

The Parslows in Italy 2019

We arrived in Rome late afternoon. After taking a train from the airport to central Rome we ventured through 2km of busy streets to find our hotel. Tired and somewhat disorientated we found a small restaurant near the hotel for an enjoyable dinner of tomato soup and pasta.

The next morning, we walked back to the train station just stopping to buy Graham a hat. On the two hour train trip to Naples we saw lots of olive trees and grape vines, not surprisingly. In Naples we were picked up by a driver and taken to a very fancy hotel in Sorrento. This was the beginning of our premium tour titled "Classic

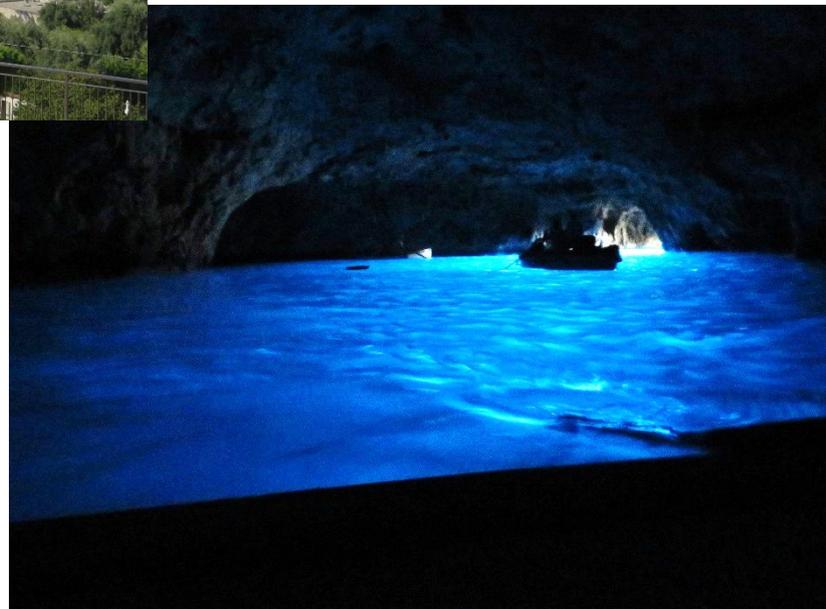


Italy" put on by the US Tauck company. From the Sorrento balcony we looked over the Bay of Naples to see Mt Vesuvius and the sprawling suburbs of Naples. Unfortunately, the smog never completely cleared. Even so the photo shows the mountain.

The next morning our tour took us to the Isle of Capri. The highlight was a short trip in a row boat into the Blue Grotto (Grotta Azzura). This is a cave

with a very narrow opening to the sea which requires everyone in the boat to lie down to get through, but once inside the sun shining on the water shows an amazing blue.

The island of Capri is mountainous and the roads are tortuous. It is a playground of the rich and famous and there is nothing in the shops that "normal" people buy. The views were spectacular, but the crowds were a detraction because it is easy to day-trip from Sorrento.

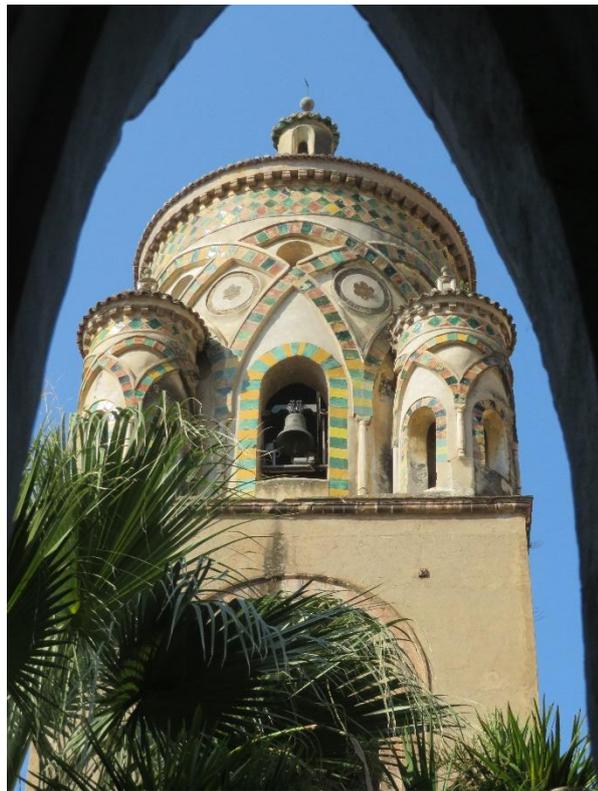


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Day 2 of the tour was a drive along the Amalfi coast. This was a test of the bus driver's ability at every turn. Buses and cars often



have to stop for a while to let each other pass as the road is very narrow, but the scooters keep dashing in and out. Amalfi is another tourist town selling leather bags, porcelain and limoncello (liqueur made from lemon peel) and has an impressive church built in the Moorish style.



