted by lively street performances and the melodic strains of local bands, transforming the surrounding area into a bustling spectacle each evening.

Our mornings begin with a delightful buffet, offering typical tasty Mediterranean foods, indulging in local specialties such as ham and cheese, accompanied by freshly baked croissants and aromatic cappuccino, providing the perfect start to our day. Although relaxation was often a luxury amidst our packed schedule, we could still enjoy an hour of serenity on the terrace during our breakfast time, offering panoramic views of the city awakening to a new day.



3. [Day 1] – Favara (The Valley of the Temples)

Our first stop of the tour was the ancient city of Favara, where the remnants of the Greek colony of Akragas still stand today. It was such a surreal experience to witness Greek ruins while traversing the Italian landscape, it felt like killing two birds with one stone from the perspective of an architecture student. The Valley of the Temples, home of the remains of seven temples designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site, exuded a majestic presence that left us in awe. These well-preserved structures constructed over 2,500 years ago were a testament to ancient civilizations' immortal legacy.



We spent several hours strolled in the Valley of the Temples spanning approximately 1.5 km. As we immersed ourselves in the desert-like surroundings, the need for respite became evident, prompting a break for gelato which would never fail to delight when exploring the streets of Italy.



3. [Day 1] – Favara (Farm Cultural Park)

Following a lengthy bus ride, we arrived at the Farm Cultural Park—an art gallery in the center of Favara. This unconventional destination held a profound significance, as we learned that Favara grapples with one of the highest unemployment rates in Italy. However, through the transformative power of art, the dilapidated old city center has undergone a remarkable metamorphosis, breathing new life into its surroundings. Myriad thought-provoking paintings offering sarcasm and critical on the current political landscape are adorned every corner, adding depth to our exploration and creating a photogenic vibe.



As we wandered through the corridor of the gallery, we were treated to a delightful array of refreshments. A buffet-style spread of delicious foods awaited us, complemented by glasses of wine that created an unforgettable moment for us.



4. [Day 2] – Trapani (Cretto di Burri)

Our journey started with a visit to Cretto di Burri—an expansive labyrinth of towering concrete structures. As we navigated the landscape, I was astonished by the sheer scale of the surroundings, prompting a question in my mind: "What is this place?"



The answer lies in the tragic events of the Belice earthquake of 1968, which destroyed the once-thriving city in this region. A decision was made to rebuild the city in a new location after the earthquake, leaving behind a landscape scarred by destruction. However, rather than leaving the remnants of Gibellina to oblivion, a project was initiated to preserve the original streetscape by building a concrete construction on the site.

The labyrinth was another treasure Alberto Burri left for this world. This renowned Italian sculptor's transformative vision reshaped Gibellina's urban canvas. It transcends mere concrete construction to become a monument of artistic expression by encapsulating the essence of the original cityscape, honoring the legacy of the city. His innovative approach challenges conventional notions of architecture, leaving a lasting impression on all who visit it.



4. [Day 2] – Trapani (New Gibellina)



Our itinerary also led us to explore a remarkable church which was also part of the project. As we got off the bus, I was captivated by this unconventional architecture with an enigmatic aura, completely defying the preconceived image I had of it.

The scale of the church entitled it to dwarf everything in its vicinity with its imposing presence. Stepping inside, I was greeted by the minimalist design of its interior. With a lofty ceiling, the atmosphere of serenity and contemplation permeates through the whole space, making it a sanctuary that transcends the ordinary. In this sacred space, I could feel the power of architecture transporting us beyond the confines of the mundane and connecting us with something greater than ourselves.



4. [Day 2] – Trapani (Salt Museum)



Our trip continued as we boarded the bus heading to Trapani, home to a historic saltworks and a salt museum telling fascinating stories of salt in this region.

