

## PORTRAIT OF ITALY + NEW YORK 2009

We had a small taste of Italy in 2007 when we cruised from Venice to Istanbul, stopping at the Amalfi Coast for the day. Our stay in Venice was too short, as there was a marathon being run and it took forever to get from the ship to the Grand Canal.

The problem with a cruise is that you are only in a port for a day, and that does not give you enough time to explore in depth. Also, two cities we wanted to visit, Rome and Florence, could only be reached by long bus rides from the port cities if we were on a cruise.

I had taken a trip to China with Odysseys Unlimited, and loved the fact that they featured small groups of no more than 24. On our trip to Ireland, we had 39 people, and we had not met half of them by the time the tour was over.

We found a tour of Italy that looked very interesting, that went where we wanted to go, and the travel distances between cities were not too long. The tour we selected stops in 5 cities, and we will tour the surrounding area. The cities are: Amalfi, Rome, Todi in Umbria, Siena in Tuscany, and Venice.



In looking at the prices of the tour, there was a \$400 a price difference between leaving from LAX and JFK. Since I could use frequent flyer miles, it would cost very little to fly from LAX to JFK. This would break up the trip into two 5 hour legs, and we could spend some time in New York. The \$800 difference would also more than pay for the hotels in New York.

I made our hotel reservations at JFK for pre and post trip stays. I also got us tickets to see Jersey Boys on Broadway while we were in New York. We also plan to spend a day with my sister and brother in law, who Kathy has never met.

We will have another free day and will do some sightseeing in New York-Empire State Building, Statue of Liberty, etc.

Here is what happened:

### NEW YORK

We arrived at JFK on time, and hailed a taxi to take us to our hotel. The problem was that Pres. Obama was in town for a \$38,000 a plate fundraiser and half the streets around the airport were blocked off. I felt like sending the Democratic National Committee for the additional taxi fare.

The next day we tried to go into the city with a fellow from our hotel. It was a learning experience, but worked out after one false start. We took the hotel shuttle to the Airtrain, then the Airtrain to the Long Island Railroad Station. We then took the LIRR to Penn Station in downtown Manhattan. We went to the Empire State Building, and they routed us around the entire base to get to the elevator! We finally got to the top, and looked out at the city. Unfortunately, it was rainy and we could only see about 6 blocks!

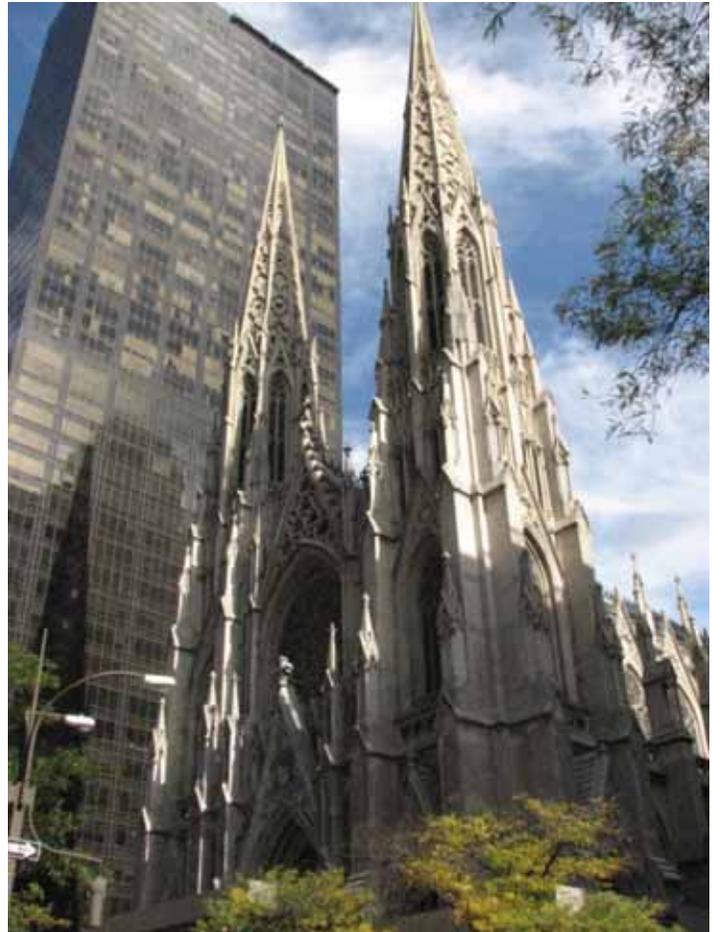
From there we took a taxi to see Jersey Boys, which was really fantastic. The show was full of music we grew up with, and it was hard to sit still. After the show, the actor playing Frankie Valle came out and signed autographs.

