

Italy Trip Itinerary: Pam and Gary 2008

June 25-6: Rome:

Find an entrance to the Subway system (Metro), and pick up a guide map, probably at a magazine stand. Buy your tickets (biglietti) either at the stand or from a machine. Insert the tickets into the entry box and wait for each of them to be stamped, then retrieve them. Depending on the stop you choose, you will be able to use them to connecting trams, buses, etc., within 75 minutes (?). (I'm assuming you have already converted dollars to Euros. If not, go to an ATM machine (Bancomat) and use a credit card to buy them. The card will get you a much better rate than cash or traveler's check. DO NOT GO to a currency exchange—they will charge you an arm and a leg! If the ATM refuses your card, go to a bank, present your passport and ship ticket; they'll honor your card. Your best bet is a card you have used for a long time and have a good record of paying promptly.)

Get off at the station marked Vatican City. (Citta` del Vaticano). You may have to switch lines (A to D or vice versa) at "Termini" (the central train station in Rome). Follow the signs to St. Peter's Basilica. You may have to walk a few blocks to the Piazza. Depending on when you get there, you may see crowds of people waiting to see the Pope at his Wednesday morning audience. Go to the line on the right and wait to get into the Basilica. You will be stopped by guards with search wands, etc. like at the airport.

When you enter the Basilica, look to the right. You will see Michelangelo's Pieta`, now behind glass (someone attacked it a few years back and damaged the Virgin's face, which had to be reconstructed). All around are statues and paintings of the saints by famous artists. One dates from the 11th (?) century—a seated St. Peter in bronze showing wear on his outstretched toe, from centuries of pilgrims rubbing it. It dates from the old basilica (Constantine's ?). If you can get close to it (sometimes it's roped off), do the same. You will also see the tomb of John Paul II. The Main altar is crowned by a bronze "Baldacchino" with swirling columns, done by Bernini. The bronze was removed from the Pantheon and melted down. This sort of thing was done a lot during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance—especially if the material was gold, bronze or marble. If you're adventurous, go up the tower to the dome and walk around. If you whisper against the wall, you can be heard on the opposite side. These acoustics are the result of Michelangelo's design, based on Brunelleschi's dome in Florence. Also go to the crypt below the main altar (you'll see signs directing you). There you'll find St Peter's tomb and other Popes including John XXIII.

When you're finished, ask how to get to the Sistine Chapel. On the way you'll find a cafeteria ("self service"; cafeteria means something else in Italian) where you can find an excellent buffet lunch at a reasonable- by European standards- price. A bathroom ("toilette") is nearby. Try to find a guide book to tell you who, what and by whom the paintings of the Sistine Chapel are all about. The Room has been used by Papal Consistories to elect new Popes, and was recently restored. The Ceiling is by Michelangelo, of course, as is the "Last Judgement" over the main Altar (this is especially intriguing from a symbolic point of view. You may want to google everything before you leave.).

From there go to the Raffaello Stanze (Raphael rooms)—once again marvelous and needing much detailed explanation (more than I can give you here). The "Segnatura" is a room that sums up the Renaissance, with the "Disputa" on one wall (theologians discussing the Blessed Sacrament) and the "School of Athens" on the other, using Leonardo to represent Plato (arm raised), Aristotle (arm level—the middle way) and Michelangelo in the foreground, with Bramante as Pythagoras, etc.—symbolizing the ancient philosophers. On a smaller wall is Mt. Parnassus with Apollo surrounded by ancient ancient poets, like Homer—and Dante! (Religion, Philosophy and Poetry/Art)

Continue through the Vatican Museum to the hall of statues. You'll probably pass through the courtyard of the museum where you'll find a huge pine cone from Roman times, and a huge bust of Augustus (ignore the rest). Ask for the Apollo Belvedere, to see that, plus other Roman copies of Greek originals including the Laocoon, and the Torso from which Michelangelo learned a lot about sculpting bodies. These were dug up when the Basilica was being built in the 16th century.

