

TRIP TO ITALY

Beth and The Jeffs

13-20 January 2009

Tuesday, 13 January 2009

Today, we met at JFK and flew to Roma. All connections went smoothly and the weather cooperated, although we experienced some turbulence on the way over which delayed our dinner.

Wednesday, 14 January 2009

We arrived in Rome around 8AM, took the Leonardo Express to Termini (central RR station), and got a 9:44AM EuroStar train to Naples. The scenery quickly turned rural, with fields and vineyard, orchards, and olive groves. From Naples, we took an 11:41AM Circumvesuviana train to Sorrento. Finally at 1PM, we were able to check into Hotel Savoia, which was conveniently located near the train station. It was clean and redecorated within the past few years. Each room had a small balcony with table and chairs (although mine had some access problems due to a faulty set of blinds).

We found a quick food stop (Dolce e Salato) where we ate microwave-heated pasta (I had bowties with four cheeses) accompanied by loud TV. Although it wasn't ideal, it was quick and we were then fortified to walk around town, including a large loop down to the shoreline and back. Sorrento is located on the top of a cliff; actually it was two towns on opposite sides of a ravine that were eventually united by a road. So it is a steep trip down to the coastal areas. Additional photos are available at: <http://picasaweb.google.com/martensid/SorrentoItaly>



Had pizza for dinner and limoncello (syrupy lemon liqueur) at Franco's; pizzas were rectangular and pretty tasty (although our future pizzas were progressively better – good thing we started here!) I put my leftovers out on the balcony and wondered if I would ever be able to open the blinds to retrieve it (answer: yes, with much prodding and tugging). We walked 8 miles today!

Thursday, 15 January 2009

We started the day with a delicious breakfast at the hotel; croissants filled with lemon custard that wasn't too sweet, fresh juice, muesli – kept us full for a while. We took the 9AM train to Pompeii under skies with light rain, which increased at various times during the day, along with spots of sunshine. All along the tracks, we could see groves of citrus, covered with black nets, which apparently help trap the warmth.

Pompeii was breathtaking. Even though I had seen photos and read books, it was so much more than I expected! It was huge and tall and so much of it was still in place; the artwork and level of society and pleasure was admirable for a 2,000-year-old town!



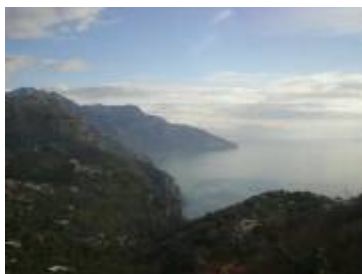
Although we became separated at Pompeii, we all reconnected at Herculaneum (Ercolano), Which was even more stunning than Pompeii. Also destroyed by Mt Vesuvius, it became buried under 60 feet of mud and thus was more intact. The baths were in almost pristine condition and the mosaic floors intrigued me (I want to make one for my front foyer). Additional photos are available at:
<http://picasaweb.google.com/martensjd/Pompeii>.



We returned to Sorrento and had a delicious dinner at La Favorita – O’Parrucchiano. We ordered main dishes and different sides (artichokes, mushrooms, and peppers stuffed with olives and eggplants). I enjoyed my squid and prawns dinner – all fresh and succulent. On our way back to our hotel, we stopped at the pastry shop and each got a treat (I enjoyed my chocolate covered marzipan cookie). Today, we walked 10 miles, so I’m sure I earned the cookie!

Friday, 16 January 2009

After another good breakfast at the hotel, we took the SITA bus to Amalfi. We sat on the right side of the bus for fabulous views of the coast. However the most exciting event was the small rockfall that blocked the road such that the bus couldn’t pass. We had to wait for a pay loader to remove some of the rock – One interesting observation: the small towns on the hills sloping to the sea reminded me of Herculaneum!



From Amalfi, we took a second bus to Salerno; now, that was a white-knuckle trip! The driver kept up a constant barrage on his horn. He forced oncoming traffic to back up and, at one point, one of the passengers in a car headed the opposite direction rolled down his window and touched our bus a few times – it was that close. I don't think he arm was even outstretched! Views were lovely although Salerno wasn't particularly attractive.

We then took the third bus, which took us to Paestum. It was a local that went through Italy Real, meaning main streets of car dealers and junk, along with a dairy cooperative and granary. One older woman on the bus was telling stories that kept the front passengers and driver in hysterics – I really wished I understood Italian on that trip.



We arrived at Paestum with the intent of eating lunch, but the place was closed and it was 2pm and the site entrance closed at 3:30. So we did without, in order to tour the ancient Greek and Roman site. The huge Greek temples dwarfed the rest of the Roman ruins. It was fascinating to promenade through these ruins, discovering Roman mosaic tile floors and ancient Poseidon tombs.

We visited the museum with a quick tour primarily to see the tomb drawings. There was an amazing array of artifacts from the site, including Greek and Roman items.

We had an adventure getting home, with a range of activities including brisk walking for two miles to get to the train station, changing trains and stations, and eventually we made it back to Sorrento, without haven eaten since breakfast (no, I lied, we did have a gelato and pistachios that I had in my pack). We had some pizza at 9:30pm at the first place we found near the train station. We also stopped at the pastry shop on the main street and got some interesting éclair-type dessert that was delicious and a dry chocolate/hazel nut bar. We put in 8 miles walking (and a zillion miles of buses and trains!)

