

Day Two

Hello dear family, dear friends and fellow travelers:

First off, my apologies for the day in my Day Two Email. Unavailable internet connections made it impossible to send before now.

Additionally, kindly note that all day one pics have been converted to jpg format for easier viewing. Going forward we will use jpg for pictures and mov files for movies.

Now, onto our adventure.

Italy is indeed the most beautiful of countries. Beautiful weather, lovely people and magnificent vistas, both natural and manmade, The land of culture, history, art and engineering, everywhere you turn it is simply remarkable.

The first thing you notice, is how much it is like America, Easy for the American traveler, almost everyone speaks or at least understands English, and are friendly and courteous. Gas is \$8 per gallon so most cars are super small, and there are little scooters with a small bucket on the back everywhere. People wear helmets, but even very senior grandmas drive them.

We are cruising around in a big coach bus, and often its wall to wall, or fender to fender passage. Our Trafalgar bus drivers, who are as friendly as they are talented, get an A+ for their efforts.

Italy is a parliamentary republic founded in 1946 by referendum. Formed from a number of autonomous regional governments, the Italian peninsula became unified in 1815, as a result of the Congress of Vienna. It was at this time it became a constitutional monarchy, led by the house of Savoy. This unification effort, however, did not really become realized, however, until 1861, when with the help of revolutionaries like Giuseppe Maria Garibaldi, Victor Emmanuel became the first official king of a unified Italy, moving his capital from Turin to Florence.

During the first world war Italy allied with Germany, Austria and Hungary against England, France and the United States. In 1922, following the loss of World War One, Italy was taken over by Fascist/Socialist Dictator Benito Mussolini. An ally and admirer of Hitler, Mussolini's administration was also noted by substantial public construction and building projects as well as wide-spread political and racial persecutions. Not surprisingly, during the second world war, Italy again allied with Hitler and his Axis powers. Not surprisingly, due to its strategic location, it was a prime and early location for the commencement of the Allied and United States' retaking and liberation of the European Continent in World War Two.

Following the War, Italy as we aforementioned, became a constitutional, parliamentary republic, with its capital based in Rome.

Rome, of course, has an ancient and distinguished history, dating back to 753 BC. A modern city of nearly 6 million, it contains roughly 1/10th of the entire population of the entire country of Italy. Rome is the third largest city in the European Union, contained in the central part of Italy, which is the third most populous country (60 million) in the European Union.

Known as the Eternal City, Rome was the center of the Roman Empire, which lasted with virtually unchecked supremacy, until 410 AD, when it was sacked by the Visigoths. At its height during this time, it is estimated that it had a population of over 1 million people. Known for its advancements in law, engineering, architecture, and culture, all of these elements are still on display in modern day Rome.

Our adventure in this magnificent city began with a visit to Vatican City. Vatican City is its own separate country, within the city of Rome, with its head of state being the Pope. Pope Francis was out of town on our visit, so we didn't get the opportunity to either see nor meet him.

Founded as a separate political entity in 1929, prior to that, the Vatican was simply a walled off section of the City of Rome. It has been the official head of the Roman Catholic Church since before the year 100 AD, and comprised of less than 500 acres and 500 inhabitants, it is the smallest country, both in terms of population and land area, in the world. For a very brief time, from 1307 to 1377, the Pope moved the head of the Church to Avignon, France, in response to efforts to avoid the Black (Bubonic) Plague. (Good thing Pope Francis didn't decide to bring the Holy See to his home in Argentina during Covid). It is truly an awe inspiring, incredible sight.

At the Vatican, one can visit the Vatican Museum, the Sistine Chapel, the sites of the Papal Residence and Conclave, the Vatican Square, and St. Peter's Basilica, and we did it all. As a Catholic, I was moved, awed, inspired, and a bit saddened by the experience.

The line for entry inside the Vatican Walls is both long and daunting. We arrived early at 730 AM, and were lucky to have our fantastic tour director Mimi Greger prearrange everything. We were able to pass through a special entrance and exit, saving literally hours of time. Vatican security is significant, and we had to be screened much like an airport or courthouse before entry. Security for the Vatican is overseen by the Swiss Guard, a special mercenary branch of the regular Swiss Army, under the Command and Control of the Pope, since 1506. Known for their colorful, Pantalone, one piece uniforms, allegedly designed by Leonardo DaVinci, they carry both a radio and a razor sharp staff. (Rumor also has it they carry unseen firearms as well).

Upon arrival in the Vatican Visitor Center, Mimi passed the tour guide duties over to our Vatican history expert Amelia. A lovely, cultured lady in her 50s, she was as knowledgeable as she was fun.

