



Rome and Orvieto Trip Notes
-- Also see Rome Marathon and Pompeii Trip Notes --
March 16-28, 2011

Overview by Tom – pre trip

We're first going in to Rome and staying at a really ritzy hotel that Diana got a deal on through a friend - www.stregisgrand.hotelinroma.com. Be sure and check out the rooms. Then Sunday, she gets up to do the marathon and I eventually go out to the airport and get my rental car (I don't want to drive IN Rome) and drive the hour or so north to a hill town called Orvieto. Yes, THAT Orvieto (wine region) and stay in an apartment I've rented - <http://www.vrbo.com/150534>. Then on Wednesday, after she's done Pompeii and another thing or two she missed last year, Diana takes a train up to Orvieto and we tour together for a few days. Then on Sunday, we drive back to the Rome airport, turn in the car and check into an on-site hotel. We get up on Monday and take the covered walkway to the terminal and fly home. Tough life.

– post trip

The Italy trip was especially good because the weather prediction was completely wrong (rain) and we only had an hour or so the first day. Except for one day (cold and windy) the rest of the time was high 50s and low 60s with plenty of sunshine. Our hotel in Rome was gorgeous and had the distinction of being the first luxury hotel in town (about 1880). Magnificent crystal chandeliers, marble, high ceilings, etc., and Diana had a deal through one of her hotel contacts, plus we got an upgrade in the room and I wangled free breakfasts for us (good thing - the fabulous buffet was 45 Euro - about \$60 per person!!!). Found a wonderful quintessential little Italian restaurant about two blocks from the Coliseum - ate there two nights and tried for a third (Saturday night) but they were fully booked. Walked miles. Had a special tour of the Sistine Chapel with a young American guide who had been at it for six years - fun, funny but really knew his stuff and only 15 people in the group. We were the last group to go through the museum and chapel so didn't have the normal cast of zillions to deal with. Then I went back out to the airport and picked up my rental car (to avoid driving in Rome) and went north a couple of hours to the hill town of Orvieto and the apartment I'd rented through VRBO (Vacation Rental by Owner) turned out beautifully. Two bedrooms, two baths, separated by a living room and small kitchen with a view to die for from each of the three windows. You'll see soon. Diana did the marathon on Sunday and had a wonderful time then took a train up to Orvieto on Wednesday and we toured from there. Back to the airport on the next Sunday into an on-site Hilton, got upgraded to the Concierge floor with free food and booze, then up early the next morning, zipped through the first class segregated security, into an airline club to wait for boarding. Easy flight home and our limo guy was on time and ready to complete the final leg of the adventure. Tough life. May our luck continue.

I'll drink to that! – public fountains and more



A photo show on this trip is now on Tom's website www.TomsKoi.com. Click on photo shows. Thus I'll not include all those photos.

A note on the desirability of special accommodations

There was a time in my life when I camped. I moved to a fold-out camper with the hope of having running water. Then there was a time in my life when I looked for the very least costly and simplest of

accommodations. Now there are still times in my life when price prevails but mostly I hold the view that I'd travel less in order to experience historically significant accommodations (example: famous old and yet updated hotels) and/or accommodations in an area where I could learn about the region (example: an apartment in a new-to-me section of Paris.) Accommodations are an important part of the travel experience and need to be something to think about, something new and exciting, and/or bold and entertaining. Plus, why would I stay somewhere that was less than what I have at home? This trip gave me some of the best of all of the above and I'm most grateful to my hotel friends for their help in making my travel more affordable.



The St. Regis Grand Hotel Rome

From <http://stregisgrand.hotelinroma.com/overview.html> - **Iconic Elegance** -- The St. Regis Grand Hotel, Rome, is a high quality top of the line hotel and was named to Condé Nast Traveler's Gold List. It has recently gone through a thorough \$35 million restoration. There are luxurious interiors and a sober exterior, creating a seductive atmosphere of this landmark hotel.

We had a deluxe room, separate dressing area, a huge double bathroom with bidet (handy for laundry), full champagne breakfast that was one of the most luxurious ever (and which normally sold for 45 Euros each but was included), internet (which is hard to get in European hotels without paying hefty but was included) and when we arrived we were given coffees and treats while waiting for our room to be readied. Our room came with a box of chocolates and daily bottles of mineral water. When we had a small electrical glitch which they quickly repaired we were sent drinks and a huge fruit bowl. All was well. Very well. We loved the location as it was close enough to the Central Terminal to be in the center of town but far enough away to be quiet.

This hotel was the first and foremost luxury hotel in Rome and remains one of the finest of the city. Through Parker it was mine for a song. I would stay at the St Regis for 6 nights. Tom stayed for 3 nights before departing to Orvieto on Sunday when I stayed on in Rome for the marathon. (See more on the hotel at the end of this report.)

Automobiles – they call them “machine” in Italy

We see lots of Smart cars which is pretty smart considering the cost of gasoline at about \$8-9 a gallon plus the very limited parking in Rome. Yet we saw a lot of Smart cars with shattered bumpers. Here's another wee bitty car and note how they can park sideways. We had a little diesel cross-over by Nissan that did fine but sure was bumpy compared to our home car of Tom's luxurious Lexus 460.



Friendly Italians? Differences?

Yes the world is flat yet there are still meaningful differences.

- Friendly? Yes and no. We'd find the extremes as often as not. They were sometimes very friendly and helpful and sometimes just the opposite. One would shrug their shoulders at being asked directions where another would insist on taking me by the hand and showing me the way. I

wondered if half of them were taking over the French ‘hate the tourists’ attitude and related haughtiness. It made me appreciate those that were helpful all the more.

- Coffee? Apparently an Italian would never think of carrying coffee around. I never saw coffee to-go and even when my hotel accommodated me at 7am so I could make the tour, the bus driver prohibited coffee on board and looked at me like I was crazy. I recall in Budapest the shock of our tour director that I’d not want to sit and enjoy my coffee.
- Lackadaisical? Waiting is the norm. I remembered being in Rome about a year ago and hurrying up for a 7am tour and then waiting 45 minutes. So I went to the tour office the day before and asked if I could pre-pay and show up later. The answer was yes and they gave me about a 15 minute grace period but I still waited another 20 minutes.
- Loose? Italians seem loose: fannies, tummies, attitudes, tidiness, timeliness, driving safety. I hope they live longer as a result of behavior more like a Type C than a Type A or even Type B. I would have to change my attitudes to live among them.
- Clothing? Here, like in France, you could pretty much tell who was a tourist and who was an Italian by the state of dress – especially including sneakers. But on the cobblestone streets I sure missed my sneakers. Scarves are the in-thing, even when I was suffocating with the heat they would wrap the scarf. But please Americans, if you want to adopt a scarf make it a nice quality one.

Weather?

The prediction had been for heavy chance of rain for most every day we were in Italy. Yet it never rained and the sun shined most days. The temperature dropped maybe into the low 50s at night but was in the low 60s most days. It was either the Tom Burton luck or it was making up for some of the lousy weather I’d had while hiking or for marathons.

Food and Dining

Maybe we can get Tom to address this subject as I don’t really care all that much. Yet if I didn’t have Tom’s insisting on a good meal out and all his gourmet home cooking, maybe I would. I am most happy with a picnic and I generally have a leftover of some sort in my pack. I don’t particularly care for gelato so I never consume it but I sure hunted out truffle dishes as it was the season. I’m reminded of a dish in Florence where I returned the second night to have it again. I am grateful to Kathrine Switzer for sending me: pasta with white truffles. It was there that I had the local thick desert wine and biscotti that are intended to be dipped and this is one of the few deserts we consumed on this trip.



It was black truffle season and here’s how dishes arrive at the table: Big black truffles with a grater so the smell really permeates the room. But here’s how I might eat: girls on the Spanish Steps with a picnic of McDonalds.



The Vatican City

Though I’d already had a full tour of this the smallest city in the world, I felt it important that Tom see it despite his reluctance to face the crowds. We lucked out by finding the young American PhD-type who conducts English tours most days at 3:30pm from the central courtyard. He knows to get in at the very last minute when the museum is pretty much vacated so there are no lines, no crowds and it’s like a private guided tour. This young guide showed us areas of the museum that I didn’t see in my prior day trip.

From Wikipedia: *Vatican City is a landlocked sovereign city-state whose territory consists of a walled enclave within the city of Rome. It has an area of approximately 110 acres and a population of just over 800. Established in 1929 by the Lateran Treaty on behalf of the Holy See and by Prime Minister Benito Mussolini on behalf of the Kingdom of Italy. Vatican City State is distinct from the Holy See, which dates back to early Christianity and is the main Episcopal see of 1.2 billion Latin and Eastern Catholic adherents around the globe. Ordinances of Vatican City are published in Italian; official documents of the Holy See are issued mainly in Latin. The two entities even have distinct passports: the Holy See, not being a country, only issues diplomatic and service passports; Vatican City State issues normal passports. Very few passports are issued by either authority.*

The Lateran Treaty in 1929, which brought the city-state into existence, spoke of it as a new creation (Preamble and Article III), not as a vestige of the much larger Papal States (756-1870) that had previously encompassed much of central Italy. Most of this territory was absorbed into the Kingdom of Italy in 1860, and the final portion, namely the city of Rome with Lazio, ten years later, in 1870. Vatican City is an ecclesiastical or sacerdotal-monarchical state, ruled by the Bishop of Rome—the Pope. The highest state functionaries are all Catholic clergymen of various national origins. It is the sovereign territory of the Holy See and the location of the Pope's residence, referred to as the Apostolic Palace.