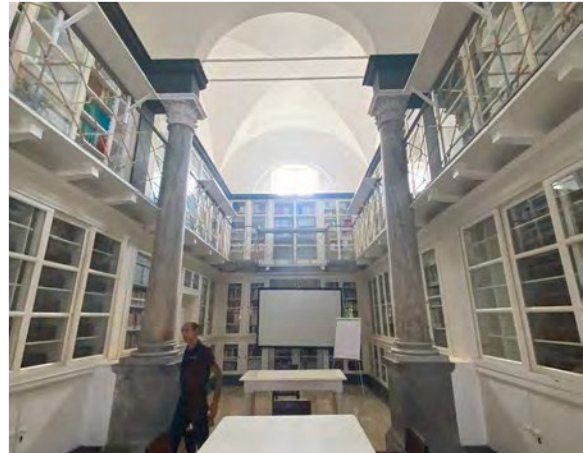
Upon arrival, we were greeted by a windmill, which is a rare sight in Japan. They use the windmill for pumping seawater, a vital step in the salt production process. The salt fields stretching into the horizon together with the windmill and a flock of birds scattered around the wetland along the coast presented a breath-taking scene.



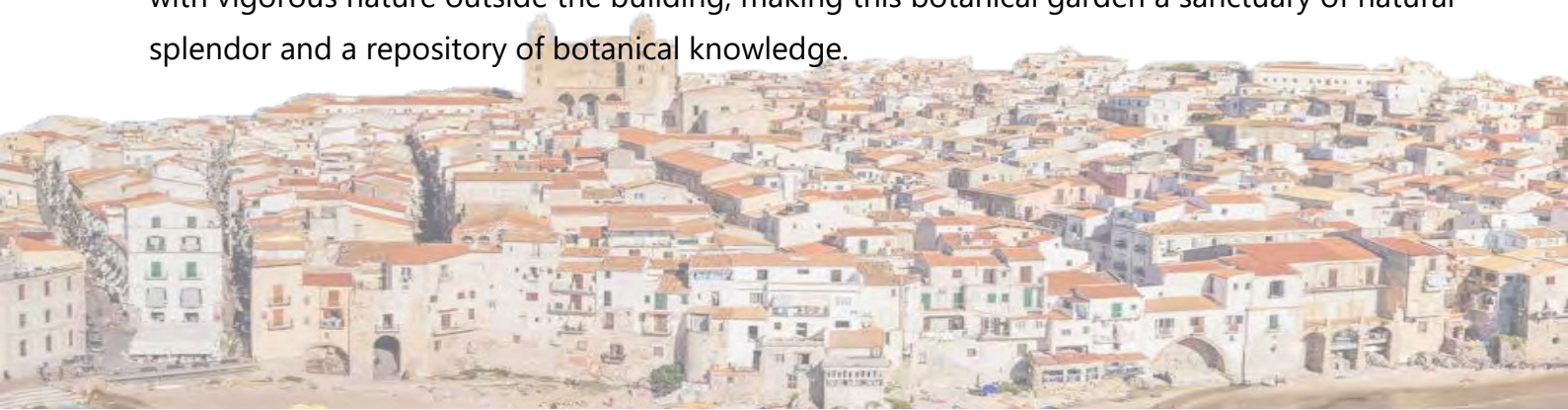
5. [Day 3] – Palermo (Orto botanico di Palermo)



On the third day of our trip, we explored the Palermo Botanical Garden, a verdant oasis that has graced the cityscape since its establishment in 1795. Renowned as the most beautiful botanical garden in Italy, it is not exaggerated to say that the botanical wonders from around the world could be found in this piece of land. As we wandered through the lush pathways in the garden, the fierce vitality and staggering diversity of flora immersed us in a riot of color and texture.



Amidst the verdant landscape, there nestled a neoclassical-style building with elegant facades contrasted with the vibrant foliage that enveloped them. These structures were once utilized as a pharmacy where plants in the garden were harvested for medicinal purposes. Inside, the small specialized library offering insights into the garden's botanical treasures, seamlessly intertwines with vigorous nature outside the building, making this botanical garden a sanctuary of natural splendor and a repository of botanical knowledge.



