

Italy, September 2022



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Sunday September 25

We had breakfast in the airport Marriott after staying the night (and enjoying a dinner at the Capital Grill on the way) in preparation for our afternoon flights to JFK and on to Milan. I had time for a short walk before we packed and got the 12:00 shuttle to the airport. It was here that we were told of a 22-minute delay – which didn't bother us much as we had a long lay-over in New York. Unfortunately (and perhaps inevitably) that were delay increased to the point where we were disembarked and told to wait for updates. These came and it soon became clear that our connection time was getting too tight, so we started looking at alternatives.

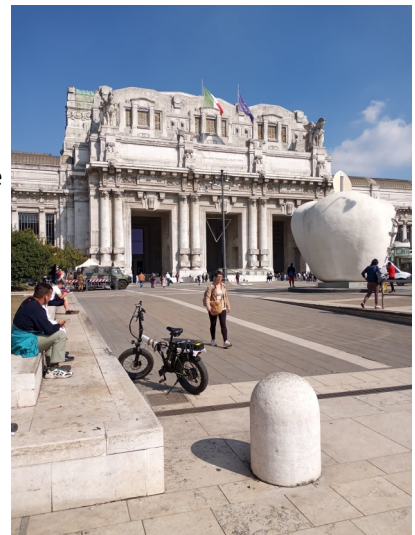
The Delta personnel (on the phone and in the SkyClub) were not too helpful as they were totally ignorant of the procedure at JFK, which often (usually?) demands a re-entry through Security and the associated time delays. To cut a very long and frustrating three hours short, we eventually decided to try flying on Monday via Atlanta, and so returned to the Marriott for another night.

A saving grace was that we were able to go to dinner in Covington at the Dee Felice Café, which we have wanted to try for some time. It turned out to be a very pleasant experience with a good meal and some entertaining piano music. We returned to the Marriott about 9:30, hoping for a better day of travel tomorrow.

Monday September 26/Tuesday September 27

We had breakfast in the hotel and then I went for a three-mile walk nearby. At 12:30, we took the shuttle to the airport and began our journey all over again. This time, things went much more smoothly. Our first flight arrived a little early in Atlanta and we had an easy change to the next gate. Here we found that the Milan flight was delayed about 45 minutes, so we had time fir a drink and snack in the lounge before boarding.

The overnight flight was generally smooth (a few bumps at take-off and near the east coast) and we were able to get a few hours' sleep after dinner. We arrived in Milan at 9:30am (after a six-hour time change) and were quickly through passport control and baggage claim. We also found the train station easily and got our tickets for the 50-minute journey to **Milan Centrale** (an absolutely magnificent railway station). From there it was a ten-minute walk to our hotel on a beautiful sunny morning with temperatures near 70F. We had only a 15-minute wait for our room to be ready, so we were unpacked and ready to go by noon.



We showered and then set out to visit the area around **the cathedral**. We walked to the nearest Metro station (10 minutes), bought a three-day pass (12 Euro each) and went the four stops to the cathedral square. It really is an amazing building and we spent quite some time just gazing at the statuary and the carvings on the front face of the

building. We then walked through the huge galleria shopping center (dating from 1865) and into the La Scala Square, where



*Galleria Shopping Center
La Scala
Leonardo da Vinci*



the opera house/theater sits on one side. We then walked back to the Metro station and returned to the hotel. It was a beautiful afternoon (sunny and low seventies) and we were out for about four hours, during which we had two coffee stops and walked perhaps a couple of miles in all. Tonight, we ate at Ostorio Italiana, just a ten-minute walk from the hotel. It was a typical, small Italian restaurant and we had a very good meal with complimentary limoncello to follow. Just like the old days! We were back at the hotel (after the obligatory two-hour meal) by 10:30.

Wednesday September 28

We were up very late and only just managed to get breakfast in the hotel. About 10:30, we left for our day out, visiting another four of the "Top 25" sites in Milan.

