



Florence Trip Notes – Go the Hikers! January 22 – February 1, 2015

This trip was conceived during a Colorado hiking extravaganza last March. Tom and I had been in Florence following the Cinque Terra hiking trip in October 2013; I'd missed too many of the museums and really wanted to return. (I'd had too few days in Florence in 2009 also.) Hiking leader Nola is an art student and we had traveled together earlier in the year so it seem logical to form an art museum trip to Florence. Kathy was with us on that Colorado trip and the logic continued that they would like to room together. Then we realized that my sister Beverly is also an art major and might like to go with us. It just kept growing. Hiking leader Steve (who is the significant other to Nola), asked "Is this a girl's only trip?" so there was born five participants and the logic to rent the lovely apartment that Tom had found for us the previous October.

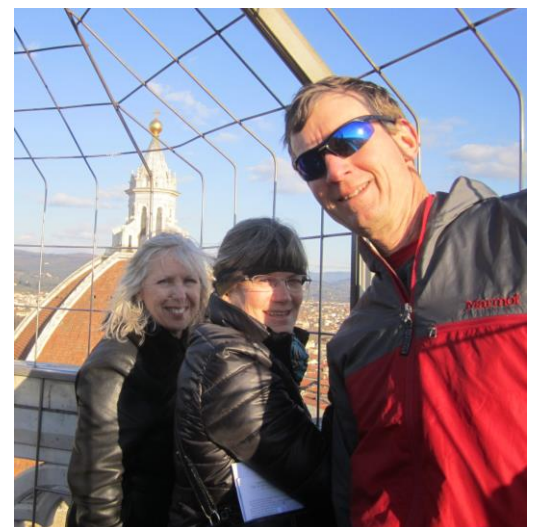
Highlights

- European Virgins are no more! Even better is that they got A+ for adaptation. Quickly Nola was guiding the rest of us.
- Nola saw the most; Beverly saw the most unique; Steve climbed the highest trails; Kathy ran in the coldest and caught the most cold.
- The food tour was full of new delights, new information, sights and tastes – not to mention the wines.
www.florencewinetasting.com/wine-and-food-tour-3.html
- Italian Opera that most of us were hesitant about and then stayed on until the end at midnight.
- The Duomo terraces, interior of the dome and climb(s).
http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florence_Cathedral#Interior
<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2014/02/il-duomo/design-video>
<http://schillerinstitute.org/educ/pedagogy/2013/vereycken-dome-1.html>



Quotes

- It's a bit like letting art unfold on a blank canvas. My life has taken some interesting twists and turns from saying "yes" to some unforeseen opportunities that the universe has presented and for that, I am very grateful! *Nola*
- You don't take a trip, a trip takes you. *Steinbeck*
- My favorite part of the trip was seeing "David" and the two paintings by Da Vinci. It was surreal to stand next to something actually created—just touched really—by persons of such talent and fame. Sort of a connection I was kind of surprised to feel (and it was a pretty strong



feeling, especially with David) and one I never expected to make. The sheer age of so much of what we saw struck me too, kind of like a sequoia tree. *Steve*



- I was mesmerized with this beautiful portrait in the Pitti Palace. *Beverly*
- The most memorable was not only the great food but the craftsmanship and detail work of those Renaissance artists -- Michelangelo with his sculpting of muscle detail and the mesmerizing art of Lippi and Botticelli, how they could blend the paints so smoothly and get the detail so precise. You just have to see it in person to "get it." I also enjoyed traveling with you and seeing how you function in a foreign country other than just on a hiking trip. Now I can really relate to what you are talking about, having experienced it myself. I also feel

confident I can find my way around still just using the skills I have every day like map reading, too. Of course, I will always have fond memories of the trip..! *Nola*

- Staying in the apartment rather than a hotel really offered an opportunity to experience Florence in a more personal way. It was so much more representative of the way Italians might approach their day to day lives. It also allowed us more time together as a group and served as a meeting place for conversations. Of course, there was a lot of ambiance and character built in to the accommodations! *Bev*
- The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page. *St. Augustine*
- Not all those who wander are lost - *J.R. Tolkien*

Pics and videos of Florence

A well done professional video that came with a tourist guide book I purchased. We'll see how often they allow us to view it. <http://www.archeo-guide.it/video/firenze.html#> Password - nd3845ys

Tom's Florence photo show from October 2013: <http://www.photoshow.com/watch/ez9qS4RT>
and Siena/Tuscany <http://www.photoshow.com/watch/ze9ip9yP>

Diana's photo show from February 2009: <http://www.photoshow.com/watch/sB6rH6MP>

Fortunately no one in our group bought a selfie stick. They were sold everywhere on the street. Sold to a bunch of twits hell-bent on getting zillions of selfies posted on Facebook? I read that they are being banned in NYC museums.

Chronological notes starting with the air trip

Everyone met up in Newark airport and almost everyone into the United lounge excepting Kathy's late plane only got her there just in time to board. I don't know that anyone was able to get more than a moment of sleep so arrival into Frankfurt for a plane change in the early morning meant a lot of zombies and even more so for our 2 PM arrival into Florence. I had arranged for a limo driver to get us to the apartment and I had also encouraged everyone to try to stay up and alive until early evening sleep.



The apartment

It is in the residential side of the river but an easy walk especially for a bunch of hikers. It has a pretty complete three bedroom, three bath, nice size full living room and very large kitchen. I'll let my past trip report (below) show how lovely it is and even more special and that it is in an old palace on a famous and convenient street surrounded by good restaurants, residents, craft and antique stores.

The first introduction to Florence

I'm not a true guide but I have had two different trips with very good tour guides, so to keep them awake I pushed them out into the cold windy city for a walk to the medieval center. We would cross the famous Ponte Vecchio Bridge going along the Arno River into the Uffizi courtyard. Then passed all the famous statuary including David and through the Plaza Signoria and onto the Plaza Republica where are on an earlier trip I watched a demonstration with the police threatening teargas. It is on this corner that Tom and I so enjoyed the people watching glorious Gilly restaurant and coffee shop and where Nola and I would return a couple evenings later. We walked onto the Duomo Plaza famous for their cathedral and the baptistery. The baptistery was covered up for cleaning because the pope is scheduled to visit Florence in November. Our walk went on through the edge of the fashion District and back over the bridge Santa Trinita which leads direct into our street called Maggio. We are in the district of the crafts people and the antique stores. Also where the residents go for the great number of old established restaurants.

Grocery shopping

A couple of us went on to do the grocery shopping after our walk but a couple had a great need to return to the apartment for an early nap. It is not that I didn't want to nap, it is that I have learned that one sleeps the best later if they can possibly avoid it. Besides, grocery shopping is a good mental exercise. It is also an exercise in meeting people for all the questions I find a need to ask. Yet I still usually get home with some oddities. We do hugely better in France having lived with the French language for five years. Spain and Italy are a challenge.



Dinner?

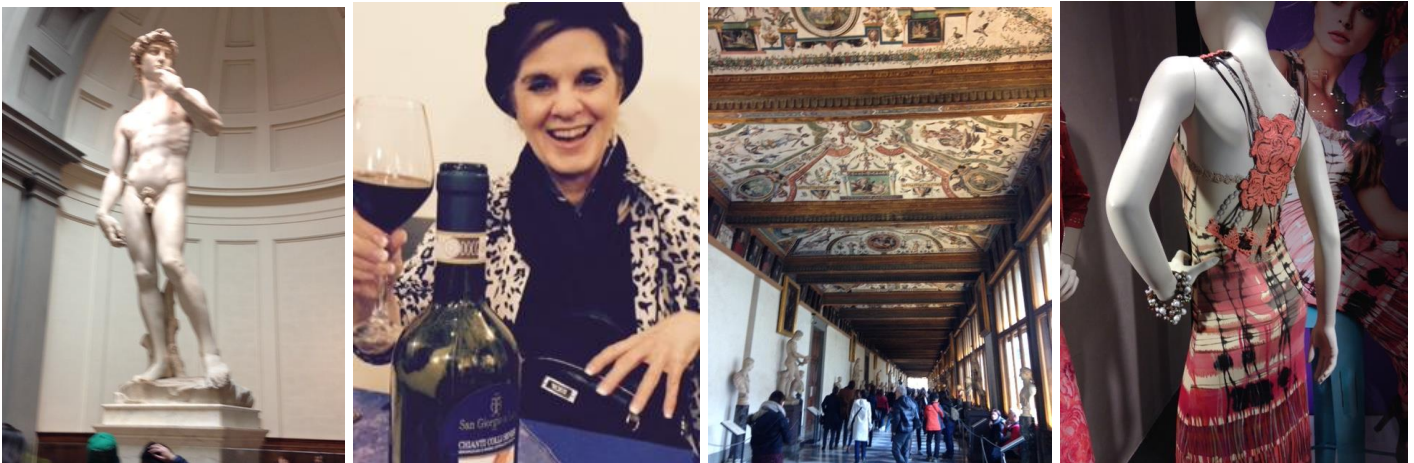
No one really had the desire to sit at a restaurant so a couple of us went back out and found a pizza shop and bought 12 pizza slices to bring home. Also some of the Florentine famous desserts. A couple of bottles of wine and an early to bed meant that we could start early the next day.

iPhone photos while my camera was getting found

TSA in Frankfurt had pulled my suitcase apart and I was half blaming them for the loss of my camera but by third day it was found in between some clothing. I'll add a few of those pictures, but before the 2009 and 2013 trip notes.



The first day from **Uffizi** looking at **Ponte Vecchio** and the wonderful sky, and then from the other side of the Arno River. Our guide took us into the **Duomo** for a look up to the famous Dome where we'd climb up a couple days later. Those figures are maybe 20' tall and people walking the two walkways are totally specs. We'd be there soon!



In the **Accademia**, David in full glory. What a bod. Then there's me after seeing David and doing what I do best. Finally – a tour inside the **Vasari Corridor**. Then that is NOT me, darn, but a model on the Fashion Road. Florence is second only to Milan for fashion and the streets are a delight with many of the shops being housed in old palaces. Beverly would partake of the Ferragamo museum.



