

*A Trip to Italy*  
*...Che Bello!*



*Spoleto*

***Two Years of Planning***

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***Two Weeks of Fun, Food and Mayhem  
In Rome, Umbria and Tuscany***

*A Trip to Italy*

*Che Bello!*

*Two Years of Planning  
Two Weeks of Fun, Food and Mayhem  
In Rome, Umbria and Tuscany*

*.....by John Perides*



*...for the dreams of my parents, Assunta and Steve...*



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*Umbrian Countryside*

## *Table of Contents*

### *Part 1*

<i>Forward.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Why This Book? .....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Prologue: Why Go Again???</i> .....	<i>7</i>
<i>Che Bello! Tour 2010 Itinerary.....</i>	<i>19</i>
 <i>Part 1    Getting to Rome and Umbria.....</i>	 <i>29</i>
<i>Chapter 1....Our Arrival in Rome.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Chapter 2....The Five Fountains Tour.....</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Chapter 3....Finishing the Five Fountains Tour.....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Chapter 4....Our First Roman Dinner.....</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>Chapter 5....The Vatican and Baroque Rome.....</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>Chapter 6....Hello Spoleto and Thank You, BB.....</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>Chapter 7....The Ancient Treasure Chest.....</i>	<i>84</i>
<i>Chapter 8....Sunday Laundry and Lost in Space.....</i>	<i>91</i>
<i>Chapter 9....Madonna dei Bagni; L'Antico Food Samples.....</i>	<i>101</i>

*A Trip to Italy... Che Bello!*



*Fine Wines of Italy*

***Forward***

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## *Why this book?*



[L'Antico Forziere, Casalina](#)

*I hope this book is useful as you make your plans to visit Italy. Perhaps our itinerary can be an outline for your plan. Each chapter tells what really occurred compared to our plan. Our lessons may help you remain calm as you meet unplanned adventures. I have added web links throughout so you can read more about the wonderful sights and sensations of Italy. The Appendix has more names, addresses and phone numbers of the places we went and the people who helped us on our journey, as well as personal recommendations, tips and recipes (try them) to use as you prepare for your own trip. Enjoy.....*



**Dave, me, Liz, Judy, Donna & Diane in [Vatican Gardens](#)**

*Prologue... Why go again???*



*Italy*

*We had just completed our 2005 Mediterranean Sea cruise, and we both knew we had missed something special in only touching a few coastal ports of Italy for half-day excursions. Florence, Rome, Pompeii and Sorrento all looked great, but our time to explore was really hampered by group schedules. To top it all, we didn't get to eat much of the heralded foods of those cities. A slice here, a sfogliatelle there, a cookie over there, in fact the only really special thing was our first tastes of limoncello at my cousin's kitchen table in the house where my grandfather was born. We had arrived unannounced in Torre del Greco that day and wound up spending two hours of unforgettable time even though we did not speak a word of Italian and they did not speak a word of English. Our limo driver was a lifesaver for that stop. He had to work through their quizzical looks as we explained in English how we were all related. It was especially difficult because we all had different last names. You see I was there in the House of Oculato with my cousin Louie Razzetti from Silver Spring, Maryland, and as you know my name is Perides. Our mothers were sisters and both Oculatos. We kept drawing imaginary family trees in the air as we tried to make clear our maternal connections to the name of Oculato, our grandfather and their great-uncle. Hey,*

they still gave us the limoncello even though they might have suspected that we were not really relatives. When we got back home I was determined to return to Italy some day. We did manage to throw some coins into the Trevi Fountain during our short excursion to Rome, so it was almost assured, right?

In 2007, I decided it was only fair to go to some Germanic regions of Europe out of respect for Diane's maternal heritage. We went to Prague. While this is a Czech region, they do have really good beer and a history of German occupation, so I figured that was German enough. Actually that was only the start of the trip. After a few days the tour company drove us through Carlsbad (Karlovy Vary) and down to Nuremberg where we departed on a river cruise through the Mein Canal and out onto the Danube River for a week-long adventure. Once on the Danube we quickly came to the German city of Regensburg, the home town of Pope Benedict XVI. From there we stopped in five cities in Austria before concluding the cruise in Budapest. Between the Czech Republic, Germany and Austria we did see seven very Germanic cities, so Diane was tickled.

By the next summer I had completed writing my cookbook, *Home Cooking Parties for Eight*, so I had time on my hands. We joined up with three other

*couples to rent a beachfront in Emerald Isle, North Carolina. While this was a long, long way from the green hills of Italy, it was during those lazy days sitting on the oceanfront porch and in the sands of that lovely place that we hatched the idea of returning to Italy. Everyone was psyched to go at the time. So when I got home I began the two years of planning that preceded the journey described in this book.*

*The internet is a wonderful tool. In just a moment you can go from your living room to the four corners of the world. When we returned from Emerald Isle I decided to retire from the daily working world and devote my time to traveling the world (cyber world that is) to see where the best place was that we could go in Italy. I wanted it to be land based and for us to see much, much more of the countryside than we had during our sea cruise. I looked around Rome; I looked around Venice; I restudied Florence. Eureka! Florence! We had only spent a half-day there during the cruise. That was enough to tell us there was much more to this city and region to be explored. It is in Tuscany, and who hasn't heard of Tuscany and its Chianti wine. Florence-Rome-Venice, this was the European Grande Tour for the last 150 years, and the idea of Tuscany really whetted my appetite.*

*I started to notice the Rick Steves travel shows about Italy, especially the Tuscan adventures. Then I saw the Rick Steves episode about the Hill Towns of Central Italy and Umbria, the Green Heart of Italy came into view. I studied maps and found Umbria truly was in the heart of it all and right next door to Tuscany. I also noted that the same kind of accommodations in Umbria cost about 25% less than those in Tuscany. It might even be possible to stay in Umbria and visit all of those other places for daytrips. I mean, Rome was 2 hours away, as was Florence, San Gimignano, and Siena. Granted Venice was about 5 hours from Umbria, but that might be exchanged for a visit to the Adriatic Sea which was half that time. I began to look at the cities and regions of Umbria and found a few familiar names, Assisi, Spoleto and Perugia.*

*I talked about the trip with everyone I came in contact with. One day I was sitting in the waiting room for my eye doctor and started chatting with Sandy at the reception desk. She and her husband had done the Grande Tour and she started to rattle off books I should read. I knew about Frances Mayes and Under the Tuscan Sun, but Sandy wanted me to read three books by Marlena di Blasi – who? The books were about Umbria and Tuscany, but Sandy wanted me to*

start with Marlena's first book on Venice just so I would have context for the second and third books. The next thing I knew Amazon.com had delivered 3 used beauties and I was off on a literary adventure with 1000 Days in Venice, 1000 Days in Tuscany and The Lady in the Palazzo. Marlena is a chef from St. Louis who fell in love with Fernando from Venice during her visits to that city to write some food articles for US magazines. She decided to pack up and move to Venice when Fernando unexpectedly followed her home to St. Louis to propose after they met in a café in Florence and struck up a romance. By the end of her 1000 Days in Venice she and Fernando had decided to opt for a country lifestyle and went off to Tuscany before finally settling on a perfect townhome apartment in a palace in Umbria's Orvieto. I did stop by their apartment when we toured this city, but alas, no one was home. I was very attracted to Marlena's writing because of her magnificent descriptions of the food customs of central Italy and her wonderful recipes.

Marlena created a yearning in me for more so I read her book about her summer in Sicily and finally noticed a book by Michael Tucker of LA Law fame. He and his wife Jill Eikenberry, also of LA Law, decided to buy and renovate a home in Umbria near

Bevagna after they fell in love with the region on a vacation. His book, Living in a Foreign Language: A Memoir of Food, Wine and Love in Italy captured my imagination to the point where I sought out the experiences he described in the book and began planning them into our trip. You'll read later about "...eat anything they serve you roasted on a stick."

Next I took a new direction and looked at two historical books. Francis, the Journey and the Dream by Fr. Murray Bodo and The Prince by Niccolo Machiavelli. St. Francis was born in Assisi and Machiavelli was a citizen of Florence. With all of this under my belt I returned to the internet and began identifying the stepping stones around which I would build our journey. I knew we would both be retired by the 2010 time frame I had selected for this trip, so we could extend it to two weeks or more. We eventually and coincidentally wound up with the same 17 days we had spent on our Mediterranean Cruise a number of years earlier. This would give us two full weeks based in Umbria and a few days and nights in Rome, our gateway city in Italy.

I settled in on my two-year journey of research and planning for our trip. It was a glorious time. I read so many websites, tried so many recipes, watched so many YouTube videos and studied so many Google

*Images pictures of our planned destinations that if someone conked me on the head and I woke up in a stupor, I would have believed that we had already made the trip. Everything was so vivid that when we really did show up on top of all of those mountains, the views were familiar. I found the most wonderful tour guides, hotels and bed and breakfast places to build a tour around. The feedback from the six people who eventually went on the tour with us was great.*

*Things went so well and we were all so excited on the first few days of the trip, I immediately began sending blog notes about our daily experiences to friends back home as we traveled. This book is the diary of our trip based on those blogs.*

*As you go through the book be sure to click on pictures and on underlined phrases if you are interested in more information. These items are linked to websites on the World Wide Web. I am pretty sure with all of these references and the insights I provide from our actual experiences you will be able to plan a pretty good customized trip of your own to this land of great food, beautiful sights and enticing history.*

*Here is the note I sent to our friends the night before we left. It is followed by the itinerary for our trip.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Our bags are packed and ready to go....*

[Click Here](#)



*We'll be somewhere beyond the sea....*

[Click Here](#)