Saturday, 17 January 2009

After our final breakfast, we headed back to Rome, taking the local train to Napoli and the EuroStar back to Rome. We checked into the Yes Hotel conveniently located (<http://www.yeshotelrome.com>, Via Magenta, 15) around 1pm and ate lunch at Gusto at the train station (I had ziti with zucchini and cheese that was very filling).

We walked to the Coliseum but it was too late to get into it and the Forum. So we walked around, experienced a march for Palestine, and ended up at the Pantheon, which was closed for Mass. So we walked to the Fountain of Trevi and the Spanish Steps, where there were tons of tourists. We stopped for dinner at Hostaria Romana, recommended by our friend Rick Steve. While we were waiting for the restaurant to open, we met some young adults who were serving as missionaries in Siberia; they





had come to Italy for training and defrosting. The waiters at the restaurant were quite silly and part of the entertainment. Dinner included Adriatic fish, chicory, potatoes, and free rice balls with mozzarella cheese. We then returned to the hotel, grabbing gelato on the way. Today was a 9-mile walk.

Sunday, 18 January 2009

Today, we experienced our new hotel's breakfast, which, compared with Sorrento, had some improvements (cheese and lunch meats) but mostly minor downgrades (powered juices, sugared croissants, slightly sour milk). Then we took the 8:30 AM EuroStar train to Florence and arrived around 10AM. At this time of year, there were no lines for the museums, so we entered the Accademia where we were awed by Michelangelo's statue of David. It really was extraordinary, despite the number of times you see photos.



At noon, we entered the Uffizzi and toured its rooms for about two hours. Its 30 or so rooms are grouped chronologically to show the development and progress of Italian art. So we started with all the Byzantine Madonnas and annunciations and so on, seeing Fra Angelico and Friar Filippo Lippi's work. And finally to Botticelli, whose *Allegory of Spring* was my favorite – although we did also see Venus on the half shell (oops, *Birth of Venus*). Leonardo de Vinci's *Adoration of the Magi* was there, along with lots of other interesting paintings, including Mantegna's *Epiphany*, *Circumcision*, and *Ascension*, Michelangelo's *Holy Family*, and a number of paintings by Rafael. A few were on loan or being restored; by the end, I certainly couldn't look at anything more.

We grabbed lunch across the street and I had a wonderful Tuscan Ribollita soup that totally filled me up. After tanking up on gelato, we then walked across the Arno River on the only bridge remaining after WWII bombing and enjoyed the views and jewelry shops. When we returned to the train station, we had time to buy snacks (I really like the Grisbi classic chocolate cookies I bought) and ended up taking a local train home, which took four hours and went along a new route. We arrived in Rome around 9PM (after almost losing the Jeffs at the penultimate stop) and searched for a restaurant near the hotel. We ended up at the Gemma de Lupe (which featured the Romulus/Remus/she-wolf story), where I had linguini with seafood (half of which we brought back to the hotel fridge and I ultimately ate for dinner when I got back to the USA). Today our travels racked up to 7.5 miles.



Monday, 19 January 2009

I got up a tad early and went to the supermarket to buy some cheeses to take home. They were mostly sheep and goat with exotic names: giglio del campidano (goat), mirau stagionato (sheep), and baia luna (sheep and goat).

After breakfast, we took the Metro, which was crowded as it was rush hour, to the Vatican area, where again there was no line. We toured the Museum where we viewed a huge number of things (thank god for Rick Steve who helped us focus on the Rafaels and such. We ended in the Sistine Chapel with Michelangelo's ceilings. Amazing and overwhelming – I never realized that Adam and God touching fingers was not a stand-alone fresco but just a small piece of a huge piece. After two and half hours, we moved on to St Peter's Basilica where we looked at the balcony where the Pope gives his addresses and the window of his bedroom and study.



We planned to take a ferry down the Tiber to the Coliseum but they weren't running this time of year, so we walked, after grabbing pizza from a riverside stand (yuck, but at least we didn't miss lunch). We walked past the synagogue (protected in front by car-bomb proof planters) and down to the Circus Maximus. Shortly afterward, we split up at Constantine's Gate. The Jeffs went to the Coliseum and Beth went to the Palentine Hill. The Coleseum was clearly the better choice and Beth regrets not having tagged along with the handsome, insightful, and witty pair. At 4pm, we met back up and walked to the Pantheon, which was an incredible Roman engineering feat. Same distance tall as wide (178 feet), its dome was still open at the top. Rafael was buried in here.

Although we had planned to take the bus back to the hotel, we couldn't find tickets and ended up walking and arrived at the hotel an hour and a half later. After a brief respite, we went for our final Italian dinner down the street at I Leoni d'Abuzzo. We had the tourist menu, which include a first (zuppa), second (cutlet), a choice of veggies (we shared salad, potatoes, and vegetables), fresh fruit salad (delicious), with a quarter bottle of wine. Enjoyable enough, the waiters seemed eager for our departure, as they kept whipping the plates away from us as we put down our utensil. We stopped at the hotel bar for a pint before retiring to the rooms to pack. Today we put in whopping 13 miles!



Tuesday, 20 January 2009

After breakfast, we checked out of the hotel, took Leonardo back to the airport, and headed back to the USA. While we were on our way, we suddenly became older than the President, while each of us had been younger when we left. Ice and snow greeted us, but we all successfully made our way back to our respective homes through various means of transportation.