

Overview

In a trip of a lifetime, we spent 24 days exploring the highlights of much of Italy (Venice, Florence, Pisa, Tuscany countryside, Amalfi coast, Rome) then took an 8 day Mediterranean cruise from Rome stopping at some additional cities in Italy, visiting a couple of Greek islands and ending in Athens. We ended our trip in Athens walking the city and touring the Acropolis.

While many of the days were hotter than average (up to 100 degrees one day in Rome), the weather was dry and we had wonderful blue skies for most of our trip. It only rained one night in Venice.

That heat was due to a heat dome that got stuck over the area. The hottest temperatures there usually do not occur until late July and into August.

I was pleasantly surprised that crowds were not as large as I had expected based on all of the estimates for Jubilee. Crowded yes, but likely not too much more than the last couple of years. Some of the B&B and hotel staff we spoke with said that the press in Italy seems to indicate that crowds are no bigger this year. Speculation is that some have stayed away due to Jubilee.

All of the long planning really paid off as we had great seats on the planes, trains, ferries and buses and did not have to stand in any long lines to enter an attraction.

We had little, nice surprises along the way and one small incident in Pompeii that did not stop us.

Most lodging was as good or better than expected. Beds were mostly comfortable, showers were hot and had great water pressure, and the a/c was enough to beat the heat. All lodging had great WiFi. Our pictures and videos were easily uploaded to One Drive each day, so we had an immediate backup.

The food was excellent and was less expensive than expected. That made up for the higher exchange rates that went up quite a bit in 2025.

Most restaurants charge a small per-person fee called coperto, that covers the cost of table setting, including linens and cutlery, as well as basic service and cleaning. We found that this was usually €3-€5. However, some upscale places might charge €20.

Tips are usually included in the posted prices. A few places told us that tips were not included. My earlier research indicated that you are never obligated to tip for meal service in Italy.

We love our Tiramisu with a good liqueur as one of the ingredients. However, we found out that Italians do not make Tiramisu with any type of liqueur. So, we were actually disappointed in all the Tiramisu we ate. I guess that is one dessert we like the “Americanized” way!

The drinking water was great everywhere. At times, we used one of many public water fountains to fill our water bottles.

The wines were also fantastic and a lot cheaper than in the states. We did not wish to like the Brunello, but we both fell in love with it.

Rather than getting tour guides, we used Rick Steve’s audio tours (free to download and use) to guide us through many key attractions. The audios are very in depth (some times too much information) and helped us to learn a lot about the places we were visiting. Over the entire trip, we listened to 18 different audio tours.

Some taxi drivers are honest. Others will try to charge you more than they are allowed. They are supposed to only charge by what the meter says, but many charge higher, fixed rates. Our ride back from the Vatican was an example. The first cab driver we approached wanted €45. The second driver wanted €30, when the cost should have been about €15. Another example was our return from St. Peter’s. One driver wanted €45, and another gave us the meter rate of €10. We gave him a good tip and thanked him.

Some public toilets, and even some toilets in restaurants do not have a toilet seat – just the ceramic rim.

All in all, this was a fantastic trip that we will never forget.

Day 1 - Travel

We flew from Milwaukee through Philly and then on to Venice. The flight from Philly was 8 ½ hours.

We had a short delay in Philly, but arrived in Venice on time.

I splurged a bit and bought “premium economy” seats on our American flights. I am glad I did that. The seats were great. They were wider and deeper than coach – basically like first class seats on a domestic flight. We received a contoured pillow, blanket, socks, lotion, and very nice headsets for watching movies (had to return those).

The airplane seemed to be a newer 787 that had large, darkened windows to keep out light, but you could adjust the amount of light that was let in – very cool.

We had two decent meals with real plates and silverware.

Day 2 – Venice (stay here was 4 nights)

We arrived in Venice on time. We walked off the plane onto the tarmac and were then bussed to the main terminal.

One of our two bags was unloaded first. The second bag was about five minutes later.