We took the Metro to Cairoli Castello where we started our walk from in front of this very imposing 16th century fortress which now houses several museums and adjoins a huge park, formerly the



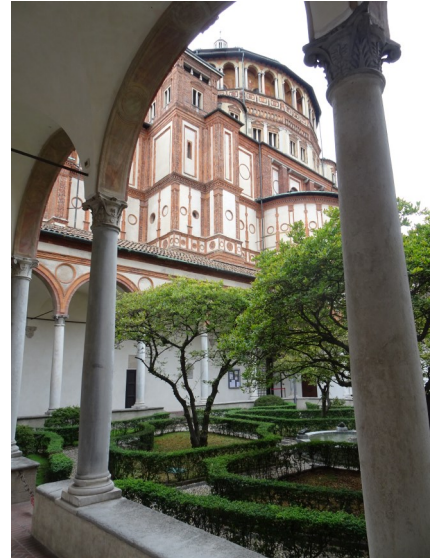
hunting ground for the rich and famous.

We then walked along a couple of streets (one of which had many palazzi along both sides – a major Milan attraction, it seems, but very little to see from the street) as far as the Santa Maria della Grazie church. This is a fine building in its own right but is most famous for its fresco of the Last Supper by Da Vinci. Tickets to view must be purchased in advance so we didn't get into the church today, although I have a distinct recollection of seeing the masterpiece on our first visit to Milan.



Santa Maria delle Grazie

Church and courtyard



From the church, we walked back to the park (Parco Sempione) behind the castle and had a distant view of the arch built by Napoleon (Arco delle Pace) but which was not completed until his "rule" over Italy had finished. We spent a little time strolling in the park before coming back through the castle to the Metro station.



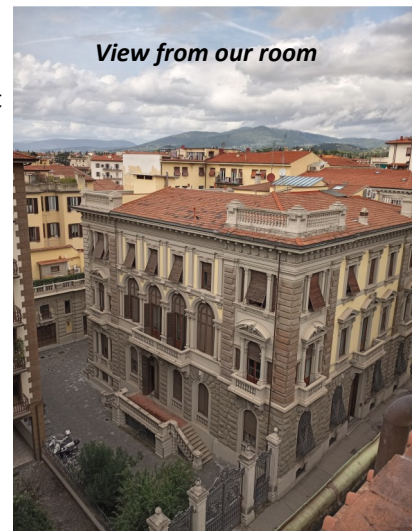
We arrived back at the hotel around 4pm, had a drink in the lobby bar, and then relaxed until dinner. Tonight, we ate at another restaurant about 10 minutes from the hotel and had another very good meal with complimentary after-dinner drinks – again for a little over \$100.

Thursday September 29

We had breakfast in the hotel, finished packing and walked to the railway station. We (eventually) found the Italo lounge where we could sit and watch the crowds in the station until it was time to board our train for Florence. Somewhat surprisingly, the train left 15 minutes late, but we had a very comfortable two-hour journey to our next destination. The maximum speed reached was 300KPH (186MPH) on the (mostly underground) stretch between Bologna and Florence. We arrived less than ten minutes behind schedule.

We pushed our cases to the taxi rank outside the station, only to find an extremely long queue. After a short debate, we decided to walk to the hotel and, despite on and off showers (and a coffee break), we made it in about an hour. Google billed it as a 21-minute walk, but the uneven pavements and streets and the luggage obviously made the journey a little longer! It was almost exactly one mile.

The hotel was relatively small but our room on the fifth floor had a small balcony



View from our room

(overlooking the city and the mountains and with a view of the dome of the duomo) and was very comfortable. We made a dinner reservation at the closest restaurant and relaxed for a few hours.

Dinner tonight was in a trattoria that claims to specialize in Tuscan food (since 1913!) and was served at a more frenetic pace than the previous two nights. Nevertheless, the food was excellent and the whole meal (three courses, wine, espresso and grappa/limoncello) cost only \$80.