*So long home sweet home.....*



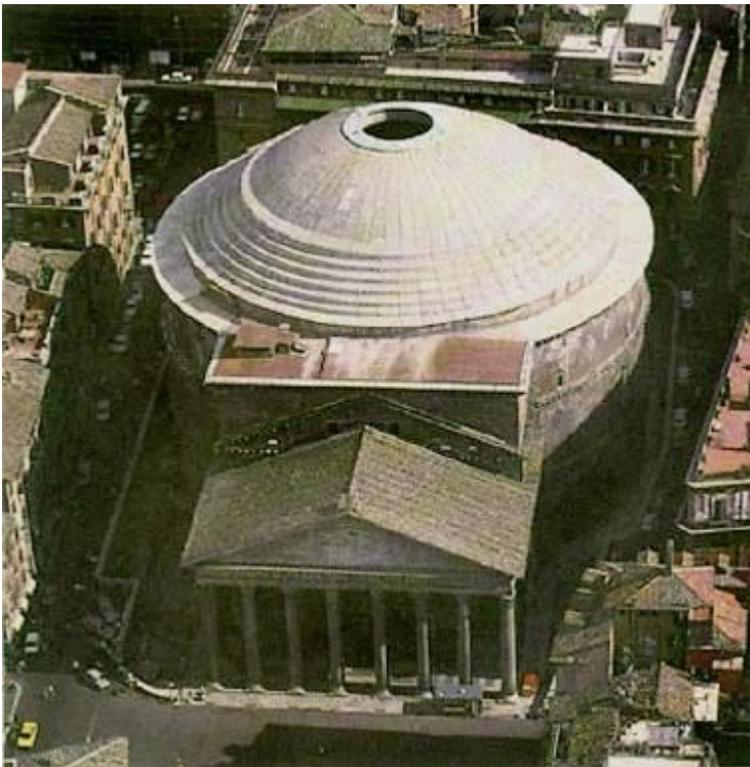
*Hello sweet Italy.....*



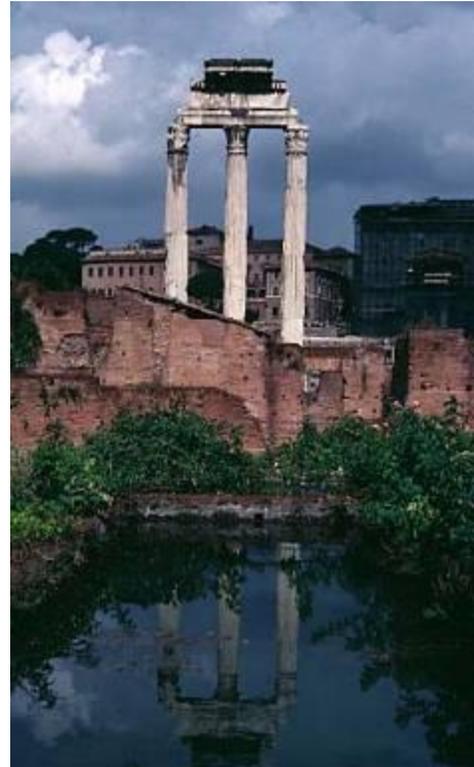
[Riomaggiore, Cinque Terre, Italy](#)



**Colosseum**



**Pantheon**



**Roman Forum**



## [Piazza Navona](#)

Our love and good wishes to all of you who eventually decide to undertake this journey. See you in a few weeks. J+D

\*\*\*\*\*

## ***Che Bello! Tour 2010 Itinerary – The Plan***

### ***Prior to Wednesday, August 18***

Obtain a U.S. passport. If you plan to spend any time behind the wheel of a car during the Che Bello! Tour, obtain an International Driver's Permit (approx. \$15) at any AAA Store in the U.S. Pack one medium suitcase to be checked, one carry-on case or pack and one carry-on personal item. The personal item may be a briefcase, pocketbook or other case/pack. The carry-on items should contain your important documents, medicines and the minimum clothing you will need to last for 24 hours if your checked luggage does not arrive with you in Rome. If you plan to bring any electrical appliance you must purchase an international converter/transformer kit. Your kit must contain a plug adapter and a transformer. A plug adapter alone is not enough!

### ***Wednesday, August 18***

5 p.m. Arrive at Philadelphia Airport (PHL). Check bags. Go through security. Rendezvous with John and Diane Perides at the US Air departure gate for Flight 718 to Rome.

6:10 p.m. Depart for Rome

### ***Thursday, August 19***

8:45 a.m. Arrive at Rome Fiumicino (FCO). Go through customs (Remember: You have nothing to declare!) and rendezvous with our Che Bello! Group at the "Meeting Point" sign posted in the Terminal Arrival Hall. The Hotel dei Consoli shuttle driver may meet us right there or just outside of Arrival Hall. Look for the driver holding a sign with the hotel name, "Perides" or both. While in the Arrival Hall you may want to buy a RomaPass (25 euros/person) at the Tourist Information Booth. Roma Pass

includes free transportation on Rome's buses, Metro and trolleys for three days and free admission for two museums or sites. After the first two museum/site uses, Roma Pass gives the holder a reduced admission price at other museums and sites, exhibitions, and events. Roma Pass can be used at more than 40 monuments, museums and archaeological sites. We will take the shuttle to Hotel dei Consoli and leave bags with bellman.

- 11 a.m. Wander the streets of Rome. Grab lunch or a snack (freelance). Have fun in any way you want, or you may join John and Diane for a subway ride on the Metro to Piazza Baberini for an informal, self-guided walking tour of the Five Fountains of Rome. We'll eat real Roman pizza and gelato along the way.
- 3 to 4 p.m. Check into Hotel dei Consoli. Relax in your room if you want or wander the streets of Rome. Our hotel is right down the block from the Vatican.
- Later We will eat dinner at a medium-priced restaurant (freelance), at no particular time, and do some more spontaneous evening touring and gelato eating. If you decide to take your RomaPass and go off on your own, we have a long list of restaurants in Rome for all price ranges.
- 11 p.m. (Recommended) Return to hotel to rest up for next day in Rome.

### ***Friday, August 20***

- 7 a.m. Breakfast (included) on Hotel dei Consoli Rooftop Terrace.
- 7:45 a.m. Rendezvous in hotel lobby with Group for 10-minute walk to Italy with Us Welcome Center to meet private group Vatican tour guide.
- 8 a.m. Enter Vatican VIP Entrance with private tour guide for 3+ hour tour (included) of St. Peter's Basilica, the Sistine Chapel and Vatican Museums.
- Noon Upon completion of Vatican Tour, at your option, you can do anything you want the rest of the day. If you have not purchased a

RomaPass already they can be purchased at Tourist Information Points, newsstands or tabacchi (tobacco) shops.

- 5:00 p.m. At your option you may join John and Diane for an early meal followed by a guided evening tour of Baroque Rome (freelance). You can even choose to eat a meal after the tour is done. If you decide to take your RomaPass and go off on your own, we have a long list of restaurants in Rome for all price ranges.
- 11 p.m. (Recommended) Return to hotel to rest up for next day transfer to Umbria.

### ***Saturday, August 21***

- 7 to 9 a.m. Breakfast (included) on Hotel dei Consoli Rooftop Terrace.
- 10 a.m. Rendezvous in hotel lobby with Group for departure to Umbria.
- 12:30 p.m. Arrive in Spoleto. Rendezvous with Love Umbria at Il Mio Vinaio (Via Arco di Druso 31) for lunch (freelance) and Umbria Orientation.
- 2 p.m. Tour Spoleto with Love Umbria (included).
- 5:30 p.m. Depart for Casalina.
- 7 p.m. Check-in at L'Antico Forziere in Casalina.
- 8 p.m. Dinner (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

### ***Sunday, August 22***

- 7 to 9 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.
- 9 a.m. Optional. Church in Casalina.
- 11 a.m. Talks about Umbria from experts (arranged by L'Antico Forziere).
- 1 p.m. At your option you may do anything you want the rest of the day. Relax at the pool. Walk the hills and valleys around L'Antico Forziere. You are welcome to join John and Diane in freelance exploring of the Umbrian countryside and nearby towns. There is

a bus stop in Casalina (very near L'Antico Forziere). The buses can take you north to Deruta, Assisi or Perugia and south to Todi and Terni.

8 p.m. Dinner (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

### ***Monday, August 23***

7 to 8 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

8:30 a.m. Depart for Assisi.

9 a.m. Rendezvous with Love Umbria private tour guide for morning tour of Assisi (included).

12:30 p.m. Depart for Spello.

1:00 p.m. At your option you may join us for a special lunch and wine tasting in Spello or go off on your own and rendezvous with us at an appointed location for our tour of Spello.

2:30 p.m. Rendezvous with Love Umbria tour guide for afternoon tour of Spello (included).

6 p.m. Depart for L'Antico Forziere

7 p.m. Dinner (freelance) Perbacco or Hostaria del Matto during return to 'Antico Forziere.

### ***Tuesday, August 24***

7 to 9 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

10 a.m. At your option you may do anything you want the rest of the day. Relax at the pool. Walk the hills and valleys around L'Antico Forziere. There is a bus stop in Casalina (very near L'Antico Forziere). The buses can take you north to Deruta, Assisi or Perugia and south to Todi and Terni.

You are welcome to join John and Diane in freelance exploring of the Umbrian countryside and nearby towns. We have set up a

winery tour, wine tasting and lite-bites for lunch at the Arnaldo Caprai Winery in the commune of Montefalco (15 euros/person). We will stop in Montefalco and Bevagna before returning to L'Antico Forziere.

8 p.m. Dinner (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

### ***Wednesday, August 25***

7 to 7:30 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

8:00 a.m. Depart for Florence, Tuscany.

10:30 a.m. Arrive in Florence. Walk around town as a group. Visit Mercato Centrale.

Noon At your option you may join us for lunch in Mercato Centrale or go off on your own and rendezvous with us at an appointed location for our tour of Florence.

1:00 p.m. Rendezvous with Beauty in Italy for afternoon tour of Florence and the Academy Museum (included).

4:30 p.m. Enter Uffizi Museum (included) for 2-hour visit.

6:30 p.m. Depart Uffizi for Enoteca Ponte Vecchio.

7 p.m. Wine, cheese and olive oil tasting (included) at Enoteca Ponte Vecchio.

8 p.m. Depart Florence.

9 p.m. Dinner (freelance) at Becattini in Poggio during return to L'Antico Forziere.

### ***Thursday, August 26***

7 to 9 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

9 a.m. At your option you may do anything you want the rest of the day. Relax at the pool. Walk the hills and valleys around L'Antico Forziere. There is a bus stop in Casalina (very near L'Antico

Forziere). The buses can take you north to Deruta, Assisi or Perugia and south to Todi and Terni.

You are welcome to join John and Diane in freelance exploring of the Umbrian and Marches countryside. We are planning a day-long journey to Loreto and the beaches of the crystal blue Adriatic Sea to visit the Santa Casa, home of the Holy Family relocated from Nazareth to Loreto in mysterious circumstances. Loreto is just 2 miles from the Adriatic beaches. On the way home we will drive south along the coast and then drive inland to the Piano Grande, Castelluccio, Norcia and home to L'Antico Forziere.

8 p.m. Dinner (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

### ***Friday, August 27***

7 to 8 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

8:15 a.m. Depart for Todi.