The Popes have generally resided in the area that in 1929 became Vatican City since the return from Avignon in 1377, but have also at times resided in the Quirinal Palace in Rome and elsewhere.

From Ellen: *I note the crush of people at the Vatican and at the Fountain of Trevi in your pictures and am reminded that the population of the earth was 4 billion when I was first in Rome in the late 70s. Now it's almost 7 billion. On my first trip, we were taken to the Fountain of Trevi during the day, and then again at night to see it by moonlight. The guide said (on the nighttime excursion), "Be careful. There may be villains in the crowd." I got amused by his use of the word "Villain" and asked him to point out a "villain". He said, with a wave of his hand, "They're ALL villains". There weren't very many people there that night, and as I looked around I decided he could indeed be right!*



The columns are fascinating if only to relate to a person's size. We saw this globe within a globe, representing a broken earth, replicated in smaller form at the Hilton Rome airport hotel. This time our tour guide got permission to rotate the globe.

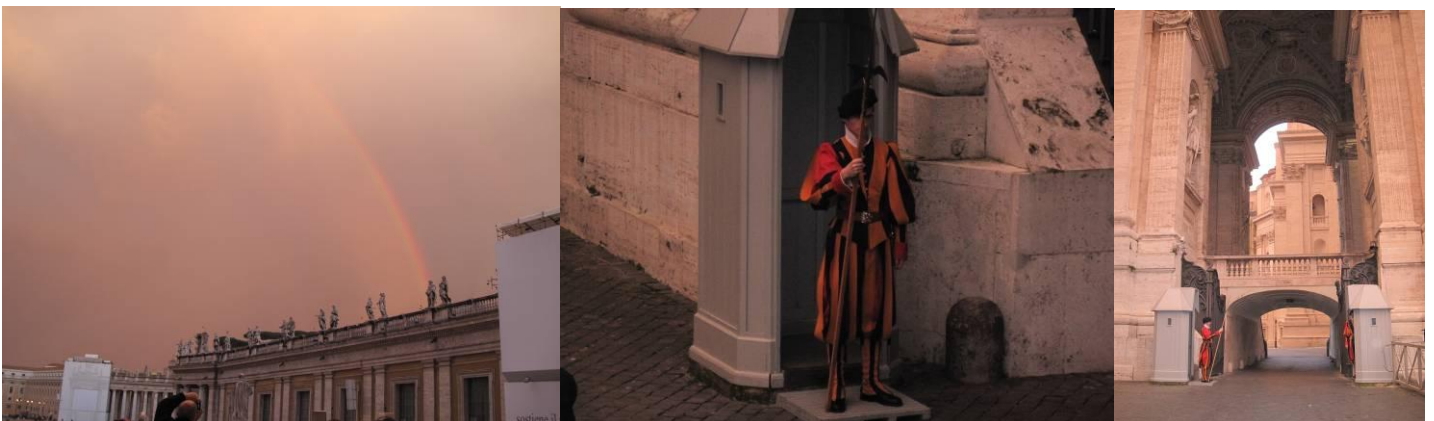


I saw much more in the Vatican museum this time, and in the tapestry room understood better how the features in the pictures moved with us and what a feat of magic this really is. When we came out of the Vatican we were graced with an unusual sky and later you'll see a rainbow too.



This door gets cemented closed from the inside and is only opened by each new pope and then re-sealed. The history of the pope's succession is storied in the carvings. Inside St Peter's with the piece d' resistance, Michelangelo's Pietà and maybe the only piece he signed (because he was miffed that someone else was taking credit.)

As a 16-year old visiting Rome and in particular St Peter's Basilica I was terribly troubled by the richness inside and the stark poverty and slums outside. And even more to see those peasants come in to give their few precious coins to the church who own the most amazing treasury and don't mind flaunting it. Rome solved the slum problem in the 70s when they bulldozed them down en mass and what you see around The Vatican now is all newly rebuilt. (This does not mean that I don't respect plenty about the Catholic religion only that it was disturbing then and remains so now.)



Do you see the lovely rainbow striking over The Vatican. Our tour guide warned us that the Swiss Guard wasn't for having their pictures taken with anybody but of course we saw someone trying. My last trip gave me a good picture of a guard close up.



The courtyard was getting ready for an appearance by the pope I suspect: It was lined with chairs. Earlier in the day before we went in, it had been lined with tourists standing in line to get in. We went around the back door with the tour guide.

Palazzo Barberini – This was my initial reason for the trip to Rome as I had missed it the year before when much of the sculpture I wanted to see was on loan to Santa Monica.

From Wikipedia - A palace facing the piazza of the same name and home to the National Gallery of Art. The sloping site had formerly been occupied by a garden-

vineyard of the Storza family, in which a palazzetto had been built in 1549. It had passed from one cardinal to another during the sixteenth century, with no project fully getting off the ground. When Cardinal Alessandro Sforza met financial hardships, the still semi-urban site was purchased in 1625 by Maffeo Barberini who then took the papal throne as Pope Urban VIII.



Palazzo Barberini in an 18th-century engraving: its entrance court is a public space.



Three great architects worked to create the Palazzo, each contributing his own style and character to the building. When Maderno died in 1629, Borromini was passed over and the commission was awarded to Bernini, a young prodigy then better known as a sculptor. Borromini stayed on regardless and the two architects worked together, albeit briefly, on this project. After the Wars of Castro and the death of Urban VIII, the palace was confiscated by Pamphili Pope Innocent X and returned to the Barberini only in 1653.



The palazzo is disposed around a forecourt centered on Bernini's grand two-storey hall backed by an oval salon, with an extended wing dominating the piazza, which lies on a lower level. At the rear, a long wing protected the garden from the piazza below, above which it rose from a rusticated basement that was slightly battered like a military bastion. The main block presents three tiers of great arch-headed windows, like glazed arcades, a formula that was more Venetian than Roman. On the uppermost floor, Borromini's windows are set in a false perspective that suggests extra depth, a feature that has been copied into the 20th century. Flanking the hall, two sets of stairs lead to the piano nobile, a large squared staircase by Bernini to the left and a smaller oval staircase by Borromini to the right. The picture is of the famous helicoidal staircase by Borromini.

Aside from Borromini's false-perspective window reveals, among the other influential aspects of Palazzo Barberini, ones that would be repeated throughout Europe, were the unit of a central two-storey hall backed by an oval salon and the symmetrical wings that extended forward from the main block to create a cour d'honneur. The Salon ceiling is graced by Pietro da Cortona's masterpiece, the Baroque fresco of the Allegory of Divine Providence and Barberini Power. This vast panegyric allegory became highly influential in guiding decoration for palatial and church ceilings; its influence can be seen in other panoramic scenes such as the frescoed ceilings at Sant'Ignazio (by Pozzo); or those at Villa Pisani at Stra, the throne room of the Royal Palace of Madrid, and the Ca' Rezzonico in Venice (by Tiepolo). Also in the palace is a masterpiece of Andrea Sacchi, a contemporary critic of the Cortona style, Divine Wisdom. The rooms of the piano nobile

have frescoed ceilings by other seventeenth-century artists like Giuseppe Passeri and Andrea Camassei, plus, in the museum collection, precious detached frescoes by Polidoro da Caravaggio and his lover Maturino da Firenze. The garden is known as a giardino segreto ("secret garden"), for its concealment from an outsider's view. It houses a monument to Bertel Thorwaldsen, who had a studio in the nearby Teatro delle Quattro Fontane in 1822-1834.

Today Palazzo Barberini houses the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, one of the most important painting collections in Italy. It includes, among many others, Raphael's portrait La fornarina, Caravaggio's Judith Beheading Holofernes, and a Hans Holbein portrait of Henry VIII. The palace is also home to the Italian Institute of Numismatics. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) was signed here in 1950, creating the European Court of Human Rights, and is a milestone in the protection of human rights. Hidden in the cellars of the rear part of the building a Mithraeum was recently found, dating probably from the second century AD.

-- Moving Right Along – Up to Umbrian Hilltop Towns --

Orvieto apartment in Umbria

Our second home of the trip would be in Orvieto. I had no possible hope that Tom would have found a perfectly modernized apartment in a medieval village but it was. Tom had met a delightful man at a local restaurant and they developed a friendship in part over the sharing of wine. Len would introduce Tom to the Orvieto Classico and it was that wine region that came to Tom's mind when I said I was going to Rome's Marathon. It was only a quick thought process to include the two cities; they couldn't have been more different!