6. [Extra Contents] – Food We Had

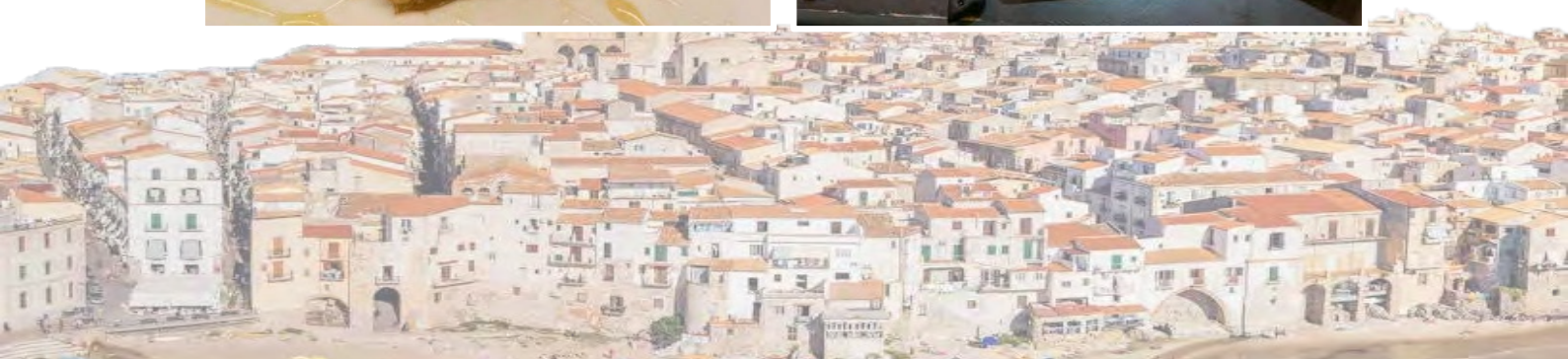
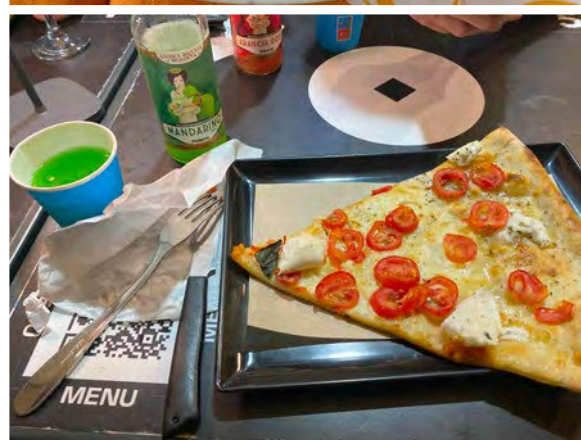
Now let's take a break and grab some Italian food!

There was so much food that tantalized our taste buds during our tour that I want to introduce. And I would like to start with pasta which took center stage in our gourmet adventures. From classic spaghetti to lasagna, the variety of pasta we had was as diverse as it was delicious. Among them the seafood pasta served at Cefalù left an indelible impression on me (the picture is shown on the upper-left). The fresh seafood and flavorful sauce were like a symphony of flavors that danced on the tip of my tongue.



6. [Extra Contents] – Food We Had

From the bounty of the Mediterranean Sea to exquisite desserts like a handicraft, the rich culinary heritage of Sicily adorned our plate with countless gastronomic delights. Every meal is a celebration and every dish tells a story here in Italy. They provided us with a feast of senses while reminding us of the joys of exploration and discovery through food.



7. [Day 4] – Cefalù

Heading to Cefalù by train, this was probably the day I had been mostly and eagerly awaiting as this was the chance to explore the renowned resort nestled along the picturesque shores of Sicily. The warmth of the Italian sun enveloped us as we arrived at the bustling beachfront, where tourists frolicked in the azure waters and showered in the golden sunlight. The calendar on my phone was the only thing that reminded me that it was late September. With swimsuits in hand, we couldn't help making our way to the shoreline as soon as our toes tipped the sand on the beach, ready to indulge in the simple joys of swimming in the Mediterranean Sea.



