

Our European Adventure Part 2 - Italy

5 – 24 August 2018

Sunday 5 August 2018

Today we left our Paris behind and travelled to Milan. The TGV service left 10 minutes late, so we thought we were going to be late into Milan however the train made up time on route and we arrived in Milan on time. The trip was very long but at times quite scenic as we travelled through the Alps between France and Italy. It was raining for a while as we passed through the Alps but soon cleared to a sunny day and when we arrived it was quite hot and humid.



Maree and Steve on the train to Milan.

We caught a taxi to our accommodation as it was too hot to walk with the cases. The taxi driver said the fare would be 10 euros, but I gave him 20 to make sure we got where we were going. It was only a short trip. The chap was very happy, turned off the metre, smiled and took us directly to the hotel. It was worth the extra 10 euros.

We were greeted at the accommodation, the “Room Inn” by the owner, Giacinto, who was very pleasant and very helpful. He carried the cases up to the room, five flights of stairs, and I was relieved about that. The room is small but has all the basics and has a lovely outdoor terrace, which we use, but we would use more if it wasn’t so damn hot in Milan. We also have access to the kitchen on the next level down where we can help ourselves to all cutlery, crockery, and glassware. Giacinto also serves us with a great breakfast, and he tells us it will be different every day. So, we can have our glass of wine in lovely wine glasses on the terrace, if I can get Maree off the bed.



Our personal terrace at our accommodation at the Room Inn.



The room and terrace in background and Maree with a glass of wine in hand.

For dinner we went to a local shop that served focaccia bread with various toppings. They also heated the focaccia and cut them into finger food size pieces. You paid for your focaccias and drinks and took the receipt to the bar, and you received your drinks order. Of course, we went for the beer as it was so hot. So, we collected our food and beers and sat outside in their eating area and watched the world go by;

Maree's favourite pastime – people watching. I didn't mind it either as there are lots of lovely ladies passing by. The women here in Italy are very well dressed at any time of the day.

After dinner we returned to our accommodation and relaxed before retiring for the evening.

Monday 6 August 2018

This morning we woke to another nice day, hot though, and had breakfast downstairs at 09:00. Giacinto had put on a lovely display of food. We were also joined by a French couple who were staying in the family room downstairs. It was nice to enjoy the local foods and have good conversation.

After breakfast we packed for our adventure for the day. We thought we would head to Milan Central station and catch the Number One Tram which is apparently a tourist attraction. Before catching the tram, we went inside the station. An incredible building as you can see from the outside structure. Milan Central may not be the largest railway station in Europe but it is still the most ostentatious. The railway terminus was inaugurated in 1931 but had a long prehistory which started in 1906. Delayed by World War I, the plans were revised under Mussolini. The result of the design was a mixture of Art Nouveau, Art Deco and fascism.



Milan Central railway station.

Anyway, back to the tram journey. The tram takes you across Milan from Central to the outer suburbs of the poorer side of Milan. It took us about half an hour to work out where the tram left from. It says Milan Central Station, but the actual route is three streets away. Not a good start on a very hot day. The trip overall was disappointing; despite TripAdvisor saying it was a must do trip as did the lonely planet guide. Not to be. Someone told us on the tram that the route had been changed due to roadworks so I was not sure if that was the problem, but it no longer was going past the tourist attractions that we thought we would be seeing. So not much there other than the history of the tram. However, after researching for an hour I couldn't find anything of interest to tell you. But here is a picture we took of the tram we travelled on.



Tram

Number One – Tourist Tram Milan.

After a walk home of about a kilometre we had a rest and then opened a bottle of wine and relaxed on the terrace before going out for dinner.

For dinner tonight we are going to a restaurant recommended by Giacinto, owner of our accommodation. He recommends it to everyone staying here as the food is very good, he says. The restaurant is "Restaurant Milano" and is located just around the corner from our location.

Well, we have just returned from dinner. I must say we both enjoyed it immensely, great food and great staff. We started off with Bruschetta Caserecci for starters and then I had the Cotoletta Milan and Maree had the Scaloppina Marsala. I took photos but Maree didn't take one of her Scaloppina. We finished off with Tiramisu; of

course, you do when in Italy. This was all accompanied by a nice bottle of Italian Sauvignon. We planned to go back tomorrow as, apparently, it is always a good idea to go back to the same family restaurant. Alas, the Italian holidays are in full swing this week and this restaurant will be closed from tomorrow for three weeks.



The Restaurant Milano



Bruschetta



Steve's Cotoletta Milan – notice the rib bone still attached at the top of the meat.

Well, we are going to retire for the evening and look forward to another day of travels tomorrow.

Tuesday 7 August 2018

Today we went to visit the Duomo Cathedral in Milan. We took the metro, and we were really surprised how modern and clean the subway system is here in Milan. A significant difference when compared to the old metro structure in Paris.

We arrived at the Duomo to find a long queue to get inside the cathedral. However, the line to get to the top by elevator was not long at all so we quickly bought a ticket for Maree so she could go to the top and look around and take in the views of Milan. I decided not to go up due to the height. The following is some information on the Duomo and also some images.

The Milan Duomo is the cathedral church of Milan, Italy. Dedicated to St Mary of the Nativity (Santa Maria Nascente), it is the seat of the Archbishop of Milan, currently Archbishop Mario Delpini. The cathedral took nearly six centuries to complete and is the largest church in Italy. Construction of the cathedral was commenced in 1386.

After its consecration in 1418 the Milan Cathedral remained incomplete for centuries. Politics, lack of money, indifference in a seemingly never-ending project and other setbacks kept the cathedral on standby. Actually, it was Napoleon who finished the facade and jump-started the final stages of construction in the early 19th century. Thousands of artists, sculptors and specialized workers were involved in the construction of this Cathedral. Considering its construction is still continuing, this could be considered the longest-worked cathedral in the world. A five-year project to clean the building was started in 2002 and routine restorations and cleaning are continually taking place to maintain its gleaming stone.

It is said that there are more statues on this Gothic-style cathedral than any other building in the world. There are 3,400 statues, 135 gargoyle and 700 figures that decorate the Milan Cathedral. Maree took some great photos from the roof top to fully appreciate the architecture of this renowned silhouette in the city. From the terrace Maree said she saw breathtaking views across Milan.



Duomo Milan



View from Duomo roof top



View from Duomo roof top



Duomo spires



Duomo spires



Selection of statues on the outside of the Duomo



Selection of statues on the outside of the Duomo

After an enjoyable day walking around the Duomo, we took our accommodation for a rest before heading out for dinner at the Cafe Princi.

After a nice meal and glass of wine we headed back to the Room Inn for a good night's sleep.

Wednesday 8 August 2018

Today we decided to make it a shopping day for Maree. We took the metro to Porta Venezia which is the start of the Corso Buenos Aires, a major street in north-eastern Milan. In this street there are over 350 shops and outlets, and it features the highest concentration of clothing stores in Europe. Due to the large number of shops, stores,

and outlets, Corso Buenos Aires is also one of the busiest streets in Milan. Corso Buenos Aires is generally more oriented towards mass products such as ready-to-wear type clothes. Corso Buenos Aires is also a great place for bargains during sales periods, especially around mid-summer when these three kilometres stretch of shop windows is filled with colorful price tags. There were sales abound today as we walked along both sides of the street.

Maree went into most of the dress and bag stores and actually found some nice things which she bought. No pictures of the shopping trip. Most shop owners I am sure would have not been happy with me snapping Maree in a shopping frenzy (yeh right – Maree in a shopping frenzy).

We took a couple of breaks for a nice cold drink and then later we stopped for some lunch at a nice café where we had a sandwich and a couple of beers as it was quite hot again today.

Tonight, we had dinner at the local café again as it is nice and close to the Room Inn and of course a nice glass of Italian wine. I have to say I have been very surprised at the quality of both the Italian and French wines we have tried on this trip so far.



Maree and Steve (behind the camera as usual) at the cafe Princi Bakery in Largo la Foppa



Our two focaccias at Princi Bakery – One with Parma Ham, Camembert and Potato and the other with Tomato, Olive, Mushrooms and Herbs. Very delicious.

Get a load of this. We were having dinner and this guy pulls up on his silver Harley Davidson, dressed in a suit and his helmet to buy some pizza. The images are him leaving the cafe and then driving off on his Harley. What a hoot.