The second day the weather was better, and we took a double deck tour bus around the lower part of Manhattan. It was one of the hop on hop off buses and we got a ticket that was good for 48 hours plus a boat

ride. We stopped for lunch in Chinatown, and after walking around we found a Vietnamese restaurant that was quite good. We then stopped in a Chinese Bakery and picked up some really tasty pastries. We then stopped by a fence where children had made tiles commemorating 9/11. It was really quite touching.



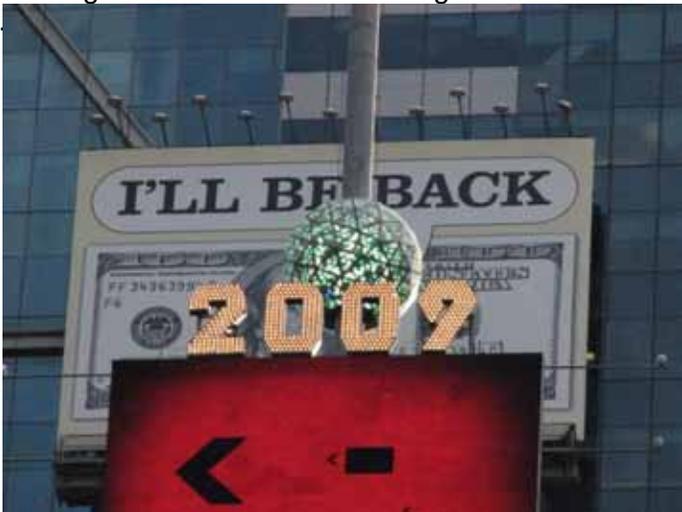
From there we went up to Rockefeller Center and looked at the skating rink. Kathy was surprised at how small it was. We then went up the street to St. Patrick's Cathedral, which I had never seen, even though I grew up in New York!



From there we took a taxi to Central Park to get a carriage ride. This was one of the things on Kathy's "bucket list". It was a lot of fun, and we passed the very large ice skating rink where I used to skate when I was in High School. After the carriage ride we went to Times Square and Kathy, being from a small town in Southern California was amazed at the number of people!



While on the bus tour, we also were able to see the Waterford ball that dropped for New Year's and an unusual building called the Flatiron Building because of its shape



We got back on the bus, but had a lousy guide who held the mike too close and was breaking up. Some people tried to tell him, but he ignored them. We got off two blocks later and took the next bus. We ended up in Greenwich Village, and were looking around for a place to have dinner. We went by on restaurant where they had a window open to the sidewalk, and someone was eating an oyster. We figured this was the place for us. We ordered something called the "Sea Tower", which had 6 different kinds of oysters, plus clams, shrimp, and Stone Crab claws. We also had a lobster roll apiece!

On our last full day in the city, we went in again with the fellow from the hotel, who was meeting his daughter. We went to the west side pier, and took a cruise of Lower New York Bay, which included the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. Both sites were very touching to us as both our grandparents must have seen these as their first sights of America.



After taking the cruise, we took the train to visit my sister out on Long Island. I had not seen her for about four years and she had never met Kathy. We had a great visit, talking about family and the cruise of Italy she and my brother in law had just taken. She showed us some beautiful Murano glass she had bought in Venice. We then went to dinner at my late father's favorite diner. When we got there we were pleasantly surprised to see my aunt and her family there. After dinner, we took the train back to our hotel and prepared for our flight to Italy.