Customs was as quick and easy as we have ever experienced. We did a self photo and fingerprint scan, and the agent scanned our passport. No forms or questions. We were first in line there as well. A minute later we were on the way to get a private water taxi to a dock near our B&B - [Corte Campana](#).

The B&B room was as expected. The bathroom had great shower pressure and temperature, but it was a small enclosure like a cabin shower – hard to turn around in. The owners were very nice and we had good conversations with them over breakfast each morning.

Our room was a separate room in their home which was located on the fourth floor of a residential building. There was an elevator on the second floor that we used to take our luggage up and down. Otherwise, we just walked up and down the stairs as needed. There were not too many stairs overall, so not too bad.

After checking in, we went to a nearby wine bar, [Wine Bar 5000](#), for our first tastes and sips of Italy. We had a couple of glasses of wine and some cicchetti (small bites). We ate outside along one of the canals and watched the gondolas glide by.

We had one of our favorite dinners at [Al Giardinetto da Severino](#).

They had a beautiful patio, excellent food and prices and a large wine list. Jan's gnocchi with meat sauce melted in your mouth. My black sea bass was the best I have ever had. It was very tender and flavorful and melted in your mouth. The whole, cooked fish was brought to our table and the waiter took the plate and stood behind us and filleted the fish. I was then served the fully plated entrée with only the filets.

We finished our meal with some Italian cookies and a dessert wine. I also had an espresso.

Day 3 – Venice

We walked to the bus station (Piazzale Roma) crossing the Rialto bridge during our walk.

We purchased tickets for the Vaporetto (line 1) and took the water bus down the Grand Canal to San Marco. It was a nice relaxing way to see the sights along the canal.

We could not get a seat at the front of the boat, but nabbed one at the back and had a decent seat to take pictures without others getting in the way.

Near the Rialto bridge, we stopped to buy a SIM card for Jan's phone so we could use it to get Google walking maps during our trip. It was not expensive and lasted our trip. However, before we travel out of the country again, we'll be getting phones and plans that will provide the tech needed without having to get a physical Sim.

We also visited [Doge's Palace](#) and took the Secret Itineraries tour. The tour was very informative and allowed us to see the prison cells and the administrative facilities. We learned that Cassanova (who was imprisoned here) was in fact not a nice person. It was a hot day and the climb up the steps to some of the rooms was even hotter.

We ate lunch at Osteria da Bubi. It was nice to sit down and enjoy a great lunch and a cold beer. The restaurant drastically changed their menu from when I initially did my research, and it was even better than I had expected.

Jan's prosciutto with burrata was huge and tasty. My spaghetti with three tomatoes and cheese and basil was very good. We shared a huge liter mug of cold beer.

After lunch, we took a gondola ride with "Christian's relaxing gondola rides".

This route was away from larger crowds and long lines. We were taken on more authentic parts of the canal with some time on the Grand Canal. He even sang to us!

It was a very nice calm and relaxing ride and worth walking a bit to get to that stand.

We tried to eat dinner at [Osteria Al Portego](#), but they had no room. They only have five tables and do not take reservations. So, we went to their sister restaurant, [Encota Al Vento](#). They were also small, but had room for us. Jan's Ravioli with asparagus and cheese was very good as was my beef tartare with burrata. However, my swordfish was tough and not good at all. The tiramisu was excellent. All in all, the restaurant was just okay – nothing special. They had a very small wine list.

We walked about 15,000 steps today.

[Day 4 – Venice](#)

Today we visited St. Mark's Basilica and Bell Tower. We took the elevator up to the top of the bell tower and had a great view. It was a fairly clear day, and we could even see the Dolomites in the distance.

The basilica was okay. However, you had to pay extra to see all the areas of the church. We just took the main tour through the church while we listened to a Rick Steve's audio tour explaining things.

We had a wonderful lunch on the terrace at [Hotel Danieli](#). Jan had a very tender and flavorful ossobuco ravioli and tagliatelle pasta. I had a simple, but flavorful spaghetti dish. We had a lemon dessert drink that was very refreshing on a hot day. The views over the water and the Doge's palace were great. The service from multiple wait staff was top notch. It was our most expensive lunch on the trip, but worth it for the view and the quality...a real treat.