Friday September 30

We had a light breakfast in the hotel and then walked (slowly) to San Marco church and the duomo. The latter had long lines for entry, so we were pleased that we had made that pilgrimage several years ago. Viewing the exterior is the best part, anyway, we feel.



*San
Marco*



*The Duomo
Florence*

We then continued to the Piazza della Signoria (near the Uffizi Gallery), where the on and off drizzle turned into a major downpour. We decided to shelter in an outdoor café and had a pleasant lunch of bruschetta, wine and coffee. The rain continued most of the walk back to the hotel, but we were able to shelter from time to time. It was dry and quite warm by the time we got back to the room. We had made reservations for dinner at a restaurant on San Marco square, so we relaxed until it was time for that short walk.

The restaurant was very quiet, which seemed unusual for Friday evening, especially after the crowds we had seen the previous evenings. The decorations were unusual, with lots of 1920s pictures and rich-looking items on the walls and tables dotted about. The wait staff were all men, dressed in smart outfits with waistcoats and like so many we have seen in Italy over the years. The menu, too, was unusual but we both enjoyed our meals as well as the wine, grappa and limoncello. It was a very pleasant evening.



Saturday October 1

We were up late again (almost 9:30) and had breakfast in the hotel. Molly felt tired, so I went for a 3 ¼ mile walk while she rested in the room. The weather was much better today, and it was quite sunny and warm for my walk to the Ponte Vecchio and back. Molly was still tired when I returned so we stayed in the room until noon and into the afternoon. Molly still felt a little under the weather, so I went for another 3 mile walk before we both relaxed until dinner time.



Florence

Uffizi Gallery and Michelangelo's "David"

*The River Arno and the
Ponte Vecchio*



Tonight, we walked to San Marco again but ate at a trattoria next door to the one we had chosen last night. This was much more frenetic, but we still had another good meal (rabbit for Molly, meatballs for me) followed by dessert, coffee, grappa and limoncello. Once again, it was a little over two hours before we started our walk back to the hotel

Sunday October 2

Molly felt better today so, after breakfast in the hotel, we walked to a church near San Marco which was listed as number 10 to see in Florence. As we have been so many times, we were amazed at the opulence inside (very plain outside) and wondered how many millions of dollars' worth of material (let alone labor) was involved in the hundreds of paintings, sculptures and other decorations.





Beautiful Florence

We then walked via the Duomo to the Central Market. Here we walked past dozens of stalls (outdoors) at which each seemed to be selling essentially the same goods – none of which we wanted and none of which we bought!

We then walked slowly back to the hotel via a café where we had a light lunch. I went for another two-mile walk in the afternoon, before we walked once again to Ristorante Retro for dinner. We were greeted like old friends and had another excellent meal (my steak was delicious) and, after we had finished, the waiter brought a slice of cheese and plum jelly for each of us and poured a glass of chianti. He would have poured a second glass, but we waved him off in favor of limoncello and grappa, both of which were re-filled. We didn't test how long this might continue but paid the bill (less than \$130 with tip) and staggered back to the hotel after another wonderful dining experience.

Monday October 3

We had breakfast in the hotel and then I went for a short walk while Molly relaxed on our balcony. A little before noon we checked out, ordered a taxi and went to the station. We had about two hours in the Italo lounge before our 2:25 train to Bologna. This was a fast 40-minute ride, and we soon found a taxi and reached our hotel before 4pm. I went for a short walk and received great first impressions of the city and its many covered arcades. I had a glass of wine at the bar across the street before returning to the hotel.

Tonight, we ate at a trattoria just a few minutes' walk from the hotel and enjoyed another good meal in relatively inelegant surroundings but with excellent service and ambiance.



Tuesday October 4



We had breakfast in the hotel and then set out on our walk. It was only about five minutes to the main square in town (Piazza Maggiore) around which are several very impressive civic buildings as well as the huge cathedral of San Petroni. This has a rather plain façade but is filled with magnificent decoration and



beautiful chapels on the inside.