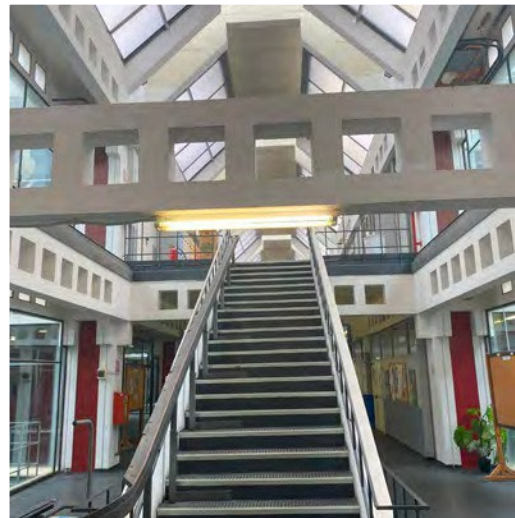
But Cefalù had more than just pristine beaches to offer. The magnificent cathedral, which once served as a fortress, proudly stands in the heart of the town, narrating the tales of the past. As the day unfolded, I reveled in the simple pleasures of a leisurely life in this seaside town—swimming to my heart's content, wandering down the sun-kissed streets, enjoying the seafood pasta, or exploring a small shop hide at the turn of an ancient alleyway whispering to invite me to step in. With each step, I found myself captivated by the allure of European cityscapes, each corner of the town offering a surprising experience or vista worthy of capture.



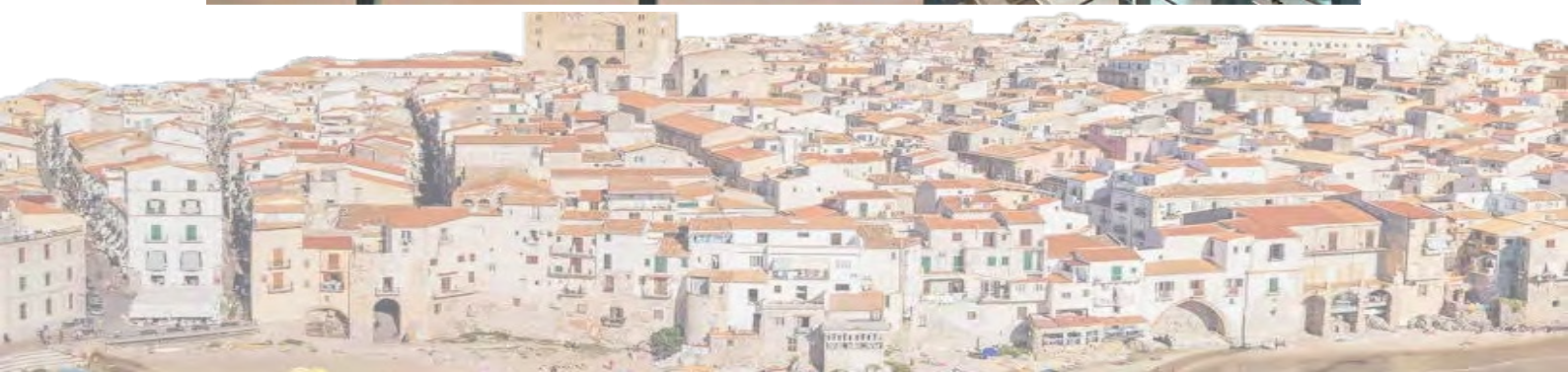
8. [Day 5] – Palermo (The University of Palermo)

The first stop of this day was the University of Palermo, of which the students from the architecture department also participated in the workshop back in Valledolmo.

As we stepped into the campus, I found the buildings in the architecture department had a great resemblance to the Japanese campus since the modern facade. Exploring the campus further, we discovered a hidden gem on a rooftop—a swimming pool open to the public, where the students can seek a respite during the intense tests and design tasks with a refreshing dip or leisurely swim



Our midday break came in the form of a gathering lunch at the university cafeteria, where we were treated to a hearty meal amidst the bustling campus atmosphere.



8. [Day 5] – Monreale (Monreale Cathedral)



Our journey continued with a bus ride to the historic town of Monreale, home to two architectural marvels that have stood the test of time—the Monreale Cathedral and Monastery, both recognized as UNESCO World Heritage sites. Stepping into the cathedral, we were immediately struck by its grandeur. Adorned with gold leaf, the exquisite mosaics on the wall bathing every inch of the interior in a shimmering glow, telling the story of faith, culture, and history. This mesmerizing Arab-Norman architecture was a testament to the perfect fusion of Islamic and Byzantine culture into Western architectural design principles. All the elements harmoniously blend creating a masterpiece of unparalleled beauty.