Though I'd been before, I was taken again. In fact I believe we ALL were and Steve even made a second trip into the **Uffizi**. Here are a couple of the more famous art works and in particular the one popularly known as "**Venus on the Half Shell**". Like the Madonna in the Paris Louvre, one could hardly get near to it. With a good explanation by our guide, the art meant more to us. With my recent readings of Italian artists, especially Michelangelo, it was having more meaning for me.



One part of the **Vasari Corridor** is dedicated to self-portraits by the artists and some were amusingly creative. I suspect we'd have enjoyed more time there but a 4-hour tour was about the maximum of my attention span anyway. That's Nola and our guide after a few portrait examples.

Saturday – the first full day

On our last trip we met a lovely lady named Angelica who gave two days' worth of touring to Tom and me. She put us in touch with her business partner Elizabeth who showed up at our apartment at 10 AM for a four hour introduction to Florence. Elizabeth is an American who married a Florentine and has lived in the city about 20 years.

Big good news but at an odd time

Marie had called at 12:30 AM with the exciting news that she had been accepted for the Stanford summer premed internship. So I had a lot of trouble going back to sleep afterward as I too was very excited. I spent a few hours thinking how to arrange the trip to Stanford, how to pay for it, what we might do tourist wise, and what an exciting event this was for her. And for us.

Private Guide and the Accademia

The walking tour with Elizabeth also took us to many of the same places as my intro tour but with a much better introduction and eventually into the **Duomo** and into the crypt and grave of **Bruneschelli**. We would come back another day also. We went past the residence of the **Medicis** and the **San Lorenzo** marketplace and eventually onto the famous **Accademia** where the original **Statue of David** exists. Everyone was very taken with this famous statue by Michelangelo and I am especially fond of his marbles referred to as the **Prisoners**. We would remain in this museum for some time after Elizabeth left us.

We walked ourselves on around **San Lorenzo** and through the **Santa Maria Novella** area and the **Hotel Baglioni** where I stayed in 2009. We would return to the rooftop for the overall view of the city. We had to search for a while but we eventually came upon the **ancient pharmacy** which is the oldest known pharmacy in the world having been started by the nuns. It was my third time here and I was bent on purchasing something finally no matter the price. A special moisturizing soap at €22.5 was my take home. I returned a few days later for small gifts for the girls so that I would be sure they had a memento of their Florence trip.

Dinner

We tried a few places to include one that I had enjoyed previously called the **White Boar** but places were sold out or not open yet. We ended up a few doors down at a little cafe - pizza place where we all loved our dinner and especially great grandma's meatballs. I suspect that we were hungry enough that anything would have been good but my memory suggested this place is worthy of returning. In fact we did return, and some of us as many as three times. The granddaughter who was our server enjoyed that we came back for grandma's meatballs so who did she bring out for picture taking but grandma. This is what travel memories are made of – that's grandma and granddaughter.



Sunday

Darn but another early up. We just get to feeling like we are sleeping well when the alarm clock goes off. But we had signed up for a special **Uffizi and Vasari Corridor** tour. If you are an art major you know about this famous collection. Or if you read Dan Brown's book called **Inferno** you know about it. I had always wanted to take this tour but was too cheap to do so and or it was sold out. Apparently the tour guides have to pay €400 each time in order to have the right to take a group inside. Then when you do get inside you have two tour guides to watch you very carefully. (Thus it's pricing is outrageous.) I signed up way ahead of time and then art student Nola thought she couldn't miss it either, then Steve thought well he would just go along too, and then Beverly the art major signed up also. I think it was at the last minute the Kathy decided to go to and there fortunately was an open spot that morning.

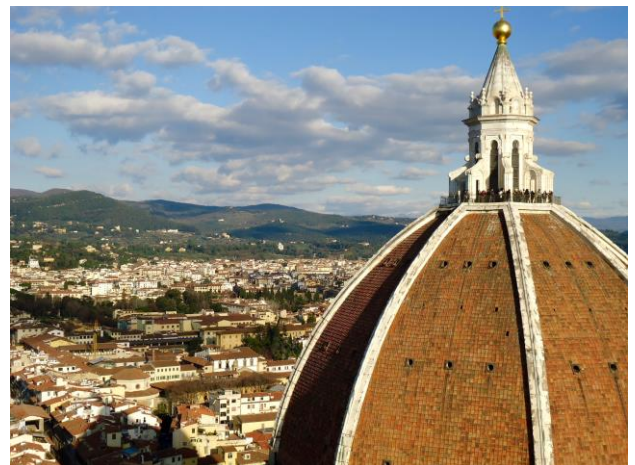
I don't know why it is we have trouble hunting restaurants but that's what we did. I guess many of them were full because Europeans eat out on Sunday. We ended up very near to our apartment at a place that is in some tour books and had been recommended by/ other tour leaders. Called the **Four Leone's trattoria** on the Saint Spirito Square where they had practically a full house of what seemed to be all locals. We ate a selection of pastas and some had huge salads and everyone was over the moon pleased with their food. And the ok price. It reminded me of going trick-or-treating on Halloween because we just had to guess at what we wanted to eat. The waitress was very kind in her effort to translate but I couldn't understand her English translation.

A hike

It was near to 3:30 and we dropped back by the apartment where Kathy succumbed to a nap and the rest of us went hiking up to the **Michelangelo Overlook** and then on up to **San Minto Church** higher on the hill. Then it was another drop by the apartment where Bev and Steve probably succumbed to a nap too and Nola and I continued on to Republica plaza for a bit of a treat at the famous **Café Gilly**. I can imagine that Tom was proud of us for such indulgence. It was an early to bed evening again as much because we needed another early rise.

Monday

Again, I had booked way ahead of time a tour in through the **Duomo** and up into the terraces with a skip the line



ticket to climb the 450 steps to the top of the **Duomo Dome**. If this sounds crazy to you, it did to everyone else too, but the more they thought about it, they all signed up to. Excepting Beverly who wisely avoided the stairs. I mean, after all, she was just selling a house much because it had stairs, to buy a house all on one level. There was a movie and then a guided tour and then the steps. And as crazy as it sounds when we were done with those steps and were thrilled with them, we moved over to the **Gotti Bell Tower** and did those steps too which were almost the same number. Our guided tour gave us a ticket to get us into other museums including the **Crypt** and the much older church of Roman times church ruins which were found and excavated underneath the cathedral. We did it all but not until we had indulged in a three course meal that included bottled water and wine. It was an add-on to the tour. It also included a cheese and wine tasting that we just couldn't handle any more food. Kathy would return at a later time to indulge and buy some wine too. I bought table wine. She bought good stuff.

I had made reservations at the **White Boar** restaurant that I had been enthralled with but everyone felt too full from their earlier meal so I walked over and canceled it. As I recall everyone just snacked, Steve ate the leftover pasta dish that he had cooked a couple nights before, and I cooked an egg, ham and toast for a **Croute Monsieur** with cheese over the top. We had a big selection of booze from my second grocery trip. It included at least three bottles of wine from me and one from Kathy plus some Cava champagne and Aperol plus a large orange for the famous Italian drink called an **Aperol Spritz**. I'd tried to come up with famous Florentine or Italian foods, snacks and drinks. No one ever got into the Grappa. I should have gotten some Limoncello but we just had too much booze to finish.

Tuesday

Ye gads but it was another early morning up and in fact even earlier. We had scouted out the location of our **food tour** the evening before but darned if coming in from the opposite direction didn't throw both Nola and me. We got there a little late and grateful to see that the tour guide was still there. But no wonder she was still there since we three were the only ones to take the tour. Steve and Kathy had felt the need to go exercise. Darned if I can figure out why you need to come to Italy to exercise (smile) but that was their choice and despite it being 28° in the morning. I am sorry to say that Kathy probably paid the price for that the next day. She was down for the count 2 to 3 days with a very bad cold.

Food tour

The food tour was one of the most delightful an interesting experiences I can recall. We learned about the location, the culture, the food, and the reasons. Our first stop was a famous coffee shop where a whole bunch of hikers meet before going out. It was noisy. If I had a whole month here I might ask if I could hike with them. But I only had 10 days. We learned about different coffee beans and why those in Italy are more important. We learned about the civet cat that consumes coffee beans which are then collected from their poop and are very expensive and they are available local in the shop where we



visited. We had two different types of espresso coffee so we got warmed up and wired up quite quickly.

We went through town and learned some even new things at the **Plaza Republica**. One stop was the **oldest truffles shop** in the Tuscany area where we were able to see the white and the black truffles and consume a small sandwich of a truffle pate. I had been anxious to return to the **White Boar** restaurant for white truffles so this was good timing. We went to one of the **oldest pastry shops** in Florence and had two samples of both a cannoli and another unique pastry. We purchased still a third one which was a mil Fois stuffed with custard. Another stop was the big covered **Market of San Lorenzo**. We had a series of olive oil tastings, balsamic vinegar tastings to include some very old ones, and some wines to go along with each of the tastings. We had a special ham like Parma but from the local region. Then when I thought I was all done along came the dessert wine with the biscotti for the Florence type of dipping. We were not done in the market and we headed over to experience their Florentine dish called Pomodoro. Yes, we should have been done but then we went for the final drop off of an **ancient old and luxurious gelato store** where we had our choice of two flavors and learned more about gelato.

I have always been mystified why Italian gelato taste better in Italy and despite my questioning I never did find any reason except that we enjoy eating gelato in Italy. It is not like there is some secret recipe that can't be brought to America.

If you think these were just samples - you are wrong. If you think they are pretty full size dishes and we couldn't hold it all you would be mostly correct but we did our very best. It took until late evening before anyone wanted to eat again. (Except me, in that I eat about every two hours.)

All along we are learning about the history of Florence and seeing some news sites, and some that we needed a brief introduction to. The market gave us three or four stops which was enough for me to be very cold because darned if it wasn't colder inside than outside. Outside had started at 28°. Quite unusual for Florence.