Well tomorrow we say goodbye to Milan and take the lunchtime train to Venice where we will be staying for four nights. Ciao.

Thursday 9 August 2018

Today we departed for Venice on the Trenitalia FrecciaRossa train service. The journey took 2 hours and 20 minutes, and we arrived around 15:10. The train

travelled at various speeds throughout the journey, but the top speed reached 299 kph as displayed on the information panel in the train carriage.



Milan Central Railway Station with our train to Venice – the red FrecciaRossa on the left



Panoramic view of our Trenitalia FrecciaRossa train carriage – very modern

On arrival in Venice, we made our way from the station to catch our taxi which was waiting for us out the front of the railway station. Not your usual taxi as this was a water taxi as the railway station fronts directly onto the Grand Canal of Venice.



Grand Canal Venice with Maree taking in the view from our taxi.



Grand Canal Venice as we travel on our taxi to the hotel.



Grand Canal Venice as we travel on our taxi to the hotel.

The taxi was a nice launch, and we were the only passengers on board for the twenty-minute journey to our hotel, which is also on the Grand Canal. We arrived at the hotel around 16:45.



Water Taxi that delivered us from the railway station to the hotel.

After checking in to the hotel we went for walk around the local area. We also went for dinner at a local restaurant recommended by the Hotel staff. Nice food and quite a nice view on the side canal with the gondolas coming and going. The average price for a ride on these black gondolas is 80 Euros. We haven't had a ride yet but will probably do one in the next day or so.



Arriving at our Hotel.



Dinner last night on the side of the canal



Gondola passing in front of our Hotel on Grand Canal

Friday 10 August 2018

Today we decided to go for a visit to the island of Murano, famous for glass making. To get to the island the hotel where we are staying provided a private taxi and organised a glass making viewing demonstration when we arrived. This was all at

the hotel's expense. Once we arrived, we were met by one of the managers of the company and taken to the area where the glass items are manufactured. We witnessed a demonstration of the glass maker creating a vase and then he went on to create a horse. It was very interesting, and the artist made it look very easy.



Murano Glass Blower making a vase.



Murano Glass Blower making a horse.



Glassblower making a horse.



Closeup of the horse.



Murano Glass Blowers.

From here we were taken to the showroom where we were able to view all the glass products made by the artists located on Murano. The showroom was located over three floors. We started on the top floor, which had the most valuable of the items on display. We fell in love with a very nice piece but the cost in euros converted to AUD was 7,200. A tad too pricey for us.

We spent a good half hour in the showrooms and the displays were incredible. Of course, we were unable to take photographs in this area.

The following is some history on the island of Murano.

Murano's reputation as a centre for glassmaking was born when the Venetian Republic, fearing fire and the destruction of the city's mostly wooden buildings, ordered glassmakers to move their foundries to Murano in 1291.

Murano's glass makers were soon among the island's most prominent citizens. By the fourteenth century, glass makers were allowed to wear swords, enjoyed immunity from prosecution by the Venetian state and found their daughters married into Venice's most affluent families. While benefiting from certain statutory privileges, glass makers were forbidden to leave the Republic. However, many of them took the risks associated with migration and established glass furnaces in surrounding cities and farther afield – in England and the Netherlands.



View of the island of Murano



View of the island of Murano

Murano's glass makers held a monopoly on high-quality glass making for centuries, developing, or refining many technologies including optically clear glass, enameled glass, glass with threads of gold, multicolored glass, milk glass and imitation gemstones made of glass. Today, the artisans of Murano still employ these centuries-old techniques, crafting everything from contemporary art glass and glass jewellery to Murano glass chandeliers and wine stoppers.

Today, Murano is home to the Museo del Vetro or Murano Glass Museum in the Palazzo Giustinian, which holds displays on the history of glassmaking as well as glass samples ranging from Egyptian times through to the present day.



View of the island of Murano

Some of the companies that own historical glass factories in Murano are among the most important brands of glass in the world. These companies include Venini, Alessandro Mandruzzato Ferro Murano, Barovier & Toso, Simone Cenedese and Seguso. In order to protect the original Murano Glass art from foreign markets, the most famous Glass Factories of this island have a trademark that certifies glass products made on the island of Murano.

After departing the factory, we stopped for some lunch before heading back to Venice by public ferry. When we arrived back in Venice at San Marco it was quite hot, so we stopped for a cold beer before making our way slowly on foot to the hotel. It was a nice walk along the foreshore and along narrow alleyways but with it being so hot we were pretty tired by the time we reached the hotel, about half an hour later. So, we rested for a few hours before getting ready to go to the sister hotel of the one we are staying at for dinner.

At 19:30 we and four other people from our hotel were picked up by private taxi, also paid for by the hotel, and driven to the Locanda Vivaldi Hotel on the foreshore of Castello. We arrived about fifteen minutes later and we were taken to the third floor to the roof top restaurant. The table that had been reserved for us was in a prime location and we had full views of the Venice lagoon and the grand canal. You can see from the images what the view was like. We both had a lovely three course meal with a very nice bottle of Italian wine, a Pinot Grigio.



Taxi taking us all to the restaurant Locanda Vivaldi in Castello, Venice



Panoramic view from the rooftop restaurant Locanda Vivaldi in Castello, Venice



Steve and Maree at the rooftop restaurant Locanda Vivaldi in Castello, Venice

At the end of the meal, we decided we wouldn't walk to get the public ferry back to the hotel but would take a taxi. The hotel called the taxi and it arrived at the hotel's landing in about five minutes. It was a nice slow ride back to our hotel. I think the driver was giving us as much time on the ride as he could, after all it costs 80 euros for the privilege of taking a water taxi.



Evening view as the sun sets behind buildings in San Marco



Night view following the setting of the sun behind buildings in San Marco

Saturday 11 August 2018

We had a lazy start to the day as we decided we would sleep and then later in the day take a leisurely walk around our local area in Venice.

So that is what we did and of course we browsed the small shops that pop up everywhere here. Maree went into a leather bag and shoe shop and found herself two very nice handbags and a matching makeup purse to go with the handbag. All made from Italian leather.



Maree's new handbags

We then stopped for lunch. We only wanted a small snack really so we both ordered bruschetta. I had the traditional with tomatoes and basil while Maree chose the parma ham, cheese, and tomato option. When the meal arrived, we were certainly surprised at how large it was. It was very delicious and certainly filling as you can see. Washed down with a coke and lemon iced tea, we took a slow walk back to the hotel for another rest before heading out to find somewhere for dinner in our local area.



Our small lunch

For dinner we headed to Zarette which is on other side of the island we are staying on. Remember Venice is a series of different islands. We found a nice place on the waterfront and enjoyed some good food and had a relaxing time. After dinner it was back to the hotel for a good night's sleep. Tomorrow we are off to the Island of Burano.



Maree at the table taking in the great view – Me



Maree's mussels and clams



Maree's salmon and salad



Steve's gnocchi

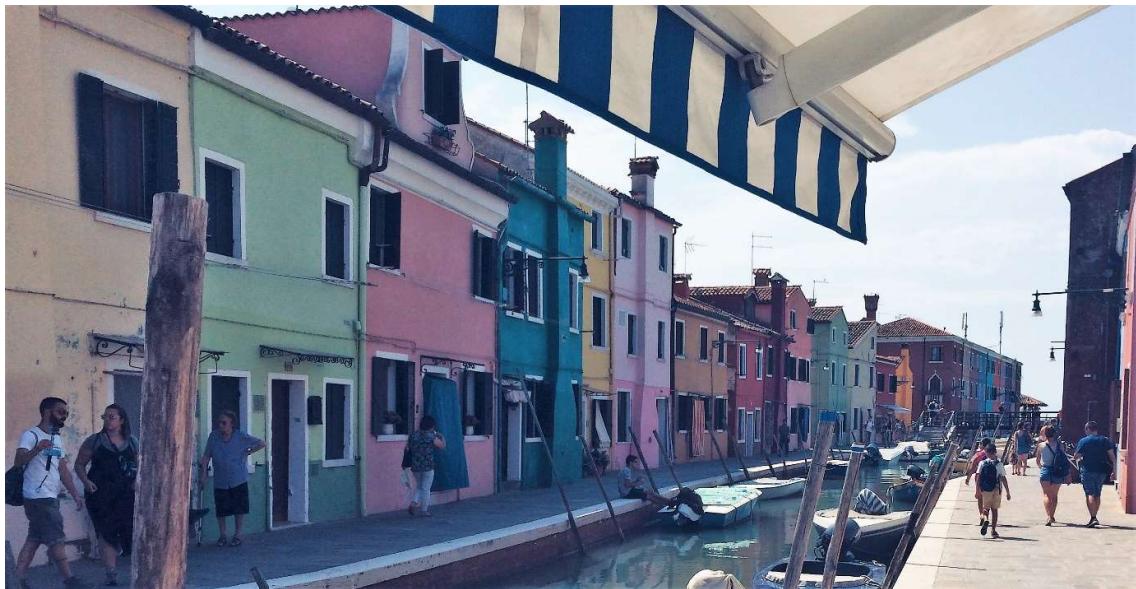


Steve's calamari

Sunday 12 August 2018

This morning we headed out to catch the ferry to San Marco to board another ferry that would take us out to the island of Burano.