We headed for the airport and discovered a huge accident had closed the approaches to all terminals. The driver took us to the Airtrain station, and we got to the terminal that way. There were very few people checking in, and we told the lady checking us in why.

We boarded our flight, and discovered that even though Kathy had a window seat, there was no window there. We found another empty window seat WITH a window, but the man in the aisle seat was a real grump and she came back after a while.

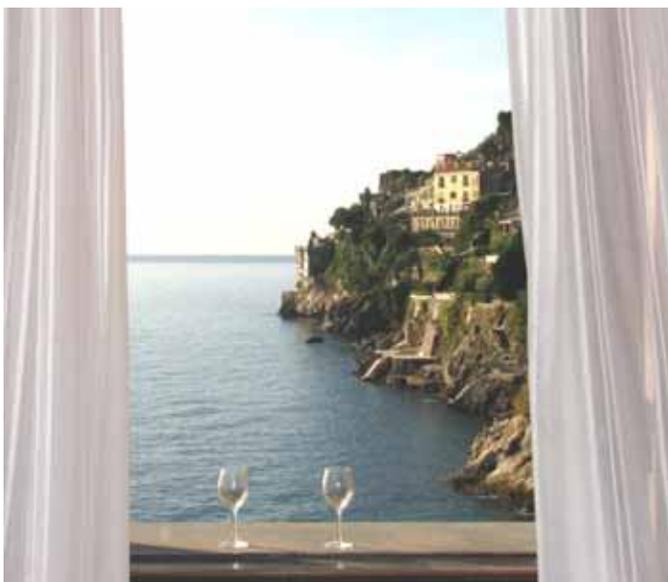
We arrived in Rome, and the walk from our gate was extremely long to get to our next flight which was to Naples. We finally got on board and discovered they had changed equipment on us. This came to light when our boarding pass was for row 30, and there were only 29 rows in the airplane! I asked the flight attendant if that meant we had to ride in the toilets, and she laughed and said there were plenty of empty seats, so just go up a row.

We were met by our tour manager, Leandro, who was fantastic, and had to wait for a few people on a later flight.

#### AMALFI

. The nature of Amalfi coastline has made very difficult and interesting the construction of the main road that connects all the villages of the coast. This incredible road was built around 1840 and completed in 1852, and it winds around the mountains, on cliffs varying from 50ft to 400ft above the sea, offering at each corner a breathtaking sea view.

After arriving in Naples this morning, we traveled to our hotel, perched on a cliff overlooking the sea. The view from our room was fantastic.



This morning we experienced this breathtaking coast by sea as we cruised from our hotel to Amalfi Center. Here we enjoyed a brief tour of the region's largest town then had lunch on our own. We found the same market we bought dried porcini mushrooms the last time we were here. As with all the Amalfi Coast towns, the streets were narrow and winding. On the outer wall was a map of the empire.



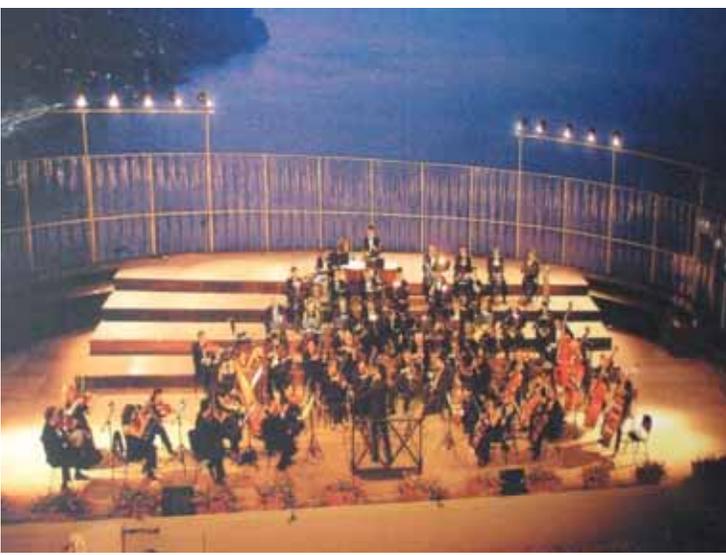
The drive through the Amalfi coast was exciting, as it is a narrow 2-lane road with trucks and buses, and scooters and motorcycles whizzing around us. As Kathy put it, it makes Highway 1 up the California coast look like a freeway!