Then walk through the Pinacoteca (Art Gallery) to see some marvelous Medieval and Renaissance paintings, including Transfiguration by Raphael and Merlozzo da Forli's Angels.

If you're not exhausted after all this, go outside, past Bernini's Colonnade, down the Via Della Consolazione to Hadrian's tomb, now Castel St. Angelo (the Church re-dedicated almost every pagan building at some point in time.

June 26:

Ancient Rome: Use the Metro to go to the Roman forum. There you'll find lots of ruins, the most interesting of which are the altar where Caesar's body was brought after his assassination (you'll find flowers placed there every day), the rostra where Mark Antony delivered his funeral eulogy for Caesar (stripped of its marble, showing only bare brick), and the Roman Senate (Caesar was NOT assassinated here but in Pompey's Forum (revenge!)) And Brutus may have been Caesar's illegitimate son, by the way. (Et tu, Brute?) The Senate may not be open when you get there, unfortunately. Also look for the "Golden Mile" (Miles Aurea),

from which all roads led to and from which all distances in the Empire were measured (Mile=the length of a thousand strides of a Roman soldier).

Now take a look at the main arches: that of Septimius Severus at the head of the Forum, and the Arch of Titus on the Via Sacra leading into the Forum. On the latter you'll find the inside of the Arch depicting Titus's destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem with soldiers carrying the menorah.

On a hilltop adjacent to the Arch of Septimius Severus is a church built atop the place where Cicero had Cataline's body thrown from the Mamertime Prison into the Cloaca Maxima (sewer) leading into the Tiber, after he was convicted of treason (Cicero was the prosecutor). Adjacent to the Forum is the Arch of Constantine and, of course, The Coliseum (Flavian Amphitheatre). You really should read up on this before you go. It was built over an artificial lake built by Nero for his Naval War Games. Nero's house (Domus Aureus, or Golden House) is still being excavated nearby.

Other things nearby: the Baths of Caracalla, Maxentius' Basilica, the Imperial Forum with Trajan's Column, the Palatine Hill with the palaces of Augustus, Livia, etc., The Capitoline Hill with Michelangelo's piazza, plus the Capitoline Museum and the Ara Caelis. Looming over everything is the Monument of Victor Emmanuel (the white wedding cake) built to commemorate the unification of Italy in 1861, and the tomb of the unknown soldier. At the foot of the Capitoline stairway is the Palazzo Veneziano (Venetian Palace) where Mussolini used to give his speeches on the balcony (with the Lion of St Mark, the symbol of Venice, in bas relief).

After lunch near the Coliseum, use the subway plus a tram to go to the Pantheon (an all concrete dome with an "oculus" or hole in the middle to prevent it from falling. It took Brunelleschi, the Florentine mathematician to figure out how to build an enormous dome that would not fall in; he used a very heavy weight or lantern, something every dome builder has used since, except occasionally they use an iron statue, as in Washington, D.C. (See Florence.) Roman engineers figured out how to extend the arch's design into a circle to make a dome, and invented concrete that did not have to be reinforced with steel to continue standing— something we did not figure out until the 19th century !!). The Pantheon's been standing since the 1st century BC. Raphael is buried there. (It's now a Church— what else?) From there walk to the Piazza Navona to see Bernini's fountain with the statue holding its hand over its face to hide what he thought was the ugly façade on Amannati's Church. It's funny.

Then take the Metro or bus and go to the Piazza di Spagna to see the Spanish Steps and Bernini's Boat, and if you have time, to the Piazza del Popolo to see the twin churches. (You can walk there if you are not tired, or go by Metro). Or go to the Trevi Fountain—hard to find, but once you're in the vicinity, just ask. Take pictures. Everyone does.