If we thought Florence was cold

Yet at home in New Jersey they were said to be experiencing a historically significant storm. I knew not to worry because Tom was well set up with a generator, and milk, and scotch, and toilet paper. So how could he be in any trouble? Yet I was concerned and was glad to hear from home and find that the storm had moved northerly. Though a second storm moved through the area it was fortunately the day after we returned home.

Dinner

I needed to satiate my desire for the white truffle dish at the White Boar. The discussions at the kitchen table of what they did or didn't want to do was frustrating me so I just announced that I was on my way to the restaurant. Steve quickly made the decision that he would go along and eventually the girls decided to go to the local pizza place where we had the wonderful meatballs made by grandma the couple nights before. Three of us would go there again but for lunch and when I asked the sweet little waitress for grandma's meatballs she went and got grandma and I took a picture.

No longer European Virgins

They found the grocery store and filled the refrigerator up. I'm so proud of all of them for going off on their own and especially Nola who had been hesitant about Europe to go out on her own and find the

opera location for us. I knew that if she could negotiate the National Parks, she could be comfortable in Florence. Kathy adventured off to Fiesole on her own in the morning as had Steve. All are now no longer European virgins. Smile.

Wednesday

Time flies. I was concerned that no one would go to **Siena** and Chianti countryside tour I suggested but off they went. They are all full of surprises. It sounds like they still like me....

I hurried off to the **Medici Chapel** which is only open in the mornings. It is an extravagant building with many of Michelangelo's best. It also had some major damage with falling marble in 1999 which had the side benefit of showing how the marble had been held up in the domes in the first place. Metal brackets had deteriorated enough to cause the marbled to slip off. It is also very over-the-top with huge walls full of brilliant marquetry made from precious jewels and marbles. It is however from a tourist standpoint pretty eclectic and messy in that different side rooms hold the treasures. Nothing seems to be very well preserved. This reminds me that I read in New York Times that Italy was looking for an overall museum curator to bring their museums up to snuff and protect their treasures. It is such a challenging job and requires such a specialist they have even noted their willingness to take someone without the Italian language. Can you imagine the French doing such a thing?

This chapel is somewhat attached to one of their oldest churches called **San Lorenzo**. I had been in during other visits but never for an extended period of time so this time I rented the audiovisual iPad and felt like I got a good tour. Only when one really delves into the particulars do you get a full impact. I saw the grave of **Donatello** and a lot of famous painters as well as many noted sculptures. The main church is really quite dramatic despite its simplistic outside. When we later visited the home of Michelangelo we saw his plan for the outside of San Lorenzo. There is talk of trying to resurrect those plans and build the facade.

I went then to the **Medici Museum** and Palace but after a bit of a look through I gave it up. I saw the alleged courtyard where Michelangelo had recovered the big marble slab for making the David statue. After spending a bit of time in a specialty food market with delicatessen and restaurant which reminded me of an upscale Whole Foods Market, I decided to return to the small restaurant where we lunched after our Duomo tour. I got filled with some wine and sparkling water and a first course of risotto with artichoke and sausage, then a second course of cuttlefish (which is squid) and spinach. It was not as good the second time. Isn't that the typical story of life?

Maybe it was a mistake time-wise, but I couldn't resist the home and museum of **Dante**. It was not what I expected but it did have a couple of displays that were unique that I will probably remember. Such as how the old jewelry items were made. With demonstrations in 12 different settings it was clear how difficult it was to make jewelry in the time of Dante. I had more of an appreciation for the old pieces on display. Two large books of **illuminated manuscripts** might have made the trip worth it.

My heart had been set on returning to the **Pitti Palace** and the **Boboli Gardens** but I got waylaid at the **Palace Vecchio**. It is where the Vasari Corridor begins and then ends at the Pitti Palace. I saw the door entry but that was nothing as compared to the way-over-the-top huge rooms and suites from the Medici family times. My entry ticket included the **archaeological ruins** recently found underneath and on the extreme it included the 250 steps up to the **tower outlook**. You will not be surprised to know that I did both. My third tower. Why? I guess because it was there, but the view was also spectacular and somewhat different as it was over the river.

I returned to the apartment within moments of when the group returned from their Siena tour. Everyone had a good day and if you are wondering why I didn't go, remember that I have been to Siena twice before. Plus I'd had reservations for a trip to Lucca for that day which subsequently that fell through. Our group came in with groceries and sufficient for whoever needed dinner. That is an advantage of having an apartment in that you have a kitchen plus a group meeting location.

Thursday

Time is going too fast.

Bargello – home of statuary

Three of us went off to the famous **Bargello museum** which holds most of the special and original statues. Along the lines of Italy needing some museum help, it is only open some mornings. I have been there but it holds so many specials that it was nice to go again and you always see things a bit more and better if you are with an art student and that is Nola. Steve surprised me with his fine appreciation of the statuary too. <http://www.visitflorence.com/florence-museums/bargello.html>

Galileo – home of Florentine scientific discoveries

We didn't hurry but from there we went off to the **Galileo Science Museum** next door to the Uffizi and spent a very long time there. We were not surprised to learn that they were far ahead of their time scientifically back in the 1400s and 1500s. See

http://www.museumsinflorence.com/musei/History_of_Science_museum.html#

We had only meant to have a bite standing up but our tootsies were hurting so we chose the same **pizza café** so that I could indulge in grandma's meatballs again. Again the **Pitti Palace** was put on hold for the following day and some went off to the famous church called **Santa Croce** which is like a famous cemetery with remains of Michelangelo, Machiavelli, and numerous famous folks. All men!

Beverly wisely spent the day at the **Pitti Palace**. Rick Steves claims it would be a Pitti to miss the Pitti Palace. I am not clear if she went first to the Ferragamo shoes museum but at some point she did and loved it. I looked at her pictures and went to the lobby and windows of it but not inside. The Ferragamo family is important to Florence and their store and museum are in their old palace.

San Spirito then Brancacci Chapel

After lunch which included a 1/4 carafe of wine I went off in the pouring rain heading to **San Spirito** but ended up at a lingerie shop purchasing leggings and a top instead. Just for fun and like joining Weight Watchers, it will put more into perspective the need to get rid of those extra five pounds.

I did finally make it to San Spirito after visiting in the **Chapel of Brancacci** and both were major surprises. Both were churches with very simple nothing outsides, and both contain very famous paintings and sculpture. **Michelangelo** had been surreptitiously allowed into San Spirito to autopsy and study anatomy of the dead and thus he had later donated one of his early sculptures which was a **Wooden Christ**. He has additional sculptures in this surprising and stunningly austere church. It is very close to our apartment which was a good thing because there was a lot of rain and I was pretty soaked. When I returned to the apartment everyone was there. To include poor Kathy who had spent the day in the apartment with a bad cold and hacking cough. We insisted she consume Brandy before she went to bed with the hope that not only she but everyone else could sleep too.

Pocket coffee

After many different countries in many different shopping trips in many different hunting, I finally have been able to resupply myself with the Ferraro pocket coffee. It was up high in the Cinque Terra mountainous hiking trip where we had been hiking for a couple of hours and our guide named Angelica asked us "How would you like Italian espresso?" It seems a rather cruel thing to ask in such an outback situation but out she popped from her backpack a small case lot of these little tiny pocket coffees. We were all very taken by this intense flavor of liquid espresso inside a chocolate. Just one bite, just one burst of espresso flavor, just a bit of ambrosia.

I took a supply home at the time but then was continually thwarted in my efforts to acquire more. It is not made nor supplied during the summer months because it melts and drips. Even in September in the Italian Dolomites it was too early to acquire it. I ordered it through the mail, other friends who had samples from me ordered it, and we didn't even mind the \$.85 per bite charge which included customs and shipping from Italy. Only during the cold season is it available. I knew it was hugely cheaper in Italy but I didn't realize how much more. But I found a big supply this evening. Eat your heart out friends. But I will try to bring home enough to share. And share I will have to because we learned that it doesn't last very long either in that it just dries out. If it hadn't already melted out.



Dinner

We had made an effort to go to the **White Boar** restaurant but only Steve and I went and that was still another night. I had made reservations for Thursday night still again. When at the last minute I declared that I had "been there - done that" and they should go on, some looked like I had said the restaurant was closed and there was no other restaurant in the city. But eventually they went on and I think they enjoyed it. I happily had my second or third time of cooking eggs and cheese sandwich. I rarely like the restaurant scene and maybe it's because I am fed so well at home.

Friday

Is this really our next to last day? But I have so much left to do; I need the **Pitti Palace**, the **hop on and hop off bus**, **Michelangelo's home**, **Santa Novella Church**, and 5 pounds less so I can fit into my new clothes.

Pitti Palace and Boboli Gardens

I had put off the visit of the Pitti Palace for too long and I was hell-bent on seeing the Boboli Gardens despite the rain. You will realize how stubborn I was about that when I tell you that I even experienced hail as well as practically the monsoons as I walked the gardens and climbed the hills. It was supposed to be dry until about 3 PM but instead it became dry about 3 PM so I went back into the gardens. The fountains didn't need to be running.



The others had gone to the **Royal Apartments** and the famous **hallway of portraits**. I would have if I had another day but I had been there in 2009. So I chose to go to the portion of the Pitti Palace that I hadn't seen: a **Costume Museum** and the **Silver Museum**. Both were absolutely excellent and I would highly recommend them as an add-on to the royal apartments. The apartments and hallway are the priority.

So I did all those open tourist things except in saving the bus and Michelangelo's home for Saturday. I also went shopping again at the **ancient pharmacy**.

Mini accident

I had put on a lot of miles so my feet and legs were maybe tired. I had gone by the grocery store for another selection of soup hoping that would help Kathy's cold and somehow I managed to trip on the cobblestones on the way home. I went flying and fell on the soup and was totally covered up with soup and rain and dirt. The young runner who stopped to help me up (once I was willing to try to get up) was very concerned and pulled out his kerchief to help clean me off. I limped home both embarrassed and a little shaken and knew to soak affected body parts in ice despite how cold they had been anyway. I had blown out the knee of my favorite pair of pants. It wasn't until I was home on Monday that I found both knees, one hand palm and up onto the wrist, plus down the side of one leg all very colorful in black, blues and greens. How I hit so many places is a mystery as is how odd how the body feels awful and then by the time there is some color you feel pretty okay.