## RAVELLO

Next we ascended to mountaintop Ravello, with its spectacular gardens and coastal views. We stopped at the Villa Rufulo, which was perched on the edge of a cliff. The villa has spectacular gardens, and during the summer concerts are given at the villa. The orchestra sits on a platform built over the gardens so it looks like they are floating.





## POMPEII

Our full-day excursion began in Pompeii, the city frozen in time by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 AD but not excavated until 1748. The last time I was there it was pouring and I stupidly forgot my umbrella, so I missed a lot of the sights.

We had a fantastic guide, who lives in Pompeii, and did it at a slow pace and stopped often. We watched another tour group literally be run through the place.

We first stopped at the amphitheater, and then looked at some of the streets. There were actually grooves worn in the stones where the chariots had been running. There were stone blocks in the street to indicate whether it was one way or 2 way streets



There were some beautiful mosaics that had been preserved and the main square had Mount Vesuvius in the background. When it erupted in 79 AD it lost about one cubic mile of its top and engulfed Pompeii to a depth of many feet.



We were taken through a brothel where there mosaics that remained picturing some of the activities there. Since this is a G-rated story, we will not include them, but you could buy refrigerator magnets with the pictures on them. Kathy would not let me buy any.

A scientist was intrigued by some of the holes in the ash, and realized that when the ash hardened, it left a mold of the person trapped inside. He poured plaster in the holes and than excavated around the plaster. There were some of the molds were on display right off the main square. There were figures of a man and a young pregnant girl.



## SORRENTO

We left Pompeii and drove to Sorrento. We had a number of stops for photos along the way and in Sorrento. Our meeting place was right next to an old paper mill that was powered by water and was down in a valley about 100 feet!



There were many beaches, and you can see how far down from the road they were. Also, one of the Windstar ships was in port in Sorrento.



## MONTECASSINO

En route to Rome today we visited the town of Montecassino, whose Abbey is the mother church of the Benedictine order and a center of medieval art. A German stronghold during World War II, the hilltop Abbey was destroyed by Allied bombing then rebuilt as a replica of the 17th-century original.

The abbey stood at the crossroads on the main North-South and East-West roads in Italy, so had a tremendous strategic value to stop the Allied advance. Unfortunately the only way to break through was to destroy the abbey. The monks hid in the underground rooms and were protected from the bombing.



The works of art in the monastery had been removed by the Germans, and some were going to be sent to Goering, but a local commander stopped that.



## ROME

We arrived in Rome, got checked in to our hotel, and later that day set out on an orientation walk of our area. It was quite a walk, as we went as far as the Spanish Steps and Trevi Fountain. It was Saturday night, and I was amazed at the number of people just milling about at both places.



The Trevi Fountain was just as crowded as the Spanish Steps



The next morning we toured the heart of ancient Rome: the 55,000-seat Coliseum, built in 72 AD to stage gladiator spectacles; and the temples of the Forum, ancient Rome's political and legal center.



The one change from the last time I was here was the addition of a partial floor over the passageways to give people a feel for what it looked like when it was in use. The large cross marks the place where the emperor sat to view the spectacles. After visiting the coliseum, we went to the Palatine hills to view the Forum. Unfortunately the old way to get there was up a slope, but now we would have had to climb a series of steps.