We drove inland to Ravello for a delightful lunch of bruschetta, pasta and gelati. A drive over the mountains returned us to our hotel for a few quiet hours before heading off on our own for a quiet dinner of salad and pizza (what else!)

Next morning we headed to Pompeii to see the extensive ruins that have been unearthed after Mt Vesuvius erupted in 79AD. We had an enthusiastic guide called Vincenzo, lots of hand waving in true Italian style. The inhabitants were killed by pumice stones or ash, not by the lava, so everything was well preserved, including bread baking in ovens. The other photos show the original brickwork and a mosaic.



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After Pompei the bus took us to Rome. Graham and I headed off on a short walk from the hotel to the Spanish Steps. Masses of tourists milled around taking photos while 6 police officers walked around blowing whistles at anyone who sat down on the steps. No one is allowed to sit anywhere. There are no warning signs and no one knows about it, so there was lots of whistle blowing!

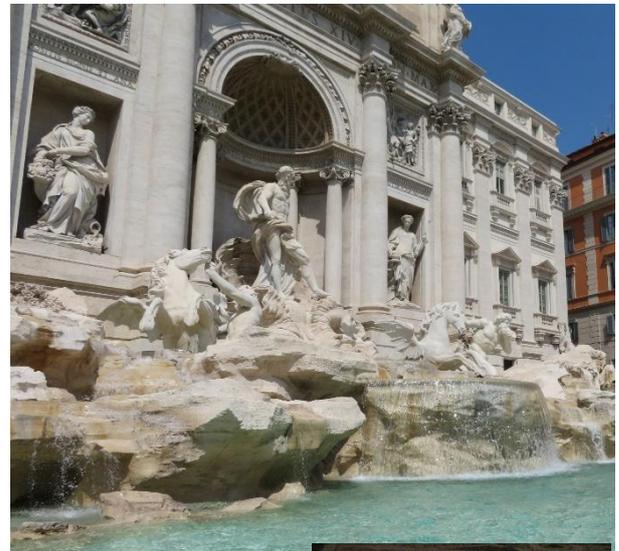


Then we went back for dinner in our hotel, where we were entertained by 3 singers performing a variety of opera excerpts, Italian tunes such as Volare, and a few modern songs as well. .

The next morning we were off to St Peters Basilica in the Vatican; lots of statues; magnificent marble floors and domes decorated with mosaics.

Then we explored Rome on our own, visiting fountains and monuments including the pantheon and the Trevi fountain – with crowds of other tourists.

In the evening we had a private visit to the Vatican museum and the Sistine Chapel. The tour group we are with organised an exclusive evening visit to avoid the daytime crowds. Our premium tour is just that and the hotels have all been 5 star.