One thing you may want to do but probably won't have the time, is to go to the Church of St Peter in Chains (San Pietro in Vincoli). The major attraction is the tomb of Julius II built by Michelangelo. In the center is the incredible statue of Moses. The tomb was supposed to be housed in St. Peter's Basilica, but Julius' successor was one of his enemies, so they switched the tomb to the much lesser destination, way off the beaten track, but named after St. Peter after all. There's lots more to see, but if you make it this far, congratulations! Take a rest!

June 28:

Portofino: A beautiful destination all on its own. Just wander around on foot or take a small boat tour around the peninsula. (Check at the excursions desk of your tour boat to see which one is best for you.) You might also prefer to take a boat south to Cinque Terre, a great little seaside town equally quaint and beautiful. If you're really adventurous try going north to Genoa to see Columbus' home town. Lots to see there, but I doubt you'll make it. However, you might be able to get an excursion to the Marble mines at Carrara. Michelangelo personally selected stones for his statues there.

June 29-30:

Livorno: This one's a real challenge. I suggest you rent a car and go immediately to Pisa to see the Campo dei Miracoli (Field of Miracles): the Leaning Tower, the Baptistery and the Cathedral—all in what is now called Italian Gothic style. The statuary and mosaics are all pre-renaissance and wonderfully antique—and in typical gothic practice, with few or no artists named. Look especially at the pulpit in the cathedral with bas reliefs designed by the family later referred to as the Pisanos—what else? They later helped decorate the Baptistery in Florence with its gigantic bronze doors—later to become the masterpiece of Renaissance, one of which, by Ghiberti was dubbed the Gates of Paradise by Michelangelo.

Next, take a brief turn to Lucca, another gothic town built on an old Roman fort. The central square is actually the site of an old arena with the buildings arranged in an ellipse. The cathedral is wonderful here, too.

Finally Florence. There's too much to do here. I suggest you buy a guide book, or at least a map showing all the major buildings—a book store should have them. First, go to the Duomo (cathedral), once the biggest church in Christendom, until the building of St Peter's in Rome. It is so huge it took hundreds of years before anyone could figure out how to build a dome over it. This is what Brunelleschi did and what's been copied ever since. (Except for the brick; everywhere else marble facing is used.) His work in the beginning of the 15th century set off the Renaissance along with the almost naturalistic murals of Giotto in the side chapels. The Baptistery, in addition to the Gates of Paradise, houses a marvelous gothic mosaic of the Last Judgement, which compared to Michelangelo's in Rome may give you nightmares. Michelangelo grew up here, looking at that

mosaic from the time he was baptized!! Once outside look up at the tower designed by Giotto, but finished off by those who preferred the more fanciful gothic style. Classicism was considered too dour by Florentines at first.

Behind the duomo is a museum of the opera (works) of the Duomo showing what the artists left behind: a statue of the Pieta` by Michelangelo with Nicodemus looming over the Virgin and Christ. Nicodemus' face is that of an old Michelangelo. The work is flawed because the Virgin's leg is cut off by Christ's body. It's a masterpiece nevertheless. There are also at least three statues by Donatello—one in a niche with the legs hidden by a shield (his first try); perhaps the most dramatic is one he did at the end of his life also—the Magdalene, emaciated and dressed in animal skins, to indicate her suffering in the desert for her life of sin (they thought she was the prostitute Christ had saved; she wasn't).

From here walk to the Palazzo Vecchio (City Hall). It housed one of the first modern assemblies to return to the republican form of government since Rome. That huge meeting hall (Salone del Cinquecento) is the place where Leonardo and Michelangelo competed for a prize to paint the walls each facing the other. Neither is visible today but Leonardo's may be hidden behind one of Vasari's works (a student of Michelangelo). There are other marvelous rooms here—including Machiavelli's office while he was Second Secretary of the Republic in the 16th century. In the square outside is the bronze marker on the pavement showing the place where the monk Savonarola was burned at the stake in 1498 for declaring Pope Alexander VI (Borgia) a heretic!

