

On **Wednesday July 15**, we left Ilkley soon after 7:30am and were at the Leeds-Bradford airport before 8. Turning in the car and check-in went quickly and we had over an hour before our 10:15 flight to Amsterdam. There we had a two hour layover and then it was on to Venice. Both flights were very comfortable and smooth (despite rain and low cloud near Amsterdam) but obviously we had been spoiled in our more usual travels as we expected more than the snack package that we received on each flight! We arrived in Venice really looking forward to our evening meal.

We took the boat service (Alilaguna) from the airport to San Marco – a pleasant ride with some great views of the city - but which stopped almost everywhere and took about 1 ½ hours. Consequently it was al-



most 7pm by the time we checked in to our hotel (just off St Mark's Square). It was over 90F in Venice and we were rather sticky by the time we got to our room so we took time to clean up before walking back outside to find a place for dinner.

***Our hotel to the right: the buildings to the left face St Mark's Square.***

The area around the hotel is a maze of narrow streets (consequently cooler than the more open areas) and has dozens of restaurants of every caliber. We chose one where we could sit outside in the fading light where it was pleasantly cool. The meal was good, the wine better and the overall ambiance better still. As usual, the meal took the best part of two hours.

## Thursday July 16

We slept until 9am and had breakfast in the hotel. It was about 10:30 before we started our day out. Once again it was hot and quite humid so we were glad that we had a limited agenda. One of the benefits of visiting somewhere for the sixth (or more) time is that one doesn't feel obliged to "do everything" in the few days of the visit. Today our only "must do" was to get train tickets for our onward journey to Florence on Sunday.



*Small canal and gondola,  
Rialto and drink stop*



*Our walk to the train station*



So, we walked very slowly through the center of Venice, across the Rialto Bridge and



eventually – after one drinks stop – reached the train station. We used the self-service kiosk to get our tickets (very easy) and then got vaporetto tickets for our return to San Marco. The water boats were extremely busy and we stood most of the way but it was fun to be a part of the Venice scene and it was nice to feel the breeze created by the moving boat. We sailed right down the Grand Canal, with its extraordinary buildings and bridges, and arrived at San Marco about 2pm.



### *Scenes on the Grand Canal*

We decided to have a light lunch (pizza, wine, water and espresso) near the hotel and it was after 3pm before Molly went to the room. Meanwhile I spent another 30 minutes finding an ATM and acquiring some more euros before I, too, returned to our air-conditioned room. The forecast is for a heatwave to begin tomorrow so we will probably limit our sightseeing time and pace once more.



***St Mark's Square***





This evening we walked to another nearby restaurant and enjoyed another good meal sitting outside.

### Friday July 17

It was 9am before we woke again and a little after ten when we set out on our daily walk. Today we planned to visit three of the so-called Chorus Churches for which a pass covering all fifteen can be purchased. We didn't plan to visit anywhere near all in our three day stay so we purchased individual tickets at each of the three. The churches are noted not only for their exterior features but also for the classical paintings and sculptures inside.



The first one, the Church of Santa Maria de Formosa, is dedicated to the “buxom” Virgin Mary and has a number of paintings of her as well as others commemorating other saints. The second, the church of Saints Giovanni and Paolo, was much bigger and far

more impressive inside. It had been built initially by one of the early Venetian doges and contains the bodies of many of the subsequent rulers of the city. Although there



are a number of elaborate sarcophagi, a few of the doges are mummified in glass cases within very ornate chapels, some containing famous paintings. The main altar was relatively simple but there were some magnificent stained glass windows and carved wooden screens.

The third church – and our last for this very hot day – was the small church built at a spot where a settled cloud had indicated that it should be built to house a small painting of the Virgin Mary which it was said had induced a number of miracles. This Church of Santa Maria de Miracoli houses the small painting above the altar which in



turn is reached via a twenty step marble staircase.

It is always amazing when visiting European churches that virtually any feature (a painting, sculpture, altar, chapel, etc) must be worth much more than the entire Church of St Anne which we attend in West Chester and the daily upkeep must be a tremendous undertaking.



Following our church visits we walked the remaining distance to Rialto where we crossed the bridge, visited the market and then found a convenient air-conditioned res-



taurant for a light lunch. It was very pleasant to sit down and enjoy a meal for an hour and it gave us enough sustenance and impetus to walk the final ½ mile back to St Mark's Square and our hotel. This was where we retired for the remainder of the afternoon before our 8pm walk to dinner. Tonight we ate at the same place we had chose on Wednesday and had an equally good meal – although we must have made different selections as the bill was 20% higher than previously. For the third night in a row we had a brief chat with couples at the neighboring table – tonight they were English, last night Finnish and the first night they were from France. It always seems easier and more acceptable to do this when in Europe and it adds to the atmosphere and interest of the evening.