Opera Il Puritani

This was the evening for the opera that Beverly had scouted out for us and purchased tickets. Everyone was committed but Kathy was too ill and thus unable to go. Fortunately Beverly had sent us a two page summary of Il Puritani and also a 56 page translation. Both of which I consumed. Amusingly, when we got there we were offered a lecture about the opera so we hurried off to hear it. Aren't we typical Americans to be surprised that it was only in Italian! We were pleasantly surprised though to find the translation in both Italian and English up above the stage. But the most amusing thing was Beverly of all people wanting to leave during intermission and Steve and Nola who we thought would only stay through intermission insisting on staying on. We all stayed on and enjoyed the cold yet invigorating walk of 45 minutes each way. Thank you to Nola for having scouted out our walk. Thank you Beverly for convincing us to even try the Opera.

We would only get home by about 1 o'clock so then after laundry and hair wash and telephone conversation with Tom I got to bed around 2:30am. No one was in any hurry to leave the next morning.

Saturday

I had meant to sleep in longer but after all you are only in Florence once and you can sleep when you're dead so I suppose that I was out by around 10. Nola chose to go to the **Michelangelo** home as well as the **hop on bus tour** too. I believe Beverly and Kathy went shopping while Steve perused the **Uffizi Gallery** again.

We were all in fairly early and for a "clean out the refrigerator" evening knowing that we needed to clean up and pack up and get up at 4 AM for our 5:30 limo service to the airport.

I was home to NJ by 4pm and the latest home was probably Beverly at 11pm since her Washington DC connection was delayed. Or maybe one could say Steve and Nola were the latest home as they stayed overnight in Denver with friends before traveling home Sunday afternoon.

4 o'clock syndrome

I'm sure of it: 4am we wake up. 4pm we are dead tired and want a nap. So I made myself stay up Saturday night until I'd been home and up for over 24 hours hoping that would help. But still I woke at 4am and got up shortly thereafter and made it to weight training session too. My next trip is to South America with only 1-2 hour time difference. The nice thing about this syndrome is that when you do get to bed, its deliciously fast asleep as soon as your head touches the pillow.

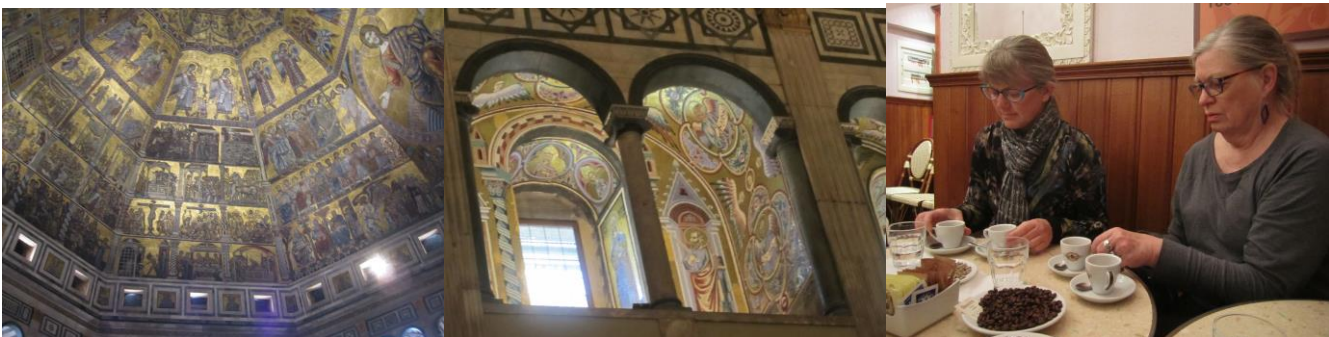
Miscellaneous photos



We were UP there! In the **Dome!** While we were up there and just before going out onto the Terraces we went through the art restorer's studios. We were all dumbfounded to see graffiti on the statuary.



We had the good fortune to have a **parade** come by as we were standing on the **Terraces**. The views were amazing and here is one across the Arno River to the **Pitti Palace**, just a block from our apartment, and then another view towards the **Synagogue**. Note the narrow dark stairways that we negotiated. They were in between the two dome shells.



In the **Baptistery** was all this gold in the dome. It was the famous doors nicknamed **The Doors to Paradise** by Michelangelo that takes most folks there. They are featured on Tom's photo show. We

saw the only other official copies at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco before the mold was destroyed.



The famous white truffles that have such a short season and which we were able to taste and which I'd experienced years ago outside of Venice, then at the White Boar in 2009 and again on this trip. Our guide just kept bringing out the food and experiences. We would end at a lovely gelato store.



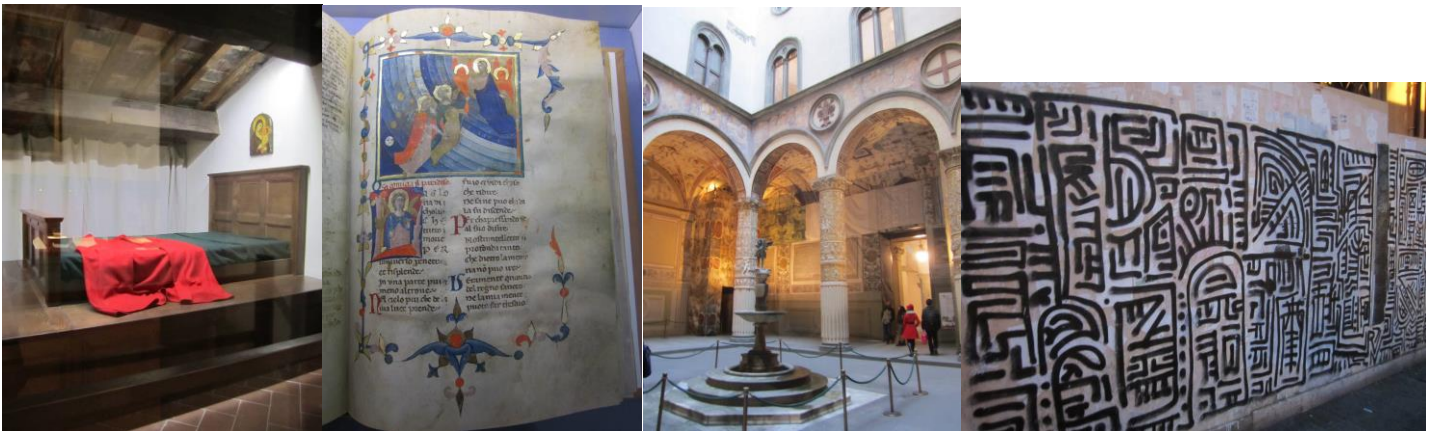
Meanwhile, Beverly was enjoying the **Ferragamo Shoe Museum** where I only went to the lobby and windows. I'd been hell-bent on getting into the **Medici Chapel** to see the **Michelangelo sculptures**; it was only open some mornings. It was far over the top with huge dome, tombs covered with these jeweled marquetry and then off in a smaller plain-Jane chapel were the famous Dawn and Dusk, etc. sculptures made by Michelangelo.



The **Medici Chapel** was off to the backside of **San Lorenzo**, one of the older churches of Florence. So I spent more time in San Lorenzo thereafter with the lovely courtyard and multiple museums to include crypts. Many of the museums offer iPad type tour guides which I always take. Michelangelo had designed a front façade for San Lorenzo which Florence is considering fulfilling.



Wonder what the gold ducat looked like?



Dante's home and museum was worth the visit but not a highlight. I learned about old jewelry making and saw some amazing illuminated manuscripts. The last picture is a little street **graffiti** on our side of the river – a full wall!



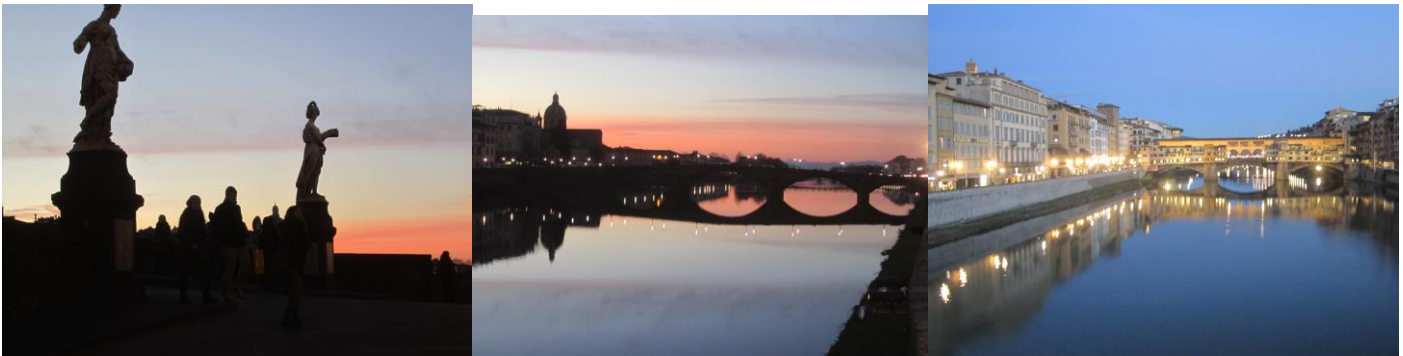
Palazzo Vecchio could have taken a full day but I hurried through in about half a day. It was absolutely over the top and fortunately had an iPad type tour guide too. I took the 'whole' tour to include the 250 or so steps up the **tower** which gave me an all different view – towards the synagogue, over the river, to Santa Croce, and a good view of the Pitti Palace where I should have been instead of waiting a day when the rains (and hail) came.



The archeological museum underground was an added plus.



Where there had been bicycle sculptures in October there were full size human/animal sculptures climbing up the wall. This just before my sunset to one side and then the opposite side to the Vecchio Bridge.