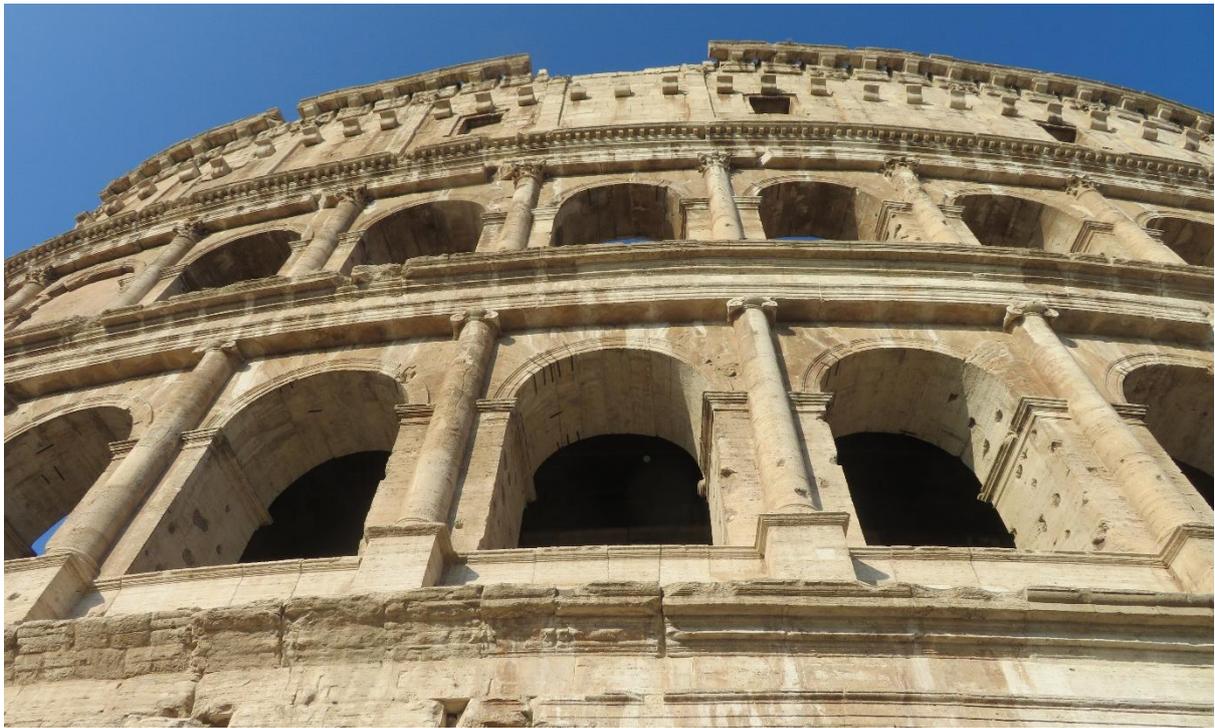


The highlights of the Vatican museum for me was the art on the ceiling that looks 3 dimensional, but is all flat. The amazing flooring features many intricate patterns. Photos were not allowed in the Sistine Chapel. The paintings by Michelangelo have been recently

cleaned and they are brighter than when I saw them in 1976.

Next morning we headed to the Colosseum - an impressive structure. But after walking around the Colosseum and the Forum for a couple of hours in heat over 30degrees we chose to return to the hotel for a quiet afternoon in the cool of our hotel.





From Rome we headed north stopping for a few hours in a lovely little town called Orvieto. It is built on the top of a hill



and has a huge church, considering the size of the town. It was a cute little town with more ceramics etc but it was also market day with a variety of different stalls including one that sold beans.



Next stop was our hotel for the next 2 nights which was a converted country villa with wonderful grounds. Next day we were off to Assisi, with all its religious connotations, hundreds of shops selling crosses, rosary beads and many other religious



knickknacks, but it is a really cute little town, again built on the top of a hill with great views.

Back at our converted villa we spent the afternoon swimming and reading by the pool. Lunch time the next day we were in Tuscany at another lovely place on top of a hill; San Gimignano. More ceramics, lots of handbags, the best gelati and spectacular views. Unfortunately it was a bit overcast, but hopefully you can get the idea.



Further north, yet another town on top of a hill with a city wall and great views, selling ceramics, leather and the best gelati. Then onto the seaside town of Viareggio where Graham and I took a bike ride along the wide esplanade with no cars and few other bikes. This was fortunate as our cycling skills were somewhat rusty, but we had fun and saw a bit of the area. What passes for a beach here is rocks or brown dirt sand and smelly seaweed.



Next morning was a boat trip to see the Cinque Terre – 5 villages nestled into small valleys at the coast. All very picturesque. We spent a bit of time at one of the villages, mostly enjoying a quiet sit

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in the shade while a few people tried to swim off the rocks or at a small stretch of rough sand that passes for a beach.



The train then took us back to our tour bus and we headed for Florence. On our first night in Florence we had dinner at a fancy roof top restaurant with great views.

Day one in Florence we saw the statue of David – the original in the museum and the copy outside. Also saw lots of other statues – most carved out of the local Carrara Marble. The churches here are all covered in marble.



Day 2 the first stop was the Uffizi gallery then the Galileo science museum. Florence also has hundreds of leather shops and gold markets. Many of the gold shops are on the famous covered bridge, the Ponte Vecchio.



The next morning we caught the fast train to Venice, where we arrived in torrential rain. A quick dash through the rain took us to our water taxi. We arrived slightly damp but in awe of our hotel which is right next to St Marks square in central Venice. The foyer of the hotel is pictured below. Juliet was missing from the balcony...

We dodged the rain for a visit to the Doges Palace and later St Marks Cathedral. By evening the rain had stopped and we had a lovely walk around the square where many shops were still open and 3 quintets were playing music to diners in different parts of the square. The next day the sun was shining and the square was packed with people.





On a visit to a Murano glass factory we saw some great creations by the glass masters. Then we set off to get lost in the alleys of Venice.

When we tired we got on a local water bus. We stayed on until the ticket time ran out, then we walked back to

the hotel acquiring a few more fridge magnets and earrings along the way. The place is FULL of tourists, there doesn't seem to be any industry in Venice except tourism. There were 5 huge cruise ships in port as well as the tourists filling hotels. Despite the crowd we enjoyed wandering around this unique city. A wonderful way to end our time in Italy.



We were disappointed to see so many cigarette butts and rubbish in many of the places we visited in Italy. We enjoyed the pasta, pizza and cheeses but found that after a while we were looking for a bit more variety in the food. The interesting thing is that food and wine in Italy varies between regions – Tuscany has different specialties from Umbria etc. Differences were a bit too subtle for us, but they are very important to the locals. All in all a wonderful, if somewhat exhausting trip.