8:30 a.m. Rendezvous with Love Umbria private tour guide for morning tour of Todi (included).

Noon At your option you may join us for lunch in Todi (maybe le Scalette) or go off on your own.

1:00 p.m. Rendezvous with us at an appointed location in Todi. Depart for Orvieto.

2:00 p.m. Rendezvous with Love Umbria tour guide for afternoon tour of Orvieto (included).

5 p.m. Depart Orvieto for Tenuta di Lavalette Vineyards.

5:30 p.m. Tour and tasting at Tenuta di Lavalette (included).

7 p.m. Depart Tenuta di Lavalette for Viterbo and Hostaria del Ponte Ristorante.

7:30 p.m. Dinner (freelance) at Hostaria del Ponte overlooking Civita del Bagnoregio.

10 p.m. Depart Hostaria del Ponte for return to L'Antico Forziere.

### ***Saturday, August 28***

7 to 7:30 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

8 a.m. Donna and Liz rendezvous in L'Antico Forziere lobby with John Perides for departure and return trip to Fiumicino Airport. If you would like to return to Rome for an informal day of touring, you can join us on this drive to Rome.

Those of you remaining at L'Antico Forziere may do anything you want the rest of the day. Relax at the pool. Walk the hills and valleys around L'Antico Forziere. There is a bus stop in Casalina (very near L'Antico Forziere). The buses can take you north to Deruta, Assisi or Perugia and south to Todi and Terni.

10:30 a.m. Arrive at Fiumicino Airport Departures Terminal 5. Drop off Donna and Liz for return flight to Philadelphia.

11 a.m. Group continues on to Rome for informal day of touring. You are welcome to join John and Diane in freelance exploring of Rome, maybe the Baths of Caracalla, the Catacombs or the Appian Way.

11:50 a.m. Donna and Liz: US Airways Flight 719 to U.S.

5 p.m. John and Diane will depart Rome for return to L'Antico Forziere

8 p.m. Dinner (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

### ***Sunday, August 29***

7 to 9 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

9 a.m. Optional. Church in Casalina.

10 a.m. At your option you may do anything you want the rest of the day. Relax at the pool. Walk the hills and valleys around L'Antico Forziere. You are welcome to join John and Diane in freelance exploring of the Umbrian countryside and nearby towns. There is

a bus stop in Casalina (very near L'Antico Forziere). The buses can take you north to Deruta, Assisi or Perugia and south to Todi and Terni.

8 p.m. Dinner (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

### ***Monday, August 30***

7 to 7:30 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

8:00 a.m. Depart for Siena, Tuscany.

10:00 a.m. Rendezvous with Beauty in Italy private tour guide for morning tour of Siena (included).

1:00 p.m. At your option you may join us for a quick snack in Siena or go off on your own and rendezvous with us at an appointed location to depart for San Gimignano.

1:30 p.m. Depart for San Gimignano (or we could choose to just eat lunch and spend the rest of the day in Siena).

2:30 p.m. Arrive in San Gimignano. Park. Walk to Piazza del Duomo

3 p.m. Join afternoon guided group walking tour of San Gimignano (included).

6 p.m. Depart for L'Antico Forziere. We have the opportunity to stop in Panzano or Greve, in the Chianti Region of Tuscany for a wine, cheese and salami tasting (freelance).

9 p.m. Dinner (freelance) in Radda in Chianti during return to L'Antico Forziere.

### ***Tuesday, August 31***

7 to 9 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

10 a.m. At your option you may do anything you want the rest of the day. Relax at the pool. Walk the hills and valleys around L'Antico Forziere. You are welcome to join John and Diane in freelance

exploring of the Tuscan and Umbrian countryside and towns of Cortona, Castiglione del Lago and Panicale. There is a bus stop in Casalina (very near L'Antico Forziere). The buses can take you north to Deruta, Assisi or Perugia and south to Todi and Terni.

7:30 p.m. Leave L'Antico Forziere for dinner (included) and Agriturismo Tour at the home of Anne Robichaud and Pino (her husband) on the outskirts of Assisi.

### ***Wednesday, September 1***

7 to 7:30 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

9:00 a.m. Rendezvous with Anne's Italy private tour guide at L'Antico Forziere and depart for Narni.

10:30 a.m. Arrive for morning tour of Narni (included).

Noon At your option you may join us for lunch in Narni or go off on your own and rendezvous with us at an appointed location to complete our tour of Narni.

1:30 p.m. Rendezvous at appointed location to complete the tour of Narni.

2:30 p.m. Depart Narni for Nera River Valley. Tour Nera River Valley.

6 p.m. Arrive back at L'Antico Forziere.

8 p.m. Dinner (freelance). You can remain at L'Antico Forziere for dinner on your own or join John and Diane for a visit to a restaurant in a nearby town.

### ***Thursday, September 2***

7 to 9 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

10 a.m. At your option you may do anything you want the rest of the day. Relax at the pool. Walk the hills and valleys around L'Antico Forziere. You are welcome to join John and Diane in freelance exploring of the Umbrian countryside and nearby towns. There is

a bus stop in Casalina (very near L'Antico Forziere). The buses can take you north to Deruta, Assisi or Perugia and South to Todi and Terni.

8 p.m. Dinner (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

### ***Friday, September 3***

7 to 8 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

8:30 a.m. Depart for Assisi.

9:15 a.m. Pick up Anne Robichaud at Santa Maria degli Angeli Train Station in Assisi. Anne will act as our personal tour guide of Gubbio (included).

9:30 a.m. Depart for Gubbio. Explore the northern part of Umbria with some surprise stops and snacks along the way to Gubbio.

1:30 p.m. At your option you may join us for a lunch in Gubbio or go off on your own and rendezvous with us at an appointed location for our tour of Gubbio.

3 p.m. Continue tour of Gubbio. Ride funicular (included) up to the top of Mt. Ingino.

5 p.m. Depart for L'Antico Forziere

8 p.m. Farewell dinner (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

### ***Saturday, September 4***

6:30 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

7:30 a.m. Dave, Judy, Diane and John rendezvous in L'Antico Forziere lobby for departure and return trip to Fiumicino Airport.

10:00 a.m. Arrive at Fiumicino Airport Departures Terminal 5. John drops group at departures curbside, returns rental car and rejoins group at Terminal 5.

11:50 a.m. US Airways Flight 719 to U.S.

*A Trip to Italy... Che Bello!*



*Trevi Fountain Photograph ©2010 D Walters*

***Part 1***

---

***Getting to Rome and Umbria***

## *Chapter 1*

### *Our Arrival in Rome....*



[Fiumicino Airport Rome](#)

## *The Plan... Thursday, August 19*

- 8:45 a.m. Arrive at Rome Fiumicino (FCO). Go through customs, take the shuttle to Hotel dei Consoli and leave bags with bellman.*
- 11 a.m. Wander the streets of Rome. Grab lunch or a snack (freelance). Have fun in any way you want, or you may join John and Diane for a subway ride on the Metro to Piazza Baberini for an informal, self-guided walking tour of the Five Fountains of Rome. We'll eat real Roman pizza and gelato along the way.*
- 3 p.m. Check into Hotel dei Consoli. Relax in your room if you want or wander the streets of Rome. Our hotel is right down the block from the Vatican.*
- Later We will eat dinner at a medium-priced restaurant (freelance), at no particular time, and do some more spontaneous evening touring and gelato eating. If you decide to take your RomaPass and go off on your own, we have a long list of restaurants in Rome for all price ranges.*
- 11 p.m. (Recommended) Return to hotel to rest up for next day in Rome.*

***The Reality...** The flight over to Rome from Philadelphia was uneventful. Typical airline food, but ahhhh, we had the great anticipation of eating in Italy in a few hours. We landed a few minutes early. In keeping with Italian tradition, they had us wait until our exact arrival time before allowing the plane to pull up the last 3 feet to the gate and let us off. The Passport Check at Fiumicino is not very rigid. A quick glance into your eyes and they send you on your way to the Baggage Claim. Great news for us, not a single piece of our luggage was delayed or lost even with two of our party coming from distant cities and making their connections in Philly. I had anticipated the worst since these members of our party were first-time European adventurers. But hey, we were good.*

*Right through the exit is the arrival hall – more like an arrival hallway - but there was our driver, Alexander on the other side of the crowd displaying PERIDES on his hand-held sign. We asked where the ATM machine was and it was right behind him. No problem there, as 3 of us took out the daily max. Out the door to his waiting Mercedes van, a fast 30-minute ride and we were in our Vatican City neighborhood standing in front of the Hotel dei Consoli.*



**[Hotel dei Consoli](#)**



*Consoli is a boutique hotel only 400 meters from the Vatican. It was highly rated, reasonably priced and so convenient. The pictures of the hotel on the internet were enticing and did not do it justice. It was beautiful, but they must have shot the pictures with a fish-eye lens. The entry lobby was so tiny, I accidentally set off the printer twice by leaning on it while our group was checking-in. I tried to stand off to the side like a "father" hen as our group signed in for their pre-paid rooms. I just let my right arm rest down on the surface next to me and whamo! Off went the printer, knocking out blank registration statements. I did it twice in two minutes. Fabrizio, the daytime front desk manager was an absolute pearl of a gentleman. He was not flustered at all and took the misprints right in stride. He was decked out in very formal attire like it was the Ritz Carlton and he certainly knew how to treat guests.*

*The hotel had our rooms ready for us 5 hours in advance, so we were able to get in, clean up and get going to our first informal tour. I had one problem; I told Fabrizio that we were heading off to Piazza Barbieri to see the first of our Five-Fountain Homemade Tour. He was puzzled and kept stroking his beard, saying "Che?" and "No, no, no, no!" I thought he was just playing with me. He finally made himself understood. He told me we were going to Piazza Barberini and if we went to the Barbieri we would be going for a haircut or beard trim. That explained Fabrizio stroking his beard as he gave me*

*his no, no, nos. We went upstairs to our room and found everything was in miniature from a floor space standpoint, but everything was upscale and beautiful from a taste and function standpoint. We quickly adapted and found a place for everything. Kind of like the first hour of moving into a cruise ship room.*

*When Diane and I made it down to the lobby everyone was on the sidewalk outside (they couldn't all fit in the lobby) and ready to go off on our Five Fountains Tour.....*



## *Chapter 2*

### *The Five Fountains Tour....*



*Fontain of the Four Rivers in the Piazza Navona*

***The Reality...** We did not take the time at the airport to buy our Roma Passes so the first stop was the news stand outside of the Ottaviano Metro Station. That's where they sell Roma Passes. Twenty-five euros each and we were ready to take on the public transit system of Rome! Well first we had to read the hefty portfolio they hand you when you buy a Roma Pass. Ten minutes later we were ready to take on the public transit system of Rome!!*