San Petroni

From the cathedral, we walked along narrow streets (all pedestrianized) to view the church of San Stefano, which is actually several churches physically joined together. Some parts date from the fifth century but the majority of that seen today is over 1000 years old.

San Stefano



Our last stop (after a one-hour coffee/wine break) was at the Two Towers. These are just two of the dozens built in the 12th century, mainly to show off the wealth of the nobility but available as a defensive structure if necessary.

We returned to the hotel before 3pm and I then went for another short walk as far as a large park near the railway station. Tonight, we ate at another restaurant just round the corner from the hotel – and not surprisingly – had another good meal.

Wednesday October 5

After breakfast we took another walk to see several more churches, piazzas and civic buildings, this time all to the east of our hotel. It was a beautiful warm and sunny day and we found time for both coffee and lunch breaks between visits. Our walk took us close to the university campus, so the streets were filled with students going to and from classes. On my later walk, I went onto the campus proper and was impressed with the arcades, piazzas and old buildings and thought what a nice place to go for studies.



***The Impressive Architecture of Bologna
with its Beautiful Arcades***



Tonight, we went to a restaurant essentially next door to the hotel and had another great dining experience in a bright, quiet (despite being full) ambiance.

Thursday October 6

We had breakfast in the hotel and then I went for a short walk. We checked out at 11 and ordered a taxi to the station for our 12:20 train to Venice. This was on time and arrived in Venice at 2pm. We rather easily got a 7-day vaporetto pass and were soon on the Number 2 route to San Marco. From the pier it was about a 15-minute walk with our cases to the Albergo San Marco, a place we have stayed on several previous occasions.

We were checked in and unpacked by 3:30 and shortly afterwards we went for a short walk to make a dinner reservation and have a light snack. We then returned to the hotel until dinner time. We ate at a nearby trattoria, which was perhaps not up to the standards we have experienced so far but certainly a good meal.



Friday October 7

We had breakfast in the hotel and then started our walking tour to include several of the Chorus Churches. These are a loose-

ly affiliated group of almost 20 churches in Venice that can be viewed for a \$12 pass. We managed to see four today, but one was closed when we arrived, so we simply looked at the exterior. Again, we were amazed at the obvious opulence inside (and outside) these churches and the cost that must have been incurred in their building and decorating – not to mention the upkeep costs necessary today.

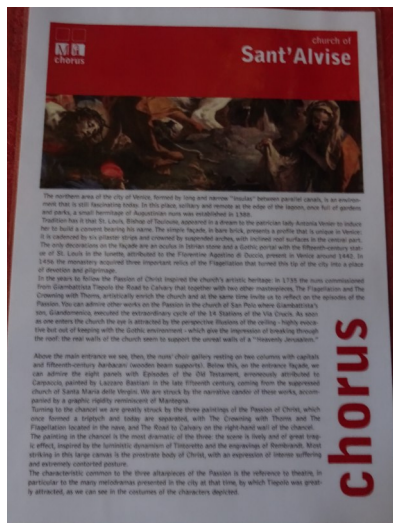


Venice Chorus Churches



In this journal we have not tried to identify each church that we visited nor have we listed their characteristics, history or architects. Suffice it to say that all were magnificent buildings (some quite plain on the exterior) and were filled with carvings, paintings and other works of art. In each church we were provided with a sheet which provided these details as well as a floor plan identifying major works.

Most of the chorus churches are at least 500 years old and many date back much further. Similarly, the paintings and other decorations date back many hundreds of years and are often the



works of famous artists. Many, of course, are less well-known names – but that may be just us!

We had lunch at a small café near Rialto and then returned to the hotel via the vaporetto.



The Grand Canal and the Rialto Bridge



Tonight, we ate at a rather elegant restaurant on the other side of San Marco from our hotel. La Caravella is a well-established restaurant on the very ritzy shopping street and everything about it was top notch – service, food, ambiance. It also cost about twice as much as any of our previous meals!