The island of Burano, an hour's ferry ride from San Marco in Venice, has brightly painted buildings. Apparently, they say that the families painted their homes in bright colours to designate where their family's quarters ended and a neighbours began, as well as to make their homes more visible from the sea. The tradition continues even today. You can see from the images that Burano is a rainbow of bright colours.



All the houses on Burano have been painted in various colours.

Although the tourists flock to Burano for a few hours, much of the island is still a working island with fishing boats leaving in the morning and returning in the evening with their catch. The locals say it isn't an easy life anymore to live in Burano as the island suffers from severe flooding each winter. Burano is also well known for the manufacturing of lace products. We saw some stores that were selling handmade lace products ranging from tablecloths and doilies to Venetian masks.

We stopped for lunch at a lovely café before wandering further around the town where Maree purchased some very nice clothing.

Following are some photographs of Burano taken as we wondered around the island.



The trees of Burano. These appear to be the only ones as you will note from the other photos.



The trees of Burano.



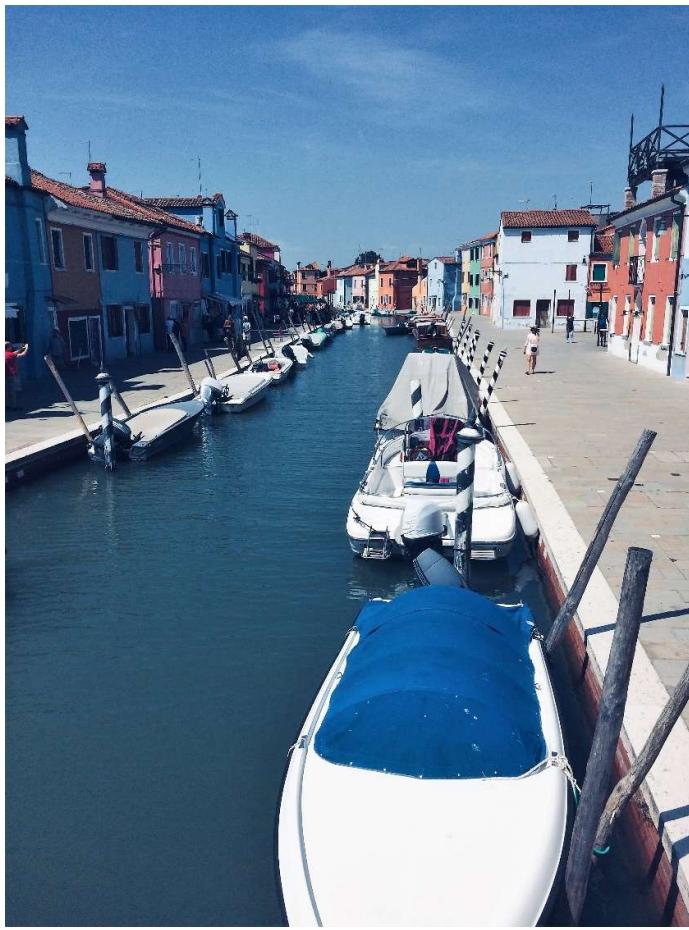
All the houses on Burano have been painted in various colours. All the houses on Burano have been painted in various colours.



All the houses on Burano have been painted in various colours



All the houses on Burano have been painted in various colours.



All the houses on Burano have been painted in various colours.



The local constabulary on duty patrolling the streets of Burano.

On our return to San Marco we stopped to take some photographs of the area as well as a photo of the famous 'Bridge of Sighs'. The Bridge of Sighs' name was given by Lord Byron as a translation from the Italian "Ponte dei sospiri" in the 19th century and comes from the suggestion that prisoners would sigh at the view of Venice through the window before being taken down to their cells, as this was the last view of Venice that convicts saw before their imprisonment.

However, the days of inquisitions and summary executions were over by the time the bridge was built and the cells under the palace roof were occupied mostly by small-time criminals. Further there is little that can be seen from inside the bridge due to the stone grills covering the windows. But who knows if it is fact or fiction. Anyway, it certainly gets the tourists to take photographs.



View of San Marco



The bridge of Sighs in San Marco.



San Marco

And of course, the dinner photos at another local restaurant near our hotel.



This restaurant was serving great local food and local Italian wines

Monday 13 August 2018

This morning we packed our bags and travelled by water taxi to Santa Lucia railway station for our train journey from Venice to Florence. The journey took just over two hours on the high speed 'Frecciargento'.

Once we arrived in Florence, we used a taxi to get to the hotel. We booked a suite at this hotel, and you can see from the images it is quite large. The painting in the images is from the artwork on the ceiling.



Florence Hotel Room



Florence Hotel Room



Florence Hotel Room



Ceiling showing painting.

The hotel where we are staying faces onto the Arno River giving us some great views of both the Ponte Vecchio and the Santa Trinita bridges. The Ponte Vecchio Bridge spans the Arno River at its narrowest point where it is believed that a bridge was first built in Roman times, when the Via Cassia crossed the river at this point. The Roman piers were of stone, the superstructure of wood. After being destroyed by a flood in 1117 it was reconstructed in stone but swept away again in 1333. It was then rebuilt in 1345.



View of Arno River from Hotel Room

During World War II, the Ponte Vecchio Bridge was not destroyed by Germans during their retreat on the advance of the liberating British 8th Army on August 4, 1944, unlike all the other bridges in Florence. This was allegedly, according to tour guides, because of an express order by Hitler. Access to Ponte Vecchio was, however, obstructed by the destruction of the buildings at both ends, which have since been rebuilt using a combination of original and modern design.

For dinner this evening we went to a local restaurant recommended by the girl who checked us in when we arrived. The food and location were so good we have booked a table for both Wednesday and Thursday evening. We can't book for tomorrow night as we are going on an all-day bus tour into the Tuscany region.



Dinner at the 4 Lions Restaurant with seating outside

Tuesday 14 August 2018

Today Maree travelled to the Tuscany region on an organised coach tour. The tour went to the towns of San Gimignano, Siena, and Chianti. I was not feeling well and unable to travel and as the trip was booked and unable to be cancelled, Maree went on her own. So, today's blog is courtesy of Maree – yeh, I get a break from the writing. But seriously it sounds as though Maree had a good time.

There were only three vacant seats on the bus, one of them being Steve's. The tour was conducted in English and Spanish, and the tour guides were a lot of fun.

Our first stop was just over an hour out of Florence, at San Gimignano. It is a medieval urban town, and we were given two hours to explore by ourselves. It was raining, but the town was still beautiful. The photos of the rolling countryside do not do it justice as they were taken in the rain. San Gimignano is a UNESCO heritage listed site. I explored the backstreets, squares, and churches. I also enjoyed a coffee and an ice cream from the "Best Ice Creamery in the World". That is what it said on the sign out the front, and I agree that the Vanilla and Melon was the best I have tasted.



View of the Tuscany valley



View of the Tuscany valley



View of the Tuscany valley



View of the Tuscany valley

The next destination was to Monteriggioni, a short 30 minutes' drive. Monteriggioni is a walled medieval castle with lots of steps, so I decided to stay on the bus. Although the day started with rain, by the time we arrived at Monteriggioni the sun was out, the rain was easing but it was quite humid.