We had our first gelato at Sosa near the Rialto – it was very good.

We had dinner at [Ristorante Da Carletto](#). This was a great little restaurant just a few minutes walk from our B&B. We walked to dinner using umbrellas provided by our B&B. This was the only time it rained during our entire trip.

Jan loved her beef, Parmesan arugula appetizer. My tuna tartare was also excellent. Jan also loved her spinach ravioli. My lobster linguine was wonderful – an excellent pasta, olive oil and lots of lobster. Our Barolo wine was one of our favorites on the trip. The Tiramisu was just okay.

[Day 5 – Venice](#)

On our last day in Venice, we took a tour to the islands of Murano and Burano. We hopped on a small boat about a 5-minute walk from our B&B and went first to Murano where we watched a glass blowing demonstration and had some time to walk around on our own. We then went back to the boat and then stopped at Burano. We saw a lace making demonstration and then walked around to see the colorful homes and shops here on this small island.

We had a quick lunch on Burano at [Riva Rosa](#) and then headed back to the main island.

Today was our wedding anniversary. I planned a special dinner for us at [Barbacani](#). They have one table for two people that sits about a foot above a canal. The table is so popular, that you have to reserve and pre-pay for the table at least a year in advance.

The weather cooled down that day and it was a perfect evening to have dinner overlooking the canal and watching gondolas glide by.

Jan's caprese salad was tasty and my beef carpaccio was good with some tasty sauces to dip the meat in. Jan liked her ravioli, but my lobster linguine was a bit disappointing.

Overall, the food could have been better, but the ambiance and the ability to dine here on our actual anniversary was unparalleled.

Day 6 – Florence (stay here was 3 nights)

This was a travel day. We are leaving Venice and taking a high-speed train to Florence.

After breakfast at our B&B in Venice, we took a Vaporetto from a stop near our B&B to the train station. We had reserved seats in business class, but once we walked onto the train, we could not find the seats. I found a conductor and asked him for help. He said the configuration for this train had changed and our seats no longer existed on this particular train. However, he said, you have been upgraded to Executive Class.

He showed us to our seats. Wow – what an upgrade. This was the highest class of service on the train. We were in the first car of the train that was dedicated to this class. There were only about 12 seats in the entire car, and all of the seats were not occupied. The seats were comfortable, and they swiveled and reclined. We received free drinks and a hot lunch (one of a few choices from a dedicated menu to this class).

There was one staff solely assigned to our car. The car also had its own restroom and a small conference room.

The speed of the train varied from 90mph to 160mph. It was a smooth and quiet two hour ride. What a way to ride the train!!

After arriving in Florence, we grabbed a taxi and went to [Il Bargello Bed & Breakfast](#) to check in. This was a very small B&B that was a short walking distance to the major attractions we planned to visit. It only had a few rooms on the 4th floor. There was no elevator, and you had to walk up 77 steps to get to the room. I underestimated the effort we would need to climb up and down those steps at least twice per day. Not bad walking down, but walking up after a long day or after dinner was a bit taxing.

This lodging was the only place we stayed that was disappointing. The room was small; the bathroom was smaller than expected and the floors were dirty. The B&B's website mentioned all of this and showed pictures. So, I was not misled, but things in person were just disappointing - especially the long climb up the steps (especially when the temperatures got up to 97 degrees).

They did have a service for someone to carry our luggage up and down the steps. So, we took advantage of that.

There were not many other centrally located lodging options unless I wanted to pay 3-4 times more. I probably should have made that splurge in this case.

After checking in and unpacking, we took a walk around to scope out the area near our B&B. We had a glass of wine at a wine window and visited a cheese shop ([Formaggioteca Terroir](#)) that Jan was familiar with from an HGTV show Fixer to Fabulous.

We had dinner at [Ristorante Pietrabilanca](#). Both the food and wine menus had a lot of options to choose from. It was more of a fine dining restaurant with very good service until the end where we had to wait a long time to get our check.