Instead, we decided to take a carriage ride to the Trevi Fountain. We found these rides a delightful way to see a city, because of the slow pace and the fact we could go where buses could not. We first went by the Piazza Nuovo, and in the centre of the piazza is Bernini's most spectacular fountain, la Fontana dei Fiumi, erected in 1651. It has a central rocky structure that supports an obelisk that was an ancient Roman imitation of the Egyptian form. Around this structure are four giant statues/designs representing the Nile, the Danube, the Ganges, and the Rio della Plata. At the northern end is the Fontana di Nettuno, with statues of Neptune and the Nereids. Finally at the southern end is the Fontana del Moro which and features the statue of a Moor fighting with a dolphin.



From there we rode down some narrow pedestrian streets looking at the sights until we came to the Pantheon.



The Roman Pantheon is the most preserved and influential building of ancient Rome. It is a Roman temple dedicated to all the gods of pagan Rome. As the brick stamps on the side of the building reveal it was built and dedicated between A.D 118 and 125.

The Pantheon exists today in such amazing form because the Byzantine emperor Phocas gave it to Pope Boniface the VIII in A.D 608 and it was used as a church ever since. The Pantheon has been in use since the time it was built.

From the Pantheon we were taken to the Trevi Fountain, and it was as crowded during the day as the previous night.



We were dropped off at the fountain, and Kathy threw a coin over her shoulder and made a wish as is the custom. From the fountain we took a long slow walk back to our hotel. On our way back we passed a shop with a necklace in the window that Kathy really liked, but the shop was closed. The following day, after our tour of the Vatican, I told her I was going for a walk, and went to the shop and bought it for her. I gave it to her as an anniversary present in Umbria, which was where we were on that date.

In the morning we visited the Vatican for a tour of St. Peter's Square and Basilica, and the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican Museums. Highlights included Michelangelo's "Pieta" in St. Peter's, considered one of the greatest sculptures of all time; his frescoed ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, now restored to its original glory; and art-filled St. Peter's itself, the most important church in all Christendom. We had a great guide named Salome, of all things, and before we started the tour, took us to a display that showed all the paintings in the Sistine Chapel on a rolling page. She explained the meaning of each one, and in the Last Judgment identified the people he represented in the painting. There was one man in the lower corner representing the devil, and it was the image of a city official he did not like!

To get to the Sistine Chapel, you must run the gauntlet of 3 rooms in the museum that are each about 400 feet long! First we stopped at the octagon to view the statues there. There was the Apollo Belvedere and the Laocoon Group. The group is of a man and his 2 sons being punished for warning the Trojans about the horse the Greeks left behind.



The 3 galleries are the Gallery of the Candelabra, the Gallery of Tapestries, and finally the Gallery of Maps. The ceilings are decorated with murals for the entire length.



We were not allowed to take pictures in the Sistine Chapel, and were supposed to be silent. Little by little the voices rose, and the guards would shush everyone. That lasted for a while, and then the process would be repeated.

We were told that Michelangelo did not paint the ceiling on his back, as depicted in the movie "The Agony and the Ecstasy". He also had a series of assistants to fill in some of the areas. I went on line and found some pictures that were taken of both the ceiling and the Last Judgment and pasted them into this story.



After we viewed the Sistine Chapel, we went to enter St. Peter's Basilica. The crowds were substantial, but I can imagine what they would be like at the height of the tourist season. My bane are people I call "vidiots", which are idiots with video cameras that park in front of some object and block the view for all others. The only way I saw the jeweled dagger in Topkapi Palace was to buy the guidebook! Kathy's bane turned out to be "shutternuts". These are people with cameras who think if you do not have a camera you have no right to stand anywhere. Kathy's favorite thing is to take her private "mind pictures".

Kathy's feelings upon entering the Basilica must have been similar to mine as I stood in front of the Wailing Wall in Old Jerusalem. Unfortunately, the spell was broken by the shutternuts pushing in front of her. Fortunately, there was a small side chapel curtained and marked in many languages that it was for prayer and meditation and no photos were allowed.

The first we saw upon entering was Michelangelo's "Pieta", and then the statue of St. Peter. So many people had rubbed the right foot of the statue that the toes were almost worn off!