*Having been a veteran of the New York City Transit System, I was prepared for the dankness of the underground. What I wasn't prepared for was that they had cleaned off the graffiti from the walls and subway cars quite thoroughly. From my YouTube rides through the Roma Metro I had seen massive amounts of graffiti everywhere – not on our ride from Ottaviano to Barberini (Barbieri – NOT!), and very little of it mussing up the walls of the city buildings as we walked from one site to another.*



*Gone...no more graffiti. We easily negotiated the turnstiles by walking over to the attendant's booth, showing our Roma Passes and being motioned through the handicapped entrances*

*which were open. No putting the little cards through the automated turnstile card processors. A short ride later we found ourselves right in the middle of Piazza di Barberini. There was the Fountain of the Triton.*



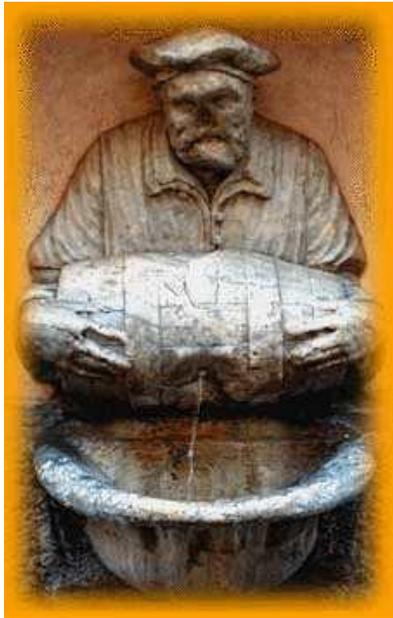
**Fountain of the Triton**



### **“Nasoni” Public Drinking Fountain**

*It was only a few minutes later that we were drinking our first water from one of the many, many public fountains of old Rome. You generally don't drink out*

*of the fancy statue laden fountains but out of spigots that come out of the wall or cast iron Nasoni (Big Noses) fountain heads coming out of the sidewalk.*



### **More Drinking Fountains**

*The water is always running fresh, clear, cool and free from these spigots. Everyone indulges. Of course you could always step next door and buy a plastic bottle of Poland Springs water from the nearby Tabacchi Shop for 2 euros. HA!*

*After a little while of snapping shots by the first few fountains we saw we were off down the block toward Trevi. We didn't have to follow my detailed walking maps. We just fell in with the flow of humanity moving out of the piazza we were in. It seems like the magnetic draw of the Trevi Fountain causes a stream of people to move from all quarters of the city toward*

*it – at least in the summer when all we tourists are in the city.*



### **Trevi Fountain**

*Trevi Fountain is eternally beautiful, but we didn't throw coins in it this time. Last time we did, and sure enough there we were standing in front of that fountain five years later just like the legend says. Those few coins in the fountain the first time around cost me thousands in 'Return to Rome' costs! I am out of frequent flyer miles after this trip and we weren't thinking of paying for tickets to fly over there again just because some silly fountain wanted us to do it!*

*When you stand in front of Trevi Fountain you really need to turn around and watch the crowd. The scene is an amazing carnival of human emotion and motion. That is as amazing as the fountain itself.*



*A few more Trevi photos, a bit of extended gawking just like everyone*



*else and in about 30 minutes we were ready for fountains 3 and 4.*

*We moved off in the direction Piazza Navona.*

*One thing you have to understand before you visit this city is that it is old. Most of the pathways were laid out without City Fathers poring over plans and denying building permits. The city is buildings built over rubble that is on top of rubble that is on top of garbage that is on top of rubble – several thousand years worth. So the streets are crooked, the surfaces are uneven cobblestones and there is a bit of captivating griminess to the whole environment, but wow! What an impact it makes on your five senses, your sensibility and your sense of history. This is no American theme park with Disney-like perfect-perfect everything. It wrenches you from your complacent position of having everything, everyday within your control to a realization that you are on new turf – beautiful for some, scary for others. If you get sore feet or legs easily – go to Disney World.*

*We marched off to Piazza Navona.....*



**Aerial View of the Piazza Navona**



*of stuff made in China. We walked into the southern end and immediately came upon the Fountain of the Moor, but we were hungry. So off down an alley we went in search of my carefully selected restaurant for price and quality. I was sure everyone would love lunch in this charming-side alley hosteria. After some difficulty we found it – CLOSED! Wait a minute this is lunchtime in the peak tourist season. Closed? We didn't know if it was closed for lunch today or forever, but the dark interior told me we weren't going to get our Wheaties here. Back down the alley and back toward the Piazza Navona. We agreed to eat in the first place we passed.*



*In a few more steps there was a nice little sidewalk café, Mimi e Coco with no one beckoning us to sit down, yet it was almost full. We later found out from one of our tour guides that we had stumbled onto the right formula quite by accident. He told us to not eat in any place that there was a pushy barker out front trying to whisk you in, where there were pictures of*

*the food posted outside – for surely they would be fake, where there was mixed cuisines like Italian, Chinese and Bulgarian all in one place – for surely all of the food would taste Bulgarian, or where there was no menu outside to be seen before you sat down – for surely you would be broke as you left that place. We sat down and had our first truly wonderful Italian meal. Wine, cheese, salume (salami), bread, scrambled eggs with black truffles, pizza Margherita,*



*pizza with prosciutto and mozzarella. Oh yes, and several bottles of water – “Gas or No Gas? No gas, please.” For those of you who have been in Europe before you are very familiar with this little dance you have with the waiter each*

*time you try to get some water. Of course you pay for water and bread in these restaurants, but keep that in perspective. You already spent thousands in airfare to get to the restaurant – a few bucks for water and bread aren’t going to break the budget!*

*Well satisfied our group arose with money in our pockets and off to the Piazza Navona we went retracing our steps to the restaurant, but not going back past the closed restaurant of my dreams. As we approached the Piazza we were surprised by these*

*very large statues of Jesus and John the Baptist inside a corner building just at the edge of the Piazza. We wandered in not knowing if it was someone's private front yard or not – no grass to give you a clue in this town.....*

## *Chapter 3*

### *Finishing the Five Fountains Tour....*

## *The Reality...*

*Did I say, "Finishing the Five Fountains Tour?"*

*Well, not quite.....*

*As we neared the Piazza Navona there were these very large statues of Jesus and John the Baptist inside a corner building at the edge of the Piazza. I wound up next in line for a baptism.*



*We wandered in not knowing if it was someone's front yard or not. Unknowingly we had stepped into the Roma Museum in the Palazzo Braschi.*



**Palazzo Braschi behind the Fountain of the Moor**



**Interior staircases of the Palazzo**

*It took us 5 minutes to figure out we were in the portico of the palazzo. We admired these huge statues of Jesus and John the Baptist and a few other notables, and then wandered through the doors. We found out we had the stroke of good fortune that the Roma Passes we had purchased earlier entitled us to free entry into the Roma Museum. So past the ticket booth, velvet ropes and the guard we went. We found room after room after room of spectacular Renaissance art. Each room had ceilings that vaulted up to 20 feet over our heads.*



*The décor of the ceilings was just as mesmerizing as the art on the walls. This was an early lesson in what would stand us in good stead during our all-too-brief stay in Rome – LOOK UP! This is not to be on the lookout for pigeons but for the masterful work that*

*Renaissance artists seemed to be prone to create lying on their backs! There were so many rooms we were amazed, but what was more amazing is there were several thousand people right downstairs in the*

*Piazza Navona, and it seemed like not a soul knew this place was right over their noses. We were virtually alone in the museum, just a few guards to tell us not to lean on the fabulous tile and wood inlaid tables which we did, and yup, we got caught. We went all the way to the end and in the last room found two magnificent and very, very large paintings of past popes with their cardinals. These life-size Cardinals seemed to jump right off the canvas and surround us. Alas, we had no time for confession. We departed the Roma Museo thoroughly delighted and stepped into the zoo of humanity that is Piazza Navona.*



*We stood in front of the Fountain of the Moor once again, and the first thing we noticed was the Statue of Liberty Mime standing in front of the fountain.*



*There was a coffee can in front of the statue. We would later find out that the statue gig had been the permanent occupation of some Romanian dude for the last 5 years. Obviously the can paid well. He seemed to make a living at it. Mazel Tov!*

*On the other side of the fountain was a grey-haired chap with hair and beard whipping in the wind. He had a little table on which he was dancing finger puppets to various classical and Michael Jackson songs. Once again we were to later find out that he had been doing this act for over 40 years. He may have been an organ grinder who had outlived his monkey. We did note that his coffee can was much more elaborate and larger than the Romanian's can.*

*We moved to the center of Piazza Navona and directly in front of the Palazzo Pamphilj (yes ...ilj – it's not a misspelling) was the 4th of our Five Fountains Tour, The Fountain of the Four Rivers.*



**Palazzo Pamphilj © Donna Walters 2010**



### **The Fountain of the Four Rivers**

*At the time of the sculpturing the 4 great rivers known by the artist and the rest of Europe were the Nile, Danube, Ganges and Plate. Obviously the*

*Mississippi, Yellow and Amazon had not yet been "found" by the Europeans, but a guide assured us that other people in what would be named North America, China and Brazil had known they were there all along – amazing, amazing facts.*



*We shot pictures from all angles and decided it was too hot to walk all the way to the Piazza di Spagna to*

*see the sunken ship fountain at the foot of the Spanish Steps. This would come at another time.*



### **Sunken Ship Fountain**

*It was time to turn for home (our hotel). In fact our hotel was actually closer than the next fountain, if we could only find our way over to the Tiber River. At this point in our discoveries of Rome, the Tiber River did not exist, just like the Mississippi for Bernini!*

*We walked off in the right directions and through some miracle of good fortune found a Granita stand (Italian scratched ices) and partially frozen bottled water. These sustained us until we walked to and fro and found our hotel. We rested for a few hours, cleaned up and went off to dinner, and what a dinner it would prove to be.....*

## *Chapter 4*

### *Our First Roman Dinner....*

## *The Reality...*

*The first thing you need to know when you eat out in Italy is the term 'vino di casa,' this way your bill at the end will not be too shocking. After that a few small things: they charge from 1.5 to 3 euros per person for the bread they put on the table (you can send it back) and 2 to 4 euros per bottle of water that you open and drink. Everything else is ala carte with prices on the menu. Of course there are a few pre-fixe restaurants serving you the whole ball of wax for 16 to 60 euros. After that just remember our Baroque Rome Guide, Jay's cautions about multiple cuisines, pictures of food out front and pushy barkers trying to get you to sit down.*

*I have to say that I did not meet a meal I didn't like in Rome. My bet is when you read a bad review from some traveler it has as much to do with the pickiness of the eater and their level of exhaustion after a hard day of touring. Try to find a place where the waiters and waitresses barely speak English and you hear a lot of people speaking Italian at the tables on the sidewalk in front of the restaurant. If you are hard of hearing, look for people talking with a lot of hand motions. That will be a good place to eat, and you can just point on the menu at the items you want to eat.*

*After resting up in our snug as a bug in a rug rooms at the dei Consoli, we found such a place just by*

walking around the streets of our Vatican neighborhood. It took us less than 10 minutes to find L'Antica Griglia Toscano.