Then we spent the rest of the day wandering through the cloister surrounding the monastery's courtyard, where we found a stunning sight — 216 marble columns enveloped the courtyard and each of them was adorned with mosaics which have different patterns with unparalleled intricacy. They are witnesses of the skill and dedication of the artisans who had crafted them. The beauty of the Monreale Cathedral and Monastery transcended mere words, it was an experience that had to be seen to be believed.



8. [Day 5] – The Cathedrals in the Trip



The cathedral and monastery were registered with the name 'Arab-Norman Palermo and the Cathedral Churches of Cefalù and Monreale' in the UNESCO World Heritage Sites, which includes 9 sites in Sicily. Our journey brought us face-to-face with some of these sites which I want to give a brief introduction here.

The Cathedral of Cefalù was one of these hidden gems renowned for its distinctive wooden trussed roof with a zebra pattern which could often be seen in Arabic design as is shown in the upper picture.

The pictures below show the Palermo Cathedral, another magnificent testament to Sicily's diverse architectural heritage. With the vaulted stone roof, the cathedral exuded its elegance that captivated us as we wandered through its hallowed hall.

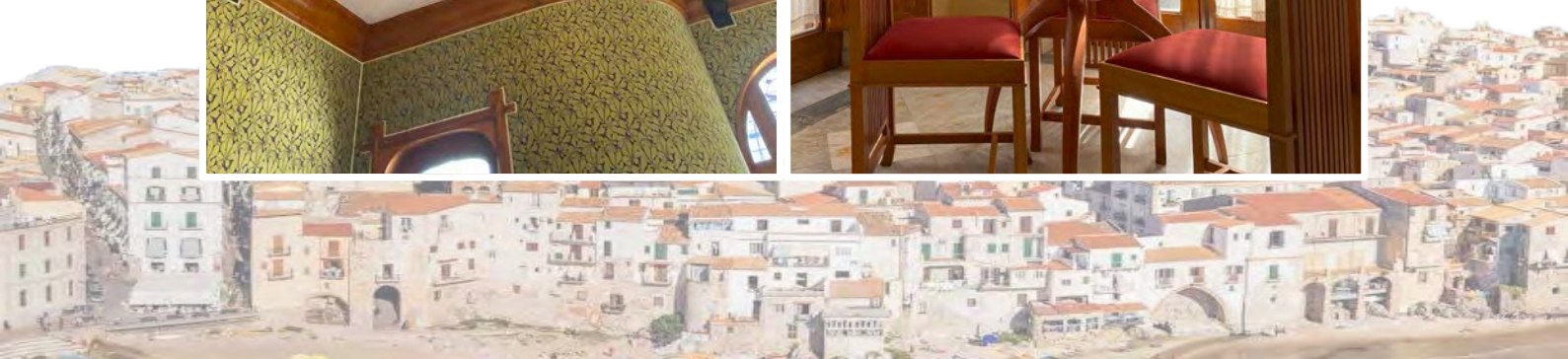


9. [Day 6] – Center of Palermo (Historical Buildings)



The final day of our trip with friends from other universities ended with a leisurely stroll through the center of Palermo. With a sense of bittersweet anticipation, we arrived at the first stop—a villa steeped in history and adorned with ornate decorations.

With intricate adornments gracing both its interior and exterior, the beauty of the villa was undeniable though many of the decorations eluded my understanding. But it was not just the opulence of the villa that captured our hearts—it was the sense of warmth and homeliness created by the soft curves of its interior and charming furniture at the corner. Each detail of the villa was crafted with a sense of whimsy and sophistication, inviting us to linger and revel in the pleasures of aristocratic life.