In addition to statues by Ammanati and others there is a replica of Michelangelo's David. The original is in the Accademia down the street surrounded by other marvelous statues from the studio of Michelangelo. In the bell tower of the Palazzo Vecchio was once a bell called the Vaca (cow) because of its bellowing sound. It called the people to meet in a parlamento (town meeting) in the square whenever the city was in danger—the first liberty bell. Before this all bells were in Churches, calling worshipers to Mass. This was the first use of a bell for civic purposes.

On the opposite side of the Piazza is the Loggia dei Lanzi with the statue of Perseus holding the head of Medusa by Cellini, and the Rape of the Sabine Women (Rape meaning capture—by the Romans who had no women at the time) by Giambologna.

Continue toward the Arno River to the Uffizi (offices of the Medici, now one of the greatest museums in the world). In the courtyard are statues of the great Florentines of history from Dante to Galileo. Once inside you will suffer from intellectual overload. It is impossible to grasp everything you will see, so take it easy.

One of the more interesting rooms contains three paintings of the same topic from around the same time, but showing three different artistic approaches: the Madonna enthroned—by Duccio, (Sienese) Cimabue (Giotto's teacher) and Giotto—who transcends the others in realism (except for perspective—you need mathematicians from the Renaissance to grasp that.) Not too far away is a charming Annunciation by Simone Martini, one of my favorite gothic paintings.

Continue on systematically room by room until you get to the early renaissance from Paolo Uccello (perspective run wild!) to Gentile da Fabriano (everyone's favorite Christmas card), Piero della Francesca (portraiture), to Filippo Lippi and Botticelli (Mythology) all the way to Michelangelo and Leonardo. The mediums progress from tempora and gold leaf to fresco to oil in the course of 200 years. And in one room is a huge altarpiece by a marvelous Dutch master showing shepherds adoring the newborn Christ (another favorite of mine). The Dutch taught the Florentines how to use oil paints (their climate was damp), and from that point everyone could have his own art gallery.

On the top floor is the long Galleria with rooms branching off with even more examples of Florentine art from Caravaggio to some baroque types I'm not too fond of, but look anyway. At one end is another copy of the Laocoon (remember Rome?)

If you're hungry go back to the Duomo and look for the Self Service (cafeteria) at one of the corners of the streets facing the cathedral. They've got good food available all day long—you don't have to wait until 8PM. Then look for the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, the former residence of the Lorenzo dei Medici. There is a lovely courtyard where Michelangelo studied as a boy, and upstairs is the chapel with a famous fresco showing Lorenzo on horseback and his grandfather, Cosimo, marching to Bethlehem to visit the Christ Child. Gorgeous!

Then go left to San Lorenzo, the parish church of the Medici. It still has no façade, but that was because the Medici were tightwads. The most interesting aspect here are the chapels with the famous tombs of later day Medici—called Lorenzo and Cosimo, but not the originals. The statues of Night/ Day, Dawn/Dusk, are Michelangelo's of course, as is the statue of the Madonna and Child, showing the Madonna with her body twisted in at least three directions (remember the paintings he did at the Sistine Chapel—he originated this technique). Another chapel was added later (not by Michelangelo) after the Medici became Dukes of Tuscany (including, once again, another Cosimo)—Oh well! There is a hidden room where Michelangelo fled to avoid capture during one of the many wars of the time. He could barely stand up, and he slept on a stone slab. He also drew a number of sketches for later works on the walls. Ask if you can take a look. It may be locked. Also nearby is the Biblioteca (library) founded by Cosimo, free to the public (the first since ancient times). Look at the staircase, constructed by Vasari from Michelangelo's design. You won't see another like it anywhere. Also notice how the writing desks are positioned next to the windows (no lights).

Ask how to get to Santa Maria Novella from here—it's not far. There is a crucifix by Brunelleschi which he used to teach Donatello about bodies. But most important is the very first fresco showing the Renaissance use of perspective—the Holy Trinity by Massaccio. The Madonna is a middle aged woman (very realistic) pointing to Christ on the cross. This also shows the first use of the device known as the “sacred conversation”, with one figure facing the viewer and pointing to the object of the piece. It is a device used by almost every famous Renaissance artist from that time on—including Leonardo, who usually had his angels, etc., pointing up.