Saturday October 8

After breakfast, we set out to view another two of the Chorus churches. This time, they were on the east side of the main island, so we took a vaporetto to the first – San Pietro. It

was a relatively short walk from the boat to the church (if we away!) and, once again, it was magnificent inside and out. It inside and a rather impressive bell tower in the square near



had found it straight had the usual opulence the church.



We retraced our steps to the vaporetto and took another ride to the Cathedral of San Alvise (St Louis). This was relatively plain on the outside but had some excellent paintings, several by artists whose name we recognized. This church had existed here in some form since the 7th century and had for many years been the main cathedral of Venice (this was the first area settled) before San Marco.

The Chorus churches are open only for a few hours each day (and then not every day for all) and they are all closed for about an hour at lunchtime. We took advantage of this and had lunch sitting outside alongside a canal before visiting San Alvise.

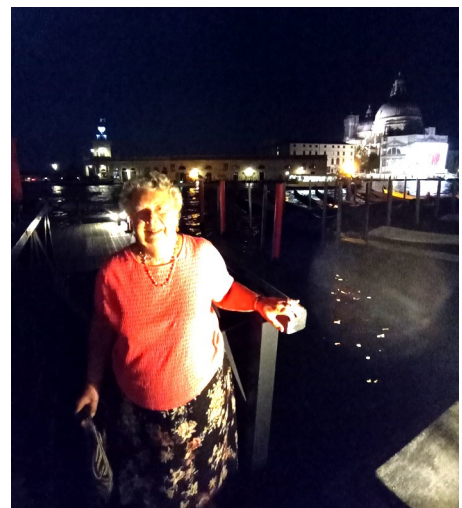
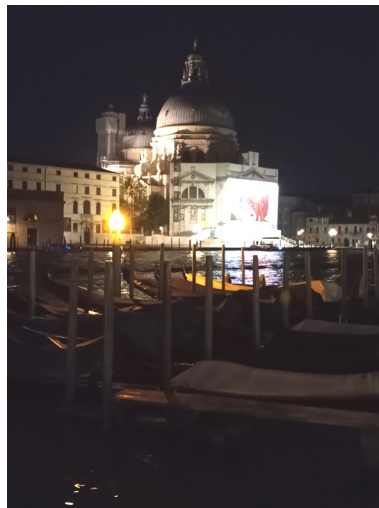
We then took the vaporetto back to the hotel. The route continued past the train station and on a canal west of the Grand Canal, so we got a 45-minute ride through a different part of the city. After spending some time in the splendid San Marco Square, we got back to the hotel shortly after 4pm after a much easier – but still interesting – day.



Tonight, we ate at Restaurant de Pisas, another high-end restaurant that sits on the Grand Canal not far from San Marco. This was another good meal in elegant surroundings with a view of the canal just a few feet away as we sat on the heated terrace.

Sunday October 9

After breakfast we set out on our souvenir shopping day. We walked on the narrow streets from our hotel as far as Rialto and returned to San Marco from there on the vaporetto. We decided to splurge and have coffee and wine on



the square. A very touristy thing to do but very pleasant on a fine Sunday morning.

After our break, we completed our shopping near the hotel and had another wine and coffee break before relaxing in the room until dinner. Tonight, we ate at Rafaele alongside one of the smaller canals. We had eaten there with Bob and Pat many years ago and we had an excellent meal tonight.

A \$75 Coffee Break!