On our way again and heading for the Famiglia Mazzarini winery. The winery specialises in Chianti Classico wine, Black Truffles, Olive Oil, Balsamic Vinegar and Spumanti (Italian sparkling wine). Following an introduction from our tour guide, we were taken to a room for lunch and wine sampling. I sat at a table with a Japanese couple and three Dutch girls and two Americans. Our waiter was very attentive to our table thanks to the young Dutch girls flirting with him. The food was accompanied by different wines – the Spumanti was served with the cured meats and then there were three different red wines accompanying the pasta and two types of cheese. Dessert was pastry served with a dessert wine (rocket fuel).



View inside the walled city



View inside the walled city



View outside the walled city



View inside the walled city



Outside the walled city



Inside the walled city

Everyone said the red wines were really good but as I don't drink red, I was able to try the Rose Spumanti. This wine, in my opinion, was not as good as the white Spumanti served with lunch. It was fun talking to the Japanese couple, and the Dutch girls were very interested in learning some Japanese. I was able to assist with the translations and the Japanese lady thought I was very clever.

The most interesting thing for me visiting this location was the explanation of how Balsamic Vinegar is made. We tasted a 20-year-old Balsamic. The way it sits on the plate, thick like jam, not runny, and the depth of flavour was amazing. Most of the Balsamic that we buy contains sugar. The sugar is added to speed up the fermentation process and is only stored for one year. Where the Balsamic we tried had been fermented naturally and stored for 20 years.



Rolling hills of Tuscany

The next stop was Siena, another medieval town and famous for its cuisine, art, and museums. We were provided with a new tour guide who gave a commentary through headphones. Siena was established by the sons of Romulus and Remus from the creators of Rome fame. The symbol for Siena is the same as the symbol for Rome, the She-Wolf. We arrived in a parade in the town to celebrate the Feast of the Assumption. The town is divided into 17 smaller neighbourhoods each with its own flag and each one was participating in the parade. Each neighbourhood was represented by their flag bearer, drummers, and their children who all marched through the streets to the Cathedral or Duomo.



Cathedral Siena

Of interest is that each Duomo in Italy incorporates three colours of marble; the same three colours that appear in the Italian flag – green, white and red. The green marble represents hope, white marble represents faith and red marble represents charity.



Siena Parade



Siena Parade



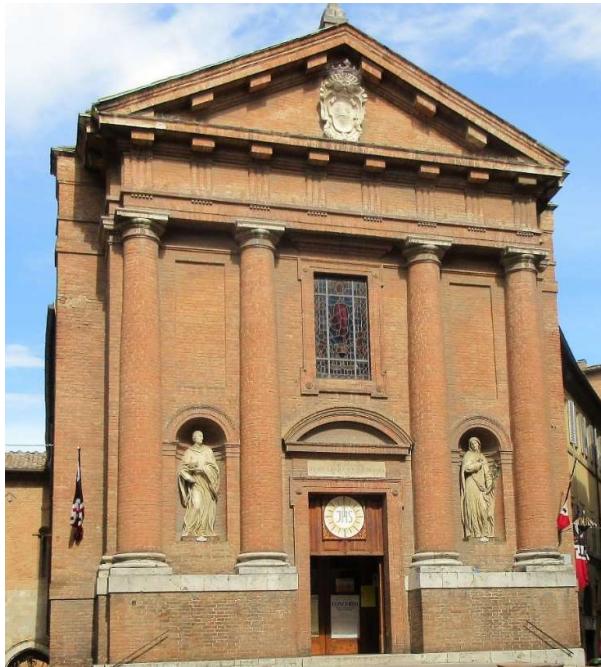
Siena Parade



Siena Parade

The local square in Siena also hosts the biannual “Palio di Siena”, a traditional medieval horse race. The event is represented by the 17 contrada of Siena. Each contrada is named after an animal or symbol and each has a long history and complicated heraldic and semi-mythological associations. The race is attended by over 50,000 people. Each vies for the trophy: a painted banner, or Pali, bearing an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The first horse over the line wins, regardless of whether the rider is still in the saddle.

Siena is also home to the bank of “Monte dei Paschi di Siena”, founded in the city in 1472, and is notable as the oldest continuously operating bank in the world since 1472.



Oldest bank in the world is located in Siena and operating since 1472.



Painting of the “Palio di Siena”, the traditional medieval horse race in Siena

Back on the bus at 18.15 just as it started to rain again, for the trip back to Florence.

Wednesday 15 August 2018

Today we took a leisurely stroll around the cobbled streets of the city of Florence. The narrow streets and shops are interesting. There is a large courtyard area just around the corner from the hotel, which is very popular with tourists, especially in the evening.

A bit of information about Florence.

Florence is the capital city of the Italian region of Tuscany. It is the most populous city in Tuscany, with over 1,520,000 in its metropolitan area.



Duomo and street with restaurants



Duomo Florence



Duomo Florence



Maree Steve in the horse and cart that we hired to take us around the inner city.

Florence was a centre of medieval European trade and finance and one of the wealthiest cities of that era. It is considered the birthplace of the Renaissance and has been called “the Athens of the Middle Ages”. A turbulent political history includes periods of rule by the powerful Medici family and numerous religious and republican revolutions. From 1865 to 1871 the city was the capital of the recently established Kingdom of Italy. The Florentine dialect forms the base of Standard Italian, and it became the language of culture throughout Italy due to the prestige of the masterpieces by Dante Alighieri, Petrarch, Giovanni Boccaccio, Niccolò Machiavelli and Francesco Guicciardini.



We stopped at a small restaurant near the Duomo and decided to order the antipasto. We were unable to finish it.

The Historic Centre of Florence was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1982. The city is noted for its culture, Renaissance art and architecture and monuments. The city also contains many museums and art galleries, such as the Uffizi Gallery and the Palazzo Pitti, and still exerts an influence in the fields of art, culture and politics. Due to Florence's artistic and architectural heritage, it has been ranked one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

Florence is an important city in Italian fashion, being ranked in the top 15 fashion capitals of the world; furthermore, it is a major national economic centre, as well as a tourist and industrial hub.

After a relax back at the hotel we headed back to the 4 Lions restaurant for dinner.