Next take your pick: Santa Croce or Santissima Annunziata. Santa Croce is the “pantheon” of Florence where the tombs of most of the famous Florentines are buried from Michelangelo to Galileo (Michelangelo's body had to be brought back secretly from Rome so the Pope wouldn't try to bury him there). Leonardo died in France but there is a monument to him nevertheless, as there is for Enrico Fermi, the immigrant to the US who set off the first chain reaction making possible the development of the Atomic Bomb, under a football field in Chicago during World War II. Dante is buried in Ravenna south of Venice because his party was outlawed in the 13th century. He's remembered nevertheless. Look around at the frescoes on the walls, by Giotto, etc.

On the way to Santa Croce you will probably pass the street where I lived as a student: Via dei Benci 20. There is a Renaissance fresco above the outside of the building that was only recently discovered after the façade was cleaned. I didn't know it was there 50 years ago. Next walk toward the river to see several famous bridges: Santa Trinita', alle Grazie, and the Ponte Vecchio. You'll see that one again when you go to the south bank.

Santissima Annunziata is a huge church perhaps best known for the frescos by Andrea del Sarto in the vestibule. On the way is the Ospedale degli Innocenti (Children's Hospital) with a loggia designed by Brunelleschi with ceramic plaques of the Infant Jesus by Della Robbia, in swaddling clothes, between the arches.

Further on is the Accademia (the David) and the Convent of San Marco with marvelous frescoes by Fra Angelico showing one of the first uses of perspective in the Annunciation. He and his students painted the wall of each monk's tiny cell with lovely colored paintings depicting the life of Christ. My favorite is one with disembodied hands flagellating Christ—almost modernistic in design.

Circle on back to the Bargello, the old police/military station, now a museum. The courtyard has a wonderful stairway with coats of arms leading to the second floor. Each floor has great statues, paintings, etc., with ceramic busts of famous men and enormous ceramic plaques from the studio of the Della Robbia on the top floor. In between are statues by Michelangelo (a young Bacchus), Donatello (the lion Marzocco and his famous David) and Giambologna (Mercury).

Other landmarks on the side streets are the house of Dante (small) and that of Michelangelo as a youth. Two famous works he did as a child are there: the Madonna of the Steps (bas relief) and a battle scene, both in marble. And the Orsanmichele, a grain storage building built by guildsmen and converted into a Church/museum in the gothic style. Niches house statues by Bandinelli, Donatello, etc., and the Main Altar is a gem of Gothic design. Also look for the Church of the Badia—one of the oldest in Florence. When I was a student I used to go there on Sundays to watch Mayor LaPira deliver huge baskets of bread to the poor after Mass. He was the only Christian Democrat to be elected Mayor in this Communist town at that time.

If you think you're finished, you're not. Cross the river and go to the Pitti Palace—the formal residence of the Dukes of Tuscany (Medici) in the late 16th, early 17th centuries. It's huge! It's filled of artwork from every century, including Raphael (who stopped in Florence to pick up a few pointers) et.al. The Boboli Gardens are used to put on operas during the summer months complete with villages, horses, etc. Once again, get a guidebook to prevent intellectual indigestion. The building itself was designed for the Pitti family by Ammanati but taken over by the Medici.

Also on this side of the river is the Church of Santo Spirito designed by Brunelleschi with a marvelous classic basilica design—in gray and white tones (very different from gothic), including the courtyard. The Church of Santa Maria del Carmine has frescoes showing the very beginnings of Renaissance art—beginning with the frescoes of Massaccio in the Brancacci Chapel. Compare Masolino's gothic Adam and Eve (no bones) with that of Massaccio—realistic, weeping human beings. And look at The Tribute Money by Massaccio showing Christ at the center with the arms of his disciples being “foreshortened”. Here we see what three dimensional art on a two dimensional plane looks like!