The main altar is built on top of the tomb of St. Peter and has 4 huge spiral supports holding a canopy. On a large scale, it resembled the chupah held over a bride and groom in a Jewish wedding ceremony.



## UMBRIA

Leaving Rome, we traveled north through a pastoral landscape of gentle agricultural land bounded by mountain wilderness and dotted with traditional villages and medieval hill towns. Along the way we visited Orvieto, perched high on a plateau above a vineyard-clad plain.

We took a funicular up from the parking lot and entered the Duomo (cathedral) square. The Duomo was very unusual as it was done in alternating layers of stone, giving it a striped appearance. Inside was another Pieta, sculpted out of a single block of marble by Ippolito Scalza.



After visiting the Duomo, we went to the Zeppelin Restaurant for a cooking demonstration and dinner. The demonstration was given by a young man we nicknamed "Luigi", but it turned out he was from Orange County California! He demonstrated how to make fresh pasta and the techniques were quite interesting. He used a very long rolling pin and only rolled out and away from his body. He showed up how to roll and cut the dough so when he slid his knife under and lifted, the pasta hung from his knife in ribbons.



## TODI

After dinner we drove to Todi and checked into our hotel, which was a carefully renovated palace from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Our room was lovely, but looked out over the fire escape and the shower was the size of a telephone booth.

Today is our second anniversary, and I gave Kathy the necklace she admired in Rome. She wondered how I had gotten it, and I told her that was the purpose of my "walk" that day in Rome.

We toured this peaceful town this morning, visiting the plain but lovely 16th-century duomo that dominates one of Italy's finest medieval squares, and the museum housing Etruscan and Roman artifacts found nearby.



The duomo had a bell tower, and I climbed the 142 steps so I could get pictures of the Umbrian countryside.



One night we just wanted to have a quiet dinner by ourselves, but we found out most of the restaurants were closed. I remembered one down the road, and when we entered, we saw our tour manager and our driver. We wanted to leave them be, so we went into the back room, and were met by almost all of the other folks from our tour!

We all laughed about the situation and enjoyed our dinner with our group.

It reminded me of an old musical called "Pajama Game" where this couple was going to Hernando's Hideaway where, according to the song, "There is a place where no one knows your face". They get there and all their friends greet them!

I also tried to do a little "artistic" photography and the pictures below are the result.



## ASSISI

Today's excursion is to Assisi, considered a gem of an Umbrian town with inviting plazas, flowers everywhere, buildings of white marble, and a pervasive medieval air.

The town, like most medieval towns in the area was built on a hill for defensive purposes. The town was long and narrow with the city gate entrance at one end and the Basilica of Saint Francis at the other, some 1200 yards away and down a steep hill.

We visited St. Clare Church named for a lady who gave her wealth away and founded the order of the Poor Clares.



The renowned Basilica of Saint Francis is the burial place of St. Francis and a sacred pilgrimage site that dominates the town. Inside the upper church are Giotto's priceless frescoes "The Life of St. Francis." In medieval times most people were illiterate, so the frescoes were like a picture book for them.



In the lower church there were some frescoes by pre-Renaissance painters of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century. Under the lower church is the crypt of St. Francis, with some relics of the saint. The return trip to our meeting place required a brutal climb up steep streets, but at the end of the cloister was a taxi and we took full advantage of our luck.

#### PERUGIA

We left Umbria for the equally alluring region of Tuscany. We stopped along the way in Deruta, known for its prized hand-painted Majolica ceramics. We visited a shop to see a demonstration of painting, which was very interesting. It seems the colors painted change when the piece is fired.



We stopped for lunch in Perugia, another medieval town, which had an interesting fountain in the town square.



We are on our way to Tuscany to stay in a refurbished 18<sup>th</sup> century villa. I am hoping our room has a balcony, so I may take a picture that resembles a tapestry we have in our dining room.

We arrived at the villa, which was up a steep narrow road, and the gate was so narrow the bus had to retract its mirrors and our tour director had to guide the bus in.

We picked up our key and checked out our room. As if to make up for the last hotel with a view of the fire escape, our room was the only one in the villa that had a private patio!