### **L'Antica Griglia Toscano**

We looked at the menu and with the aid of the 3 half-Italians (us) sitting at our table and an Italian to English pocket dictionary, all four of us had meals we raved about. We tossed caution to the wind, and we ate the bread that was delivered to us in a basket. We asked for oil (olio - not too hard to say) for the bread. We ordered vino di casa. We bought two bottles of water, frizzante and 'no gas,' oh, we were in a ristorante zone! We literally went wild by the standards of most guide book cautionary tales. In the end, the bill was not bad at all by what we were led to believe are Rome standards, about 25 euros per person. It was all good.



*So what did I eat..... oxtails. I had not had oxtails in 5 years, since I stumbled upon it in a little Spanish joint in the Bronx when I was doing a consulting job*

*for Stella D'oro cookies (ah, that was a plum job – lots of samples!). The tails I had then were good, but this version in Rome was fantastic.*

*My Roman oxtails were obviously slow cooked in one of the most flavorful tomato sauces I had ever tasted. Prior to this I had always eaten oxtails with a brown, natural sauce. The tenderness of the meat and the richness of the tomato sauce made it bone-sucking goooooood!*

*On the side I ordered fried chicory – never had that before. Oh, God! It was fantastic!!!! I passed it around the table. All four of us agreed it was a terrific side dish. I have got to try making it when I get home. Not so hard, oil with thinly sliced garlic sautéed until soft, chicory reduced in the pan and then coated with pepper, to taste, and*



*then all of it cooked until the chicory had given up most of its water and is just short of crisp. It was so delicious, I had it the next night in another Roman restaurant selected in the same manner, just walking down a nearby street, and it was just as good but cooked less so the chicory retained a lot of moisture. I liked the crispy version a bit better, but the moister version did remind me of the sautéed escarole my mother made between 10 and 20,000 times for my father. By the way, I never heard my mother use the term sauté – ever!*



*After a pretty good night's sleep we were off to the Italy with Us tour guide office to meet Helen Donnegan who placed us with Hillary, a Scottish lass for our first guided tour – the Vatican Museum and the Sistine Chapel. Her words made the place come to life.....*

## Chapter 5

### *The Vatican and Baroque Rome*



[Vatican City](#)

[Baroque Rome](#)

***The Reality...*** The owner of [Italy with Us](#), Helen Donnegan is a laughing-faced person. You know the type who smiles as soon as they see another face, any other face. She speaks perfect Italian with an Irish brogue and has been in Italy for nearly 40 years. She has been running her tour guide agency for 20 years and in addition to being officially certified, she has a whole cadre of English-speaking guides with official tour guide certifications (by the state tourism board - each state in Italy has its own board.) For our pleasure Helen gave us Hillary, a Scots-woman, who turned out to be so well informed and so easy to listen to that we had a joyous time. It was 8:15 a.m. and we were one block from the Vatican Museums entrance. Hillary walked us around the corner and on a sidewalk up the opposite site of the road past the lined up hoards of people waiting to buy a Vatican Museum ticket. We must have passed 500 to 1,000 people who got up hours ahead of us. Going with a private guide really opens up a lot of doors. Our tickets were reserved in advance. We stepped into the Museum



entrance and were greeted with a beautiful blast of air conditioning. Ahhhhhhhhhh! A few minutes wait for Hillary to pick up our pre-paid passes and off we went, through more air conditioned corridors toward the Sistine Chapel. There were guards in every hallway and on the landing of each staircase. It looked like she knew them all. She had a kind of mini-conversation with each of them as she approached and passed. We entered through a back door of the Sistine Chapel, and when we got inside there were only about 6 other people in the whole place – wow! There were so few people even Hillary was surprised. She said let’s take advantage of this,” and she quickly took us to the starting point (in her opinion) and for nearly an hour wove the story of the Sistine Chapel from pre-Michelangelo days through its completion.



**Sistine Chapel**

*After experiencing the chapel through the eyes of an expert, I can unequivocally say that you cannot just get a ticket and walk through the Sistine Chapel on your own. You must be escorted and hear the story from someone who truly understands the art. You must be looking up, drinking in the spectacle of the art while your ears are filled with both the facts and the emotions of the artwork and the artists. There is no time to read a pamphlet, ceiling and wall map or a book while you consume this once-in-a-lifetime experience.*

*After about 9:30 a.m. the first wave of people from the line outside was permitted in and we lost our grip on the place. The noise level increased quite a bit, but the Vatican Monitors were there in the chapel shushing the crowd every 5 minutes or so. The din would rise ever-so-slowly, then there would be this very large shusssssssssssssssssh and it would immediately get quite. Then the din would rise again giving way to another shush. Soon civilian tourists were getting into the shushing act, and they in turn were shushed by the shushing guards. Luckily we had completed the entire ceiling and the side walls so we were ready to move into the Vatican Museums. One thing to point out if you ever get inside the Sistine Chapel, look at the frescoes on the sidewalls (not done by Michelangelo).*

*In quite a few of the very large panels you will be able to play "Where's Waldo," but instead of Waldo you*

*will be looking for a small white dog. There really is a small white dog painted into quite a few of the masterpieces put there first by one of the Renaissance Masters, Cosimo Rosselli, as an homage to his dog who he brought with him frequently while he painted. As the story goes the dog who became everyone's pet was painted several more times by Rosselli's contemporary masters who painted the other panels. They were a small fraternity of expert fresco painters and the chapel walls were painted over a short period of time. It was their private joke, and the image of the little white dog was allowed to remain on the walls by the Pope's administrator of the chapel painting.*



**Find the dog in the Last Supper by Rosselli.....**

*The Vatican Museum is an extraordinary collection of historical, archaeological, religious and man-made artifacts. You could probably spend a one week vacation in the place and only scratch the surface.*



*So fly to Rome, eat wonderful food and think about staying inside the air conditioned Vatican Museums for your next vacation.*

### **[Vatican Museum Link](#)**

*If you want to read more about the details of the museum, click on the Vatican Museum Link. This link has wonderful descriptions with many other links. In the Greek section of the museum I found several 2,500 year old sculpted busts with my mouth, nose, eyes and brow.*



After the tour, we went back to our hotel fully satisfied. Everyone went to their rooms and flopped back in bed for a few extra hours sleep. We were still trying to adjust our body clocks – not easy when you fly west to east and 6 time zones over. A few decided to skip the evening tour and just keep resting. Four of us went off to the Campo dei Fiore, which is a piazza where fresh-cut flowers have been sold for over 2,000 years.



[Campo dei Fiore YouTube](#)



[Campo dei Fiore Pictures](#)

Sure enough, there were flowers on display and for sale. Each morning this is also the location of the fresh food market for the neighborhood.

There we met Jay, another of Helen Donnegan's charges. Off he whisked us through parts of Rome we had seen the day before but down all new alleys and Roman Vias. Jay is a transplant from

Washington DC, Georgetown I suspect, who landed in Rome about 15 years earlier and never left. He wore a sport coat in the 90+ temperatures and carried a thick volume of the history of Rome, just in case we asked anything he wasn't sure of. Well we couldn't reach that watershed. He was so full of facts about the last 2,000 years and especially the last 600 that we did not ask anything he didn't know. He taught us about the entire city being built up over the 2,000+ years of its existence, layer upon layer of buildings, fallen building rubble, garbage, fill and more buildings, until some parts of the city laid 40 and 50 feet below. This is why the oldest parts of the city still have no subway service. There are just too many archaeological treasures and any digging project beneath the city takes so long that it virtually cannot be financed in any efficient manner.

We returned to the Trevi Fountain and he took us up a set of steps in the front of an old church so we could see over the throngs of people – very clever. We walked via different streets to the Piazza Navona and he gave us insights into the street actors, mimes and even the local drunk who was lying nearby. Naturally he spoke about the fountains, but he also



*knew a lot about the Braschi, Barberini and the Pamphilj families. The wealth of these people was just unimaginable, especially compared to the everyday dog-faced folks in the street.*

*We finally made the hike over to the Piazza di Spagna*



*and saw the Spanish Steps. The steps were in the regular summer state – packed with tourists. Jay then dispensed useful information about the pickpockets in and around the piazza.*

[Spanish Steps](#)

*We finally saw and drank from the Fountain of the Sunken Ship, the 5th of my Five Fountains Walking Tour that we could not finish on the previous day. We looked up the Spanish Steps and thought better of it allowing gravity to keep us firmly planted at the bottom. Finally, filled with even more information we bid Jay goodbye and headed down the steps of the metro to happily use our Roma Passes again.*

*As we arrived back at the Ottaviano Stazione it was evening and we took a different route to our hotel on*

the lookout for some place to eat. We found a completely new sidewalk restaurant. The owner was my shape, but not my scale. He spoke some English. I joked back and forth with him, and the next thing I knew we were embracing. We stayed for dinner. It was a small place named L'Abruzzese. I ordered the Gnocchi Mare e Monte. Perfectly light gnocchi, nice clams and nice mussels. A glass of the vino di casa rosso made it even better. I asked the waiter for a bit of



parmesan cheese for my pasta dish and he said in broken English, “We Italians, we don’ta put the formaggio ona da fisha.” I looked back at him and said, “See look in my mouth, I put in there what I like, getta the cheese.” He did. When we left I kissed the owner on both cheeks. He returned the affection. I make friends easily.