The **Bargello Museum** in an old palace is one of the most important museums in the city and it mostly contains statuary by the big names. I have trouble not giving you more samples but I'm running out of room.



We could have spent a full day in the **Galileo Museum** next door to the Uffizi. The inner workings of inventions were featured and explanations of how and why developments. See this cute settee? It weights you! A large display of clocks surprised me to find one from Japan that was in the form of an inroe that the samurai of the Edo period would attach to their belts.



Off to **San Spirito** where Michelangelo was allowed to autopsy bodies in his studies and his early wooden Christ hangs (no pictures allowed) and then to the **Brancacci Chapel** for early works of Masaccio and where perspective was first shown.



San Spirito was very close to our apartment. Austere outside, dramatic inside. Full of enough history to give goose bumps. Onto **Pitti Palace** and **Boboli Gardens**:



Of course I tried to see it all, rain or not. I climbed every hill I found and here is the look down at the backside of the palace. Get a load of those shoes: they are from the **Costume Museum** but look like today's fashion. Fortunately I had on good walking shoes that were rain resistant.



The **portrait gallery and state apartments** are the more important part of the **Pitti Palace** but I hadn't seen the **Boboli Gardens** very well, nor any of the **Costume Museum** or the **Silver Museum**. Unfortunately it was my last day and the weather hadn't cooperated and I was insistent so despite pouring rain and even hail, I traipsed the gardens. I dried off in the museums. The Costume Museum was in amazing rooms and full of history of amazing women.



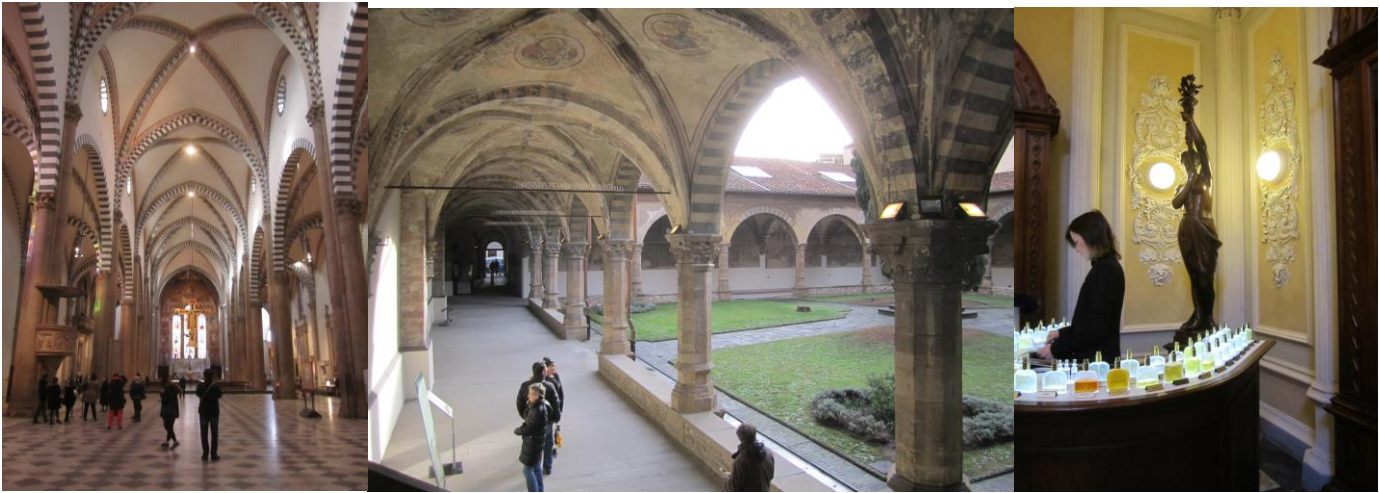
These rooms of the Silver Museum were many and all full of trompe l'oeuil – fool the eye. Those arches are only paint. Those balconies are only paint. The little pile of sculptured cherubs were table size and a delight.



Looking up in one of the many rooms – again, this is totally flat but with the look of beams. One room had silvers of course, another was cameos, and one was all little portraits. The weather was not to have cleared but it did so I went back out, up another hill or two, and this is probably the tea or coffee house.



Santa Maria Novella was just out the backyard of my first accommodations in 2009 but I'd only accomplished a brief tour. There is a huge new courtyard in the front, then they've maintained the many courtyards and cloisters inside. It is momentous. It has a unique perspective in the building in that it gives the allusion of being longer inside due to the narrowing of the arches.



The nuns of Santa Maria Novella created a pharmacy so long ago that this **ancient pharmacy** is thought to be the oldest in the world. If I had a ton of money, I'd stock up there.

Other things to buy:

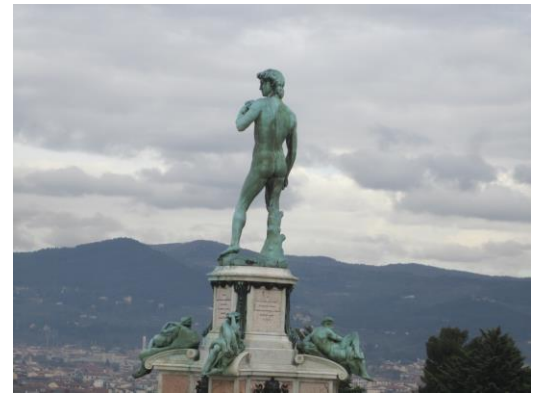


Florence is known for the art work of marquetry. These two paintings are made up of a zillion little pieces of stones. Or if you want your own museum pieces (replica) there is a shop filled with replicas of any and everything. Take home your own David!

End

And on that note and with this picture of David high up on the Michelangelo Overlook, I'll end.

Portions of past Florence trip notes follow, then our itinerary below that with descriptions of our paid tours.



PS – from a lovely card showing Old Florence which is mostly still intact:



And then there was Florence 2013 and vicinity

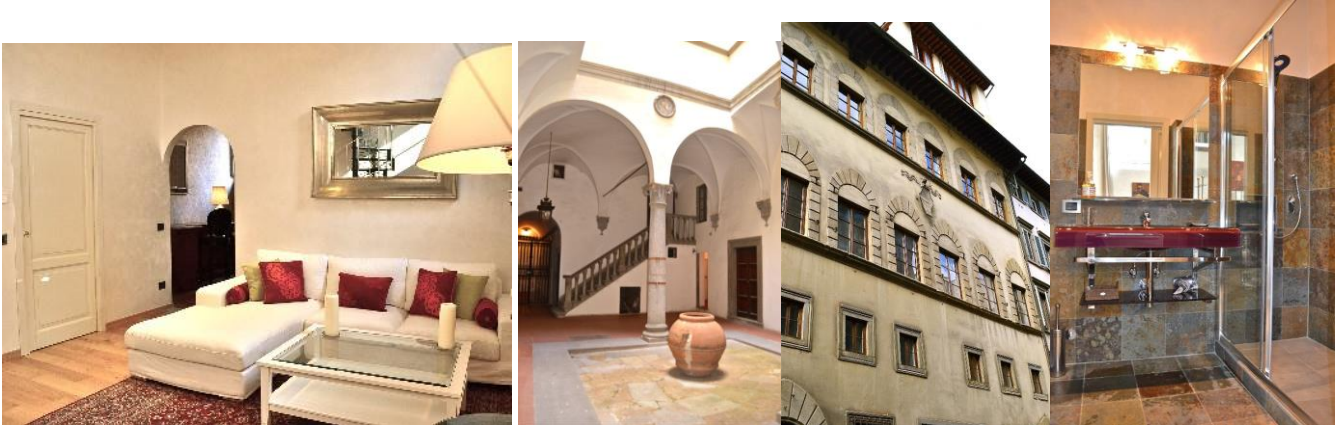
We so enjoyed our tour guide Angelica that we hired her for two days in and outside of Florence. The rental car and the drivers were a challenge but Angelica saved the day and offered to drive. She also had not driven a hybrid and this Citroen DS was tough for her and Tom both.

Apartments are important to us – why live less than at home?

From www.vrbo.com: The apartment is located in one of the historical sites of Florence: via Maggio, next to the Pitti Palace and the famous Boboli Garden and it's just a few minute walk from Ponte Vecchio. The street itself has always been the street of the antique shops in Florence, however, since it's only a short walk from the historical square of Santo Spirito, the area is surrounded by typical local restaurants and by many other shops for each type of need.

The Palace, though very old, in fact it belonged to the Corsini family until the XIXth century and then to the Rosselli del Turco family it is still under the protection of the Fine Arts, but has a modern elevator and the apartment maintains the beauty of a conservative restoration and provides all the amenities and comforts. In the apartment there is a spacious living room of 40sqm, a separate dining room with a dining table for 6 persons and a fully equipped kitchen.

The master bedroom has a king size bed and it is vary spacious and comfortable. The second bedroom has a baldachin king size bed and both the bedrooms has original drawings on the walls. In the loft there is a double bed and an en suite bathroom. Both the bathrooms have closed showers and they are fully equipped. In the apartment there is AC in all the rooms, WIFI internet access and it is 1292 square feet. The renovation has been completed in October 2012 so the apartment is brand new and accurate in every detail.





With picture of apartment and the spiral staircase came this worried reminder from a friend with a good sense of humor:

“BUY IT BUY IT BUY IT BUY IT!!!!!!”
Hope there's a bathroom on first floor, so that you don't tuck your cell phone into your underwear when you climb the spiral stairs, as my friend did, in her daughter's NYC place, and then forgot about her cell in her underwear by the time she climbed to the top of the spiral stairs to go to bathroom, AND THEN HER CELL FELL INTO THE TOILET WHEN SHE SAT DOWN!”

Fortunately we have a bathroom downstairs along with two bedrooms and then another bathroom upstairs with the third toilet.