Amelia began our tour by showing us the Papal Gardens. A small immaculately cared for garden plaza, right out of central casting, where the Holy Father and his Cardinals could take quiet, meditative moments of prayer and reflections underneath the beautiful Italian Sun and Stars. There did not seem to be a blade of grass or leaf out of place.

We next moved on to the inside of the Vatican Museum. Assisted by earphones that directly transmitted Amelia's remarks to the inside of our ears, we were shown room after room of breathtaking and incredible works of art, including paintings, tapestries, and sculptures from the time of Christ to the present day. Each seeking to convey the glory and majesty of God and the Church, the certainly achieved that effect.

From the Museum, (as if that wasn't enough), we moved onto one of the most amazing sites I have ever seen, the Sistine Chapel. The awesome church takes its name from Pope Sixtus the IV, who had the incredible building constructed from 1473 to 1483. All the most respected artists of the day, including Raphael, Michaelangelo and Leonardo DaVinci, participated in the project. The Courtyard just before the chapel, contains an amazing, immense gold globe, which reflects the Italian sun, and astonishes every onlooker. Even Marilyn was awestruck and asked Amelia about it.

The inside walls and ceiling of the chapel are decorated by the most magnificent paintings, frescos and tapestries of human history. Each is more breathtaking than the next. The back wall behind the alter contains the famous DaVinci mural, while the ceiling and other walls could have a normal human staring for hours in amazement. The detail, movement and color are simply what defines masterpieces. No photos are permitted inside the chapel, so a full account of the pictures can be seen here:

[Sistine Chapel - Wikipedia](#)

Another interesting fact about the chapel is that it is the room in which not only the Pope holds private masses, but also where the pope gets elected. Such election, know as a Conclave, occurs when a Pope passes away or resigns, in order to select his successor. Conclave is an Italian term emanating from "lock the door", signifying when the College of Cardinals are locked within the Chapel to pray and vote for a pope's successor. When the Cardinals come to a majority vote on a decision, they burn the ballots, with a special enhancement, in a stove inside the chapel, producing the famous "White Smoke" which indicates to the public, from a designated stove pipe, that a new Holy Father has been chosen. The last time this happened was in 2013, when Pope Francis was elected to succeed the resigning Pope Benedict.

Speechless after the Chapel, on whose floor I knelt to offer some prayers, Amelia next escorted us out to Vatican Square. From the dark inside of the Sistine Chapel to the bright sun of the Square, one felt an almost surreal experience.

At this location one can see the Papal Residence, St. Peter's Basilica, the Vatican achieve building, the Vatican Post Office, and the Vatican Residences and Hotel, which house the residents, guests and Cardinals. An immense plaza, constructed from 1586 to 1657, St. Peter's square as it is known, is centered by a huge obelisk, and is surrounded by enormous columns and buildings at every side. It has been the place where millions of faithful have stood to hear the blessings of the Pope, and to worship at the heart of the Catholic Church.

At the top of the Square is St. Peters. This, the largest Church in the World, contains a lower stage, and a upper story arched window, from which the Pope may hold mass or extend his blessing to all who stand in the square to receive it.

Few have not seen the Pope, standing in front of this famous upper story full length window, deliver his blessing.

It truly is Holy Ground.

Just in front of that window, on the steps to the entrance of St. Peters, is a permanent white stage, with an overhang, constructed so that Pope may say mass in front of the tens of thousands that crowd the square on those occasions. So when he doesn't address the crowd from the window, he may say mass down below on the stage.

St. Peters itself, is an incredible place. The largest church in the world, its enormity is breath taking.

The first thing you notice is that there is a central door, which only the Pope may use, that is actually sealed with concrete from the inside, and adored with a cross, only to be removed at his direction, or during a 25 year jubilee celebration.

When one enters on the left of that door, looking ahead to the alter, it seems a mile away. There are no pews in the main aisle of the church, but there is still plenty to see. Construction started in 1506 and was not completed until 120 years later in 1626. Laid out in the shape of a Cross, its roof is adorned with the tallest dome in the world, at nearly 450 feet, with an internal diameter of 135 feet. Allowing impressive natural light to flow upon the main alter, which is beneath its center, the dome gives this awe inspiring building even more added pinnace.

Off to the left facing the alter, behind bullet proof glass, when you first enter the church, is the famous Pieta carved by Michaelangelo. This simply magnificent masterpiece shows the Virgin Mother Mary heartbroken as she holds the dead body of her crucified son. Expressive in every way, this sculpture makes one think of the horror of Christ's tortuous death, and the absolute agony Mary had to witness. It is simply a must see, and will cause anyone, except the hardest hearted, to drop to their knees and say a prayer.