They gave us hot towels to start. This was the only place we ate that did this. We were also given an amuse bouche to start the meal.

The serving of the wine was an experience all in itself. They open, decant and test the wine like very few fine dining venues do – even in the states. Very nice for those like us who appreciate that level of service for the wine.

I had the crispy scallops which tasted wonderful and were different than any I have ever had. My slipper lobster pasta was not very good. It also was a unique dish with rather raw, locally caught slipper lobster. Supposedly, it has a sweeter, more delicate flavor than a main lobster, but I did not care for it. Jan liked her unique ravioli which were in the shape of a star. Another unique dish – the deconstructed tiramisu, was also just average.

We definitely were able to try some new things here, but it was not a favorite meal of our ours.

Day 7 – Florence

We took a regional train to Pisa. It was about 80 minutes each way. Seats on a regional train are not reserved – first come, first served.

We took the train to the station that was a bit closer to the leaning tower, Pisa S. Rossore, but made the return trip from the larger station nearby, Pisa Centrale.

There were a ton of people trying to get that iconic picture of a person trying to “hold” up the leaning tower. Of course, we got that picture as well.

We had a great lunch at La Vineria di piazza which was located on a small piazza away from the crowds. We arrived at noon as they were just opening and so were able to pick a table on the patio next to the piazza. The other tables quickly filled up. The caprese salad was refreshing on a hot day. We both had a superb gnocchi dish with a flavorful sauce topped with a solid, thin piece of provolone cheese and bacon. One of the best dishes we had all trip.

On our walk back from the train station to our B&B, we stopped at the Duomo to take pictures and grabbed a gelato across the street at Edorardo. It was super creamy and smooth. I had the Zabaione which was made with fresh eggs and wine – it was my overall favorite gelato. Jan had the Fragola (strawberry).

We had one of our best meals, maybe the best, at [La Buchetta](#) for dinner. It was a fantastic experience with personable service and superb food. The carpaccio was a large portion. It was served on a bed of arugula (rocket) and topped with two large triangles of Parmesan cheese. Jan loved her ravioli with blue cheese. My gnocchi had one of the best sauces I ever tasted and had bacon and some red pepper flakes. It was ‘melt in your mouth’ good.

For dessert, we had gelato that they made at our table utilizing liquid nitrogen (I'll post a video). Never saw anything like that. To end the meal, they gave us a gratis Limoncello.

There was a sign on the wall near our table that said, "If wine was not an important thing, God would not have given it his first miracle!".

Day 8 – Florence

We toured the Accademia mainly to see Michelangelo's David. It certainly did not disappoint. You were able to get close to the statue and walk around it to get a great view of the entire piece. What a wonderfully inspired piece of art – plus, it's named after me!

We then did the "renaissance walk" following another of Rick Steve's audio tours. This was a good way to see a lot of the city while getting information about the things we were walking by.

We had lunch along the Arno River at [Trattoria Ponte Vecchio](#). We started with a huge salad and then shared a pizza with prosciutto, tomatoes, arugula and buffalo mozzarella cheese. A unique pizza, but really not up our alley.

We met a family sitting across from us that were Packer fans from Utah. Yes, Packer fans are everywhere.

We then toured a nearby piazza and then the Uffizi gallery.

On the way back to the B&B, we of course, had a gelato.

We had dinner at [Osteria Vini E Vecchi Sapori](#). This was one of our favorite meals on the trip - excellent meal and service. I am glad that we had reservations. Our reservation was for 9pm and there were many others at the door trying to get a seat. Many of them ended up coming back at 11pm for a meal.

They had a lot of wine choices, but we tried 3 of their house options, a Chianti, a vino Montalcino and a reserve Montalcino. We liked the vino the best.

To start, we enjoyed one of the best bruschetta's we've ever had. In true Italian fashion, the bread was soaked with olive oil – just delicious. Jan had a tomato sauce-based fettuccine with mozzarella cheese that she loved. I had lamb chops. They were grilled perfectly and accompanied by some tasty herbed potatoes – wonderful.