From another friend and we couldn't have said it better:

Florence is the birthplace of the Renaissance and it's fabulous. I'd like to spend a summer in Florence. I was there in 1978 on an once-over tour of Europe in 15 days. (London, Paris, Lucerne Switz, by train to Italy and Lake Como, Assisi, Florence and Rome). I found myself with a free afternoon in Florence. I had not done any reading before the trip. The afternoon brought Churches and the Vecchio Palace and a half-hour interchange with a wine accouterment shop keeper (He didn't speak English and I don't speak Italian) He invited me in, gave me a tour of his shop, demonstrating what some of the esoteric items were for, It was a lovely and very informative half hour after which we shook hands, did a bit of bowing as thanks, and I went on my way. About 4:00pm, walking down an arcade to the left of the Vecchio Palace, I saw a small sign that said Gallery, and the entrance price was 35 cents American. Hmm. The price was right so I went in and up the stairs into one of the most celebrated museums in the world - the Uffizi Gallery. Now, I arrived there, fresh from a marriage to an artist and teacher who believed and taught that there was no art before impressionism. (Anything before that was just copying from nature. Anything after that was creating). Well, this Gallery stayed open till 8:00 PM. When I came stumbling out of there at 8:00; I really was in shock. I had seen some of the most glorious and celebrated art on the planet and I KNEW there was art before impressionism!! Florence is a magnificent treasure trove.



Siena on our day trip with Angelica



Tuscan countryside and Tuscan cheeses

Monteriggioni

For more info: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monteriggioni> - The town is architecturally and culturally significant; it hosts several piazzas, and is referenced in Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy. He was a Tuscan poet and he used the turrets of Monteriggioni to evoke the sight of the ring of giants encircling the Infernal abyss.

“ però che, come su la cerchia tonda
Montereggion di torri si corona,
così la proda che 'l pozzo circonda
torreggiavan di mezza la persona
li orribili giganti, cui minaccia
Giove del cielo ancora quando tuona. ”
—Dante Alighieri, Inferno canto XXXI, lines 40-45

“ As with circling round
Of turrets, Monteriggioni crowns his walls;
E'en thus the shore, encompassing the abyss,
Was turreted with giants, half their length
Uprearing, horrible, whom Jove from heaven
Yet threatens, when his muttering thunder rolls. ”



We listened to the reading of Dante and it was inspiring. Darned if I can find the picture of the costumed performer.



Italy's original Wall Street with twin towers then back to Florence after a very long, educable and enjoyable day.

The land of art and history from 2009 trip

Friend Dana had been surprised that I'd not visited Florence and I had to confess that I knew I should but that the Italians were not my favorites. From living in the south of France and crossing the border into Italy, it always struck me that a black curtain had been drawn on Italy, complete with ancient dirt and a lackadaisical manner. From this trip I've decided that the dirt is primarily the holding onto old and historical buildings and I should be glad and that their lackadaisical manner is easiness and a love of life that I should learn to appreciate. Having confessed my finally excusing the Italians, I still admit that after a couple days in Florence I was anxious to get out, at least to the edge of town where there's some greenery and less pollution.

Florence has nary a tree in city center and it takes quite a walk to get out to the tiniest of a park, or up to the hilltop overlooking Florence. I did both and felt that I'd exceeded a marathon to do so but grateful to not have filth wash off me at the end of the day. By the fourth day I broke my usual rule (if you go to Florence, you see Florence) and traveled to Siena and San Gimignano both of which I felt less guilt about visiting when I realized they either have major importance and/or a UNESCO site and both within an hour of Florence and through the Chianti wine region and their famous wine route.

Florence is 'blessed' with 2 million visitors a year and that's in a tiny city of about 300,000. Tourism is their main industry with other sources of income paling in comparison. The crowds and the lines even in the winter are staggering. The lack of local feel to the town is mindboggling as everywhere it's clear that tourism rules. Yet it's equally clear that the tourists come for a reason and the famous trove of art work, ancient palaces, and rich expenditure from as early as 1100s remain and are impressive. Now that I've seen how the Medici family and others spent money I have less worry about our \$8,000 umbrella stands and million dollar bonuses. Imagine having a corridor built from one palace to the other for a length of over 1 kilometer, built on top of buildings, columns of walkways, over bridge vendors and through archways, simply so they don't have to mingle with the commoners? Imagine a home that's multi blocks long built so as to up another family? Sound like today?

Those aren't homeless, they're Gypsies

I asked about all the homeless and found that they simply can't deal with them because they are Gypsies who come and go. Some are colorful, most are sad, and there's far too many of them. Here's a picture of one of them – you could caption it —Diana and her traveling friends - as maybe this isn't a Gypsy but a poor American suffering the Euro conversion rate.



An updated monastery

I'd heard from friends that Club ABC gives bargains and I used them for the Prague and Budapest trip in 2007. I still had a discount coupon from that trip and this being off-season it was quite a bargain.

I'd checked air fares and for the same price I could have included all hotel and transport for this 6 day trip. But still, I didn't expect much by way of a hotel. Yet the Hotel Baglioni was a pleasant surprise in that it was centrally located and within a few minute walk from most sights, the view from their windows was either the Duomo or one of two major churches, and they had modernized. Inside it was something akin to a monastery with narrow halls and wooded arches as well as high beamed ceilings but with a sense of luxury so long as one remembered they were in a European city center. I think it was an 18th century Renaissance palace. Heated towel racks, bidet, huge luxury bath towels, generous amenities, amazing breakfast buffet, yet a block of narrow corridors to walk through to get to the room, and we still have to deal with the Italians who have a way of making you feel like you're annoying them just by being there.

My last night in Florence, with a rare break in the weather, I found the extent of the hotel's rooftop terrace restaurant. I'd had breakfast each morning on the top floor with window views in three directions but I'd not been out (and up!) on

the terrace. With full plantings and multi leveled terraces, it must be a delight in the summertime. There are terraces to the terrace all of which would equal 9 floors up for one of the best views imaginable and maybe of the entire town (unless you climb the hilltop across the Arno River as I did.) But would I want to be there in the summer? Read on!

Crowds and more crowds; shopping despite rain and more rain

Outside of my hotel were hords of people but that rarely changed unless I got across the river or out of town. Most commonly it was Americans. I still had the wonderment of the economy looking just fine, but my driver told me that his business was off 50% and he typically dealt with Americans. All of which reminded me that you couldn't pay me to be in Florence during the tourist season. If this is what it's like in the winter, and this is the rainy season (and it rained most days I was there, some days intermittently with some days a wee bit of sun), what a crowded scene it must be in the summer. Florence has tried to deal with the traffic by making small zones traffic free and installing short half-length electric buses, one mostly notices the noise and pollution of the cars and big tour buses. I can't remember a town where the traffic was so noisy and so pervasive except maybe Bangkok or Saigon.

The fashion district which includes the original houses of Gucci and Pucci who began and remain there is a sight to behold though I don't think their windows can begin to compare to those of Paris. Every expensive designer name I could think of was established within this small area. I don't know that their customer base was very strong however. I saw more people in the main market looking over the multitude of leather products, and just as many people at the outlying market with the less touristy feel. They might be suffering and yet perhaps it doesn't take many customers to make their day. Outside of Santa Croce was a good sized market of olive oils.

Even the famous double decker Ponte Vecchio (bridge) was filled with shoppers but I couldn't tell if they were purchasing. The bridge used to contain butchers but the wealthy of the town didn't like the smell so they replaced the butchers with gold merchants who remain to this day, shop after shop of gold. This is where they added a second and upper layer to the bridge for private conveyance.

Out of town

When I read that Siena was only an hour out of town and to get there one had to drive through the hills of the Chianti countryside, it sounded even more irresistible. The AAA travel guide calls Siena arguably the most beautiful town in Tuscany and I can think how this might well be possible as it sits up high on a hill and still contains some of their ramparts. I was equally drawn because cars are not allowed. A smaller town than Florence, it has been in major competition in historical days, and contains medieval streets, splendid palaces and a Duomo. Their Duomo outshines that of Florence not only because of its size but it's 400 marble art works pieced together on the floor. Also the thirty or so choir books/illuminated manuscripts in the Libreria Piccolomini. Our tour included the cathedral's museum and a walking tour of the Piazza del Campo, one of the most beautiful in the world according to many experts and one that is vast, fan-shaped open space of red bricks divided into nine segments by long spokes of white marble, and tilts with the natural slope of the hillside. The surrounding buildings are in a semicircle and are rose colored palazzo which retains its strict 13th century regulations that was laid down to preserve the city as a great showcase. They did well and its lingering effect is memorable. Some might recognize Siena because of its Palio, a fiercely contested bareback horse race that's held on the Campo each year.

In the afternoon we drove to San Gimignano a tiny city has remained intact through the centuries, situated on a hilltop, and on the UNESCO heritage listing. It's known as the Manhattan of the Middle Ages with its many towers. It's not only picturesque but famous for the elegant soaring towers that were the skyscrapers of the medieval Tuscan world. Equally fascinating and deserving of more time was the ancient medieval hamlet of Monteriggioni still intact and enclosed by its famous walls. There was very little open which was good because that kept the tourists away and I managed to walk the ramparts and most of their little streets and climbed many of the steep slopes.

What's for dinner?

I had the good fortune to mention to Kathrine Switzer that I was on my way to Florence and found that after our conference in South Dakota last August that Florence had been a part of her European adventure. She especially had fond memories of a restaurant across the River Arno called Osteria del Cinghiale Bianco translated to —White Boar - and recommended the fresh pasta with truffles. I'm not much into restaurants but she had insisted and I was hungry and thus it must have been meant to be that I would have one of my finer experiences in Florence here. Twice. But it takes a little bit of history since isn't our life experiences and history part of what makes us what we are and why we enjoy what we enjoy?

In the 70s while living in Europe Tom purchased a Ferrari 365GTC for pick up outside of Venice, in a town called Mogliano where we stayed in a huge old villa (that happened to be on strike but what's new for the Italians?.) We'd driven the Ferrari in a blinding rain storm to the Villa and she simply refused to start again for three days despite all efforts by the mechanic who eventually declared her well again for no reason. During the wait for the Ferrari to run, each evening we were 'forced' to return to a restaurant that will remain in our hearts as one of our very favorite of our lifetime to include our first experience with white truffles. White truffles are only once a year and they have an odor and taste that's quite different from black truffles and the smell permeates the room.