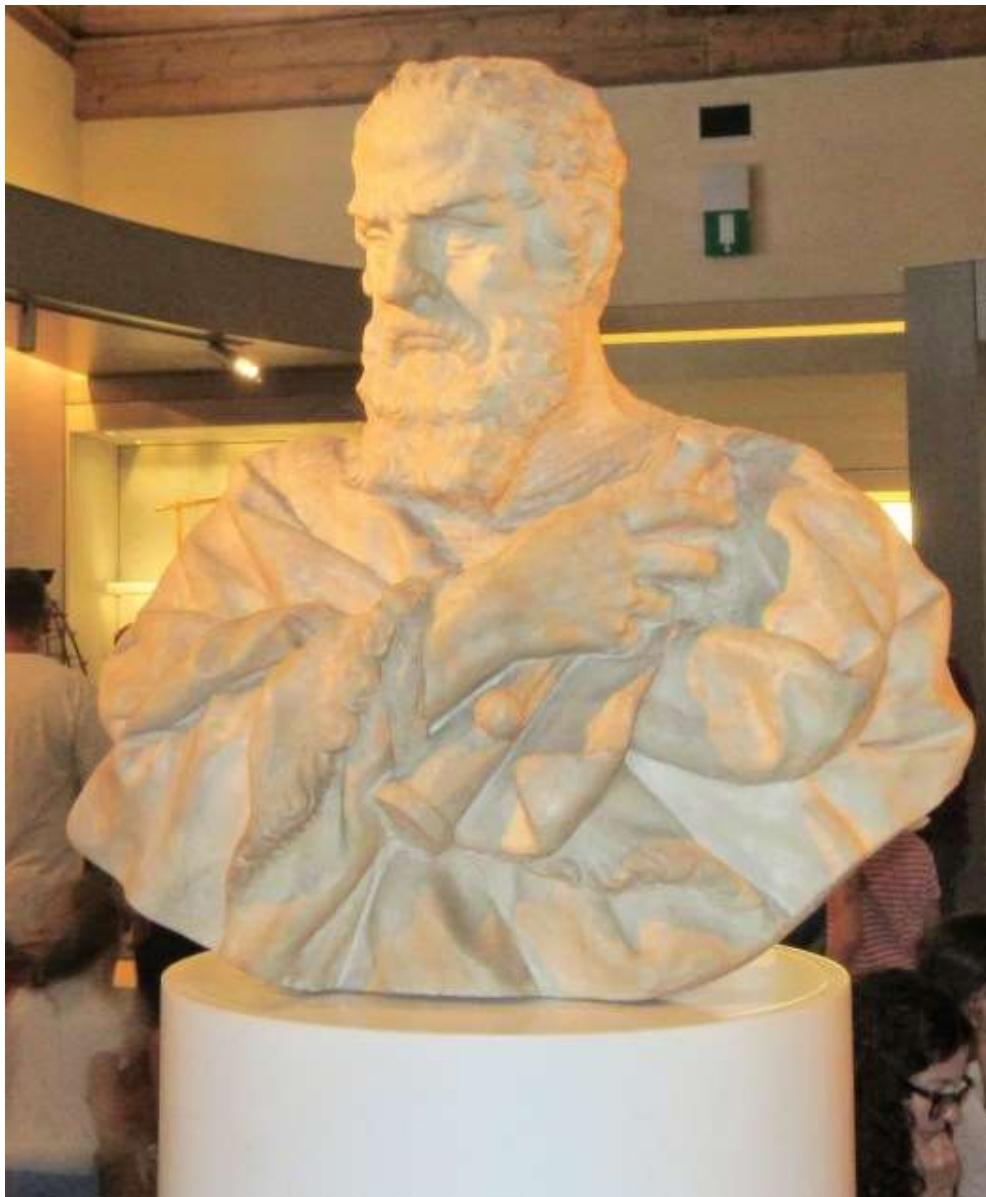
Thursday 16 August 2018

Today we concentrated on two museums. The “Museo Galileo” and the “Galleria Dell’Accademia”.

The “Museo Galileo” is located in Piazza dei Giudici, along the river Arno and close to the Uffizi Gallery. It is housed in Palazzo Castellani, an 11th-century building which was then known as the Castello d’Altafronte. Museo Galileo owns one of the world’s major collections of scientific instruments, which bears evidence of the crucial role that the Medici and Lorraine Grand Dukes attached to science and scientists. The Museo di Storia Della Scienza re-opened to the public under the new name Museo Galileo on June 10, 2010, after a two-year closure due to important redesigning and renovation works. It was inaugurated just four hundred years after the publication in March 1610 of Galileo’s *Sidereus Nuncius* (The Starry Messenger), the booklet that revolutionized mankind’s conception of the universe, decisively contributing to the advent of modern science.



Completed on May 6, 1593, this large armillary sphere was built under the supervision of Antonio Santucci at the request of Ferdinand I de’ Medici displayed in Museo Galileo



Bust of

Galileo displayed in Museo Galileo

The “Galleria dell’Accademia di Firenze”, or “Gallery of the Academy of Florence”, is an art museum in Florence, Italy. It is best known as the home of Michelangelo’s sculpture David. It also has other sculptures by Michelangelo and a large collection of paintings by Florentine artists, mostly from the period 1300–1600, the Trecento to the Late Renaissance. It is smaller and more specialized than the Uffizi, the main art museum in Florence. It adjoins the Accademia di Belle Arti or academy of fine arts of Florence, but despite the name has no other connection with it.

David is a masterpiece of Renaissance sculpture created in marble between 1501 and 1504 by the Italian artist Michelangelo. David is a 5.17-metre marble statue

of a standing male nude. The statue represents the Biblical hero David, a favoured subject in the art of Florence.

David was originally commissioned as one of a series of statues of prophets to be positioned along the roof line of the east end of Florence Cathedral but was instead placed in a public square outside the Palazzo Vecchio, the seat of civic government in Florence, where it was unveiled on September 8, 1504. The statue was moved to the Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence, in 1873, and later replaced at the original location by a replica. Because of the nature of the hero it represented, the statue soon came to symbolize the defence of civil liberties embodied in the Republic of Florence, an independent city-state threatened on all sides by more powerful rival states and by the hegemony of the Medici family. The eyes of David, with a warning glare, were turned towards Rome.



Michelangelo's David as displayed in Galleria dell'Accademia di Firenze.

David

marble, ht. cm 516,7

1502-1504

"Nor has there ever been seen a pose so fluent, or a gracefulness equal to this, or feet, hands and head so well related to each other with quality, skill and design". With these words Giorgio Vasari attempts to define the reasons behind the marvel that the vision of David provokes in the observer. He continues by stating that the statue so far surpasses both in beauty and technique ancient and modern statuary that one needn't bother seeing other works in sculpture.

At the end of 1501, Michelangelo obtained the permission of the Opera del Duomo to work a block of marble which had been abandoned in the courtyard of the Cathedral of Florence for the creation of the figure of the young hero, subsequently placed in front of Palazzo Vecchio in Piazza Signoria.

It has always been a subject of debate among scholars whether David is represented before or after his victory over Goliath. His sling is also barely visible as though to emphasize how David owed his victory not to brutal force, but to his intellect and to his innocence. As soon as it was placed in front of Palazzo Vecchio, the statue became a symbol of liberty and of civic pride for the Florentine Republic. Surrounded by hostile enemies, the city identified itself with the young hero who, with the help of God, had defeated a much more powerful foe.

In 1873, Michelangelo's statue was brought here to the Tribune of the Galleria, built expressly for it and, only in 1908, was it substituted in Piazza Signoria by the marble copy still there today. The bronze copy found in Piazzale Michelangelo overlooking Florence was done in 1866.

This is the plaque at the base of the statue of David displayed in Galleria dell'Accademia di Firenze.



Michelangelo's Daphne and Cloe as displayed in Galleria dell'Accademia di Firenze



Artwork displayed in Galleria dell'Accademia di Firenze.



Giant cross displayed in Galleria dell'Accademia di Firenze.

This is our last day in Florence and tomorrow we head of to La Spezia where we will visit the Cinque Terre.

Friday 17 August 2018

Today we travelled to La Spezia. As the train to La Spezia travels through the town of Pisa it would have been silly not to get off the train and look at this famous tower. So, we arrived in Pisa, checked our bags into the luggage storage facility and took a taxi out to the Piazza dei Miracoli where the Tower was built. We took the taxi as the temperature made it too hot to walk the one kilometre distance.

Pisa is in the Tuscany region of Central Italy straddling the Arno River just before it empties into the Ligurian Sea. It is the capital city of the Province of Pisa. Although Pisa is known worldwide for its leaning tower (the bell tower of the city's cathedral), the city contains more than 20 other historic churches, several medieval palaces, and various bridges across the Arno. Much of the city's architecture was financed from its history as one of the Italian maritime republics.



Piazza dei Miracoli inside a walled area with the Campanile – free standing bell tower (leaning tower) in the background – Panoramic view



Close up of the Campanile – the Leaning Tower of Pisa

The city is also home of the University of Pisa, which has a history going back to the 12th century and has the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, founded by Napoleon in 1810, and its offshoot, the Saint Anna School of Advanced Studies as the best sanctioned Superior Graduate Schools in Italy.

The Piazza dei Miracoli, formally known as Piazza del Duomo, is a walled area located in Pisa, recognized as an important centre of European medieval art and one of the finest architectural complexes in the world. Considered sacred by the Catholic Church, its owner, the square is dominated by four great religious edifices: the Pisa Cathedral, the Pisa Baptistry, the Campanile – free standing bell tower, and the Camposanto Monumentale. The Piazza dei Miracoli was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site In 1987.

The Leaning Tower of Pisa, the Campanile of the Piazza dei Miracoli mentioned in the previous paragraph, is known worldwide for its unintended tilt. The tower is situated behind the Pisa Cathedral and is the third oldest structure in the city's Cathedral Square, after the cathedral and the Pisa Baptistry.



Steve at the Tower – yep, I'm still on holiday with Maree



Maree in the usual pose one has to do at the Tower.

The tower's tilt began during construction in the 12th century, caused by an inadequate foundation on ground too soft on one side to properly support the structure's weight. The tilt increased in the decades before the structure was completed in the 14th century. It gradually increased until the structure was

stabilised (and the tilt partially corrected) by efforts in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

The height of the tower is 55.86 metres from the ground on the low side and 56.67 metres on the high side. Its weight is estimated at 14,500 tons. The tower has 296 or 294 steps; the seventh floor has two fewer steps on the north-facing staircase. Prior to restoration work performed between 1990 and 2001, the tower leaned at an angle of 5.5 degrees, but the tower now leans at about four degrees. This means the top of the tower is displaced horizontally 3.9 metres from the centre.

After viewing the Piazza dei Miracoli, especially the Campanile (leaning tower), we had some lunch and proceeded back to the railway station, by taxi, to wait for our train to take us to La Spezia.