Here I am arriving in Orvieto with Tom as a built in tour guide by then. Next is the window view from our apartment that would be my favorite spot of Orvieto.

In keeping with our philosophy that one learns an area better by living within it, you'll see that this was a perfect example. Here's about the apartment from the website: *Orvieto, Umbria, Italy, Europe (85 km from Perugia, 90 km from Assisi, 100 from Rome, 180 Flo). 2 Bedrooms + Convertible bed(s), 2 Baths (Sleeps 4-6) - Ripa medici, the house with a wonderful view is a beautiful, sunny apartment on Orvieto medieval walls. It is located in the medieval part of the historical center of Orvieto. Facing the ancient walls, it offers a suggestive view of the surrounding countryside, with its vineyards and olive trees. The flat is 65 square meters and consists of two double bedrooms with ensuite bathrooms, a large sitting room, a fully equipped kitchen, washing machine and dryer. All the rooms, included the kitchen and the bathrooms, are parquet olive wood and furnished with fine antique furniture.*





The Cathedral and the main street are within easy reach (3 minute walking). All the restaurants and 'trattorie' typical of the old city center are also within walking distance.

Built on top of a steep-sided outcrop of volcanic rock, in antiquity Orvieto was a flourishing Etruscan hill town. Important remains of Etruscan arts may be found all over the place. The old, middle-age section of the town still retains its medieval atmosphere in the network of narrow, meandering alleyways, the many old houses, gothic churches and medieval towers and walls, which have been preserved intact in it.



Apart from cultural highlights, Orvieto is also famous for its wine and the 'slow' life that the people who live upon the hill and in the surrounding valleys are still able to live. Orvieto belongs to the network of Italian slow towns and every year a Slow Food Festival is held in the city with itineraries that allow people to take a sip of what it means to eat genuine food and drink genuine wine. A witness of this life style is the farmers' market that takes place in the city center every Thursday and Saturday. 'Slow' does not mean 'still.' Orvieto is also a lively, young place. The lively atmosphere of the town reaches its peak during Umbria Jazz Winter, a world famous jazz festival that takes place every year between Christmas and New Year's Eve. Some jazz concerts are held in the nineteenth century city Theater 'Teatro Mancinelli' which also hosts other interesting cultural events and performances. Besides, festivities are celebrated throughout the all year.

Sabrina the owner - Our Orvieto apartment was owned by Sabrina who was worth her weight in gold on her own. She'd been helpful via email before we arrived and upon arrival had guided Tom to the top tourist sites and restaurants of the area. She had a spare cell phone that she loaned us, and the apartment was wired with free Wi-Fi (a real problem in Italy to obtain Wi-Fi without a hefty charge.) How she knew to make the apartment so perfectly modernized and classy is anyone's guess as she seems to have lived in Orvieto all her life.

Upon arrival Sabrina presented us with a bottle of Prosecco. I'd not understood the variety of Prosecco until our Milan and Lake Como trip but it's a common drink at our house now. A couple days later she made us a blackberry tart and I'm embarrassed to say that we (mostly ME) ate the entire thing! (And I wondered why I gained weight on this trip?) While sitting in the sunshine at the little window facing the valley and in total quiet and privacy since we were at the edge of the medieval wall looking down.

Here's Tom's review of the apartment for Sabrina's website - "Location, hospitality, view, ambience and charm." All the nice things said about Sabrina, the wonderful owner and host of this apartment are true. From the first

meeting to the fond farewell, she was our advisor, guide and friend with excellent written and spoken English. The two bedrooms with individual baths are separated by a living room and small kitchen with the highlight being the fabulous view from all three windows. The apartment is at the southern edge of the wall of this Medieval hill town so is well lit by the sun throughout the day. And Orvieto is noted for its white Orvieto Classico wine as well as some lovely reds so be sure to try them when you visit the best restaurant in town - La Palomba (reservations a must any day - closed Wednesdays). Also ask Sabrina for other suggestions. Free covered parking comes with the apartment with an elevator up to within steps of the front door. Excellent central heating, plentiful hot water, lovely hardwood floors, double glazed windows and modernized baths complete the picture. The ancient town is a real charmer too with XIII century stone houses and cobbled streets. Plenty of shopping and a good supermarket (small but adequate and even has wine and spirits). For some reason, breakfasts were not being served during my stay but I'll bet Sabrina's a good cook. This place and this town are both highly recommended.

Orvieto – Ornate Orvieto

By Rick Steves: Umbria's grand hill town, Orvieto, is no secret, with three popular claims to fame (cathedral, Classico wine, and ceramics), it's loaded with tourists by day and quiet by night. The town sits majestically on a big chunk of volcanic tuff. Streets are lined with exhaust-stained buildings made from the volcanic stuff. Train travelers and drivers use a handy funicular that shuttles them quickly from the train station and car park at the base up to the hilltop town.

Duomo - Orvieto's Duomo (cathedral) has Italy's liveliest facade (from 1330), thanks to architect Lorenzo Maitani and many others. Grab a gelato and study this gleaming mass of mosaics, stained glass, and sculpture. Why such an impressive church in a little town? Because of a blood-stained cloth. In the 1260s, a skeptical priest — who doubted that the bread used in communion was really the body of Christ — passed through Bolsena (a few miles from Orvieto) while on a pilgrimage to Rome. During Mass, the bread bled, staining a linen cloth. The cloth was brought to the pope, who was visiting Orvieto at the time. Such a miraculous relic required a magnificent church. To the right of the altar, the **Chapel of St. Brizio** features Luca Signorelli's brilliantly lit frescoes of the Apocalypse (1499-1502). Step into the room and you're surrounded by vivid scenes of damnation and salvation — Orvieto's artistic must-see sight. Only 25 people are allowed in the chapel at a time.

Archaeological Museum - Across from the entrance to the cathedral is a former palace holding a fine Etruscan collection. The highlights of the first floor are the Roman coins. A first-floor balcony affords a grand view of the cathedral. The best of the Etruscan vases and bronzes are on the top floor, where you'll also find a WC and free coffee. Look out the windows at the Duomo's glittering facade.

Museo Emilio Greco - This museum displays the work of Emilio Greco (1913-1995), the Sicilian artist who designed the modern doors of Orvieto's cathedral. His sketches and bronze statues show his absorption with gently twisting and turning nudes. Greco's sketchy outlines of women are simply beautiful. The artful installation of his work in this palazzo, with walkways and even a spiral staircase up to the ceiling, allows you to view his sculptures from different angles.

Underground Orvieto Tours - Orvieto is honeycombed with Etruscan and medieval caves. Guides weave a good archaeological history into an hour-long look at about 100 yards of Etruscan and medieval caves. You'll see the remains of an old olive press, two impressive 130-foot-deep Etruscan well shafts, and the remains of a primitive cement quarry.

St. Patrick's Well - Modern engineers are impressed by this deep well — 175 feet deep and 45 feet wide — designed in the 16th century with a double-helix pattern. The two spiral stairways allow an efficient one-way traffic flow: intriguing now, but critical then. Imagine if donkeys and people, balancing jugs of water, had to go up and down the same stairway. At the bottom is a bridge that people could walk on to scoop up water. The well was built because a pope got nervous. After Rome was sacked in 1527 by renegade troops of the Holy Roman Empire, the pope fled to Orvieto. He feared that even this little town (with no water source on top) would be besieged. He commissioned a well, which was started in 1527 and finished 10 years later. It was a huge project. (As it turns out, the town was never besieged, but supporters believe that the well was worth the cost and labor because of its deterrence value — attackers would think twice about besieging a town with a water source.) Even today, when a local is faced with a difficult task, people say, "It's like digging St. Patrick's Well." It's a total of 496 steps up and down — lots of exercise and not much to see other than some amazing 16th-century engineering. Bring a sweater if you plan to descend to the chilly depths.



To round out your Orvieto visit, window-shop for ceramics, and sample some Classico wine. Local wineries offer tours and tastings. Drinking a shot of wine in a ceramic cup as you gaze up at the cathedral lets you experience the three joys of Orvieto all at once.

More Medieval Hilltop Towns

It's hard to imagine all the medieval hilltop towns this region afforded us and they started to blend in together after a time. Fortunately Tom had arranged for a private tour guide who was not only an art historian, licensed guide, but who grew up in Assisi, the now popular touristy town. Marco was able to guide us around the towns and a bit away from the tourist masses. He also had a love of the historically significant churches and their frescos and could explain their meaning and stories. While I admit to getting frescoed out at a point and had to really concentrate, I was grateful for the educational experience. Without Marco we'd have simply wandered the streets and tried to sort it all out with tourist books and missed most of the best of these hilltop towns. Marco also took us to a local out of the way restaurant in Assisi as well as gave us other recommendations.

Todi

We learned that Todi has earned awards for being one of the most livable cities. It was one of the least touristy and afforded us an okay dinner and lots of walking the back streets. Our friends Linda and Paul had told us about Todi since Paul studied Italian while living here.