Very sadly, in 1972, a mentally disturbed man, Laszio Toth, attacked this incredible sculpture with a hammer. Now, placed behind 6 inch thick glass panels, it has been perfectly and meticulously restored to its original beauty.

Further up to the right side is the burial tomb of Pope John Paul, who is now been beatified as a saint. His life was nothing short of miraculous, and all he did for his church and the freedom of the world, deserves all the accolades that this remembrance spot displays.

Just to the left of this location is the glass tomb of Pope John the 23rd. An incredibly popular and dynamic pope, his body rests inside the glass, in what is an incredible but somewhat macabre tribute. A large man, his snow white face and skin can be seen clearly in a back lighted glass box.

The church itself had three major artists who contributed heavily in its construction and design. Such include Raphael, Michaelangelo, and Leonardo DaVinci. All made substantial influences on the building and the artwork therein. DaVinci personally designed the most impressive feature of the building, the dome and its many interior windows.

The main altar, which is centered under the dome, is the location for the Pope, as the Bishop of Rome, to say mass. Just in front of the altar, over which is an incredible, bronze canopy, is a below level grotto, which contains, among other things, the burial remains of the First Pope, Simon-Peter. The message of Jesus that he would be the rock upon which he would build his church, is now literally come to fruition, and is now more than allegorical.

Behind the main altar is another chapel section, where regular masses are held. This section, together with a similar one to the left of the main altar, does contain pews, and Marilyn and I knelt here and said a few prayers, truly moved by the experience.

With every inch of the church's walls and floor, decorated and memorialized, this Cathedral is without a doubt befitting its location. We spent about an hour in the building, and barely scratched the surface.

When we exited St Peter's we ventured down into the square for a full and closer look. Surrounded by an incredible colonnade, and centered with magnificent fountains and an obelisk, everything in this place gives the impression of holiness, reverence and devotion. It was a bright, cloudless day, with warm sunshine, and such only added to the experience.

One gets the feeling that angels must visit this place often.

Upon exiting the Vatican, we explored across the street to a gift shop and luncheonette. There Marilyn bought a very beautiful Rosary and lunch. I joined her, and our two new friends Tim and Carole for the time.

After lunch, we re-entered our motor coach, accompanied by Amelia, and drove to the site of ancient Rome and the Colosseum.

Built in 69 AD, after a fire nearly destroyed the city of Rome, this edifice is one of the greatest architectural achievements in human history. The structure, known at the time as the Flavian Amphitheater, took 11 years to construct, is five stories tall, would hold over 100,000 spectators, and is a marvel engineering and design. Built of limestone, volcanic rock and brick faced roman reinforced concrete, this wonder of the ancient world is still standing today after nearly 2000 years of use and public abuse.

The line for the Colosseum was lengthy but moved quickly, and in no time at all we were through security and inside this wonderful attraction. The first floor curved ceilings were multi storied and gave room for the introduction of all sort of items for the performances.

The Colosseum was not just home to Gladiator contests, but featured all kinds of wild animals, from Lions, Tigers and Bears to Elephants, Wolves and Rhinos. The first floor, which was underneath the stage floor, contained people powered crank elevators to lift the participants and animals into the arena. The wooden floor, which no longer exists, affording a view into the first floor compartments below, was normally covered with sand for the competitions, but would sometimes be flooded with several feet of water, in order to host mock naval battles for the spectators.

Along with its sure immense size, this building, complete with Emperor's platform and luxury boxes for the elite of Roman Society, rivals any modern stadium.

At its center, stands a large wooden cross, which marks the spot where the Emperor would sit to view the competitions. Gladiator contests would be hosted by sponsors who would pay a large premium should the contest be to the death. Gladiators most often therefore did not battle to the death, and became very famous celebrities, renowned for their style, skills and demeanor.

Just behind the Colosseum is the Roman Forum. This plaza, adorned by large still standing columns, was the focus of Roman political and cultural affairs. For centuries the Forum was the center of day-to-day life in Rome, hosting triumphal processions and elections, public speeches, and significant criminal trials. It was also the nucleus of commercial affairs. It additionally became the site of many statues and monuments, that commemorated the Rome's great men and events.

Just behind the forum is the famous Roman Circus grounds, made famous by the chariot races in the movie Ben Hur. Like the Colosseum, the Circus Grounds could also accommodate in excess of 100,000 spectators along its oval track which spanned more than a mile in length. In the center of the track, was the Circus' spine, which was an elevated area between the tracks used for storing items used for producing or managing the event held at the grounds. Along the outside of the track are elevated slopes upon which spectators would watch the festivities. The Circus grounds, despite their ancient heritage, are still in use today by the citizens of Rome, for concerts and similar events. Indeed, just two days prior to our seeing such, it had been the site for hosting a rather major European rock concert.

