



After we got settled, our Tour Director took us on an orientation tour of Venice. I had been there a few times, and had 3 maps, so I went along to find out where the closest restaurants were. I wanted to go to the Jewish Ghetto, which was the oldest one in Europe. I broke off from the group and made my way to the museum for a tour.

The guide explained that in 1516 Venice ordered the Jews to live in an area of the city where the foundries, known in Venetian as "geti", had been situated in ancient times, to wear a sign of identification and to manage the city's pawnshops at rates established by the government.

The first Jews to comply with the decree were the Ashkenazim from mid-eastern Europe. Their guttural pronunciation mangled the Venetian term "geto" into "ghetto", creating the word still used today to indicate various places of where people of the same ethnic or religious group are clustered. The "Ghetto" was closed during the night, and the boats of the Christian guards scoured the surrounding canals to impede nocturnal violations.

It was quite a contrast after visiting all the magnificent churches and cathedrals to discover that the synagogues in the Ghetto are on the top floor of the pre-existing buildings and recognized with difficulty outside. We visited 3 Synagogues, the first being the German, which was unusual because of its elliptical shape.



The second one was the French synagogue, which had sort of a dome on it and was slightly more ornate. There was a sort of faux marble in these synagogues, and it was forbidden to use real marble.



The most ornate was the Spanish synagogue, because the members were traders and were wealthier. They hired a Gentile architect to design the synagogue, and that is why there is a pediment over the Ark.



The next day the rest of our group were taken by speedboat to St. Mark's for a walking tour. Since we had done that our last time in Venice, we bought all day tickets for the vaporettos (water taxi) and set off. Our first stop was at Burano, noted for its colorful houses, the leaning bell tower, and its lace.





We stopped at a number of shops, including one where a lady was making lace, which is a dying art.



After touring Burano, we took the vaporetto to Murano to look at their famous glass. We got invited to a glass blowing demonstration, which was quite interesting. The man made a small vase and an animal.



After the demonstration, we were invited to the showroom, where they had some beautiful pieces and some chandeliers, but we decided we had no place to put it, much to the disappointment of the saleslady. Armed with my Venice map, and the knowledge of the vaporetto routes, we took another vaporetto that went clear around part of Venice and ended us up near the Grand Canal. We stopped for a coffee on the main street and watched the sunset over the church of Santa Maria della Salute. From that point, we took another vaporetto up the Grand Canal to the railway station plaza, where we caught another vaporetto back to the hotel. All in all, we were on the water from 10 AM to 6 PM! Not a bad day for us.



We had our farewell dinner that night, which was fine, and said goodbye to the group. One couple, also going to Los Angeles, had a 4:20 AM flight! We are glad we decided on that layover in New York.

Poor Kathy, for the second time in our travels, she was in the shower when we had a power failure. The emergency lights were on in the hallway, so we were able to see well enough.

The power was restored, and all went well for the rest of the evening.

The next morning we were taken to the airport by motorboat, which was a first for us. There was a sign on the dock indicating it was 7 minutes to the terminal. NOT! It was more like 20 minutes unless you were a sprinter. Our flight from Venice was short, and when we hit the Rome Airport we saw a sign indicating our gate was 11 minutes away. Based on our experience in Venice, that meant 30 minutes! When we arrived in Rome on our way to Naples, we had hiked the distance and remembered how long it was. Kathy managed to sweet talk one of the jitney drivers to take us to the escalator to our gate. The trip in the jitney took more than 11 minutes by itself. We then had to take an escalator to the tram which took us out to the gate.

The flight home was a disaster. The agent thought he was doing us a favor by putting us in an exit row. The problems were that there were no windows, the seats were narrower, and the sides of the seats were rigid. Fortunately, I spotted a row of empty seats across the aircraft, and with fingers crossed, waited for the doors to close. We got settled in for the flight to New York, which was 5 hours shorter than directly to Los Angeles. It was a good thing, too. It seemed there was a group of 80 who had just visited relatives in Calabria, and every Italian on the plane wanted to visit every other one.

We overnighted at the same hotel that we stayed at on the way to Italy and the next day flew American to Los Angeles. We were met by our driver and taken home.

All in all, it was a great trip, but the land tours are quite a bit more strenuous than a cruise. On a cruise you unpack once and travel between ports while you sleep. On the other hand, you never get a chance to see much of the countryside. We really had a chance to get a true feel for Italy with this land tour.

Our next 2 trips will be cruises, however, and we will look forward to several relaxing sea days.

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