From Wikipedia: *Todi is perched on a tall two-crested hill overlooking the east bank of the river Tiber commanding distant views in every direction. In the 1990s, Richard S. Levine, a professor of architecture at the U. of Kentucky chose Todi as the model sustainable city because of its scale and its ability to reinvent itself over time. After that, the Italian press reported on Todi as the world's most livable city. Almost all Todi's main medieval monuments — the co-cathedral church (Duomo), the Palazzo del Capitano, the Palazzo del Priore and the Palazzo del Popolo — front on the main square on the lower breast of the hill: the piazza is thus one of the most picturesque in Italy and is often used as a movie set. The whole landscape is sited over some huge ancient Roman cisterns, with more than 500 pits, which remained in use until 1925.*



Spello

This is very close to Assisi but a world apart tourist wise. It has the more significant Roman walls and preserved buildings but has not been exploited quite the same way as Assisi. It is also a wee bit out of the way whereas Assisi is on all tourist bus routes. It was



one of Marco's two homes where he grew up so he knew it well. Whereas Assisi is of a white stone, Spello is all very pink. Orvieto is black from the volcanic rock. Spello has an annual festival where they line the streets with flowers – all the main street is flower lined which is at least a kilometer long.

From Wikipedia: *The old walled town lies on a regularly NW-SE sloping ridge that eventually meets the plain. From the top of the ridge, Spello commands a good view of the Umbrian plain towards Perugia; at the bottom of the ridge, the town spills out of its walls into a small modern section (or Borgo) served by the rail line from Rome to Florence via Perugia.*

History: Populated in ancient times by the Umbri, it became a Roman colony in the 1st century BC. Under the reign of Constantine the Great it was called Flavia Constans, as attested by a document preserved in the local Communal Palace.

Main sights: The densely-inhabited town, built of stone, is of decidedly medieval aspect, and is enclosed in a circuit of medieval walls on Roman foundations, including three Roman Late Antique gates and traces of three more, remains of an amphitheater, as well several medieval gates. Spello boasts about two dozen small churches, most of them medieval including Santa Maria Maggiore (known from 1159), probably built over an ancient temple dedicated to Juno and Vesta. The façade has a Romanesque portal and a 13th century bell tower, while the pilasters next to the apse have frescoes by

Perugino (1512). The most striking feature is however a very fine chapel frescoed by Pinturicchio. The Umbrian artist was called to paint it in 1500 by Troilo Baglioni, after he had just finished the Borgia Apartment's decoration.

Sant'Andrea (known from 1025). The interior, on a single nave, has 14th century frescoes. There's also a panel by Pinturicchio.

San Lorenzo (12th century). San Bernardino da Siena began his preaching season in this church in 1438.

San Claudio (11th century or earlier), an elegant example of Romanesque architecture with a rose window on the asymmetrical façade. The interior has 14th century votive frescoes from the Umbrian school. It is said to have been built on the remains of a Paleo-Christian cemetery.

Tega Chapel (14th century), with Umbrian school 15th century frescoes, including a Crucifixion attributed to Nicolò Alunno.

Other points:

Palazzo Comunale Vecchio ("Old Town Hall", built in 1270 and enlarged after the end of the Baglioni seignory, in 1567-1575). It has some frescoed halls, one attributed to the Zuccari brothers. It is faced by a 16th century fountain.

Palazzo Cruciali, built in the early 17th century.

Palazzo Baglioni, erected as a fortified mansion around 1359.

The Governor's Hall has frescoes from the 16th century.

Arch of Augustus (1st century BC-1st century AD).

In the plain, near S. Claudio, are the remains of a semi-excavated Roman amphitheater; and a small valley to the east of the town is remarkable for its traces of Roman centuriation.

Festivals: The Infiorata includes a whole night of work to create a roadway of flowers for the Corpus Domini feast.



Assisi

Rick Steves says it well: lovely and touristy but well worth the trip. We did the most touring with Marco in this town and primarily understanding the frescos and back streets. I was moved by the St Francis story and had hoped his austere religious beliefs remained but was later to learn that they did not.

While we got frescoed out, friend Ellen helped remind me how important they were: *The frescos at Assisi are very important in the history of Art. Giotto was an innovator who changed the way artists saw and drew human beings. Much more natural than the stylized figures that were current at the time. You're lucky to see them. I remember that there was serious earthquake damage at Assisi and a major portion of one of the frescos was destroyed. I'm wondering if there's any possibility of restoring it. Was this discussed? There's also a chapel in Padua with frescos by Giotto. I haunted that place, buying a new ticket every time they emptied the place. They finally got the message that I really cared, and let me stay. After seeing them numerous times and drinking in the figures, and knowing what the figures in illuminated manuscripts of the period looked like, I really understood what a revolutionary Giotto was.*



Tom's pictures are probably better but they are covered in his photo show – link at www.TomsKoi.com. We went in the 'back door' of Assisi with our local guide but soon would come into contact with the hordes of tourists.



This first picture represents the ancient measurement scales.

From Rick Steves: A worthy hometown for St. Francis is battling a commercial cancer of tourist clutter. In the summer the town bursts with flash-in-the-pan St. Francis fans and monastic knickknacks. But those able to see past the tacky monk mementos can actually have a "travel on purpose" experience. In the early 1200s, a simple friar from Assisi challenged the decadence of church government and society in general with a powerful message of simplicity, non-materialism, service to the community, and a "slow down and smell God's roses" lifestyle. Like Jesus, Francis taught by example. A huge monastic order grew out of his teachings, which were gradually embraced by the church. In 1939, Italy made Francis its patron saint. The Basilica of St. Francis, built upon his grave, is one of the artistic highlights of medieval Europe. Open again, restored, and safe after being damaged by the earthquakes of 1997, it's covered with precious frescoes by Giotto, Cimabue, Simone Martini, and other leading artists of the day. With a quiet hour in the awesome basilica, some reflective reading and a meditative stroll through the back streets, you can dissolve the tour buses and melt into the magic of Assisi. Grab a picnic and hike to the ruined castle, surrounded by the same Tuscan views and serenaded by the same birdsong Francis enjoyed. Most visitors are day-trippers. Assisi after dark is closer to a place Francis could call home.



Oh my goodness, not surprisingly I totally lost track of which picture belonged to which hilltop town. Did they start blending together? Absolutely. Assisi was white stone. Spello was pink. Orvieto was black lava stone. This first picture is the narrow little road we drove, following our tour guide, from Assisi to Spello. Spello was quieter and more enchanting.



The Wine Route between Montefalco and Brevagna was said to be one of the most beautiful roads in the country. It was not only lined with vineyards but lovely estates.

Montefalco is home of the most important red wine in Umbria and among the best of Italy, called Sagrantino which is a DOCG. There were many wine tasting shops in the upper town as well as at the main square. Their former Franciscan church houses a noted fresco cycle by Benozzo Gozzoli from Florence. Right outside the city walls is a dramatic panorama of the Spoleto Valley.

From Montefalco to Brevagna is part of a wine route that is said to be one of the most glorious roadways of the area. We drove it twice though once would have been enough -- it was the only way to return home. These are windy and tiny roads frequented by Italians who are like kamikaze pilots and surely must have a death wish to drive as they do.



Brevagna – Our guide Marco said this hilltop village was not to be missed but how many hilltop villages can you take in? They have working reconstructions of a paper mill near the Franciscan church plus other working crafts.

The main square and its two Romanesque churches were undergoing major renovations to the plaza in front. We did visit the three-generation-long family run business where we would purchase meats of the famous Cinta Senese and our picnic of the day and next day.

Nardi was quite a different experience. While it was also a hilltop town, it was surrounded by major mountains and nary a tourist. Our tour guide suggested a visit to Nardi which we did on our own.





Little streets, lots of steps due to the hills, and then look at the house with the dog on the rooftop corner. He would have had a view overlooking the hills.

One of the oldest and tiniest walled cities - Civita di Bagnoregio –

The only way to get to this 2500 year old medieval village is by foot up a very steep graded walkway.

From Rick Steves: People who've been there say "Civita" with warmth and love. This precious chip of Italy, a traffic-free community with a grow-it-in-the-valley economy, has so far escaped the ravages of modernity. Please approach it with the same respect and sensitivity you would a dying relative, because — in a sense — that's Civita. Civita teeters atop a pinnacle in a vast canyon ruled by wind and erosion. Only a few residents — many in their late 80s and 90s — remain as, bit by bit, the town is being purchased by rich big-city Italians who come here to escape on vacation. And yet, the town survives.



The saddle that once connected Civita to its bigger and busier sister town Bagnoregio eroded away. Today a footbridge connects the two towns. A man with a Vespa does the same work his father did with a donkey — ferrying the town's goods up and down the umbilical bridge that connects Civita with a small, distant parking lot and the rest of Italy.