From the ancient Roman sites, we next ventured into the more modern areas of the city. We were able to see major government buildings, such as their version of the White House, which is the office of the Prime Minister, the edifice of the Senate and Parliament, and their Palace of Justice, which houses the Italian Supreme Court. While in town we witnessed a large demonstration of Taxi Drivers, raising their voice of concerns to their government regarding Uber and Lyft. Yes, modern democratic government in action.

We also were fortunate to gaze upon the many bridges over the famous Tiber River. These bridges, many over 1000 years old are paragons to engineering, strong enough today not only to last the tales of time, but also to carry the weight of modern traffic, including busses, trucks and multitudes of cars.

One of our last stops was the Pantheon.

The Pantheon is a former Roman temple built by Emperor Hadrian in 126 AD. In 609 AD, it became a Catholic church (Basilica di Santa Maria ad Martyres or Basilica of St. Mary and the Martyrs).

Another marvel of Roman engineering, the building is cylindrical with a portico of large granite Corinthian columns (eight in the first rank and two groups of four behind) under a pediment. A rectangular vestibule links the porch to the rotunda, which is under an awe inspiring coffered concrete dome, with a central opening (oculus) to the sky.

Now, almost two thousand years after it was built, the Pantheon's dome is still the world's largest unreinforced concrete dome. The height to the oculus and the diameter of the interior circle are the same, at an amazing 142 ft.

One of the best-preserved of all Ancient Roman buildings, this is in large part because it has been in continuous use throughout its history: since the 7th century, it has been a Roman Catholic church dedicated to St. Mary and the Martyrs.

The beautiful plaza square in front of the Pantheon is called Piazza della Rotonda.

Walking into the Pantheon, one is awestruck by its sheer size and majesty. Directly across the door, a football field away, is the alter, adorned in gold and artwork. The dome, which lets in a circular light through the oculus, operates as a sun dial, as the sun travels around the inside of the accented dome during the day. Looking up, one is reminded of the well of the souls from the first Indiana Jones movies.

Two items of note. First the Pantheon contains the tomb of the great artist Raphael. Secondly, despite having its open hole in the roof, weather elements, such as rain, only effect the pewless floor directly under the oculus. At that spot, there are timely holes in the tile floor, which allow the rain water, when it does fall, to be instantly evacuated from the building. Again, simply amazing.

The Pantheon, although a church, is official state property of Italy, and is visited annually by over by over 6 million people.

The building, made of Roman Concrete, is adorned with marble, and really does show the standard exemplar for future architects when classical styles were revived. It was simply wonderful.

From the Pantheon we next travelled to see the fountains and piazza's of Rome. Our first stop was the Trevi fountain, with its magnificent artwork and cascading waters. Legend has it if you toss a coin behind your back, over your shoulder, and

into its waters, a wish you make will come true. Marilyn and I both tossed Euro coins into its blue waters, with a wish and a prayer. Well you know the saying... when in Rome.

Next to the Trevi is a world famous gelato shop, where we sampled their product that lived up to its reputation. I got a small dark chocolate and strawberry. It just might be the reason to return to Rome again.

We next ventured to the famous four rivers fountain, made known to many by the novel Angels and Demons. Such represents the four major rivers of the then known continents. Interestingly enough, the Americas are not represented either by the Amazon or the Mississippi, but instead by the Rio de la Plata between Uruguay and Argentina (upon which my Dad, Bob Geddis and I travelled when we went to Antarctica). The other three rivers represented in this 1651 masterpiece are the Danube for Europe, the Ganges for Asia, and the Nile for Africa.

Crafted in 1651, the fountain contains four men reclining at its base, representing their respective continents, and is topped by an immense obelisk made of Aswan Granite.

The four rivers fountain is the centerpiece of the Piazza Navona. This wide open plaza is surrounded by 15th century buildings and has at its base, dozens of shops and restaurants.

It is at one of these restaurants that we joined our new friends Carole and Tim for dinner. Marilyn had Prauns (which looked like a gigantic bug. I had spaghetti bolognese. Both were excellent (but of course I am taking Marilyn's word for it as I am not terribly thrilled with bugs).

After a long day, we returned home via our motor coach to the Grand Tiberio Hotel. Along the way we were blessed to see a beautiful sunset over looking the city, from the vantage of a bridge on the Tiber River.

It was a simply wonderful day, and I took several pictures. Our Day Two pics can be viewed here at:

<http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/819europe/Day02/>

Despite being a bit fatigued, we are looking forward to continuing our adventure tomorrow.

Thanks for reading.

My Warmest Personal Regards,

Bob

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