That night we slept well, and when I arose I was off to the airport via the metro to the central train station, Termini, and then connecting with the express train to

*the airport to pick up our car. I didn't know it as I left the hotel, but I had entered the twilight zone and was now on Italian time and scheduling. Suffice it to say that I was almost an hour and a half later getting back to our hotel than I had planned. We left Rome almost 2 hours later than planned, and we nearly lost another hour in stop-and-go traffic on our way up to Spoleto. At one point during the stop-and-go on the Autostrada, I could have sworn Rod Serling walked by our car. No really, some guy who looked just like Rod Serling was walking along the Autostrada making better time than anyone in a car. Where did he come from?*

*Just so you can understand the fortitude of Italian Tour Guides, when we finally arrived at our meeting*

*point in Spoleto, Cristiana Bradley and Isabella Bellucci were both there at Il Mio Vinaio waiting two and a half hours past our lunch date. When I pulled up in our van they were*



*both surprised at the direction I had arrived from. I jumped out to greet them and to inspect the large gouges in the side of the van. A little more on that later....*

## Chapter 6

*Hello Spoleto and Thank You, BB*



***The Plan...*** I had made the lunch date with Cristiana, the owner of [Love Umbria Tours](#), about 6 months earlier. We had agreed that over lunch she would acquaint our group with the history of Umbria. This way everyone would have some bearings on where we were and what had gone on here over the last 3,000 years. Yes, 3,000 years, the Umbrians and Etruscans had pre-dated the Romans by 1,000 years.

***The Reality...*** Between making the lunch date and arriving in Spoleto, the issue of official certification for tour guides came up. You see, Cristiana is English and she has a Blue Badge designation from England for leading tour groups through Umbria, but the official Italian designation Guide Turistiche issued by state regulators is different, involves passing a 14-week course and a final examination. Cristiana did not have the license designation Guide Turistiche dell'Umbria which meant she would have to stand outside of each church and describe it. Only officially certified and licensed guides are allowed to go inside of each church and museum with you and describe the historical artifacts. Well, I knew that without pointing and seeing inside the churches and museums, the endless flow of words describing the stuff inside would just get too, too cumbersome to process. Cristiana was a peach, and she readily agreed to give us a licensed Umbrian Tour Guide,

hence there was Isabella standing to greet us at the Enoteca Il Mio Vinaio alongside of Cristiana. It was Isabella who would guide us through 5 hilltop towns over the next seven days. I paid Cristiana in cash on the spot for all of the guide services from Love Umbria, and she was off immediately to another appointment. Isabella sat down and lunched with us.

Isabella comes from Bastia Umbra, a few miles from Assisi, and she turned out to be the best guide of the seven we used throughout Italy. She had a light and breezy style, plenty of English and a charming voice. In fact her voice and vocal mannerisms took me back frequently to my early childhood hearing my mother speak to her mother. My grandmother spoke very, very little English. My grandfather who ran the family flower shop in Coney Island was much more fluent. We heard Isabella speak to us in English and to people on the street in Italian. Wow, the pitch and melody of her Italian voice sounded just like one of many conversations I had overheard when I was 5 and 6 years old. Her English voice had the pitch of my mother's voice. Her little pauses to find a word were accompanied by an 'eh' sound I had heard my mother use each time she paused to find an Italian word speaking with her mother. Naturally I was immediately drawn to stand closer to Isabella on most of our tours, of course, I am slightly hard of hearing, oh and she was delightfully pretty. None of that hurt.

When we entered Spoleto before we met Cristiana and Isabella we were following the instructions shouted at us in an English accent by Griselda (a.k.a. BB) from my Garmin Nuvi 270. I will admit; I had the volume turned high. We left the highway and turned onto the ring road that climbs to the top of the town. BB, always wanting to take the 'fastest' route, told me to turn right toward the center of town, so I did. In just a few yards the new street became so incredibly narrow the side view mirrors were snapped back like they are pivoted back against the side of your car by an attendant when you enter a car wash. In this case the attendants were the solid rock walls of the ancient houses lining the narrowest little donkey path you have ever seen.



Almost instantly following the mirror snap, I slowed and Dave and I opened our windows to pull the mirrors all the way in. That helped for an instant, but then there were terrible screeching and scraping sounds. The passenger side of the van was now in contact with the wall. These are not flat brick walls. Instead, they are

chiseled walls of solid rock that make up the foundations and side walls of the homes. Some of the jagged edges were resculpting the shiny side panels of the passenger side of the car. I could not assess the damage since we could not open the car doors, not even the sliding back doors. I pulled left a bit, heard some more intense screeching and then a snap, crackle, pop (rear light cover). I inched forward, now thinking oh what the hell, but then came a left turn followed very closely by a right turn. We turned off BB because she was working way too fast and calling repeatedly for the turns. When she disappeared from the equation all I had facing me were some people walking toward us looking at our plight and wincing. I needed that, oy! Believe it or not I managed to make both turns with a few maneuvers each. The road widened a bit, and in a few minutes we were up at the top in the Piazza del Mercato creeping forward looking for Il Mio Vinaio and Cristiana. When we finally pulled up she was surprised to see the direction we had come from. Being a resident of the town, she knew there was no good way for such a big vehicle to have arrived at the piazza from that direction. I jumped out of the car eagerly to greet her and just as eagerly to see if my insurance deductible coverage from American Express would cover the damage. I would later find out I would have to do some homespun body work to bring it in line with my rental car and AMEX coverage.

All of the others in our group were happy to finally get out of the van, and after saying hello and paying Cristiana for the week's tours with Isabella I continued on down the street alone looking for a parking space. Most of the streets were narrow and one way so I kept going and going and going the only way I was able to go and then downhill and downhill and downhill until I was far, far away. I parked and started walking back up the hill. Now I had been training at home for just such an occurrence, but this hill was something else, really steep with 12 inch sidewalks on both sides. Row homes were on both sides and every minute or so another car came zipping down the hill. I walked mostly in the street and occasionally had to jump to the tiny sidewalk to stay in one piece. About halfway back I started needing a rest, so I slipped into a doorway a few times and held onto the door jambs to avoid rolling back down the hill. On one of these rests I was passed by a 5-year old boy and his dad who were taking the hill by storm. I just stayed in my doorway and breathed deep breaths of recovery. Eventually I made it back to the restaurant where everyone was drinking wine and eating bread and melon. They asked what took me so long and then saw my soaked shirt. They stopped asking.

We had another great meal with more truffles flavoring the eggs and pizzas and the wine matching all of the flavors of fruit and cheese perfectly. Once again the price was extraordinarily reasonable with

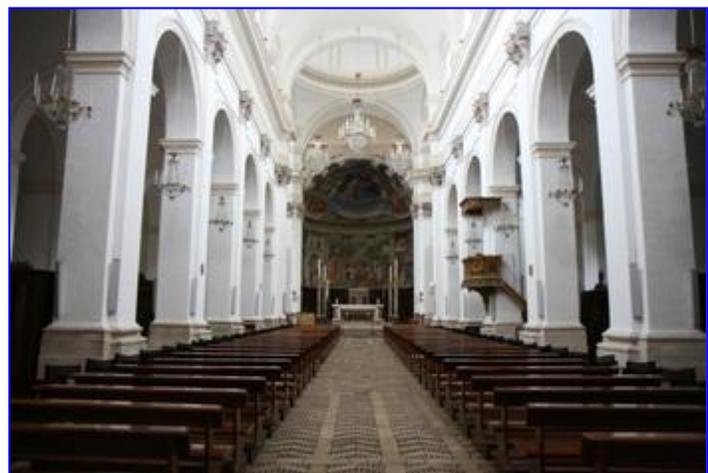


*the meals, wine and some sweets totaling less than 100 euros for the seven of us. We ate and laughed and rested. We were ready to tour Spoleto, Isabella, noting my earlier distress when I arrived at table took off at a slow pace.*

### [Duomo of Spoleto](#)

*We walked slightly uphill as we approached the staircase to the Duomo of Spoleto and then down the long descending staircase. It is as beautiful an approach as I have ever seen leading up to the front of a church.*

*She described the exterior architecture*

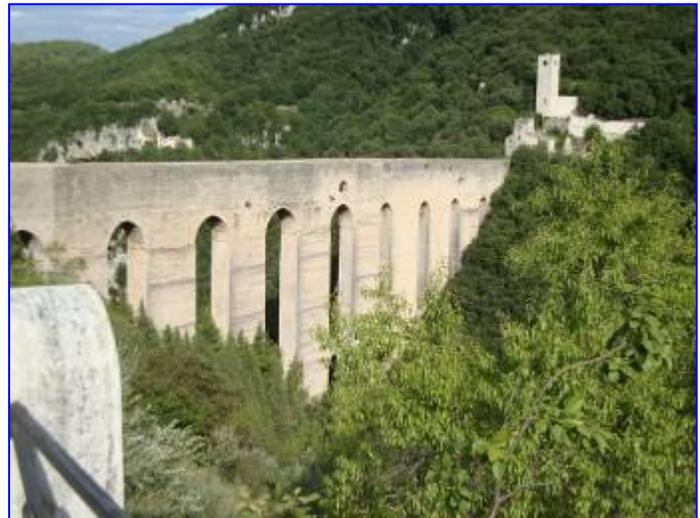


*and period styling and then took us inside to another gorgeous interior. I kept thinking about our fund raising campaign to build our very*

*plain modern-styled church at home which could fit entirely within the walls of this enormous church. We do not have frescoed walls and ceilings in our Church of the Holy Eucharist in Tabernacle, New Jersey. We don't have stone floors or side chapels that are frescoed, but we do have nice stained glass windows, so I guess we are even! HA!!*

*We watched either a wedding or a baptism forming outside of the church with lots of fancily dressed men and women as we departed. We are finding out that people (people does not include teenage boys) get dressed pretty well over here when they go out in public, especially to special events. We and other tourists are easily identified in mixed settings, but for the most part 90% of the people you pass in the hot spot towns are tourists, so you don't have to keep looking down at you wrinkled jams (long shorts).*

*We pressed onward toward the Ponte delle Torri now walking up a 90 degree incline, well maybe it was 10 to 20 but it might as well have been a straight cliff going upward. After a relatively flat Rome this was our first shot at a true hill town.*



[Ponte delle Torri](#)

....I must pause here, because as I write this I am sitting outside of a local do-it-yourself laundromat and a local woman just walked into the shop carrying a huge load of wash. She has on a shiny black striped top with a beaded front and \$300 black jeans with a dazzling white jeweled bracelet with a Gucci bag. See, this is what I mean about Italians dressing up in public and she is only doing a wash! More on her, her daughter and the laundromat later. Back to Spoleto....