Entering the town through a cut in the rock made by Etruscans 2,500 years ago, and heading under a 12th-century Romanesque arch, you feel history in the huge, smooth cobblestones. This was once the main Etruscan road leading to the Tiber Valley and Rome. Inside the gate, the charms of Civita are subtle. Those looking for arcade tourism wouldn't know where to look. There are no lists of attractions, orientation tours, or museum hours. It's just Italy. Civita is an artist's dream, a town in the nude. Each lane and footpath holds a surprise. The warm stone walls glow, and each stairway is dessert to a sketch pad or camera.

Today, Civita's social pie has three slices: the aging, full-time residents; rich, big-city Italians who are slowly buying up the place for their country escape (a blue-blooded "Marchesa" owns the house next to the town gate — and Civita's first hot tub); and visitors enjoying la dolcezza di fare niente (the sweetness of doing nothing).

The basic grid street plan of the ancient town survives. The rock below Civita is honeycombed with ancient cellars (for keeping wine at the same temperature all year) and cisterns (for collecting rainwater, since there was no well in town). Many date from Etruscan times. Take a look around to see Vittoria's mill (mulino), an atmospheric collection of old olive presses. The huge olive press in the entry is about 1,500 years old. Until the 1960s, blindfolded donkeys trudged in the circle here, crushing olives, and creating paste that filled the circular filters and was put into a second press.



Other hilltop towns previously enjoyed during a trip to Florence included San Gimignano and Siena. I think that I've now seen enough medieval hilltop towns but glad I did these. Orvieto was the perfect setting for an extended stay with its good location, quiet setting, perfect accommodations, and some top rated tourist sites not to mention some of the more famous wine of the region. Thanks Len and Tom!

Thank you Linda who offered her trip report from the region and is attached at the end. Linda and Tom can talk food so if you like food and especially gelato you will like Linda's report best.

Food – since I didn't get Tom to "talk food" for this report and many folks have asked for more foodie-talk, here's my effort which excludes my peanut butter sandwiches that I brought from NJ.



The champagne breakfast at the St Regis which I skipped. Huge lemons the size of giant grapefruit used to make limoncello which I didn't skip. The local desert of Umbria made of phyllo dough and sweet fruits and nuts which I missed despite my effort to find it again later.



Tom enjoying the local Umbrian wine. The Italian dessert introduced to me by Kathrine's restaurant in Florence is sweet desert wine with biscotti. Yes, the biscotti gets dipped into the wine. There is a lush layered pie with fruit and custards that is certainly worth the caloric count. I fortunately (or unfortunately?) managed to find this desert a couple times.

A note on logistics – The direct flight returning from Rome to Newark now leaves too early to catch the convenient train from Termini to the airport. Staying at the Hilton Rome Airport was a convenient way to manage departure as it's on the airport grounds and has a shuttle to the outlying Terminal 5 where all the American airlines have their own separate security set up. It also offers free shuttle service into and out of the center of Rome.

Marathon Report? PS Though this trip started in Rome for the Marathon, that trip report is under separate cover and includes pictures and notes from my trip to Naples and Pompeii before joining Tom in Orvieto.

Itinerary

Wed 3/16 - Diana and Tom

5:30pm Depart Newark EWR via CO#40

Thu 3/17 - Diana and Tom

6:50am+1 Arrive Rome FCO

Hotel St Regis Grand Hotel Rome (1) www.stregisgrand.hotelinroma.com
Via Cittorio E. Orlando, 3, Rome 00185 Italy Tele (39)(06) 47091

Marathon Village for race packet pick-up open from 17th to 19th 10am to 8pm. In the Athlete's House. At Palazzo de Congressi, Piazza John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 00144 Roma

marathonvillage@maratonadiroma.it - *Palazo dei Congressi - The design of the Palazzo dei Congressi in 1938, but the outbreak of World War II delayed construction of the building, which was completed only in 1954. The building, designed to house part of the Universal Exhibition of Rome in 1942, is one of the greatest expressions of rationalist architecture of the last century. The architect Adalberto Libera has managed to live elegantly in the same building a taste for the classic with clean and modern forms of rationality. Inside the Palazzo dei Congressi can admire exceptional frescoes and mosaics of the most important Italian artists of the twentieth century, including Achille Funi, Achille Canevari and Gino Severini, a leading figure of the Futurist movement. Of architectural interest are: the Main Hall, a former Congress Hall, recently refurbished by the architect Paolo Portoguese, the terrace with hanging garden and outdoor theater, the latter were designed and produced by the same host for Freedom events and important events.*

Thu 3/17 - Loudean, Nana (Mary) and Angela

1:55pm Depart KC's MCI thru CLT – US Air #720

Fri 3/18 - Loudean and Angela

8:20am+1 Arrive Rome

Hotel Courtyard Rome Central Park (near the Vatican)
Via Giuseppe Moscati 7, Rome, 00168 Italy Tele: 39 06 355741

Fri 3/18 - Diana and Tom

On Friday 18 and Saturday 19 you can taste an excellent pasta (€ 3,00) in the first floor rooms of the Palazzo dei Congressi.

7:30pm Dinner at La Taverna dei Fori Imperiali, Street Madonna dei Monti, 9, 00184
Tele: +39 06.679.86.43, Metro B "Cavour" – closed Tuesday
<http://www.latavernadeiforiimperiali.com/>

Sat 3/19

Loudean's friend Donna visiting for the weekend and all doing the 4K on Sunday

Sun 3/20 - Diana

9:00am Marathon starting near to the coliseum - Via dei Fori Imperiali
<http://www.maratonadiroma.it/default.aspx> - 7 hour time limit

Course: All of Rome's best. The Colosseum and the Roman Forum, Piazza Venezia and the Altar of the Fatherland, the Theatre of Marcellus, the Mouth of Truth, the Circus Maximum, St. Paul's Gate and the Pyramid of Cestius, the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, St. Peter's Square, the Vatican Walls, The "Foro Italico" and the Olympic Stadium. Piazza Navona, Via del Corso, the Spanish Steps, Piazza del Popolo and its twin churches, Piazza Navona, the Trevi Fountain.

Sun 3/20 - Tom

Am Depart to airport for rental car and drive to Umbria and Orvieto

Apartment In Orvieto - www.ripamedici.it/PrezziEng.html c/o Sabrina Tele 39 0763 341343
Call 39.328 7469620 – apartment has internet - at Piazza Ranieri, stop at the end of the square, near the Restaurant Il Pozzo etrusco. At the corner there is Vicolo Ripa Medici. Sabrina lives at No.14. - <http://www.vrbo.com/150534>

Wed 3/23 - Diana

Am Train to Umbria's Orvieto to meet Tom

Wed 3/23 - Loudean, Nana (Mary) and Angela

10:20am Depart FCO Rome thru CLT

9:17pm Arrive KC's MCI

Sun 3/27 - Diana and Tom

Am Drive back to Rome, turn in rental car, hotel near to airport

Hotel Hilton Rome Airport

Via Arturo Ferrarin 2, Fiumicino, Rome, Italy 00054 Tele: 39 0665258

Mon 3/28 - Diana and Tom

9:50am Depart Rome FCO via CO41

1:30pm Arrive Newark

Info? Try USO Rome Center, Via Vespasiano, 44, Roma - 00193 (Vatican Area)

Monday-Saturday: 0830-1700 Tel: 0039-06-397-27-419 E-mail: inforome@uso.org

Facing St. Peter's Basilica, you will need to go through the arches to the right of St. Peter's. You will now be on Via Porta Angelica - follow straight until the end of the wall and cross over the square at this point you will see the store FOOT LOCKER. Go left in front of FOOT LOCKER continue to the next corner and take a right this will be VIA VESPASANO. We are two blocks up on the left - number 44, next to the piano store on the corner.

Linda's Umbria trip notes from 2009:

Highlights of our trip

- **The charm of small, untouristed towns in Umbria and Emilia Romagna.** Todi, Norcia, Brisighella, Ascoli Piceno, Ravenna, Parma and Padova were our favorites ... each one charming and picturesque and breathtakingly beautiful. We felt like we had discovered the "real Italy".
- **Perfect weather.** Our timing was perfect; prior to my arrival, it had been cold and overcast. From the day I arrived, we had blue skies, lots of sun and 70 to 75 degrees. A few days it was slightly hotter, but overall, we could not have asked for better weather.
- **Vivaldi concert in a Venice church.** Listening to such beautiful music filling the large expanse of this church, surrounded by lovely frescoes and marble statues, was truly magical.
- **The amazing hilltop village of Castelluccio.** This hilltop town's setting surrounded by snow-capped mountains and flower-filled meadows was simply unbelievable.
- **Wonderful Italian food.** The pastas, prosciutto, parmesan cheese, black truffles and tiramisu were especially divine. We also enjoyed seeing the beautiful and colorful displays of fresh fruits and vegetables in the open markets of Bologna and Padova.
- **Gelato.** Not a day went by when we didn't enjoy this Italian treat. We tried many new flavors, but our favorites were chocolate fondante (dark chocolate) and coffee (Linda) and fior de latte (sort of like vanilla cream) and tiramisu (Paul).
- **The arcades of Bologna.** Bologna is a lively university town with fantastic walking streets and lots of piazzas. What sets it apart from many other Italian towns is its arcades – there are over 42 kilometers of them in the city! It made walking here a delight.
- **Wandering the piazzas, small cobblestone streets, and alleys of each city.** To us, this is the essence of Italy.
 - **Parmesan Cheese Factory Tour:** Seeing thousands of wheels of this cheese all in one place was so cool!