When we arrived at La Spezia, we found that the elevators where not working that take you down to the exit tunnel and then back up to platform 1 where you exit the station. So unfortunately, I had to carry the two suitcases down 20 flights of stairs and then up the same number to platform one. To say, in the excessive heat, I was exhausted was an understatement, so we grabbed a taxi to take us to the apartment where we were staying. The location was less than one kilometre away but there was no way either one of us was going to drag the bags that far in the heat. The taxi driver was happy to take us, so I gave him a good tip for his service.

After checking in we had a rest before going out for dinner. Dinner tonight was at a local Japanese restaurant. You can see some of the courses we had, and we also selected the all you can eat for euro 20 each. The food was off the same menu but a lot cheaper than the menu prices. The food was great and so good that we intend to go back for dinner tomorrow night.

Tomorrow we are off to have a look at the towns in the Cinque Terre, which is why we travelled to La Spezia for two nights.



Maree at the restaurant



Nigiri sushi of tuna and salmon



Nigiri sushi of tuna, sea bass and salmon

Saturday 18 August 2018

This morning we set off for the Cinque Terre. The train trip from La Spezia to the fifth town is only 30 minutes.

First, we had to buy our rail tickets. Well, the queue for the ticket machines was long and it took us 30 minutes to get to the machine. Despite the option to use English on the machine it was still an issue trying to work out how to buy the correct ticket. In the end we just settled for a one-way ticket to Levanto which was one stop further on than the last Cinque Terre town of Monterosso.

We then went to the platform and there was a train waiting. So, we headed for the door only to find people hanging out the door of the train trying to pack themselves into the carriage. Needless to say, we gave that train a miss and waited for the next one 20 minutes later. The train that arrived was a double decker so there was plenty of room for everyone waiting for this train.

We decided we would travel to the fifth town and then make our way back rather than get off at the first one and travel onward. Good decision as most people got off at the first town. The travel to all the towns was mainly through tunnels due to the mountainous terrain.

On arrival at the fifth town, Monterosso, we got off the train and before doing anything else, bought the proper Cinque Terre tickets, which are created as souvenir tickets. From here we went for a wander around the town, took plenty of photos and then stopped for some lunch at a nice restaurant.



Cinque Terre tickets



Monterosso panoramic views of the beach and all the umbrellas



Monterosso Views of the beach



Monterosso Views of the beach and all the umbrellas

After lunch we decided that we had wandered around enough, in the heat, and made our way back to La Spezia. We had a great day in the “Italian Riviera”.

Following is some information we learned about the Cinque Terre.

The Cinque Terre is a rugged portion of coast on the Italian Riviera. It is in the region Liguria, in the northwest of Italy, to the west of the city of La Spezia, and comprises five villages: Rio Maggiore, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola and Monterosso. The coastline, the five villages, and the surrounding hillsides are all part of the Cinque Terre National Park and are a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Monterosso views



Monterosso views



Coloured houses in Cinque Terre

Over the centuries, people have carefully built terraces on the rugged, steep landscape right up to the cliffs that overlook the sea. Part of the charm of the Cinque Terre is the lack of visible corporate development. Paths, trains, and boats connect the villages and cars cannot reach the towns from outside. The Cinque Terre area is a very popular tourist destination, and it was definitely packed today; made worse by the heat

Rio Maggiore is Cinque Terre's most famous town, as well as the closest town to La Spezia. This is the start of the zone's famous trekking route, dug into the rock in the early 20th century, and leading to Manarola.

Vernazza features a picturesque small port, evidence of its ancient maritime traditions. The old town bears defensive structures, elegant architecture, decorative portals, and elaborate colonnades running between the narrow lanes converging on the main piazza, adjacent to the small port. The Parish House of Saint Mary of Antioch, the Doria Castle and the Sanctuary of the Virgin of Reggio are this town's main attractions.

Corniglia is located on the top of a peninsula, where the people produce wines, such as the Cinque Terre DOC, the Pollenza, and the very well-known Sciacchetrà. The production is limited to the coastal areas of the Cinque Terre and specifically to the territories of the communes of Rio Maggiore, Vernazza and Corniglia. The wine has been known since Roman times. The wine is produced from a must containing at least 40% of the Bosco grape but may also contain up to 40% of Albarola and/or Vermentino and up to 20% of other white-

berried grapes approved and recommended by the Province of La Spezia. The wines tend to be dry with yellow straw colour and a delicate aroma.

Manarola may be the oldest of the towns in the Cinque Terre, with the cornerstone of the church, San Lorenzo, dating from 1338. The local dialect is Manarolese, which is marginally different from the dialects in the nearby area. The name “Manarola” is a dialectical evolution of the Latin, “magna rota”. In the Manarolese dialect this was changed to “magna roea” which means “large wheel”, in reference to the mill wheel in the town. Manarola’s primary industries have traditionally been fishing and winemaking. The local wine, called Sciacchetrà, is especially renowned; references from Roman writings mention the high quality of the wine produced in the region.

Monterosso town is an ancient village located atop a hill, offering amazing panoramas. The main tourist attractions are the Old Castle, the Church of Saint John the Baptist and the Convent of the Capuchin. The town stands at the foot of Feniglia Hill and has beaches, which were also packed, and terraces carved into part of the hill side. Most sought-after attraction is the statue of Neptune, or Il Gigante, which has stood the test of time and still guards over the bay.



Neptune

Sunday 19 August 2018

Today we left La Spezia to travel down to Rome.



View from our La Spezia apartment balcony

We left on the direct service to Rome and the high-speed train took just over three and a half hours. The train arrived onto platform 25 in Rome Central. Walking from this platform to meet the driver who would take us to our accommodation reminded me of the walk from the aircraft to immigration in Dubai.

For those who have done the Dubai arrival walk will know that dependent where the aircraft parked it can take up to 20 minutes to reach immigration. That is how long it took us to walk from the third last carriage on platform 25 to the end of platform six where we were met by the driver.

He took our cases, and we took a slow walk to the vehicle. We use Blacklane cars for some of our pickups when we know we will be tired on arrival. They are not cheap but worth every penny.

We checked in to our apartment, had a rest and then went out for dinner to a local restaurant. After dinner we went back to the accommodation and to bed, as we were pretty exhausted.



Our apartment at the CancelleriaDieci in Rome



Our apartment at the CancelleriaDieci in Rome



Our apartment at the CancelleriaDieci in Rome



Our apartment at the CancelleriaDieci in Rome



Our terrace in the apartment at the CancelleriaDieci in Rome

Monday 20 August 2018

Today was just a leisure day to take a break from doing all the touristy things. Tomorrow, we start again with a tour of the Colosseum with special access through Gladiator's Gate where one gets into the arena floor for a great view and experience inside.

Tuesday 21 August 2018

Today was the tour of the Colosseum, Nero's House, and the Roman Forum. The walk started off at the Colosseum where you go inside at the Gladiator's entrance, and you can walk around inside the arena. As you can see from the photos the inside of the Colosseum is quite impressive. From here the tour went around Nero's house and then onto the Roman Forum. The three-hour walk was quite exhausting. Following is some of the information we learned from the tour.

The Colosseum

The Colosseum, also known as the Flavian Amphitheatre, is the oval amphitheatre in the centre of the city of Rome. Built of travertine (a natural stone), tuff (a light, porous rock formed by consolidation of volcanic ash.) and brick-faced concrete, it is the largest amphitheatre ever built. The Colosseum is situated just east of the Roman Forum. Construction began under the emperor Vespasian in AD 72 and was completed in AD 80 under his successor and heir Titus. Further modifications were made during the reign of Domitian (81–96). These three emperors are known as the Flavian dynasty, and the amphitheatre was named in Latin for its association with their family name (Flavius).



The arena inside the Colosseum viewed from the Gladiator's Gate entrance.



The arena inside the Colosseum viewed from the Gladiator's Gate entrance



Maree in front of the arena inside the Colosseum



The arena inside the Colosseum viewed from the Gladiator's Gate entrance.

It is estimated that the Colosseum could hold between 50,000 and 80,000 spectators, having an average audience of 65,000. It was used for gladiatorial contests and public spectacles such as mock sea battles, animal hunts,

executions, re-enactments of famous battles, and dramas based on Classical mythology. The building ceased to be used for entertainment in the early medieval era. It was later reused for such purposes as housing, workshops and quarters for a religious order, a fortress, a quarry, and a Christian shrine.