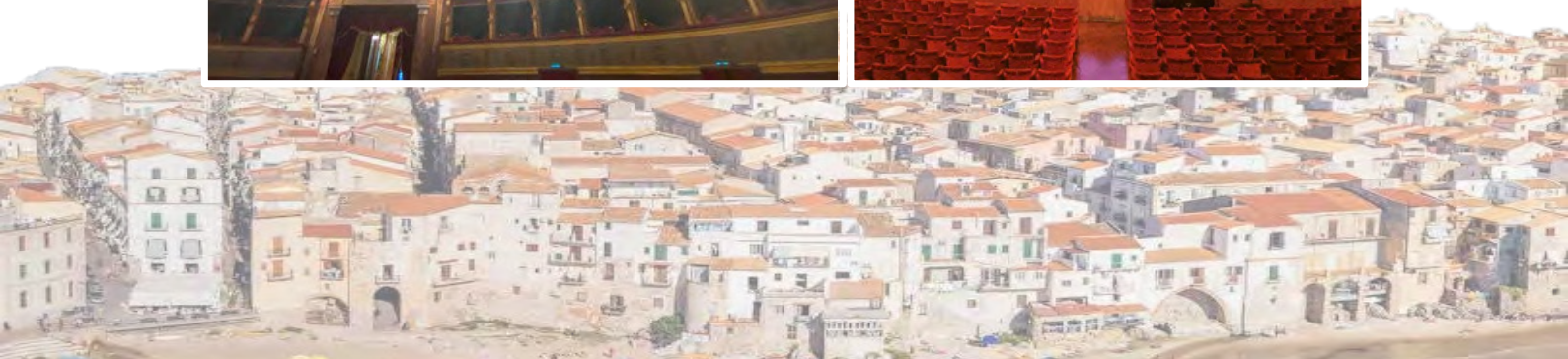
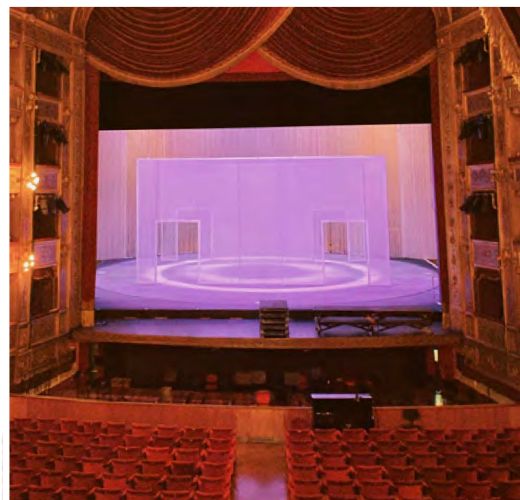
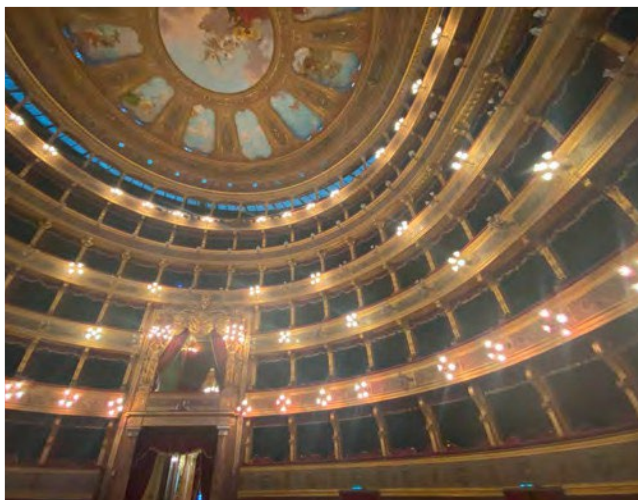


9. [Day 6] – Center of Palermo (Teatro Massimo)



The itinerary then led us to the next stop—the majestic Teatro Massimo. Serving as the iconic filming location for the movie "The Godfather.", the theater not only left us the impression of an architectural spectacle that featured an imposing neoclassical façade, but also as an important role in cinematic history. Though I had yet to see the film, the thought of standing in the footsteps of cinematic legends filled me with a sense of excitement and intrigue.

Stepping inside the theater, the sumptuous interior adorned with intricate details took our breath away. As I gazed out from the VIP seats, taking in the view of the whole stage below, I made a silent vow to return one day, to take my seat among the audience and experience the magic of opera in this magnificent venue.