Our itinerary

Wednesday, May 6 - Todi

After my 15-hour flight on Air France (business class, thank goodness) via Paris, Paul was waiting for me at the Rome airport! He had already rented a Fiat, equipped with a GPS, which proved to be a lifesaver throughout the trip (no more poring over incomprehensible maps with too-small type!)

We drove one and half hours through lovely green countryside to Todi, where Paul was in language school. He was staying in a room at the home of the Contis, a charming couple who were so nice! I settled into Paul's room, then took a long nap. We had dinner with the Contis and Hiromi, a fellow student in the school from Japan. Paul had told me beforehand what a great cook Signora Conti was, and I was not disappointed. Dinner that evening was delicious: orecchiette (literally, "little ears") pasta with four cheeses; scaloppini of chicken with prosciutto; peas with prosciutto; and roasted fresh vegetables (tomatoes, zucchini and bell peppers).

Afterwards, Paul, Hiromi and I walked in town and had our first gelato of the trip, sitting on a small, picturesque plaza by the fountain.

Thursday, May 7 - Todi

Paul went to school this morning, while I slept, trying to shake off the jet lag. At 10 a.m., I went on a walking tour of Todi with Julia from the language school. Todi is a beautiful, small, hilltop town with views to the green valley below, and picturesque streets, squares and churches. Paul and I both loved this town!

During Paul's morning break around 11 a.m., I met up with him and the school director Stephania for a coffee and croissant, then I wandered the delightful town some more until 1 p.m. I loved this – leisurely enjoying the pleasant, untouristed streets on a postcard-perfect day with the birds singing. Paul met me for lunch at Le Scalette, a wonderful restaurant overlooking the city and surrounding countryside – what a view! We loved our shared tagliatelle pasta with mushrooms, guinea hen with prosciutto, and a wonderfully fresh salad. Of course we had gelato afterwards!

Paul had made arrangements with the school for Romy and her boyfriend Francesco to drive us to Assisi for an afternoon of sightseeing. After a gorgeous, one-hour drive, we walked through parts of this very historic town. There was a festival taking place that day – and you had to have purchased tickets in advance -- so we missed some of the city center. Nonetheless, we enjoyed walking many of the cobblestoned streets and visiting the famous Basilica. I also photographed some festival participants in their medieval costumes. After our second gelato of the day, we drove back to Todi and rested a moment before dinner with the Contis. Tonight it was delicious pasta with wild asparagus and tomatoes, followed by prosciutto, dried meats and potato bites, and lemon cake for dessert. We walked a bit in town before going to bed.

Friday, May 8 – Todi & Norcia

Hotel: Casale Nel Parco Del Monti Sibillini, Norcia

While Paul was in school, I slept until 9:30 a.m., when the birds singing outside our bedroom window awakened me. My first sightseeing of the day was from the top of the campanile at Church of San Fortunato, right near the Conti's home. I walked up the 180 stairs to stand next to the bells for a spectacular view of the city's red tile roofs and surrounding countryside. I should mention that from the moment I arrived, the weather was picture-postcard perfect: 70 to 80 degrees, clear and sunny, with a slight breeze. It stayed this way during the entire trip except for one overcast day in Venice!

Then I wandered around town, bought stamps for my postcards, wandered some more, and had gelato for breakfast at Gianni Pianni, eating it on a small square while I wrote postcards. This was so lovely, so relaxing! I made my way back to the Contis for a fabulous lunch: spectacular lasagna (handmade thin, supple noodles with wild asparagus and a light béchamel sauce); roasted rabbit with olives; roasted vegetables with bread crumbs and olive oil (zucchini, bell peppers); and chocolate cake for dessert.

We said our sad good-byes to the Contis and to Hiromi before driving to Norcia. This drive was glorious: green, green valleys, fields of red poppies, flowering fruit trees, small villages, and hilltop towns. Once in Norcia, we checked into our hotel, an agriturismo called Casale Nel Parco Del Monti Sibillini. What a setting, against the mountains just outside of the city with terrific views, flowers everywhere, even a pool!

Our room wasn't ready yet, so we went into town, walking inside the walled city and down the main street. Norcia is known for its truffles, smoked meats and cheeses, and everywhere you looked were stores with beautiful displays of these delicacies. Several stores where we stopped to admire the view gave us samples of prosciutto – what a treat! Once back to our hotel, we took a nap.

We had dinner that evening at the hotel: antipasti plate (prosciutto, pecorino, ricotta with nuts, pancetta, salami), then pasta. I had strangozzi al tartufo (a fettuccini-type pasta with black truffles); Paul had strozzapreti alla norcina (twisted tubular pasta with black truffles and mushrooms) – yum! We drove into town for a walk and gelato. We especially liked the flavor “Baci” (hazelnut and chocolate) and each had a double helping!

Saturday, May 9 – Norcia, Castelluccio, Ascoli Piceno & Brisighella

Hotel: Il Palazzo, Brisighella

Paul had fresh ricotta and a perfectly ripe pear for breakfast while I visited the goats and sheep next door. Then we went back to Norcia’s town center to buy truffles at Moscatelli’s, a wonderful store with an owner who looks just like the Godfather. Paul bought four 18-gram jars of summer black truffles (estivi) and two 18-gram jars of winter black truffles (inverni), one jar of winter truffle salsa, one jar of summer truffle salsa, and one small jar of truffle honey. As a gift, Mr. Moscatelli gave us complimentary sausages which we later enjoyed at lunch.

At other stores in town, we bought two kinds of prosciutto, a wedge of pecorino and bread for lunch later. We took lots of photos in the main square and quaint side streets before driving on to Castelluccio via a beautiful winding road lined by cottonwood and fruit trees in full bloom.

Castelluccio was definitely a highlight of the trip! This ancient hilltop town is surrounded by snow-capped mountains and fields of yellow flowers. We had a bright sunny day and no tourists except for lots of bikers making the challenging climb to the top. The setting and the drive there were AMAZING.

We had more scenic driving listening to Italian opera as we made our way from Castelluccio to the hilltop town of Ascoli Piceno. I loved this uncrowded, postcard-perfect Italian town! It was such a delightful surprise: you’d walk down a charming pedestrian street, turn the corner, and there would be a beautiful piazza. You’d walk down another street, turn another corner, and see another piazza. It was just lovely. We took a ton of photos, watched three weddings, and enjoyed our Norcia meat and cheese lunch sitting on the gorgeous Piazza del Popolo at the historic Cafe Meletti. Heaven! We wandered this fantastic town, then went back to Café Meletti for fantastic gelato: a triple cup of chocolate, coffee and stracciatella (chocolate chip).

We hated to leave Ascoli Piceno, but more sights awaited us! We made the three-hour drive on the autostrada to Brisighella and our agriturismo Il Palazzo. This B & B has a lovely view over the vineyards, but the room was very simple and a bit dark and dank. The worst part was that the bathroom was up a very steep set of stairs. (I later fell on those stairs when I got up during the night but, fortunately, I was OK.)

I took a nap while Paul took photos of the surrounding vineyards and spoke with owner Hector. Then we drove about 10 kilometers out of town to dinner at Trattoria Di Strada Casale. We highly recommend this restaurant, with its warm and cozy family-oriented dining room, and fantastic food. Paul had herb fritters with salad followed by veal meatballs, and we shared the tasting menu: asparagus flan, wonderful lasagna, pork chop with onions and potatoes, and hazelnut torte with crème anglaise for dessert.

Sunday, May 10 – Brisighella, Imola and Faenza

Hotel: Il Palazzo, Brisighella

After breakfast, we explored Brisighella’s charming squares, and second-floor arcades. We walked up many stairs to the fortress and clock tower, high above the town with fantastic views of the

countryside and green patchwork valley below. We also had fun watching a parade of Fiat 500s that happened to be that day!

Our drive from Brisighella to Imola was like Napa Valley - through rich agricultural land with vineyards, apple orchards and fields of red poppies. Our destination was San Domenico, often described as the best restaurant in Italy. It was beautiful and very elegant. The only customers were us and one other couple (everyone was at the beach – it was a beautiful day), so we had amazing service. The chef came out to talk to us about the menu and, after lunch, Wine Steward Matteo took us down to the huge wine cellar – Paul loved this!

Here was our menu: Prosecco with an amuse bouche of burrata between parmesan wafers in a beet sauce, then I had a starter of scallops in lobster sauce with braised endive, while Paul had cod in tempura with parmesan cheese sauce. This was followed by the restaurant's signature dish of a large ravioli with ricotta, spinach and slices of black truffles in a wonderful butter sauce. The surprise was an egg inside that oozed out and combined with the ricotta and spinach for a taste of heaven! The eggs in Italy are definitely different: richer and more golden in color. Paul had wonderful gnocchi with fava beans, black truffles and peas, followed by roasted branzino (Italian sea bass). We passed on major dessert, instead opting for petit fours and sugared orange peel.