We continued onward pressing up the ring road around the Spoleto castle ([Rocca](#)). On the other side of the hill from the Ponte delle Torri we found the entry gate to the Rocca, it was about to be closed for the night. Lots of people were still filing out and heading across the ring road to the top end of a modern escalator system that carries hundreds and thousands of tourists daily from a public parking area far, far below. Wow, we could have parked there and saved deep scratches in the car. We could have parked there, escalated up and walked downhill almost the whole time. First visits to any new place are always revelations. The knowledge of this escalator's location would help us and hurt us in the days to come as we returned to Spoleto for an ill-fated dinner.

*We continued down the hill along the road and stopped at a magnificent viewpoint. There was a little park and a small refreshment stand – time for a granita (Italian ice). Ah, onward and now the road was descending – hooray. We*



*made it back down to Piazza del Mercato and Il Mio Vinaio. We discovered that Isabella was parked on the same street we were parked on, so we continued down the hill together to our cars. As we strolled/fell down the hill she told me that she had paid the customary street parking fee at the freestanding parking meter machine in the middle of the block and placed the receipt in the window of her car. I had no idea there was such a freestanding machine parking meter machine in the middle of the block, and she gestured to me with a naughty, naughty sign. Now, would my car be towed away or just ticketed? Ah there was the van, and no ticket. Hallelujah!*

*We were now at the end of the day and parted at the bottom of the hill. Isabella continued to her car. We had a plan for where we would meet two days hence in Assisi. Ciao, Isabella – Ciao, everyone – Ciao, Ciao. Time to see our country inn, L'Antico Forziere (The Ancient Treasure Chest) for the first time.....*

## Chapter 7

### *The Ancient Treasure Chest*



*L'Antico Forziere*

***The Plan...*** We would settle wearily back in the van and let BB do the thinking to guide us home.

***The Reality...*** She cooperated uncooperatively! She would not accept the address of the country house. We would come to find out that the dirt road the country house structure was sitting on for the last 600 years did not have an official designation accepted by the Garmin GPS map, so as far as the Nuvi 270 (BB) was concerned the place didn't exist. I had a solution for that – we would go to the middle of the town of Casalina, and I could get us to the country house from there. I had seen enough maps that did believe there was a real place and road, so I was confident that I could feel my way from the Centro Storico, as all town centers are known, here.

Dave almost immediately figured out that if you put the city into BB and then pressed 'Done' without entering a street name BB would give us all of the street names in the town. We could pick any one and throw in a fictitious house number and away we could go. It worked perfectly and we sped off to The Ancient Treasure Chest on the other side of the Spoleto Valley. Thirty-five minutes later we saw signs in the middle of Casalina for L'Antico Forziere and the next thing we knew we were on the dirt road to the inn. We only missed the driveway once. Upon

*back tracking we found the entrance to the parking lot and were home for the night.*

*We quickly unloaded our gear and were happily greeted by Samuele our host for the*



*stay. He acted thrilled that we were there, and I soon found that he was a sincere man and extremely helpful. So, he probably was thrilled that we were there. With some help we managed to get our luggage into our rooms, and we had an hour before dinner - time to clean up and relax. I even jumped in the pool for a little while and really cooled down.*

*The family that runs the inn is the Rodellas.*



*Samuele (on the left) speaks the English for the family so he was our main point of communication. His father Alexandro, who looks younger than me, sets up breakfast every day and does a*

*lot of chores around the inn, both inside and outside.*



The two younger brothers are Stephano and Andrea, twins, who are both professionally trained chefs. Their apprenticeships were served in fine hotels in Rome and Florence.

Mom works at the desk and around the rest of the inn as well. These folks know what makes a good hotel, and they work very hard at the details to achieve the feeling of fine treatment. They succeed.

The pool was surrounded by plants and shrubs, and Diane's cousin, Donna was the first to notice that the shrubs were rosemary, thyme and several other herbs we couldn't readily identify. This kind of dual practicality was repeated in other parts of the compound. There were dandy chaise lounge chairs with sunscreens and giant, maybe 9' diameter cloth umbrellas.



As soon as I got there, I plunged right in and what a relief. When you walk around stone cities for a good part of the day in warm weather you get this inner kind of tired. I know for me and the others who had trained their legs for this trip, the tiredness was from the neck up. The pool created such a revival of mental energy it was a grand escape. After soaking for 20 minutes or so, it was time to get ready for dinner.

Be prepared if you go to Italy, dinner at the earliest is 8 p.m.; more like 9 p.m. They will feed us crazy Americans at 7:30 if we insist, but that's it. If you get to a restaurant at 7 p.m. like we did later in the week at Spoleto the place will be so dark that you could swear they are closed for the season. More on that later.

So it was 8 p.m. at L'Antico Forziere on our first Saturday and we assembled all washed and primped up for dinner on the patio. Our table for six was waiting for us, and sure enough, we were the first ones in the restaurant. Samuele (he waits on all of the tables as well as does the front of the house) poured a complimentary pre-dinner glass of Prosecco, bubbly and delicious. "May we have some water?" "Still or frizzante?" "Huh?" "Gas or no gas?" "Oh, no gas please, but could we also have one bottle of frizzante?" (frizzante - HA! we are trainable) Suddenly, there was Alexandro with six little dinner rolls and six curls of butter, 2 curls per plate, three

plates strategically and evenly placed around the table - a free first round of bread. "Hmmm, unusual." At the bottom of the menu it says in very polite language that if you want a second roll everyone will be assessed a 3 euro bread service charge. What is this obsession they have over here with their bread? It is almost like they are selling their children into bondage. Naturally, we didn't order the extra bread, but a few seconds later there they were generously distributing unordered soup for all, no charge, and what a good soup it was. Just a taste, a few spoonfuls in a tiny soup dish, but it hit the spot with the Prosecco and free tiny roll. We had a choice of 3 courses from four offered courses, Antipasto, Primi Piati, Secondi and Dulci. While no course appears big, all three taken together are plenty - quite enough. Of course one night I did order all four courses - a bit too much, but I managed to get the Dulci down. Each course had 5 offerings so it was easy to fashion different meals throughout the four dinners we ate at the Ancient Treasure Chest during our first week. Some of them even became favorites in the first one or two bites and were repeated by some later in the week. They changed the menu for the second week.

It is hard to describe this food. It is combinations of nearly everything you have had at one time or another in your life, but it tastes unique and delicious and looks like nothing you have ever had presented to you even in the fanciest places. These twin brothers

are true artistes. They decorate your plate like it was a canvas and they have the paint. The desserts are major works of art – **major works of art**, and they must be ordered at the beginning of the meal so they can be ready 2 hours later when you are ready for dessert. Yes, each dinner here takes about 2 to 3 hours to complete. They do not rush you in any way. We even had to ask them to shorten the length of the meal one night when we wanted to finish in less than two hours so we could hit the hay early for a 7 a.m. tour departure the next morning. By the way, Samuele had no idea what I was talking about when I said, “We want to hit the hay early tonight.” His eyes glazed over. I can just imagine the mental images in his head as he translated in his mind and thought about those big hay rolls I see around here in the fields - something about us hitting them. “Hit them? Hit them with what...a stick...a car?”

Well we didn't quite finish in under the hoped-for two hours on the special request night, and our dinner on the first night was over close to 11:30 but a complete success. Other people had come into the restaurant between 8:30 and 9:30, so even way off here in the country Italians are true to form with late dinners. We retired for the night because the next day was Sunday, and we had mass and laundry to do.....

## *Chapter 8*

### *Sunday Laundry and Lost in Space*

## ***The Plan...*** Sunday, August 22

7 to 9 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

9 a.m. Optional. Church in Casalina.

11 a.m. Talks about Umbria from experts (arranged by L'Antico Forziere).

1 p.m. At your option you may do anything you want the rest of the day.

***The Reality...*** Our first breakfast told us what we would be having over the next 2 weeks of breakfasts. They don't serve hot breakfasts in most of Italy. Of course we very rarely ever have a hot breakfast at home so it is somewhat par for the course for us, but then, we are at L'Antico Forziere and in the breakfast treasure chest we found, freshly made croissants, puff pastry rolls with chocolate ganache filling, homemade pound cake, mini Kaiser rolls, prosciutto crudo and sliced cheese, three kinds of cereal, several kinds of juice, kiwis, perfectly ripened pears and peaches, apples, some fresh fruits I couldn't identify but ate anyway, yogurt, bread for toasting, butter, Nutella, several flavors of jam and honey. They ask you if you want Café Italiene, Café American, Cappuccino or tea. In all quite a satisfying selection.

We scarfed down an array of items from the buffet table and were ready for our first full day in Umbria.

Since everyone had packed as lightly as possible, we all agreed that laundry made sense on Sunday, and when we found out there was no local morning mass; we were off to the laundry. Wait – where is the laundry? We went right to Samuele and he handed us a colorful multi-page brochure that had an address. So we could program BB and be on our way. Samuele gave the place a call to be sure they would have their doors open on Sunday morning. They assured Samuele that they would wait there for us – I think they live over the store since they have been there standing in the threshold every time we have passed the store since. One thing that was puzzling was the brochure was for luxury cashmere and said nothing about laundry. Off we went.

BB took us 2 towns over and right to the Luxury Cashmere Shop. The owner was standing outside in front of the store wearing Valentino linen pants, with an extra button on his shirt open and next to his Mercedes Benz (the big one). Uh oh. We got out of our van and shook hands with him vigorously. “Bongiorno.” “Bongiorno.” “English?” I said pointing to my mouth as if the sound wasn’t coming out. He smiled, shrugged and shook his head no. Uh oh. Well he escorted us into the beautifully decorated store to meet his wife. “Bongiorno.” “Bongiorno.” “English?” I said pointing to my mouth again as if the

sound still wasn't coming out. She smiled, shrugged and shook her head no - no. Uh oh – UH OH. The two of them proceeded to talk in Italian to us very quickly. We weren't getting it. They continued as if we did.

We didn't see any washing machines or dryers. UH OH – UH OH! She took us into their showroom and the next thing we knew Cousin Donna was walking around the store in a 650 euro Cashmere sweater and was laughing nervously. She liked it. We said, "No, no, no, no, no."

I asked her to call Samuele so he could act as an interpreter. She did and when she got him on the phone she had one of those 500 word Italian conversations complete with arm waving all around the place. Finally I got the phone from her. Samuele distilled it down to six words - they did not do laundry there. It would be sent out and ready the next morning. I asked him to find out the cost per load and handed the phone back to the women. The husband just waited on the other side of the showroom probably trying to figure out what upgrades he would like to have on his next Mercedes with the receipts from our laundry. When I got the phone back I found out they wanted 15 to 20 euros per load and an extra 10 euros if we wanted everything pressed too. We never press our drawers or socks back home, why start now? I looked at my

companions in the shop and they were all in agreement, the prices were way too high.

