Mary Dowden is a study abroad alumni and the peer advisor for study abroad.

I recently returned from studying abroad in Ljubljana, Slovenia, one of the most incredible and rewarding experiences in my college career. Somewhere between studying, sightseeing, socializing with other exchange students, and getting to know some of the locals, there was one thing that I did almost every day. I ate gelato.

Gelato is the fancier, European type of ice cream. Because I ate it every day, I came to recognize characteristics of a really good gelato place.

With the help of Andy Steve’s book Andy Steve’s Europe: City-Hopping on a Budget, I put together some tips and tricks to look for when scouting out a good gelato shop.

1. **LOOK FOR NATURAL COLORS**
   Notice the natural flavors and their colors. Does the color of the flavor look natural? For example, if there is banana flavored gelato, the color should be a grayish white, not neon yellow. The natural colors always taste better.

1. **CAN YOU SEE ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS?**
   Some careless gelato shops stack their burlap sacks of artificial flavoring in plain sight. If you can see those burlap sacks, walk away.

1. **DON’T BE TRICKED BY THE FLAIR**
   There are so many gelato shops that want to attract your attention. Many places will pile their gelato so high and then decorate it with memorabilia and bright colors. This indicates that there is a chemical stabilizer in the gelato, keeping it from melting. It may look nice, but it does not compare to well-made gelato. The right temperature for gelato is almost at its melting point, this allows for the flavors to be more pronounced and vivid.

1. **LOOK FOR METAL**
   Metal bins are reusable containers for the gelato, meaning that the gelato is made on-site and is fresh. Plastic bins most likely have been transported, and are not as fresh. Look closely to see if there is a layer of ice or hardened gelato crust on the gelato. This means that the gelato has been frozen for a while and is not as fresh and delicious.

1. **TRUST THE PEOPLE**
   Is there a line for the gelato? Are people inside enjoying their gelato? A good way to tell if a place is worthwhile is by seeing if they have a lot of business. Usually when there is a long line for something, it is worth the wait. This is especially true in large cities where there are gelato shops on almost every street.

One thing that I loved while studying abroad is that no matter where people are from or what cultures they come from, I was able to find commonalities with them that could evolve into friendships. I made so many life-long friendships with incredible people, and sometimes it even began with meeting at the local gelato shop.