After this amazing meal, we walked in Imola, not as charming a town as others we had seen, but still nice. We also walked in Faenza as we ate our gelato, and stopped in the church to hear mass being sung. We went back to our hotel and took a nap before having a casual dinner of prosciutto, pecorino and sausage at the picnic table outside of our hotel room, overlooking the vineyards.

Monday, May 11 – Ravenna & Bologna
Hotel: Albergo Orologico, Bologna

We slept late this morning, then drove to Ravenna, a small city with great walking streets, a huge plaza and sophisticated shopping. It is best known for its fantastic mosaics and Byzantine architecture. Paul had a coffee on the main plaza, then we visited three important monuments in the city, the Neonian Baptistery, the Basilica San Vitale and the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia – all with amazing mosaics. We also made a quick stop at Dante's tomb.

We had a delightful lunch at a random restaurant: a quiche-type appetizer with a chopped salad (an interesting note to this salad was small servings of honey and honeyed balsamic vinegar on the side), then we each had pastas. Mine was golden cappellacci with mascarpone cheese, spinach, pine nuts and mushrooms; Paul's was ravioli with leeks, zucchini and pine nuts in a tomato sauce. Of course, gelato followed, this time dark chocolate and coffee – yum!

We drove on to Bologna and looked at a couple of agriturismos, but none suited, so we drove into the city and, after a frustrating search, checked into room 39 at Albergo Orologico. This hotel turned out to be great, and we were very pleased with our large, comfortable and quiet room. The hotel is in a perfect location, just steps from the main Piazza Maggiore.

After relaxing a bit and a quick shower, we walked along wonderful arcade streets with high-fashion shops to dinner. Our destination was a small trattoria recommended by our hotel, Trattoria da Giampi e Ciccio. This was a charming place, with simple yet delicious food: I had lasagna and Paul had tortellini en brodo (the specialty of Bologna). After dinner, we walked in this lively university town while we ate gelato. We so enjoyed seeing Italians dining and strolling and hanging out in the Piazza Maggiore and by the Neptune Fountain, which were beautifully lit at night.

Tuesday, May 12 – Bologna
Hotel: Hotel Roma, Bologna

We spent today in Bologna, one of our favorite cities. We started by wandering on Via Caprairie and Via Clavatore, the gourmet food store streets. We salivated over the beautifully presented prosciutto; cured meats; parmesan, mozzarella, burrata and mascarpone cheeses; fresh fruit; and colorful vegetables. In season were tomatoes, zucchini (always with the blossom attached), small purple artichokes, asparagus, strawberries, peas, endives, petit green beans, and bell peppers, making for very colorful displays. It was great fun walking here!

We took a break at Café Pasticceria Zanarini on the Piazza Galvani – a lovely setting to relax and take in the Italian street scene. Across the street was Furla, a store where Paul insisted on buying me a beautiful, very Italian handbag and a cool watch.

Albergo Orologico was booked for that night, so, unfortunately, we had to switch hotels to the nearby Hotel Roma, which was not nearly as nice. After taking care of these logistics, we walked to lunch at Trattoria La Braseria, an unassuming place we stumbled upon and decided to try because we were hungry and it looked good. It turned out that this lunch was a standout of the trip! Paul loved his prosciutto with cantaloupe, and my ricotta cheese and spinach ravioli with asparagus in a light asparagus cream sauce was fantastic. We shared a terrific tiramisu for dessert, the best of the trip. An interesting side note about this restaurant was that most of the patrons were basketball players eating large quantities of food!

We then walked the arcaded streets of Bologna (over 42 kilometers of them), explored the university area, and visited the beautiful San Giacomo Maggiore Church. A good physical challenge – and worth it! – was walking up 498 stairs up to the top of Torre Asinelli for a great view of the city.

After this work-out, of course a gelato was required, and a double at Gianni did not disappoint. This was followed by a lovely nap before dinner at Ristorante Cesarina, where Paul had vegetable soup with shrimp (vellatata) and ricotta ravioli in tomato sauce, and I had an interesting artichoke salad with fennel and parmesan cheese, followed by a veal cutlet Bolognese. Paul had a limoncello afterwards.

What a charming Italian restaurant with ceramics on the walls, beautiful table linens and flowers! We think the food was better than we gave it credit – we probably didn't order as well as we should have. We strolled in the beautifully lit Piazzas Della Meranzia and Maggiore, and ate gelato before bed.

Wednesday, May 13 – Bologna, Parma & Padova

Hotel: Hotel Donatello, Padova

We explored the Mercato dell'Erbe this morning, a small but interesting fruit and vegetable open market. Just like the market we visited yesterday, it was full of the most beautiful and colorful produce! We said our farewells to Bologna and headed towards Parma, with the mission to tour a Parmesan cheese factory. Our first stop was in the tiny town of Lora, where we stopped at a small store with the yellow & blue "Parmigiano Reggiano Produzione E Vendita" sign out front. We bought some cheese for lunch, and asked the vendor if we could see the warehouse. When he slid open the doors, we were stunned to see thousands and thousands of large wheels of cheese; we estimated that there were close to 10,000! There they were, row after row after row, organized by year starting from 2004. It was just amazing.

We drove some more around the region, and found another smaller factory. We tasted cheese there as well and bought a healthy-sized wedge. We just loved seeing all that cheese! At this location, they also had pigs, which, we learned, are fed the remains of the cheese-making, resulting in tender meat for prosciutto. That's why prosciutto and parmesan cheese are often made in the same location.

We continued on to Parma, a fantastic city with lots of pedestrian streets, arcades and big piazzas. We bought some delicious prosciutto and ate it, along with the parmesan cheese from our two Parmesan cheese factory tours, on the steps of the church of Piazza Garibaldi. After a gelato, we explored this wonderful city and went in the Duomo and the Baptistery, both of which had amazing frescoes.

We would have liked to stay on in Parma, but we had to be in Venice by the next day. So we made the two hour drive to Padova (Padua) and checked into Hotel Donatello. What a great view from our room– we were on the top floor looking directly onto the San Antonio Church, which was golden in the sunset light. Wow! This church was very different from those we had seen up until now – a massive structure in the Byzantine style with lots of turrets, domes and arches.

I think Padova was my favorite of all the cities we visited. It had tons of squares and piazzas, many pedestrian streets, lots of people sitting out enjoying espresso while watching the Italian street scene, churches everywhere you looked. It was clean and beautiful, and had such a medieval feel – at any moment I thought a character from a Shakespeare play would round the corner.

We had dinner at Ristorante Alle Piazze Da Giorgio: eggplant flan with fresh tomatoes; delicious tagliatelle with zucchini, carrots and scallops; and swordfish with olive oil and tomatoes, accompanied by green beans, potatoes and the most delicious artichoke (it was small and purple and the entire thing was edible). As usual, we walked some more as we ate gelato.

Thursday, May 14 – Padova & Venice

Hotel: Oltre il Giardino, Venice

We go up early this morning so that we could enjoy as much of Padova as possible before having to leave for Venice. First, we visited the interior of the Church of San Angelo, which was just amazing with its gold mosaics, marble, frescoes, bronzes and artwork. Saint Angelo is quite revered – to the point that special San Angelo cakes are baked and sold in the streets surrounding the church.

Then we walked along wonderful pedestrian streets to Piazza de Frutta and Piazza dell'Erbe. These had the most beautiful and colorful displays of fruits and vegetables, meats and cheeses of the trip – even better than Bologna!

Padova is known for its chapel with frescoes by Giotto. We went there, but couldn't bring ourselves to pay the 12 euros (\$18) each to view them for just a few minutes (viewing is limited for preservation purposes). Instead, we bought posters of the frescoes in the Office of Turismo and had a gelato.

Before leaving town, we saw the Piazza del Valle, unlike any of the other piazzas we had seen so far. This was more like a park, with big expanses of lawn, a canal around the perimeter with bridges over it, huge statues, and a fountain in the center. It was beautiful.

The drive to Venice was quick, only 40 minutes on the autostrada, and we dropped off the rental car. We took the vaporetto (water taxi) to our hotel, which went along the Grand Canal and under the Rialto Bridge for a fantastic, photo-opp introduction to the city. Once ashore, we found our hotel, Oltre il Giardino, fairly easily.

What a charming place! Our room (Ivory), was small but it overlooked a sweet garden with climbing roses, rosemary bushes, and magnolia and olive trees. Paul had breakfast at the wrought-iron tables in that garden each morning during our stay. This was so quiet and serene compared to the hustle and bustle of the city!

Every day, there were fresh flowers in the vase on our desk: calla lilies on the first day, then white peonies. There were Bulgari toiletries in the modern bathroom, and lovely linens on the king bed. The hotel was the former home of the composer Gustav Mahler, right next to a small canal, looking onto picturesque, deep yellow-painted homes on the other side.