Although partially ruined because of damage caused by earthquakes and stone-robbers, the Colosseum is still an iconic symbol of Imperial Rome and is listed as one of the New 7 Wonders of the World. It is one of Rome's most popular tourist attractions and also has links to the Roman Catholic Church, as each Good Friday the Pope leads a torchlit "Way of the Cross" procession that starts in the area around the Colosseum.

The Colosseum is also depicted on the Italian version of the five-cent euro coin.



Gladiator's Gate



Inside walls of the Colosseum and Gladiator's Gate



Inside walls of the Colosseum and the seating areas



Inside walls and arena floor of the Colosseum

The name Colosseum has long been believed to be derived from a colossal statue of Nero nearby (the statue of Nero was named after the Colossus of Rhodes). This statue was later remodelled by Nero's successors into the likeness of Helios or Apollo, the sun god, by adding the appropriate solar crown. Nero's head was also replaced several times with the heads of succeeding emperors. Despite its pagan links, the statue remained standing well into the medieval era and was credited with magical powers. It came to be seen as an iconic symbol of the permanence of Rome.

In the 8th century, a famous epigram attributed to the Venerable Bede celebrated the symbolic significance of the statue in a prophecy that is variously quoted: “Quamdiu stat Colisæus, stat et Roma; quando cadet colisæus, cadet et Roma; quando cadet Roma, cadet et mundus” (as long as the Colossus stands, so shall Rome; when the Colossus falls, Rome shall fall; when Rome falls, so falls the world). This is often mistranslated to refer to the Colosseum rather than the Colossus. However, at the time that the Pseudo-Bede wrote, the masculine noun *coliseus* was applied to the statue rather than to what was still known as the Flavian amphitheatre.



Statue from the Farnese Garden. On the slopes of the Palatine Hill, the legendary Farnese Gardens began in the middle of the sixteenth century and overlooks the Basilica of

Maxensius and the Arch of Titus.

The marble statues originally decorating the Farnese Garden in the small portico in front of the Nymphaeum of the Rain, and now placed inside the Aviaries, are of uncertain provenance: according to some they were found in the ruins of the Theatre of Pompey, according to others in the Forum of Trajan in the 16th century.

The sculptures, of colossal size (probably up to 3 metres tall), depict Dacians in their typical garments consisting of a sleeved tunic and ample cloak, closed on the right shoulder by a circular fibula, with their arms folded over their body in the attitude of the vanquished, in accordance with the most common iconographical scheme used to represent prisoners belonging to these barbarian peoples. The head of the Dacians has the typical hairstyle with long, fat locks, slightly disordered, arranged on the forehead in a short fringe and falling to the neck. The face, with a frowning expression, has large eyes, a short curly beard and moustache.

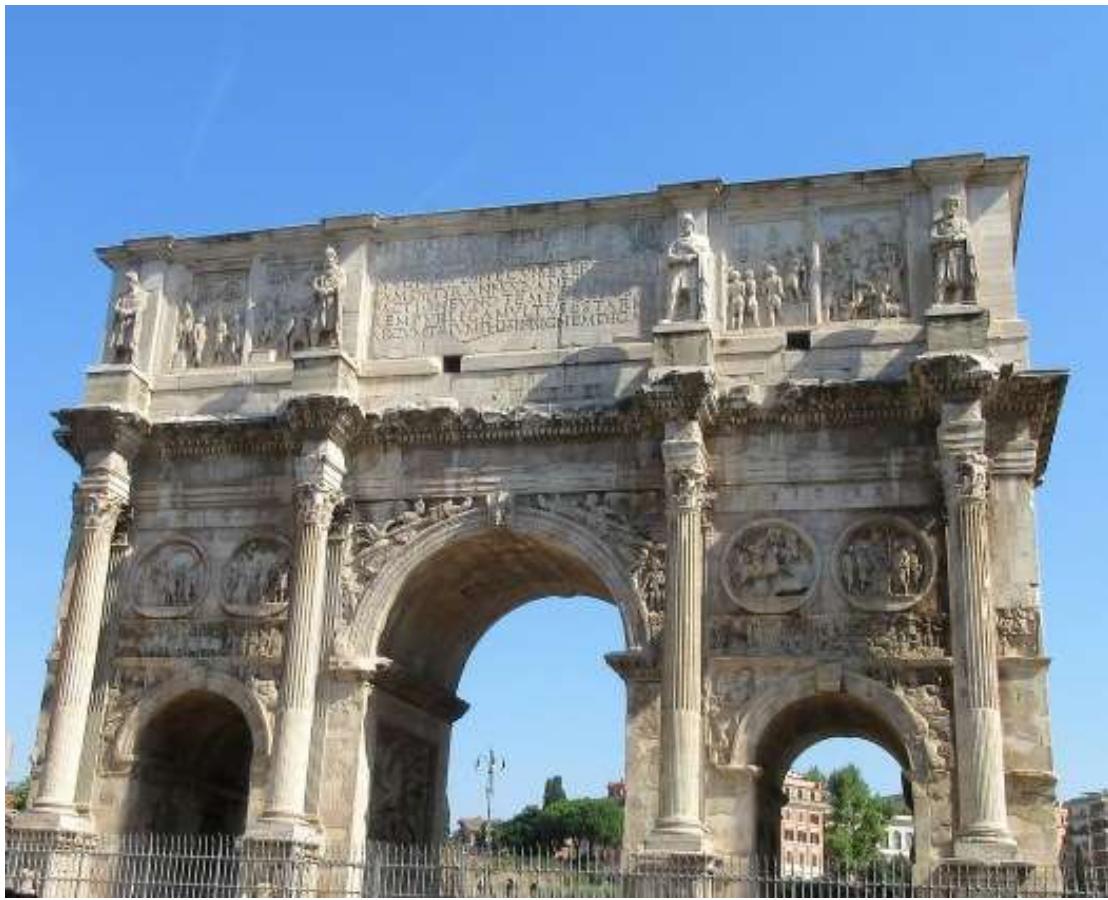
The Caption for the image of the statue immediately above.

The Colossus did eventually fall, possibly being pulled down to reuse its bronze. By the year 1000 the name “Colosseum” had been coined to refer to the amphitheatre. The statue itself was largely forgotten and only its base survives, situated between the Colosseum and the nearby Temple of Venus and Roma.

The name further evolved to Coliseum during the Middle Ages. In Italy, the amphitheatre is still known as ‘il Colosseo’, and other Romance languages have come to use similar forms.

The Roman Forum

The Roman Forum is a rectangular forum (plaza) surrounded by the ruins of several important ancient government buildings at the centre of the city of Rome. Citizens of the ancient city referred to this space, originally a marketplace, as the Forum Magnum, or simply the Forum.



The Arch of Constantine is a triumphal arch in Rome, situated between the Colosseum and the Palatine Hill.



View of the grounds between the Colosseum and the Palatine Hill.



View of the grounds around the Arch of Constantine between the Colosseum and the Palatine Hill.



View of the structures between the Colosseum and the Palatine Hill.

For centuries the Forum was the centre of day-to-day life in Rome: the site of triumphal processions and elections; the venue for public speeches, criminal trials, and gladiatorial matches; and the nucleus of commercial affairs. Here statues and monuments commemorated the city's great men. The teeming heart of ancient Rome, it has been called the most celebrated meeting place in the world, and in all history. Located in the small valley between the Palatine and Capitoline Hills, the Forum today is a sprawling ruin of architectural fragments and archaeological excavations attracting.

Many of the oldest and most important structures of the ancient city were located on or near the Forum. The Roman Kingdom's earliest shrines and temples were located on the southeastern edge. These included the ancient former royal residence, the Regia (8th century BC), and the Temple of Vesta (7th

century BC), as well as the surrounding complex of the Vestal Virgins, all of which were rebuilt after the rise of imperial Rome.



View of the structures between the Colosseum and the Palatine Hill. The three columns in the foreground are located where the Vestal Virgins lived; their task to look after the Eternal Flame for the Pope.



View of the structures between the Colosseum and the Palatine Hill.



View of the structures between the Colosseum and the Palatine Hill.

Other archaic shrines to the northwest, such as the Umbilicus Urbis and the Vulcanal (Shrine of Vulcan), developed into the Republic's formal Comitium (assembly area). This is where the Senate—as well as Republican government itself—began. The Senate House, government offices, tribunals, temples, memorials, and statues gradually cluttered the area.