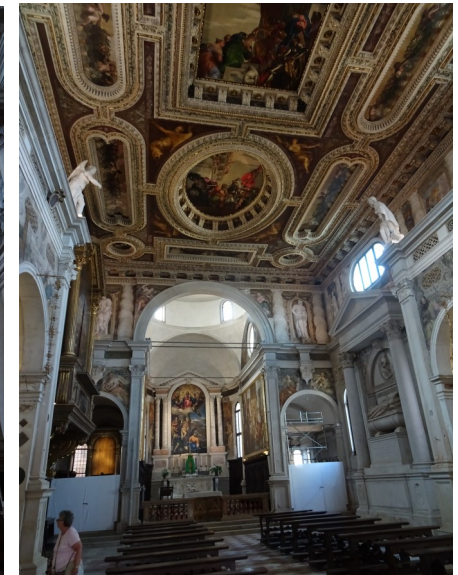
Monday October 10

After breakfast we got the vaporetto to another of the Chorus churches (Santissimo Redentore) on the island of Giudecca. This was extremely ornate both inside and out and had been built (incorporating a much smaller church that had existed there) to give thanks for the end of the plague.

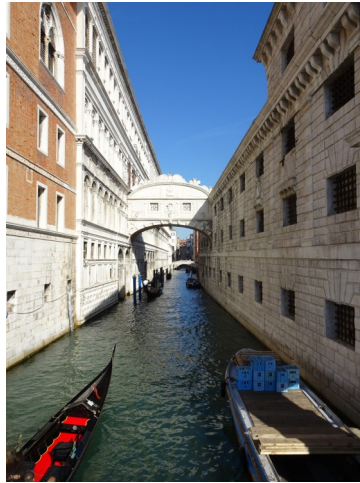


We then crossed back to the main island and did two more of the chorus churches (Santa Maria del Rosario and San Sebastiano), the second of which was beautifully decorated and most of the paintings had vibrant colors. Presumably some recent restoration work had taken place.

We then sat outside on the wide walkway near the canal and had a pizza lunch before taking the vaporetto back to the hotel. Actually, I got off one stop before molly so that I



could take a longer walk back home.



Quintessential Venice

Tonight, we decided to “wing it” and find a convenient restaurant near the hotel for dinner. We went to two or three without success and were trying to find our way back to San Marco when we came across a smart-looking restaurant with several tables available. We took a chance and – although perhaps

not the best meal we have had – it was a pleasant experience and we felt lucky to have found somewhere with tables available!

Tuesday October 11

We had breakfast, completed our packing and then did some last-minute shopping near the hotel. We checked out about 10:30 but sat in the hotel lobby until about 11:15. We dragged our cases across San Marco and got the vaporetto to the station. This was as quiet as we have seen a vaporetto on this trip – we had seats, somewhere to put our cases, and were able to enjoy one more trip up the Grand Canal.

Once at the station, we found the nearest café and had coffee and a pastry as we had about two hours before our train. We enjoyed watching the world go by, ordered two more drinks, and slowly walked into the station just before 1:30. We easily found our platform and our seats on the train and settled back for the 2 ½ hour ride to Milan. It was a very nice ride through the mountains of northern Italy, close to the lakes region, and finally into Milan.

Here we changed trains and got the airport “express” which took us to the same terminal as the Sheraton, where we were to spend the night. We had a good meal in the hotel and retired about 10pm.

Wednesday October 12

We were up about 7 and had breakfast in the hotel before checking out and walking to check-in for the plane and then the

long walk through Security and Passport Control. We arrived in the lounge after walking an estimated two miles! Thankfully, the gate was close to the lounge and the flight left on time at 11:30.

It was an extremely long trip over the Atlantic (10 ½ hours) and we arrived in Atlanta to some rough weather. Nevertheless, we were able to make our connection and then had a short, but bumpy, ride to Cincinnati. Our bags arrived with us, and we were soon on the airport shuttle to the Marriott to retrieve our car. A car that wouldn't start! We were surprised that it had a completely flat battery after 16 days, but we were prepared! This had happened before, so I had a charger ready to go. This involved opening the trunk with the disassembled car key, opening the doors, likewise, opening the hood and connecting the charger. The first three tries did nothing but the fourth started the car. We were on our way home!

Despite missing a day at the front end and having a short delay due to battery problems at the end, this was a fantastic trip. We realize that we are doing things at a much slower pace than in the past, but we thoroughly enjoyed soaking up the ambience – and the sun! We can't wait to go again.