We had a quick lunch at a nearby pizzeria, sitting outside before beginning our exploration of Venice.

Let me start off by saying that Venice is simply amazing – it is unique and beautiful and so photogenic. It is a city comprised of canals and small bridges, winding streets, alleyways, medieval houses, and squares (called campos) with ancient water wells in the center. There are no cars in Venice; the Grand Canal is the main thoroughfare, and there are only 2 bridges that cross it – the Rialto and Accademia. It is very easy to get lost here, and everywhere you go, you see tourists huddled over maps, trying to figure out where they are.

So we joined in, just wandering and getting lost and marveling at the city's beauty. We also marveled at the stores, which sold carnival masks, leather goods (especially purses and shoes), Venetian lace, and high fashion in profusion – and at very high prices. One pair of shoes particularly caught my eye: these high-heeled beauties had diamonds on the soles, and cost 620 euros (about \$1,000)!

We made our way to St. Mark's Square, the huge piazza that is familiar from the many photos you've seen. It was very crowded, with tourists of every nationality especially French and Italians (the statistics are that Venice gets between 11 and 13 million tourists a year!). Still, it was impressive both architecturally and in sheer size, despite lots of scaffolding and reconstruction work. The façade of the Basilica is unbelievable, and this piazza boasts a beautiful clock, an iconic bell tower, and arcaded shops and restaurants around the perimeter.

We had to have a gelato in this square, and then headed back to our hotel for a nap. The bells ringing woke us up in time for dinner at Circolo La Buona Forchetta, a restaurant nearby recommended by Paul's brother. Paul had spider crab appetizer, the mixed seafood (shrimp, sea bass, scallops and crawfish); I had a delicious tagliatelle with salmon in a light cream sauce and salad caprese.

Friday, May 15 – Venice

Hotel: Oltre il Giardino, Venice

Paul had breakfast outside while I slept. Then we wandered to St. Marks Square for a tour of the Basilica, which is just amazing with gold mosaics everywhere, a huge 24 karat gold altarpiece with over 2,000 precious stones, and gorgeous artwork. Then we wandered more, stopping in several spectacular churches, each more magnificent than the last. We were especially impressed by the choir stalls at the Church of Santa Maria de Frari, and a violin exhibit in the church where Vivaldi used to perform.

We wound up in an area called Drosoduro, where we had lunch at Pane e Vino in a tranquil square far from the tourist zone. I had prosciutto followed by tubular pasta with asparagus, cherry tomatoes, mozzarella and pecorino; Paul had a salad with prosciutto, then lamb chops with asparagus. We walked some more, enjoying our daily gelato.

We were weary from all that walking, so I was very glad to get back to the hotel for a much-needed nap. We had dinner at Ristorante S. Stefano, on a delightful plaza, sitting outside and watching the world go by and the sun set. Paul had a simple pizza and I had spaghetti with clams (Venice is a seaside town after all). We loved the tiramisu for dessert.

That evening brought a highlight of our trip: a Vivaldi concert performed by Interpreti Veneziana at the San Vidal Church. There were four violins, two cellos (serious, intense Davide Amadio was wonderful to watch), a bass and a harpsichord. What a gorgeous setting, what wonderful music – this was truly magical.

Saturday, May 16 – Venice

Hotel: Oltre il Giardino, Venice

On our last day in Venice, we started by touring the Doges Palace on St. Mark's Square. This was amazing with 24 karat gold ceilings, the largest fresco in the world, a gilded staircase, carved wooden thrones, huge sculpted fireplaces, and an armor and weapons collection. It was also disturbing, as we toured the surprisingly large underground prison and crossed the Bridge of Sighs.

Next we took a one-hour vaporetto ride around the Grand Canal on our way to San Giorgio Maggiore. This was very scenic and it was nice to rest our feet, but it definitely was the long way around, taking much more time than we thought (had we boarded the correct vaporetto, it would have been a five minute crossing). Anyway, it was very cool to see San Giorgio Maggiore, a beautiful church designed by Palladio and featuring Tintoretto's "Last Supper" as well as intricate carved choir stalls.

At San Giorgio Maggiore, we took the elevator to the top of the Campanile for a fantastic view of Venice and the surrounding islands on a perfectly clear, 70 degree day with a slight breeze. A sailboat regatta was underway, making the view even more picturesque (if that's possible).

We had a mediocre lunch on a quiet street not far from St. Marks of salads and tagliatelle pasta. We walked more around the area east of St. Mark's, with its delightful squares and delicious gelato. By the time we got back to the hotel for our daily nap, I was wiped out. We had dinner at a nearby, noisy, and not-very-good trattoria: spaghetti with shrimp, grilled fish, and mixed fried seafood. On the way back to our hotel, we had the last gelato of the trip ☺.

Sunday, May 17

Our flight home left at 9:50 a.m., and we arrived in L.A., via Paris, 14 hours later. A long flight, but business class made it as pleasant as possible. What a fantastic vacation!

St Regis Grand Hotel, Rome



Exterior

Iconic Elegance

The St. Regis Grand Hotel, Rome, is a high quality top of the line hotel and was named to Condé Nast Traveler's 2005 Gold List . It has recently gone through a thorough \$35 million restoration. There are luxurious interiors and an sober exterior, creating a seductive atmosphere of this landmark hotel.

Legendary Service

This hotel guarantees to please even the most difficult travellers. It offers a 24-hour butler service ensures all needs are met quickly and successfully. Dining at the hotel is a truly wonderful memory. "Vivendo" restaurant guarantees perfectly prepared traditional Italian cuisine

Lavish Accommodations

All of the 138 guest rooms and 23 suites have unique personalities and are elegantly decorated in a combination of Empire, Regency and Louis XV styles. Well-appointed bath amenities and extraordinarily comfortable beds guarantee a relaxing vacation.

Features & Activities

The St. Regis Grand Hotel, Rome is unique among the world's fine hotels and offers the very best facilities and services for its guests. It aims to serve you with the best amenities and comforts available.

Dining Overview

Dining at the The St. Regis Grand Hotel, Rome is as extraordinary as the hotel, has one of the most well know restaurants in Europe and has been nominated by Zagat.

It is the perfect destination for intimate dinners in the wine cellar Di Vino and the up to date Le Grand Bar is a very popular destination in this part of Italy.



Entrance



Lobby



Restaurant



Restaurant

Vivendo

Vivendo is well layed out, separated in several eating areas and staffed by attentive servers. Our award-winning chefs prepare creative Italian and international dishes including : Potato and Cheese Ravioli on Tomato and Mint Fondue and Herb and light mustard crusted Loin of Lamb with Thyme Artichokes. It is a modern Meddeterennean style restarunt that offers a seasonal menu, delicious Italian wines and has been nominated in 2006 By the Zagat awards as one of the best Restaraunts.

Le Grand Bar

Here is the perfect place to sip a Bellini or a Negroni, and dine on Mediterranean and International dishes. It has become a popular hang out for Italians.

Le Grand Bar offers elegance pianoforte and immaculate service that make this place worth coming to . Cocktails are prepared professionally, they really know how to make a drink, here, whether it be a "Bellini" and "Negroni", or exotic fruit cocktails imported from the Caribbean such as the "Mai Tai" and "Scorpion".

The bar is open during the day and evening, for a quick snack or a light meal, Le Grand Bar is the perfect place to relax and enjoy this unique atmosphere of a historic landmark in Rome.

Di...Vino Private Wine Cellar

Here it is possible to organise an intimate dinner for 14 or receptions for up to 30 surrounded by the cellar's 600 wine selections of the world's finest wines. Interior features stones from Diocletian's Baths. Periodic presentations by wine producers.



Le Grand Café



Di...Vino



From Barb Damon:

Have you got things lined up for Rome? You mentioned the part about having a Dr.s note. I had forgotten about that...what a funny thing, eh? Were you able to acquire something? Where are you planning on staying? We stayed:

Rome Marriott Grand Hotel Flora ,

Via Vittorio Veneto, 191
Rome, 00187 Italy
Phone: 39-06-489929

This location was just a couple of blocks to the metro. We took the metro to the EXPO. Not sure if EXPO is at the same location, but I recall having to walk about 1/3 of a mile from stop to EXPO. We just took a taxi to 'as close as the driver could get' to the Colosseum on marathon morning, then walked up to one of the nearest hotels, after the race, to catch a taxi back.

I wasn't, necessarily, expecting the event to be as well organized as it was. That being said, we encountered many 'obstacles' on the course (people running with strollers, MANY citizens 'crossing' the course, cyclists taking advantage of the 'closed' streets- out for a Sunday ride, along side of you, old men standing on the athlete side of aid stations picking through the offerings- oranges, etc., ETC). Also, be very careful when going through aid stations particularly, on the cobblestones... they get quite slippery when wet (we saw several people have 'their feet go out from under them'). This is a great event to bring a camera, and enjoy all that is ITALY! Absolutely a favorite of ours!

From Judy following the Big Bend hiking report: Please get a second (or more) bucket for your bucket lists!