

Day One

Hello dear family, dear friends and fellow travelers:

Today we began our first day of the great European Adventure. Four Countries and 14 Cities in 11 days. A cavalcade of merry marauding, that we hope you will join us for each day.

This morning started off at 6am as we finished packing, printed off boarding passes on paper (yes we're old), printed off our prepaid parking voucher (\$345 dollars for the week) and went downstairs to load up the Rav 4.

Scheduled to leave on a direct Delta Airlines flight from Boston to Rome, we needed to get to the airport at least 3 hours before our 6pm departure time. Channeling my inner Sharon, we planned to arrive by 1pm.

Our first mission of the day was to drop off Sunny the Wonderdog with my dear friend David Kenyon. Sunny usually stays with our dear friends Patty and David Pietrusza, but as David Kenyon was so kind to volunteer, the Pietruszi dodged a bullet, and we didn't have to impose on their immense kindness this time.

David Kenyon and I recently returned from our own adventure to Nashville and Birmingham. There we visited the Parthenon, the famous District, the Ryman Auditorium, and the Grand Ole Opry. We also had the great fortune to attend two USFL football games, and several steak dinners, and a great time was had by all.

We went to mass on Saturday night, so we were good to leave for Boston early in the morning. We hit the Road by 10 and arrived at Central Parking by 1pm.

Not surprisingly, when we went to check in, the kind young lady at the desk (Angel) told us it was too early to check our bags. Upon leaving the desk, however, we bumped into another kind and helpful employee (Bill), who scanned our passports and gave us a bag checkin slip, and assured us our bags would be placed on our plane and available for pick up when we arrive. We are hoping that the other Delta employees will honor Bill's promise, and that they will be there in Rome Italy when we get off the plane. We shall see.

After the bag exchange we passed through security. Always an arduous process, where you are made to all but undress, and my briefcase, filled with electronics, is highly scrutinized.

After security, we walked from Terminal E to Terminal C and lunched at Wahlburgers.

Logan is a beautiful, comfortable, highly modern airport. It is clean, lovely, and filled with every comfort item one could expect. Amenities are everywhere, and it was a really good place to choose as our departure center. Moreover, you just can't beat a direct flight.

This entire trip was arranged by our AAA travel agent Rhylee Hasel. What a talented and patient woman. Trafalgar tours, who will be hosting this adventure was our choice in tour groups as we used them upon our visit to Hawaii five years ago. We were very pleased with the experience. But the post co-vid issues presented with booking the trip proved very challenging for Rhylee, who never seemed to lose her good cheer. 3 hour wait and hold times to ask Trafalgar a question, were routine. But all her hard work seemed to pay off. Let's hope Trafalgar's service in Europe is every bit as worth the time we all put in on it.

Three days ago we received an email from our Trafalgar Tour Director, Mimi Greger. She is as professional as she is gracious, and I have pestered her with several questions. She has delightfully responded each time, and I think I'm fast becoming her favorite customer (not). We get to meet her first-hand and in person, upon our arrival in Rome. There we will be able to buy several optional experiences, which I hope will be open, and which I am very much looking forward to. As you all know me, I'm the guy who wants to do everything, and as fast as I can. The proverbial energizer bunny on steroids.

Well, at 510pm, we boarded the Delta Airbus 380 jumbo jet (one of the largest in the world) and took our seats (53A and 53B) near the back of the plane. We were on the right side (facing the back) and it was just the two of us on that side. The seats were plush and comfortable and the flight attendants were very friendly and responsive to all our needs and questions. Despite the usual hiccups one might expect (a young lady behind us accidentally but repeatedly kicking the back of our seat and a large man in front of us reclining to the full level), it was a very comfortable and non eventful 7 and a half hour flight. At one point Marilyn even fell asleep, which is something she rarely does on planes.

At 230 am New York time (630am local time) we touched down at Leonardo DiVinci Airport in Rome. Our approach took us over a beautiful view of the Italian Countryside, seeing numerous farms along a lovely Mediterranean coastline. We taxied up to the gate, and in no time we're inside Terminal 3, where thanks to our new friend Bill from Boston, we collected our luggage, and proceeded uneventfully through customs.

At meeting point 4, I made two new friends, Roberto and Anna Maria from Trafalgar, who kindly informed us our bus to the hotel would arrive at 930 am, so we grabbed a continental breakfast (some fruit and a pastry) from a nearby shop and waited for the bus time to come. Shortly after we finished our nosh, we ventured outside in front of Terminal 3, climbed aboard the Trafalgar labeled bus, and began our Roman Holiday.

The drive in from the airport was about 45 minutes and the traffic was moderate along the four lane route. The countryside was hilly and looked like a scene right of a Italian brochure for travel. A beautiful sunny day, everywhere could be seen flowers, beautiful trees and Mediterranean vistas. It was a lovely, enjoyable ride.

Soon enough we began to enter the eternal city of Rome. Compact streets lined with multi storied apartments and tiny cars and scooters everywhere. Our huge bus navigating the curvy, tiny streets made us appreciate the talent and skill of our bus operator Paul.

As we pulled into the Grand Tibero Hotel, it was everything one could imagine. A large, stone building with a grand entrance, we went to check in where I met our new friend Umberto. He sadly informed me that our room was not yet ready, but as Marilyn was exhausted, an impassioned request of my new buddy, together with a 20 euro tip, soon enabled Umberto to accommodate us.

Before we proceeded up to the room, we meet our tour director Mimi. What a lovely, intelligent lady. She signed us up for an optional experience tomorrow at the Vatican, together with a tour of the Roman fountains and the Colosseum later in the day. Together with our planned excursion, we should have a full day. With Marilyn spent, we left Mimi, headed up to room 207, a beautiful spacious room with a king sized bed, and unpacked and fell fast asleep until 4pm.

At that time, we both awoke took showers, and headed out to a local coffee bar where Marilyn could get some tea. Recharged with some caffeine, we returned back to the Roman sunshine and strolled back to the hotel lobby.

There, we reconnoitered with Mimi, where she presented a brief orientation.

At 6pm, we all loaded onto the bus again (the 40 or so of us on the tour) and took a bus tour of some of the sites of Rome.

This fast paced, wet your whistle introduction, included a mixture of new and ancient sites, including a drive by of many residential, shopping and commercial districts, the colosseum, the circus grounds, the Tiber River, the outsides of Vatican City, the United States embassy, the Medici estates, several DiVinci haunts, and numerous fountains and government buildings. It was a gorgeous afternoon, and I took several pictures (albeit from inside the bus). Our day one pics can be viewed here at:

<http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/819europe/Day01/>

Upon the conclusion of our introductory tour we returned to the Hotel. Along the way, we made two new friends, a senior couple from Orlando, Kim (who was a former Denver firefighter) and his wife. After Kim retired, they toured

America in an RV, volunteering extensively with habitat for humanity. In that work, they settled in Orlando and both went to work at Disneyworld in different roles.

Eating dinner with this warm and friendly couple, we shared many stories together. This is their fifth Trafalgar tour (our second).

After a lovely dinner, Marilyn was crashing so we returned to our room, where she watched some Italian tv and I did some electronic prep work for tomorrow, powering up devices and arranging converters.

It was a long day, but we are looking forward to tomorrow.

Thanks for reading.

My Warmest Personal Regards,

Bob

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