At Kathrine's favorite little restaurant I see that pasta with truffles is on the specials menu, but so are some boar recipes so I ask for a recommendation and am clearly told that the truffles are in season so I should go that direction. With the smell permeating the restaurant I start getting the idea but can't imagine my luck, but sure enough, I'm served this dreamy white sauced thick pasta with a mound of shaved white truffles on the top. I even have my picture taken. I even call Tom with a "guess what I had to eat" and like our usual ESP, he guesses it first off. Thank you, Kathrine.

On that note, if you don't know who is Kathrine Switzer, think K.V. Switzer, entering the prestigious Boston Marathon in the 1970s under her initials K.V., and when the race director gets wind of a woman in his marathon, he goes to disqualify her and pull off her bib number, only to be struck down by her bodybuilder boyfriend, all of whose pictures are splashed over the front pages of every newspaper in the world. K.V. devotes her life to women being allowed to run, travels the world organizing the Avon women's runs, and finally and almost single handedly gets a woman's marathon in the Olympics. Thank K.V. girls for Title 9 and for your being allowed to compete in sports. Double thank you, Kathrine.



My picture with a plate of truffled pasta just happens to be in a marathon shirt. Had it been the prior day it would have been in a Marathon Woman black t-shirt of K.V.'s registry. (Yes, I know that I need some clothing other than work clothes or marathon clothes but I spend my money on traveling instead.)



Touring

I don't know art and I don't understand enough to fully appreciate it and thus any museum visit might take me 10 minutes instead of the hours that I should take. My friend Ellen says she can spend a day in front of one picture, whereas she has a friend who can swan in and out of the museum in an hour.

I'm worse. So I hired a tour guide for both the Academy of Arts one day and for the Uffizi another day. I'm glad to have done it and feel that I learned something and yet still I can admit that I'm only okay for about two hours and then it becomes tedious. Do I have time to learn?

My trip into the Pitti Palace over in Oltrarno was a mistake to do it alone as it could have had more opportunities to learn than the others museums. The Palace might be more dramatic in setting than some of the famous French chateaux. The outside of the building leaves much to be desired but the inside, the sculpture, the state apartments, and the gardens probably deserve at least a full day and it was somewhat criminal that I only took 2 ½ hours there too.

Walking along embassy row past huge villas and many overlooks was more my style and just as much so because it was up a high hill culminating at an overlook to the city called Place Michelangelo. I tried getting up there by way of another route a second day and got lost in a fascinating warren of little alleys and villas and had some thoughts that I might never find my way out but came upon Fort Belvedere instead. Dogs didn't like me and a little old lady tried to explain to me how to get out of the maze of alleys.

My first day was spent walking miles on my own, and early the second day I took a guided bus and walking tour of the main sites as a way of orienting myself to the city and focusing on the history. I'd studied tour books before arriving knowing that I needed to be up to speed quickly.

Bernini lives here but he's visiting America

Another top reason to visit Florence was prompted by a Smithsonian magazine special on Bernini's sculpture which so fascinated me that I tried to visit LA while his work was on loan to the Getty. I'd researched where to see his work and was set to visit the Bargello Palace which is now the National Museum. Imagine my surprise when it wasn't open Friday afternoon (it closes at 1:20pm), or my dismay to find it closed Saturday yet the hours showed it was to be open. Knowing it's always closed on Monday, I managed to get there Sunday morning and hurried about to find the two Bernini sculptures including my favorite. I'm only telling you this so you don't hate me: both sculptures were out on loan to America. I'm sure you're going to give me sympathy, yes?

Should you like any of these sculptures, let me tell you that they are currently available for sale and I couldn't tell they were fakes. Each and every famous statue – imagine them lined up in a shop.

Penises?

I never saw so many as in Florentine statues. I learned that David's was mistakenly sculpted as uncircumcised and after figuring that out, I had to look at them all. You're never too old to be educated. There are close up postcards of David's anatomy, though I much preferred his glutes. (On that subject, sorry to tell you but apparently all Italian men didn't look like this – they used the laborer types as models.) The best scene was an apron with the figure of David worn strategically by one of our young Japanese tourists in Siena bringing a big hoot from everyone on the tour that our staid Japanese gal would model it. Maybe penises bring out the best in us all?

On that I should end



Itinerary

Thu Jan 22 – Beverly

9:49am Depart St Louis STL via UA#4341
1:15pm Arrive Newark EWR

– Nola and Steve

10:15am Depart Denver DEN via United #1677
3:53pm Arrive Newark EWR

- Kathy

1:49pm Depart Orlando MCO via UA#194
4:30pm Arrive Newark EWR

- Diana, Nola, Steve, Beverly and Kathy

Meet in United Club

7:30pm Depart Newark EWR via United #968

Fri Jan 23 - Diana, Nola, Steve, Beverly and Kathy

9:15am Arrive Frankfurt FRA for plane change

12:20am Depart Frankfurt FRA via Lufthansa City Line #8796
1:50pm Arrive Florence FLR

Car www.BlackLane.com for a 5 person van

Apartment Via Maggio 50, Florence www.vrbo.com/421522 – for 9 nights
Landlady: Francoise DEGRELLE at florenceintoscana@gmail.com
+39-342 99 65 329 Italy or + 352-621 65 44 14 Luxembourg or + 352-621 307 358 Luxembourg

From www.vrbo.com: The apartment is located in one of the historical sites of Florence: via Maggio, next to the Pitti Palace and the famous Boboli Garden and it's just a few minute walk from Ponte Vecchio. The street itself has always been the street of the antique shops in Florence, however, since it's only a short walk from the historical square of Santo Spirito, the area is surrounded by typical local restaurants and by many other shops for each type of need. The Palace, though very old, in fact it belonged to the Corsini family until the XIXth century and then to the Rosselli del Turco family it is still under the protection of the Fine Arts, but has a modern elevator and the apartment maintains the beauty of a conservative restoration and provides all the amenities and comforts. In the apartment there is a spacious living room of 40sqm or 1292 SF, a separate dining room with a dining table for 6 persons and a fully equipped kitchen. The master bedroom has a king size bed and it is very spacious and comfortable. The second bedroom has a baldachin king size bed and both the bedrooms has original drawings on the walls. In the loft there is a double bed. There are three bathrooms. In the apartment there is AC in all the rooms, WIFI internet access. The renovation has been completed in October 2012 so the apartment is brand new and accurate in every detail.

Sat Jan 24 - All

10:00am Start of walking tour – Elizabeth will meet outside apartment door at 10am
Stopping for small snack instead of lunch.

1:00pm Entry to Accademia with Elizabeth until 2pm then can stay on

Sun Jan 25 – Diana, Nola and Steve

10:00am Start of Vasari Corridor and Uffizi Gallery Guided Tour #E1-E2 – 3 ½ hours
Booked through www.caftours.com a division of Grayline Tours

Description: We will start our tour at Palazzo Pitti with an external visit going backwards through the ideal “Prince’s Itinerary”, the suggestive elevated passageway which connects the Palazzo Vecchio with the Palazzo Pitti, in the Oltrarno district, passing through the Uffizi Gallery and over the Ponte Vecchio: one of the most magnificent example of the 16th century architecture ever built! On our guided tour we will cross the Ponte Vecchio, enjoying splendid views of the town center, admiring the coats of arms and other en route details soon before reaching the elegant Palace of the Uffizi, brilliantly designed by the architect Giorgio Vasari. This Museum, one of the most famous in the world, hosts some among the most magnificent and invaluable works of art. Following a chronological sequence from Cimabue to Masaccio, from Piero della Francesca to Filippo Lippi, we reach the Botticelli Room where the Birth of Venus and the Allegory of Spring are the maximum symbol of sublime beauty. We will continue our visit through the drawing skills of Leonardo, the Michelangelo Room with its Tondo Doni, Raphael’s magnificent portraits ending up with the glorious Venus of Urbino by Tiziano. At this point we will take a break of 15 minutes. We resume our tour right at the entrance door to the Corridor, the amazing elevated tunnel which we have been able to see from the outside on our walk from Piazza Pitti to Piazza Signoria. The Corridor was designed on the occasion of the wedding between Francis I and Joan of Austria and built in the record time of only 5 months by Giorgio Vasari, with the idea of giving Florence a precious jewel that would also serve the purpose of giving the ruling family of Florence a safe passage between the seat of government and their home. As the door opens, you will instantly be hit by a deep sense of emotion: the corridor, almost a kilometer in length, is a royal passageway that travels over the heads of the citizens of Florence, a fantastic imaginary carpet where the grand Duke of Florence could walk without an escort in total safety. This is an amazing discovery, amongst a superb collection of paintings and a row of round windows of the aerial passageway offering breathtaking views over the hills, the Arno river, its bridges, the palaces and churches of the city. In the three main sections of the corridor, we will see 16th and 17th Roman and Neapolitan paintings, and then the magnificent collection of artists’ self-portraits from Vasari to Italian and foreign artists of the 20th century. A face to face encounter with artists that doesn’t exist in any other museum in the world, a discovery that will print an indelible memory of Florence in your mind forever. Lastly, right by the exit of the Vasari Corridor, in the enchanting Boboli Gardens, you will be able to admire the Buontalenti’s Grotto (1583-1587).