The villa was on the top of a hill, and the Tuscan scenery was breathtaking! Everywhere you looked there was a picture! There were rolling green hills, tile roofed houses, colorful vineyards and fields in every direction.



Our Dining Room tapestry



The real thing->



The Villa



Our Patio

### SIENA

Today we visited walled Siena, whose ochre-colored buildings and ancient ramparts evoke the city's medieval past. Fan-shaped Piazza del Campo is one of Europe's greatest public squares, and twice a year they hold a fantastic horse race around the square. There are 17 districts and 10 of the districts race for bragging rights for a year. The winners host a huge feast in the square after the race.

I downloaded a few pictures to give a flavor for the enthusiasm of the people and size of the piazza



We first visited the church of San Domenico, where the head of St. Catherine of Siena was displayed. Kathy remembers reading about her, but did not relate her to the city of Siena until we got there. We then visited the duomo, and it was so foggy that I could not get a clear picture until after lunch! We had lunch in the piazza, across from the city hall with its tower. I declined the invitation to climb the 400 odd steps because I needed to save myself for Venice.



I noticed on our map that there was a synagogue off the piazza, and I went to find it. Fortunately I found a sign that led me to it. As it was Saturday afternoon, no tours were allowed, but I did get pictures.



## FLORENCE

The next day we visited Florence, a living monument to the Renaissance and the crown jewel of Tuscany.



The first pictures were from an overlook showing the duomo with its stupendous dome by Brunelleschi and the Ponte Vecchio (old bridge) over the Arno River.

We first visited the Galleria dell'Accademia to view Michelangelo's sublime "David," as well as his pieces for the papal tombs called the "prisoners" as they looked like they were trying to escape the marble.



As you can see by the pictures of the baptistery and duomo, it was raining in Florence. Because of the distances involved and the weather, we opted not to go to the Uffizi Gallery. Instead we had a nice coffee at a place near the duomo that was under shelter and heated.



### SAN GIMIGNANO

We encountered classic Tuscany today as we visit the hill town of San Gimignano, known for the 13 watchtowers that have left its skyline virtually unchanged since medieval times. I took the left picture from our villa with a telephoto lens.



After visiting 3 medieval towns, Kathy was “towned out”, and stayed at the villa all day. She enjoyed the day off as it has been sort of go go since we got here.

I did a little hunting and gathering here and bought a bag of dried Porcini mushrooms. The same store also sold truffles, which are very expensive, but I knew she would be tickled if I got some. I bought a jar with 2 small truffles that were the equivalent of \$340 a pound!! I also bought some small souvenirs.

Later we visited a local winery and enjoyed a tasting. We tasted a white and 2 reds, the second red was young and had a lot of tannin, to a point where it left a furry feeling on the tongue.

When I got back to the villa that night, Kathy was really funny. As I brought out each bag she would smell it to see if it had truffles in it. I held the jar for last, and she was really excited that she finally got her very own truffles!

#### VENICE

We left Tuscany today and we traveled through the Veneto region to Venice, arriving early in the afternoon.

After read a write up on Murano, which is an island famous for its glass, the article suggested we go to Burano instead, which is much less touristy and less expensive.

Our arrival at our hotel was unusual to say the least. It was the first time I got to a hotel by speedboat with my luggage in another boat!



We were given our room keys, and went to check the room out. It overlooked some inner courtyard and was small. We requested a room change and were given a room that was much better, as it overlooked the canal in front of the hotel, AND had a bathtub!

The pictures below are the view from our window.



After we got settled, our Tour Director took us on an orientation tour of Venice. I had been there a few times, and had 3 maps, so I went along to find out where the closest restaurants were. I wanted to go to the Jewish Ghetto, which was the oldest one in Europe. I broke off from the group and made my way to the museum for a tour.

The guide explained that in 1516 Venice ordered the Jews to live in an area of the city where the foundries, known in Venetian as "geti", had been situated in ancient times, to wear a sign of identification and to manage the city's pawnshops at rates established by the government.