I told Samuele to let her know and handed the phone back to the woman. She got the news from Samuele and they hung up. The next 5 minutes were taken up with a “no hard feelings dialog’ all done with unintelligible words to each other and gestures to the heart, bows, clasped hands, hugs and handshakes. He then walked us around the backroom to show us the specialized cashmere cleaning machines, indicating that they could not be used for regular Mt. Idie Ditie cleaning.

He then got an idea and started pointing to his head. Both of them eventually made it known that he wanted us to follow him. The next thing I saw was the Mercedes on the move and him waving for us to follow. He led us over to the next town and a small strip shopping center where, lo and behold there was just the kind of self-service laundromat we were looking for in the first place. We jumped out of the van and the door to the laundromat swung open – Halleluia! There were 3 washing machines and 2 dryers. The large load washing machine was in use and we had 4 loads to do. We started reading the machine operating instructions and they were written in Italian. Three of us, each half Italian, were struggling with the translation over Machine 4 trying to make out the Italian. Judy, who is not Italian at all, standing over Machine 5 started reading and

translating the instructions posted over her machine or at least all of us including Judy thought for a second that she was actually reading the Italian and translating. Then she stopped abruptly and said, "Wait a minute, these instructions are written in English. From the English version we learned how to specify the load size, water temperature selection, put the coins in the centrally located wall box controller and start the machine. We even found out that the machines automatically dispensed the soap and softener. We were in like Flynn. Of course we had to do 2 sets of 2 loads to gain our freedom. A long time to kill.

What would we do for an hour or two? Some read books. Others listened to books on tape. We cruised around the shopping center to see what was there. AHA! A gelato shop was on the other side of the center. Next thing we knew Donna, Diane and I were in the shop ordering our multi-flavored cups. We got along great with the non-English speaking woman behind the counter. We pointed and waved our arms and pretty soon we were eating some of the most delicious flavors of ice cream – scusi – gelato we could imagine.

In broken Italian I managed to tell her I was half Italian and half Greek; Diane was half Italian and half German; and Donna was half Italian and half Irish. I told her that my family originated from Torre del Greco just south of Naples. That is like telling

someone from Bangor, Maine that you are from Carmel, California. The two cultures are so different that nothing registers in the head to create familiarity. There was an unshaven middle-aged guy trying to get her attention and she told him in no uncertain terms to leave the air conditioned store and go sit out at one of the alfresco tables (hot). He did as he was told and she turned back to smile at us.

We were already sitting, oh-ing and ah-ing our way through the six or seven different flavors we had in our three medium sized cups (oh yeah, I got a grande). Soon our foray into the unknown came to a close, we paid far, far less for the gelatos than we did in Rome and developed an instant love for the shop owner and the product – we would be back!

We returned to the fancy laundromat and were just in time to move the laundry to the dryer. These are good machines and new from the German manufacturer, Miele. The dryer provided so much heat and fluffing air our clothes were entirely dried in less than 20 minutes. In fact the machine would not accept payment for more than 10 minutes at a time. The next wave of our group hit the washing machines and before we knew it we were returning to the L'Antico Forziere....or so I thought.

I came out of the shopping center and turned right – right? WRONG! We had not programmed BB yet to bring us HOME to the inn parking lot. I beat a path

down the road and suddenly found that we were rising and rising into the mountain that is behind our inn and Casalina. The roads around here are very narrow and doing a K-turn is not easy, so I forged on. We suddenly were hit with a series of hard left then hard right curves and we ascended even faster. These are the famous switch-back roads my cousins Robert and Neil had warned me about. The next thing we knew we were entering the Commune of Collezone. I kept figuring if I just stayed on this road it would eventually lead home. HA! We visited the Communes of Casalalta, Canalicchio, Castelleone, Deruta and finally Casalina, where we knew our way in from the center of town to the Ancient Treasure Chest parking lot. We did not drive past the driveway this time. Instead of taking 8 minutes to get back we were about 90 minutes and some of the most harrowing roads we had seen to that moment (remember we only had the van for about 24 hours at this point). More would be in our future.

What may sound like a penalty for a mistake turned out to be a glorious experience for all. This was especially true when we arrived in the tiny hilltop hamlet of Casalalta. We parked in the town piazza which was as large as a 2-car garage. Walked to the railing at the edge of the piazza and literally swooned with joy over the valley stretching out before us.





*The Green Heart of Italy nickname they have for Umbria became a full reality for all of us at that moment. Incredible hills were rolling away from us with*



*farm after farm of olive trees and vineyards. Farm houses were dotting the landscape and there were birds in full flight below us. We don't see many birds flying*

*below us in South Jersey, except for those squashed on the road with one wing sticking straight up in the air! Extraordinary, extraordinary, extraordinary!*

*After 15 minutes of gawking we jumped back in the van and continued following our nose on the switch-back roads and eventually discovered Earth in Deruta. Of course upon arriving at the town we unwittingly drove into the Hilltop Centro Storico of Deruta, to a narrow blocked road (road construction) and had to back the van all the way out including several backwards turns. After this I became inwardly hysterical each time I saw a Centro Storico sign in a new town. STAY OUT! That would be a better sign and it appears in too few hilltop towns in this part of Italy.*

*We were ready for the pool and the evening mass at Madonna dei Bagni before gathering for our second meal in the outdoor dining room of The Ancient Treasure Chest. Our expectations were set high for the meal by our first night's meal and by the description of Madonna dei Bagni as an important Sanctuary church. The pool was comforting and then several of us jumped in the van and off to Madonna dei Bagni; only 3 minutes away, or so we thought.....*

## Chapter 9

### *Madonna dei Bagni*



[Madonna dei Bagni](#)

### *L'Antico Forziere Food Samples*



## ***The Plan...*** Sunday, August 22

7 to 9 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

9 a.m. Optional. Church in Casalina.

11 a.m. Talks about Umbria from experts (arranged by L'Antico Forziere).

1 p.m. At your option you may do anything you want the rest of the day.

## ***The Reality...***

As you can see by the plan, we had intended to go to a morning mass right in Casalina only one-minute away. We got there a few minutes early for the regular 10 a.m. Sunday morning mass and the doors were locked. Samuele, not being a regular churchgoer, did not understand why this was the case, but he said we could just as easily go to the evening mass at the Sanctuary of Madonna di Bagni, only 5 minutes away. This was timely since we were going to do laundry and rest most of the day.

Since Madonna dei Bagni is a special sanctuary church, Samuele told us that it can sometimes become very crowded owing in part to the extremely limited seating. "Be there a bit before 5 p.m. or you may not get seats," he warned. We got there without a hitch and very promptly only to find a nearly empty church parking lot (dirt) and a wide open, completely empty

church building. Being the out-of-towners we searched around for someone to ask knowing full well that we would get that shrug, smile and shake of the head 'no' when we asked in English. Lo and behold Judy walked around the front of the tiny church and keeping her translation streak going – remember her performance in the laundromat - found three teenagers who spoke just enough English to tell her that in the Summer the masses are at 7 p.m., not 5 p.m. Of course they may have been speaking in Italian and Judy just heard them in English. At that instant it was confirmed Samuele like many other Italians indeed was not a regular churchgoer.

We wandered into the church exhausted from a full day of laundry instructions reading, gelato eating and being lost in some of the most wonderful countryside of our lives. We sat in the tiny (at least by my standards) folding chairs and prayed. After a while we rose and started looking at the walls of this very small church. There were beautiful paintings on the side altars, yes even this small of a church over here has side altars, but there also were these beautiful little plaques everywhere. I mean everywhere.





*As we inspected the 8" x 10" majolica pottery plaques it was a bit of a mystery what they were all about. One thing in common among all of them was the initials P.G.R. We would later find out this meant Per Grazia Ricevuta (For*

*Graces Received). Each plaque had a scene depicting some kind of an event like a drowning, fire, accident or some other catastrophe. There was also what we figured out was a year the event took place on most of the plaques. This became clear as we found recent years and more modern scenes such as automobile*

accidents. Then we went back to the beginning and found that these plaques had been placed on the walls of the church as early as the mid-1600s right up to the present day. We lit a candle, said a prayer, left an offering and jumped back in the van.

In a few minutes we were back at L'Antico Forziere and decided to employ that well-known religious practice, shut-eye prayer. I know you see some people using this form of prayer every Sunday in church. Only a short time later our nap – uh, prayer was interrupted by the alarm clock tweeting for dinner. Rather than bore you with words, let me show you a few pictures of the stylish manner in which Stephano and Andrea dress their plates.



Diane and I ate this special dessert for two on our very first night at the inn.

This is typical of the complimentary first course soup starter. Every night there was a different color soup (veggie base).





*One of the many pasta dishes served to us during the week. We experimented, but always asked what it was we had eaten after we were surprised by the great tastes.*



*Cannelloni*



*Tagliatelle*



*Boneless veal chop*

*Medallions of  
pork with  
mixed  
vegetables*



*Beef tenderloin  
with rocket salad  
leaves and  
balsamic dressing*



### *More desserts*

*We ate them all and even had the nerve to ask for plain gelato (4 flavors, of course) on some nights! One night I had a traditional Umbrian dessert pecorino and honey with sweet crackers (no picture).*



*Every night before dessert each of us was given a small complimentary portion of white sabayon sweet cream served on a curiously bent spoon and a chocolate truffle coated in cinnamon. These were to provide a transition from the meal to the finishing desserts and coffees.*



*I also have to say the soups, antipasto, salads, primi piatti, secondi and contorni foods at L'Antico Forziere were as authentic to the flavors of the local cuisine of Umbria as we tasted in any other restaurant in the area, but all of those places served the food a lot like the way you and I would put it on a plate at home. Forziere believes in the visual art of food as well as the oral thrill which made the adventure even greater.*

*Miracle of miracles, dinner the second night took another 3 hours, but we started ½ hour earlier, so we were beginning to game the system. We would be in bed earlier and ready for our next guided touring adventure. In the morning we would drive to Assisi and pick up our old friend from Spoleto, Isabella Bellucci. She would drive all the way from Bastia Umbria to the Assisi train station to meet us (about 3 miles), and we would follow her to the Parcheggio for the Assisi Centro Storico - sounded easy enough. For the moment it was sweet dreams with only one Gas-X tab necessary....*

## **Go to Part 2**