9. [Day 6] – Palermo



As the old saying goes, 'All good things come to an end.' Our unforgettable journey finally drew to a close and again we gathered at the bar in the heart of Palermo to celebrate the last night of our trip together.



As we were waiting for others before going to the bar, it was like a scene straight out of a movie that coincidentally unfolded before our eyes. The air was suddenly filled with the haunting strains of moody music. In the center of the square, a crowd had gathered, their movements fluid and synchronized as they danced a tango-like dance beneath the glow of dim streetlights. It was a sight rarely seen in Japan, and yet here in the heart of Palermo, it felt like the most natural thing in the world. In that fleeting moment amidst the laughter and conversations with our friends surrounded by dancing people and music, I felt a profound sense of connection—not just to our friends, but to the city itself, with its culture and tradition. The most meaningful experiences sometimes are found not in the grand monuments or historic landmarks, but in the simple moments of shared joy and human connection. Just like us, a group of architecture students brought together by our shared passion for architecture, but on this final night, our conversation strayed far from this realm for the deep connection we built during the trip.

10. Final

This was a day of bittersweet as it was time for us to say goodbye. Though there was a sense of sadness lingering in the air, the unforgettable memories we had shared and the bonds we had forged along the way made us firmly believe that we would meet again someday somewhere.

As the others headed back home, our team remained behind for one more day due to the date of our flight. With hearts heavy with nostalgia, we set out to make the most of our remaining time in this vibrant city, enjoying the last stroll in the streets and seeking out souvenirs to commemorate our unforgettable journey.

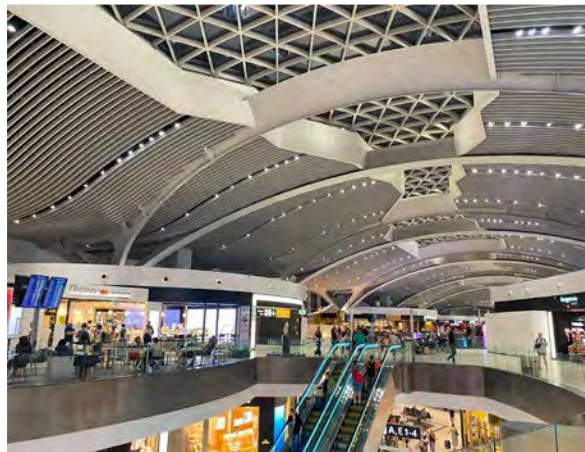
Among the treasures we discovered were the delights of a local supermarket—a vault of Italian food. From shelves lined with an array of pasta varieties to displays brimming with cheeses and fine wines, every corner of the store offered a glimpse into the heart and soul of Italian cuisine. In the end, I left the supermarket with a basket full of pasta, cheese, and wine. It was a small but meaningful token of my time in Sicily, meant to evoke cherished memories with every bite and sip.



10. Final



With a long and arduous flight journey closed our trip, it carried us from the sun-drenched streets of Sicily back to the familiar embrace of home. The first stop of our flight was the historic city of Rome. From there, we then made our way to Incheon Airport in Korea.



During the short stay in the two airports, I couldn't help but be attracted by the scale and ingenuity of the architecture surrounding us as an architecture student. From the soaring ceilings and tree-like branching columns of Incheon Airport to the graceful curves and elegant arched steel frame of Rome Airport, each terminal was a masterpiece of design and engineering.



11. Summary



This workshop in Sicily was a journey of contrasts—an intense workshop followed by the relaxation of the grand tour. As I navigated the challenges of sleepless nights and constant discussions of design during the workshop's first half, I found consolation and rejuvenation in the tranquil exploration of Sicily's architectural wonders during the latter half of the tour.

From students to professors, each encounter and interaction during the trip offered valuable insights and lessons, enriching my experience and broadening my perspectives. Moreover, the need to communicate effectively in English became increasingly apparent in the workshop, reminding me of the importance of language proficiency in a global context.

Despite the inevitable trials and tribulations encountered along the way, our journey was undeniably fulfilling and unforgettable. As I look back on our time together, I am filled with gratitude for the memories and the friendships in this trip.