The first Jews to comply with the decree were the Ashkenazim from mid-eastern Europe. Their guttural pronunciation mangled the Venetian term "geto" into "ghetto", creating the word still used today to indicate various places of where people of the same ethnic or religious group are clustered. The "Ghetto" was closed during the night, and the boats of the Christian guards scoured the surrounding canals to impede nocturnal violations.

It was quite a contrast after visiting all the magnificent churches and cathedrals to discover that the synagogues in the Ghetto are on the top floor of the pre-existing buildings and recognized with difficulty outside. We visited 3 Synagogues, the first being the German, which was unusual because of its elliptical shape.



The second one was the French synagogue, which had sort of a dome on it and was slightly more ornate. There was a sort of faux marble in these synagogues, and it was forbidden to use real marble.



The most ornate was the Spanish synagogue, because the members were traders and were wealthier. They hired a Gentile architect to design the synagogue, and that is why there is a pediment over the Ark.



The next day the rest of our group were taken by speedboat to St. Mark's for a walking tour. Since we had done that our last time in Venice, we bought all day tickets for the vaporettos (water taxi) and set off. Our first stop was at Burano, noted for its colorful houses, the leaning bell tower, and its lace.



We stopped at a number of shops, including one where a lady was making lace, which is a dying art.



After touring Burano, we took the vaporetto to Murano to look at their famous glass. We got invited to a glass blowing demonstration, which was quite interesting. The man made a small vase and an animal.



After the demonstration, we were invited to the showroom, where they had some beautiful pieces and some chandeliers, but we decided we had no place to put it, much to the disappointment of the saleslady. Armed with my Venice map, and the knowledge of the vaporetto routes, we took another vaporetto that went clear around part of Venice and ended us up near the Grand Canal. We stopped for a coffee on the main street and watched the sunset over the church of Santa Maria della Salute. From that point, we took another vaporetto up the Grand Canal to the railway station plaza, where we caught another vaporetto back to the hotel. All in all, we were on the water from 10 AM to 6 PM! Not a bad day for us.



We had our farewell dinner that night, which was fine, and said goodbye to the group. One couple, also going to Los Angeles, had a 4:20 AM flight! We are glad we decided on that layover in New York.

Poor Kathy, for the second time in our travels, she was in the shower when we had a power failure. The emergency lights were on in the hallway, so we were able to see well enough.

The power was restored, and all went well for the rest of the evening.

The next morning we were taken to the airport by motorboat, which was a first for us. There was a sign on the dock indicating it was 7 minutes to the terminal. NOT! It was more like 20 minutes unless you were a sprinter. Our flight from Venice was short, and when we hit the Rome Airport we saw a sign indicating our gate was 11 minutes away. Based on our experience in Venice, that meant 30 minutes! When we arrived in Rome on our way to Naples, we had hiked the distance and remembered how long it was. Kathy managed to sweet talk one of the jitney drivers to take us to the escalator to our gate. The trip in the jitney took more than 11 minutes by itself. We then had to take an escalator to the tram which took us out to the gate.

The flight home was a disaster. The agent thought he was doing us a favor by putting us in an exit row. The problems were that there were no windows, the seats were narrower, and the sides of the seats were rigid. Fortunately, I spotted a row of empty seats across the aircraft, and with fingers crossed, waited for the doors to close. We got settled in for the flight to New York, which was 5 hours shorter than directly to Los Angeles. It was a good thing, too. It seemed there was a group of 80 who had just visited relatives in Calabria, and every Italian on the plane wanted to visit every other one.

We overnighted at the same hotel that we stayed at on the way to Italy and the next day flew American to Los Angeles. We were met by our driver and taken home.

All in all, it was a great trip, but the land tours are quite a bit more strenuous than a cruise. On a cruise you unpack once and travel between ports while you sleep. On the other hand, you never get a chance to see much of the countryside. We really had a chance to get a true feel for Italy with this land tour.

Our next 2 trips will be cruises, however, and we will look forward to several relaxing sea days.

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