My very favorite Church, however is the Romanesque San Miniato al Monte (pre-gothic) with a very gothic pulpit inside nevertheless. You have to climb a bunch of steps to get there, but it's worth it.

Two days is just not enough for Florence!!!

July 2: Messina

Ask your excursion desk officer how long it takes to get to Catania, then, if possible, rent a car and go. There you will see an old Greek theater (Odeon) and you can drive up around Mt. Etna. It is still active (more so than Vesuvius) so don't go too far. You'll like the view. If there's time, drive to Syracuse also. The Greek Theatre there is spectacular, as is the stone quarry and the Roman amphitheatre (an oblong arena). If neither trip is possible, take an excursion to Messina itself. It's beautiful, but not spectacular.

July 5 & 6: Venice

This is another exhausting experience because of the time allowed. No rental cars here; just ferry rides (on vaporettos) and walks.

Start at San Marco's Square—an incredible sight all on its own. You might enjoy a gondola trip up the Grand Canal, if you've brought enough money with you. But first, go into the Cathedral to look at the mosaics and other works of art. The four Byzantine bronze horses that used to be on top of the façade are now inside the museum. The Cathedral itself is a combination of Byzantine and gothic architecture. If it rains you will probably have to walk on boards to get into the cathedral; the floor itself is “wavy” and is covered with carpets to prevent people from slipping. There is a marvelous altarpiece encrusted in gems (the Pala d'Oro) in one of the side altars—take a look. Outside is a belltower with iron mechanical men hitting the bell on the hour. It is a gem! Also atop a pylon is the lion of St Mark and a statue of St Mark on another.

Next, go into the Ducal Palace next to the Cathedral. On one corner you'll find embedded a statue with four kings dating from the time before Constantine when the Roman Empire was divided into four parts. Venice was founded at the time of the barbarian invasions, built on a series of islands in the lagoon so that their armies could not invade without ships. It worked for a while; but that meant Venice would have to become a sea/trading power if it was to stay alive. They set up a Republican form of government that lasted a thousand years (twice that of Rome's) which continued electing their senate and Doge (Duke or Leader) until Napoleon conquered it in 1797 and turned the city over to Austria (an Empire!!) because he thought it was too Aristocratic. Sometimes political figures are just stupid. When the Venetians revolted Austria tried to bomb the town from air balloons—thank God they didn't have airplanes in the 19th century.

The entrance to the Palace is a huge Renaissance style staircase with statues by Sansovino (a Florentine who also designed the library beyond the Piazza) on either side: Beautiful! Inside is the great meeting room (Sala del Maggior Consiglio) where the great council of the Republic met to make decisions. The frescoes are by Tintoretto and son, (I think his daughter Marietta did a portion as well), dark but beautiful—the largest in oil ever attempted at that time, and stuck to a wall as though it were a fresco—perfect for that damp weather! There is also a box where people could secretly denounce their enemies prior to trial, and a dungeon adjacent to the “bridge of sighs” where the condemned would travel on the way to prison. But for all the scariness of it, Venice was the most liberal state (next to Florence) in the world at the time. When the Pope tried to initiate the Inquisition there, they yawned. When Spain threw the Jews out of Spain in 1492, they welcomed them to live on an island which got its name “ghetto” from the iron filings that iron mongers used to throw (gettare) there as a kind of junk pile. The Jews were delighted and built two magnificent synagogues there, still operating today.

For lunch, try “Harry’s Bar”(an American hangout Hemingway used to visit) just off a side street, or go to one of the lunchrooms (café’s) on the Square—elegant and expensive, but the spaghetti alle vongole (clams) is luscious (a Venetian specialty).