**Saturday July 18**





Today was even hotter than the past two and we took our walking very slowly – as, it seems, so did everyone else. We walked across St Mark's Square and along a busy shopping street to the bridge at Accademia. Here we crossed the Grand Canal and walked towards the southern tip of the island to visit the cathedral of Santa Maria della Salute. This church was built in thanksgiving for the relief from the plague in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and has the dome (not unlike St Paul's or St Peter's, and similar in size) that – in addition to the Doges' Palace and bell tower on St Mark's Square – is iconic Venice.



The exterior is massive and has many statues and other features and – at least according to the guide book – the interior is quite restrained. However, the dome, the beautiful floor and the many paintings and sculptures (at all levels) make for an overall impressive sight.



After leaving the cathedral we walked along the outer edge of this island until we found a street that led back





to Accademia. Back on the “mainland” we found an air-conditioned restaurant for a light lunch. Actually for us it has been a relatively big lunch these past three days and we have thoroughly enjoyed water, wine and a salad (or similar) with espresso and (at least today) dessert. With dinner not taking place until 8:30 or so, a lunch of this magnitude somehow doesn’t feel so much out of line. We cer-

tainly have enjoyed it.

We completed our walk by returning to the hotel where we collapsed for the rest of the afternoon. Tonight we found a third restaurant close to the hotel where we could sit outside and enjoy a good meal, although the humidity was even higher than on previous evenings. As we went to bed we could hear the fireworks which were just getting underway as part of a big festival on the waterway across the island from the Grand Canal where we had walked earlier in the day.





## Sunday July 19

It was 9am before we got up once again but we had finished breakfast and checked out before 10:30. We walked across St Mark's Square with our cases and got the first vaporetto up the Grand Canal. It was very humid and already in the mid-eighties so the little breeze created by the moving boat was welcome – although insufficient to keep us cool. It was a 45 minute ride to the railway station so we had two hours before our train to Florence. We spent the first hour trying to keep cool and having a drink at a restaurant on the edge of the canal. Then we walked slowly to the station and waited for the platform to be announced.



The two hour train ride in the air-conditioned first class compartment was very comfortable and my shirt had just about dried out by the time we reached Florence. Here the temperature was about 95F but we both felt that it was considerably less humid than in Venice (which is perhaps not surprising). The walk to the hotel (about 10 minutes) was easy enough but the heat was quite oppressive. However, we stayed dry and were soon in our pleasantly air-conditioned room in a very nice BestWestern hotel. We hibernated until dinner time.

### *Santa Maria Novella (right outside the train station in Florence)*

We walked a couple of hundred yards from the hotel and found a small café where we had two starters, two mains, two sides, one dessert, a liter of wine and espresso for \$40. Amazing value; especially after Venice.





## Monday July 20

After breakfast we walked first to the Duomo on a very hot but not overly humid morning. We didn't join the  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile long line to go inside but we admired it and the Baptistry from the outside.



*The exterior of the Duomo and the bronze artwork on the Baptistry doors*



We then had a drink at a sidewalk café before tackling the market for our souvenir shopping. This done, we had lunch (met a couple of guys from London who play jazz semi-professionally and will be in New Orleans playing when we are there in September) and then strolled slowly back to the hotel. We rested and cooled down for a couple of hours and then went for another short walk (and another drink) to the River Arno.



Tonight we found another restaurant close to the hotel and had another filling meal; a little more expensive than last night but still only about \$60.



**Tuesday July 21**

Today was our day to spend time in the **Uffizi Gallery**. In all we spent about 2 ½ hours wandering past the paintings and sculptures



in this world-famous building. Many of the paintings have been in this gallery for over 300 years and, with the ongoing cleaning and restoration projects, most look like new. Clearly a lot of money has been spent over the past 30 or so years but it must have been ongoing well before that. We saw one ceiling, for example, that had been restored last in the 1700s and most of the Roman sculptures, copied in turn from the Greek, had been “touched up” even further back.

The building itself is worth the price of admission and many of the paintings must be priceless. (Somewhat surprisingly, some photography is allowed inside the gallery but for the most part we simply looked). Once again, the Medici family was a huge benefactor and indeed commissioned a number of the works of art. Many had also been commissioned for use as altar pieces in local (and national) churches and donated to the Gallery after hanging in their original location for centuries. It is remarkable to contemplate the number of people that must have stared at them as we were doing today and to think of the history associated with the intervening period.