Statue from the Farnese Garden. On the slopes of the Palatine Hill, the legendary Farnese Gardens began in the middle of the sixteenth century and overlooks the Basilica of Maxensius and the Arch of Titus



Statue from the Farnese Garden. On the slopes of the Palatine Hill, the legendary Farnese Gardens began in the middle of the sixteenth century and overlooks the Basilica of Maxensius and the Arch of Titus



Water fountain in the Farnese Garden. Having a water fountain was a sign of wealth.



Colosseum exterior walls

Over time the archaic Comitium was replaced by the larger adjacent Forum and the focus of judicial activity moved to the new Basilica Aemilia (179 BC). Some 130 years later, Julius Caesar built the Basilica Julia, along with the new Curia Julia, refocusing both the judicial offices and the Senate itself. This new Forum, in what proved to be its final form, then served as a revitalized city square where the people of Rome could gather for commercial, political, judicial, and religious pursuits in ever greater numbers.

Eventually much economic and judicial business would transfer away from the Forum Romanum to the larger and more extravagant structures (Trajan's Forum and the Basilica Ulpia) to the north. The reign of Constantine the Great saw the construction of the last major expansion of the Forum complex—the Basilica of Maxentius (312 AD). This returned the political centre to the Forum until the fall of the Western Roman Empire almost two centuries later.



Maree in front of the three columns in the foreground being the site where the Vestal Virgins resided.

The Vestal Virgins in Roman religion were six priestesses representing the daughters of the royal house who tended the state cult of Vesta, the goddess of the hearth. Chosen between the ages of 6 and 10 by the pontifex maximus

(“chief priest”), Vestal Virgins served for 30 years, during which time they had to remain virgins.

Afterward they could marry, but few did. Those chosen as Vestal Virgins had to be of the required age, be freeborn of freeborn and respectable parents (though later the daughters of free men were eligible), have both parents alive, and be free from physical and mental defects. They lived in the House of the Vestal Virgins on the Roman Forum, near the Temple of Vesta. Their duties included tending the perpetual fire in the Temple of Vesta, keeping their vow of chastity, fetching water from a sacred spring (Vesta would have no water from the city water-supply system), preparing ritual food, caring for objects in the temple’s inner sanctuary, and officiating at the Vestalia (June 7–15), the period of public worship of Vesta. Failure to attend to their duties was punished by a beating; violation of the vow of chastity, by burial alive (the blood of a Vestal Virgin could not be spilled).

But the Vestal Virgins also enjoyed many honours and privileges not open to married or single women of equivalent social status, including emancipation from their fathers’ rule and the ability to handle their own property.

Following the full day, we headed off to dinner at the same restaurant as last night. We have decided that as the food at this restaurant is very good, we will stick with it and slowly go through the menu.

Wednesday 22 August 2018

Today is another leisure day to take a break from doing all the touristy things. Tomorrow Maree is heading off to the Vatican, Sistine Chapel and Peter’s Basilica tour. This tour starts early before the Vatican and Sistine Chapel opens so the tour should be very good without the crowds, but we will see.

Dinner tonight at our usual restaurant, the Terra di Siena.

Thursday 23 August 2018

Today Maree went on a tour of the Vatican Museums, Sistine Chapel and St Peter’s Basilica. She had a great tour, and the following information is provided from the tour. She also took some great pics of which I can only load a selection of the 80 photographs she took. Unfortunately, no photographs are allowed to be taken inside the Sistine Chapel.

VATICAN MUSEUMS

The Vatican Museums are Christian and art museums located within the city boundaries of the Vatican City. They display works from the immense collection amassed by Popes throughout the centuries including some of the most renowned classical sculptures and most important masterpieces of Renaissance

art in the world. The museums contain roughly 70,000 works, of which 20,000 are on display and currently employ 640 people who work in 40 different administrative, scholarly, and restoration departments.



Ceiling artwork throughout the Vatican Museums



Ceiling artwork throughout the Vatican Museums



Ceiling artwork throughout the Vatican Museums



Ceiling artwork throughout the Vatican Museums

Pope Julius II founded the museums in the early 16th century. The Sistine Chapel, with its ceiling decorated by Michelangelo and the Stanze di Raffaello decorated by Raphael, are on the visitor route through the Vatican Museum. There are 54 galleries in total, with the Sistine Chapel, notably, being the very last gallery within the Museum. It is one of the largest museums in the world.

SISTINE CHAPEL

The Sistine Chapel is a chapel in the Apostolic Palace, the official residence of the Pope, in Vatican City. Originally known as the Cappella Magna, the chapel takes its name from Pope Sixtus IV, who restored it between 1477 and 1480. Since that time, the chapel has served as a place of both religious and functionary papal activity. Today it is the site of the Papal conclave, the process by which a new pope is selected. The fame of the Sistine Chapel lies mainly in the frescos that decorate the interior, and most particularly the Sistine Chapel ceiling and The Last Judgment by Michelangelo.



The immense of the rooms inside the Vatican Museum of which this is only the part of one.

During the reign of Sixtus IV, a team of Renaissance painters that included Sandro Botticelli, Pietro Perugino, Pinturicchio, Domenico Ghirlandaio, and Cosimo Rosselli, created a series of frescos depicting the Life of Moses and the Life of Christ, offset by papal portraits above and trompe l'oeil drapery below. These paintings were completed in 1482, and on 15 August 1483 Sixtus IV celebrated the first mass in the Sistine Chapel for the Feast of the Assumption, at which ceremony the chapel was consecrated and dedicated to the Virgin Mary.





Ceiling artwork throughout the Vatican Museums

Between 1508 and 1512, under the patronage of Pope Julius II, Michelangelo painted the chapel's ceiling, a project which changed the course of Western art and is regarded as one of the major artistic accomplishments of human civilization. In a different climate after the Sack of Rome, he returned and between 1535 and 1541, painted The Last Judgment for Popes Clement VII and Paul III. The fame of Michelangelo's paintings has drawn multitudes of visitors to the chapel ever since they were revealed five hundred years ago.



Giant Fractured Sphere inside the Vatican City. It isn't clear what the artist's intentions are, but it gives off the impression that it is reflecting the complexity of our world and how easily it can be torn apart.



View from the rooftop in the Vatican City

ST PETER's BASILICA

The Papal Basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican is an Italian Renaissance church in the papal enclave within the city of Rome. Designed principally by Donato Bramante, Michelangelo, Carlo Maderno and Gian Lorenzo Bernini, St. Peter's is the most renowned work of Renaissance architecture and the largest church in the world. While it is neither the mother church of the Catholic Church nor the cathedral of the Diocese of Rome, St. Peter's is regarded as one of the holiest Catholic shrines. It has been described as "holding a unique position in the Christian world" and as "the greatest of all churches of Christendom".



Maree with St Peter's Basilica in the background



St Peter's Basilica

Catholic tradition holds that the Basilica is the burial site of Saint Peter, chief among Jesus's Apostles and the first Bishop of Rome. Saint Peter's tomb is supposedly directly below the high altar of the Basilica. For this reason, many Popes have been interred at St. Peter's since the Early Christian period, and there has been a church on this site since the time of the Roman emperor Constantine the Great. Construction of the present basilica, which would replace Old St. Peter's Basilica from the 4th century AD, began on 18 April 1506 and was completed on 18 November 1626.



Image looking up to the top of the dome inside the Basilica. The dome stands above St Peter's tomb.

St. Peter's is famous as a place of pilgrimage and for its liturgical functions. The Pope presides at several liturgies throughout the year, drawing audiences of 15,000 to over 80,000 people, either within the Basilica or the adjoining St. Peter's Square. St. Peter's has many historical associations, with the Early Christian Church, the Papacy, the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-reformation and numerous artists, especially Michelangelo. As a work of architecture, it is regarded as the greatest building of its age. St. Peter's is one of the four churches in the world that hold the rank of Major Basilica, all four of which are in Rome. Contrary to popular misconception, it is not a cathedral because it is not the seat of a bishop; the Cathedra of the Pope as Bishop of Rome is in the Archbasilica of St. John Lateran.



Inside the Vatican City looking back towards St Peter's Basilica.

As we are travelling to Switzerland tomorrow you will need to view the Switzerland pages for our travel.