More info on Vasari: <http://www.visitflorence.com/florence-museums/the-vasari-corridor.html>
<http://www.partner.viator.com/en/13618/travel-tips/Visit-the-Vasari-Corridor/ttd>

Dinner Try for White Boar Restaurant Tele: Tel: +39.055215706

Mon Jan 26 – Diana

10:00am Terrace and Dome of Cathedral Tour #OD1L – 1 ½ hours then Tuscan lunch and drink included plus additional entry tickets good for 24 hours
Booked through www.caftours.com a division of Grayline Tours

Description: This exclusive tour begins with an evocative introduction movie, played in an ancient rectory private room, located in the Duomo square, it will follow a guided visit of the interiors of the magnificent Santa Maria del Fiore Cathedral and its panoramic north terrace, an exclusive place from where, those who wish, will have a priority access to the famous Brunelleschi’s Dome. The video introduction will allow you to go back over the history of Florence, the “Cradle of Renaissance”, thanks to the exclusive images, showing how the city and its monuments have grown through the centuries, with a particular focus on the monuments making part of the Duomo complex. Avoiding the line you will enter, accompanied by a licensed English speaking guide, inside Santa Maria del Fiore, where you will discover the superb works of art preserved there, as Paolo Uccello’s clock, Vasari’s frescos and Bandinelli’s marble choir. Then, you will have the chance to get to one of the exclusive terraces of the Cathedral, where to enjoy your first-row position on the magnificent scenery surrounding you, dominated by the amazing Brunelleschi’s Dome. From this breath-taking location, you will experience the incredible sensation of being able to “touch” part of the city center and admire the wonderful hills surrounding it. At the end of the guided tour, you can continue your visit on your own, directly from the north terrace, without any additional queue, using your ticket to climb even higher, up to the magnificent Dome, where you can enjoy a spectacular 360° view of Florence, from its highest location. At the end of your visit, a few steps from the Cathedral square you will be offered a delicious taste of Chianti wine and tidbits of cheese with balsamic vinegar. Your ticket is valid

24 hours and allows you to visit on your own other monuments at the Duomo Complex (Baptistry, Crypt of St. Reparata, Giotto's bell tower).

See National Geographic February 2014 - <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2014/02/il-duomo/design-video>

Tue Jan 27 – Diana, Beverly and Nola

9:30am Florence Food and Wine tour for 3 ½ hours

Booked through <http://www.florencewinetasting.com/wine-and-food-tour-3.html>

Description: First Stop is planned in an Italian Bar where you will taste 2 different types of coffee and also learn about the Italian roasting process. Second Stop you will taste a panino tartufato in a delicatessen shop founded in 1885, which has won a vast recognition amongst the locals for its gastronomic specialties with truffles that still remain a Florentine tradition. Third Stop is at the San Lorenzo Central Market where you will taste a typical dish of the Tuscan cuisine, balsamic vinegar and extra virgin olive oils, crostini and much more!!! Fourth Stop you will visit a local Enoteca where you taste two Tuscan wines, Italian cheeses and two very local salamis and learn about their origins. Last Stop is at one of Florence's Best GELATO shops, where we will taste a home-made, natural Italian ice cream!!!

Wed Jan 28 – Diana

8:30am Pisa, Lucca and Viareggio mini-van #S3 – 11 hours – wait list as needs 4 participants.

Booked with www.caftours.com/pisa-lucca-and-viareggio.html a division of Grayline Tours

Lunch: Try Café del Mercato at Piazza San Michele

Description: Plunge into a sea of beauty, and experience the heart-stirring discovery of splendid architectural, sculptural and painted masterpieces, the nostalgic charm of a famous seaside resort and a relaxing encounter with splendid natural beauty. Lucca lies between Florence and the Tuscan coast. It is a refined city crammed with majestic churches, surrounded by 16th century walls with its imposing gateways and massive bastions. One can walk along a stretch of the tree-crowned city walls, enjoying a wonderful view over the roofs, alleys, tower-houses, Romanesque churches and aristocratic palaces of the city, and then move into the compact historical town centre. Discover Piazza S. Michele, the heart of the city, with the splendid Basilica in white limestone (12th – 14th century) and the stately Palazzo Pretorio. Walk past the charming little shops lining the squares and narrow streets and enter Piazza del Mercato where you can admire its circular perimeter built on top of the remains of the Roman amphitheatre dating back to the second century BC. Continue your walk until you reach the famous Gothic Cathedral of San Martino (11th century), where you will be enchanted by the delicate effigy of Ilaria del Carretto by Jacopo della Quercia. Continue your walk and discover the solid bulk of the Guinigi tower, with a huge holm oak growing above its battlements. Leaving Lucca, after a short journey, we reach the splendid, sandy Versilia coast, and the seaside town of Viareggio, famous for its beautiful beaches, for its wonderful Art Nouveau buildings and the long and relaxing walk along the Viale del Mare with cafès–chantants, restaurants, shops, and venues that are among the most elegant of the coast. Enjoy some free time to admire the architecture of the bathing establishments along the famous Viale Margherita, the chalet and cafès, including the Gran Caffè Margherita, an Art Nouveau building, one of the symbols of the city. You can savour the fragrant cuisine of Viareggio in one of the many restaurants on the seafront and, during the warmer seasons, take a dip into the warm Tyrrhenian Sea with the spectacular backdrop of the white marble Apuan Alps sparkling in the sun. In the afternoon, we move inland and drive into the heart of the famous city of Pisa, with the glittering sight of Piazza dei Miracoli, a UNESCO heritage site, where the peerless marble masterpieces emerge miraculously from the green sward: the famous Leaning Tower, the magnificent Baptistry, the stunning Cathedral, and the Monumental Cemetery, supreme expressions of the Romanesque architecture of the 12th and 13th centuries, containing works of staggering artistic impact.

Fri Jan 30 - All

Eve Opera I Puritani – tickets and arrangements with Beverly

<http://www.operadifirenze.it/it/> - Note by Bev to Steve: Uhhh...Steve, it's Italian opera. Approximately 3 hours, 20 minutes according to a Metropolitan review. "It's not over 'til the fat lady sings!"

Sun Feb 1 - All - Diana, Nola, Steve, Beverly and Kathy

5:30am www.BlackLane.com

7:15am Depart Florence FLR via Lufthansa City Line LH#319 or UA#8795

8:55am Arrive Frankfurt FRA for plane change

- Diana, Nola and Steve

11:05am Depart Frankfurt FRA via UA#969

2:00pm Arrive Newark EWR

- Beverly

11:25am Depart Frankfurt FRA via UA#988

2:35pm Arrive Washington DC IAD-Dulles

4:50pm Depart Washington DC IAD-Dulles via UA#3434

6:05pm Arrive St Louis STL

- Kathy

1:40pm Depart Frankfurt FRA via UA#9065 operated by Lufthansa

6:05pm Arrive Orlando MCO

- Nola and Steve

3:26pm Depart Newark EWR via UA#1151

5:55pm Arrive Denver DEN

Links:

Oldest pharmacy and perfume shop known; beautiful building:

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/heaven-scent-17187251/>

<http://www.museumsinflorence.com/musei/Pharmacy-Santa-Maria-Novella.html>

Dinner - Eat white truffled pasta at Osteria del Cinghiale Bianco "White Boar" per KV. Directions on Grand Hotel Baglioni map. Reservations required. www.cinghialebianco.com/ Borgo San Jacopo, 43 - 50125 Florence - Italy Tel: +39.055215706 Email: consolmauro@gmail.com *It has been more than twenty-two years since that March 1, 1984, when Massimo Forgings, restaurateur for a lifetime, took over the Osteria del Cinghiale Bianco. With his experience and personality, assisted by the family, he was able in a short time to transform an environment storico efficient and fun in a restaurant frequented by customers of all ages and backgrounds. The restaurant is located on the ground floor of an ancient fourteenth century tower of Borgo San Jacopo, one of the most characteristic streets of ancient Florence, including art shops, antique shops and chic boutiques. There are two dining rooms. The first room is housed in the tower of the '300, of which only the stone. The second room and kitchen are located on the old courtyard of the same, which in 1500 was covered by times in order to fix the historic building still exists. A local characteristic, with romantic corners, niches in brick and stone that, especially at night, by candlelight, creating a special atmosphere*

Packing:

Passport

Bar soap and washcloth if needed – rarely found in Europe

Adapter plugs

ATM card after checking with your bank and also telling them you'll be using credit card in Europe

Zip bags for both food and currency

PJs and robe

Spi Belt or money belt for safety? I didn't but might.

Grocery bag

Need a sleeping mask and earplugs for plane? Diana will have 1 extra airline ditty bag.

Scarf? You'll be surprised at how everyone wears big long scarves wrapped around their neck, even boys and even with short sleeve t-shirts.

Shoes that are comfortable
Granola bars?

Books Owned:

Map Easy \$6.95 map recommended – Diana and Nola both have them

AAA Spiral guide with Diana

Rick Steves' pocket guide with Nola and with Diana

Books to read to prepare for a trip to Italy – as found by Nola

<http://skywalkerbeth.blogspot.com/2008/03/some-books-i-read-before-and-after-may.html?m=0>

<http://www.villavacations.com/openthedoor/OtherItalylinks/Reading%20List-Italy.pdf>

Suggest Dan Brown's "Inferno" as a tourist book.

Suggest Agony and Ecstasy about Michelangelo

Links:

<http://www.walkaboutflorence.com/italy-tuscany-florence-tours>

This language program is free to download as an app and might be useful: <https://www.duolingo.com/>

Florence in the Off-Season - 25 Tips, Notes, and Reflections | Europe Forum | Fodor's Travel Talk Forums

<http://www.fodors.com/community/europe/florence-in-the-off-season-25-tips-notes-and-reflections.cfm>

Book Florence Tours & Things to do in Florence - View All Tours - Gray Line

<http://www.grayline.com/things-to-do/italy/florence/>

Things to Do in Florence: 30 Ideas - <http://thisismyhappiness.com/2013/01/04/things-to-do-in-florence/>

Bed and Breakfast in Florence, Cheap Accommodation • B&B Florence Old Bridge <http://www.florenceoldbridge.com/>

Across street is their regular hotel which looked fine and is inexpensive too.

36 Hours in Florence, Italy - See the skyline without battling crowds, sample pastries from a secret gem, sip artisanal beers and soak up culture during a weekend in the Tuscan capital.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/28/travel/things-to-do-in-36-hours-in-florence-italy.html>

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/italy>

Looking at Art: Michelangelo's "Last Judgment" – YouTube

<http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=9h2W6dkYlhw&autoplay=1>

Budget restaurants: <http://www.budgettravel.com/feature/eat-like-a-local-in-florence,30702/?wpisrc=newsletter>

Science and history museum: http://www.museumsinflorence.com/musei/History_of_Science_museum.html#