Next try the Museo Correr, another fantastic museum filled with art work from every era, but especially Byzantine (a lot of which came to Venice after the Turks conquered Constantinople/Istanbul). You will also see a number of Renaissance works there by Titian and others. (Titian once asked Michelangelo why he outlined his paintings first, and Michelangelo asked back why he didn’t—HA!)

Next go to the Accademia to see a marvelous collection of works by Carpaccio (the St Ursula series) and Veronese (Feast at the house of Levi). The first is about the young woman who is urged by a vision of an angel to travel from England down the Rhine to make a pilgrimage to Rome. She did accompanied by 11,000 (?) virgins. They were captured at Cologne (the former Roman Colonia Agrippina) and martyred—or so the legend goes—thus converting the barbarians! The second was Veronese’s attempt to “modernize” the Last Supper. But the bishop objected because he depicted German (not Roman) soldiers in the scene, so Veronese just changed the name of the painting without altering the painting itself (Damn independent these Venetians—they were powerful and wouldn’t put up with nonsense, not even from the Church!). There are lots of other works by famous Venetian painters—enjoy!

At the end of the day you might want to go to the Church of Santa Maria della Salute (Renaissance and baroque) at the mouth of the Grand Canal; and/or the basilica of San Giorgio Maggiore across the lagoon—both worth the effort.

Get yourself a map of the stops of the ferries (like the subway in Rome) and decide what you’d like to do next: The Island of Murano is where all the famous Venetian glassware is made. You might want to buy some, but I’d recommend you watch them make it there but buy in one of the shops off San Marco so you don’t get overpriced (I did, so I know what I’m talking about).

Go to the Ca’ d’Oro, perhaps the most beautiful Gothic building on the Grand Canal; it’s now another museum. The Church of the Frari has a spectacular Assumption of the Virgin by Titian (also in oil—look at the colors!) and a Bellini altarpiece in the sacristy. There’s also a statue of John the Baptist by Donatello there which might remind you of the Mary Magdalene at the Opere of the Duomo in Florence. Stop at the Rialto Bridge also—you might want to buy something there—especially fruit if memory serves. And the Church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo (Zanipolo in Venetian dialect) where you’ll find a triptych by Bellini, etc. The Scuole Grande di San Rocco (St Roch, the patron saint of medicine, I believe) guild hall has marvelous hand carved wood paneling on the first floor, but on the second, there’s a large, magnificently decorated assembly hall. The Scuola or confraternity was created after the plague broke out and someone “borrowed” a relic of St. Roch from Southern France. There are other Scuolas in Venice you might want to visit as

well. Actually they were insurance companies of a sort—you saved money for your heirs in case of death, and it earned interest in trade---or would you call it a stock market?

By the way, you may want to see if you can find Marco Polo's house—I never did.

Another place worth visiting is the Arsenale, Venice's boat building yard—the very first “arsenal”. Or on another day you may want to go to the Veneto to see some marvelous palaces—especially one by Palladio (La Rotonda) near Vicenza. If it reminds you of something, think of the Jefferson monument in Washington DC or his house in Monticello. Palladio's architecture became the template for large houses all over Europe and the US.

If you get through all of this without collapsing, mentally or physically, congratulate yourself. When you get home you'll want to borrow my art books—go buy your own or go to the library: I NEVER lend mine out!!

I don't know much about Split or Dubrovnick in Croatia, except that they were once Venetian colonies. Take excursions and see if you can tell the similarities and/or differences. Then when you come home, you can tell me about them.

July 9: Naples

Don't bother with Capri; it's beautiful but a tourist trap. Instead, rent a car and either go to Pompeii or Herculaneum, or head towards Sorrento and the Amalfi coast. The road is dangerous as heck, but you'll make it because everyone else is scared of it too. Stop at Amalfi, of course, and Positano—two of the most charming sea coast towns ever. When you get back to the boat you will either know a lot more about ancient Roman ruins, or the sea foods of the Campagna (Naples region). Don't bother going into the city of Naples either—you'll get lost or regret the odors of all the uncollected trash!

Arrivederci Italia!!