### *Inside the Uffizi*

#### *Above right: Molly's favorite painting*

We found an air-conditioned café for lunch. It was nice to get out of the blazing sun for an hour although the air conditioning had difficulty beating the 100F temperatures – especially as all restaurants seem to like to keep the door open. We then slowly walked back to the hotel (and some effective air conditioning), after taking another look at the River Arno and the famous Ponte Vecchio.





***The Ponte Vecchio***  
***And***  
***A distant but beautiful view of***  
***The Duomo***



Tonight we ate at a very nice restaurant less than 200 yards from the hotel. It was a cut above those of the first two nights and that was reflected in the price – but we both felt that it was well worth it to eat well-prepared food in very pleasant surroundings.

**Wednesday July 22**

Today we walked to the Galileo Museum which is right next to the Uffizi. As the name implies it is dedicated to the work of Galileo but it is really a collection of scientific instruments and associated theories and advancements of the past six or seven centuries. It is well pre-







sented and there are a number of interactive or explanatory videos in addition to the often cryptic description of the item on display.

The vast majority of the items had belonged to the Medici and Lorraine families, although there have been more recent donations from other in-

stitutions and museums across Europe. Many of the displays had been on exhibit at the Uffizi (alongside the sculptures and paintings) until relatively recently, reflecting the interest in arts and sciences on equal footing.

We spent about two hours in the museum and then slowly meandered back to the hotel – with the requisite lunch stop along the way. It was yet another very hot day and somewhat more humid than we had so far experienced in Florence so it was nice to get back to air-conditioned comfort by 4pm.

There was a brief thunderstorm in the early evening but it had virtually stopped by the time we walked the short distance to the same restaurant that we had enjoyed last night. It was interesting that we were greeted by the owners as “regular” customers and even the waiter from last night stopped by to thank us for returning (he wasn’t our waiter tonight). We were even given a special course (“the John Travolta special”) as well as additional glasses of grappa and limoncello to complete the evening. We found it very pleasant to be treated like old friends.

### **Thursday July 23**

We checked out after breakfast and got a taxi to the airport. The journey was easy and we were there with almost two hours to spare before our flight to Amsterdam. We had another 1 ½ hour layover there before the last leg to Leeds-Bradford. Here we picked up our new rental car and were in Ilkley by about 5:30pm. It was a beautiful evening (although MUCH cooler than the weather we had left in Italy) and we finished our mini-holiday with another Italian meal at Piccolino.

Despite the sometimes oppressive heat, we had thoroughly enjoyed our stay in Italy and were once again pleased to have visited two of our favorite cities



## Back in England

The final ten days in Ilkley were similar to the others we had spent on this trip. Molly walked into town to shop, I walked and rode my bike (including one rather wet ride with Joanne's son Toby) and we enjoyed meals out at our favorite restaurants. We had one more meal with Dorothy and David and—as our final treat—we enjoyed a meal with Joanne and Robert at the Devonshire Arms, where we all enjoyed the eight course Tasting Menu.

One event that I had attended early in our stay was an evening of cycle racing on the streets of Ilkley. I have included my observations on that evening (The Ilkley Criterium) as an appendix. Finally, for completeness, the notes taken off our daily activities in Ilkley have also been attached as an additional appendix.

## *Appendix 1 The Ilkley Criterium*

On the evening of Wednesday June 24, there was cycle racing in Ilkley town center. It was only a 1.5Km route but had some steep climbs and fast down slopes and a nice flat stretch the length of The Grove. I walked down and caught the end of the women's race (a runaway victory) and the whole of the men's. In the latter, one rider waited his time and only in the last 4 or 5 laps did he break a lead of about 20 seconds but he was able to maintain that – and possible build on it – to get the win. It was a fun way to watch a race as the cyclists were passing any vantage point every few minutes.

Cycle racing has always been popular in Britain and, following the start of the Tour de France here in 2014 cycling has become a major outdoor activity for many more people. Road races of the type I watched tonight have been around for a long time but these have also become much more popular. In the nearby town of Otley there has been an evening race (with international standing) for many years but the event in Ilkley has only been going for a couple of years. Despite that, it too included a number of competitors who have been seen in National and International events.







“A challenging 1.5 km circuit around Riddings Road hill (100 feet elevation rise in 300 yards) with a high-speed finish along The Grove. Under 14s, Under 16s, Women's & Men's races” - and all over before dark!