We had a light, raspberry tiramisu for dessert – yummy and unique. It is a very small restaurant with 6 or 7 tables. We did not have to share a table, but if you are a couple, you may need to share.

[Day 9 – Tuscany Countryside \(stay here was 7 nights\)](#)

This was a travel day. We are leaving Florence and renting a car to drive to the Tuscan countryside to stay at farm (agriturismo).

The day started off ominously when we could not get a taxi to take us to pick up our rental car by the airport. The Florence B&B agent said the taxis are so busy that they cancel or do not do pickups on the city streets. She said lately she has also not been able to get an Uber Black either. Jefferson, the person that carried our luggage up and down the 77 steps, helped us get to the airport. He carried some of our luggage and walked us to the tram where we could catch a ride to the airport. He paid our fare and escorted us first to the airport, then onto the rental car shuttle. He made sure we got exactly where we needed to go. He acted well beyond our expectations – thanks Jefferson.

I am glad I rented from Sixt as I only had to wait for 3 others in line. The other agencies had maybe 20 or 30 people in line. We were given a fairly new red, Fiat sedan that had no issues during our rental.

The drive to our Tuscan lodging was under 2 hours. However, since we could not check in until later in the afternoon, we stopped in Chianti for lunch, did a tour of a castle and did a wine tasting.

We ate lunch at [Osteria Di Brolio](#), the restaurant owned by the Ricasoli family – which also owns the castle. It was a relaxing lunch where Jan had a juicy steak (not too rare) and I had pici spaghetti. Jan loved the steak. I did not like the spaghetti as much because the pici pasta is a bit too thick for my taste.

After lunch we took a self-guided tour of the castle, [Castello di Brolio](#).

The views from up at the castle were beautiful. We visited during one of the rare cloudy days of our trip. It would have been even more beautiful had it been a clear day,

Next, we went to the wine room owned by the same Ricasoli family. It is the oldest winery in Italy. It dates back to 1141. We shared a tasting of a few wines here.

We then drove to the agriturismo ([La Bruciata](#)) and checked in. It was even better than expected. The lodging was in a gorgeous, quiet setting among vineyards, olive trees, and lemon trees.

Our room was on the first floor and was a minute walk to the pool. The terracotta floors were very clean. The bathroom was modern with an open shower that had great water pressure. The bed was the best so far (could still have been a bit softer).

The property gets good breezes, but the heat here has been a bit hotter than normal...mid to upper 90s. So, we decided to use the a/c (extra charge), instead of leaving the windows

open. Plus, the screens had some holes near the bottom and let flies in. The a/c made sleeping much nicer.

We had a small table and chairs on our front patio and two chairs on the back patio off of the bedroom.

The welcome dinner was also more than expected. To start, the first course was two slices of toast: one with olive oil and another with a mashed-up mushroom and cheese...delicious. The second course was lasagna. Dessert was vanilla ice cream with small, fresh cherries. We also were given a small glass of Limoncello. Oh, and we had a full bottle of a local, red wine.

Breakfast also was great with fruits, toast, yogurt, bacon and scrambled eggs with cheese and a couple of desserts. Each breakfast was unique and tasty. Breakfast was available from 8:30am until 10:00am, so very flexible.

The pool was cool, and the chairs were fairly comfortable, except the head of the chair was about half the size we are used to in the states. You were asked to wear a swim cap if you planned on getting your head wet. They try to keep the pool drains from getting clogged with hair.

They did our laundry two different times for a reasonable fee.

We were here for a week, and it was wonderful.

Day 10 – Tuscany Countryside

We went to a grocery store to get a few things for a couple of lunches. The rest of the day we spent relaxing by the pool.

We ate dinner at [La Grotta](#). There was a nice patio, but they must have had a brief rain shower late that afternoon as they did not have a chance to dry things off. So, we had to eat inside. We chose a bottle of a Vino Nobile Di Montepulciano from their large wine list.

I started with a veal carpaccio appetizer that was tender and tasty. I was not sure what to expect from this dish, but was pleased I tried it. Jan had a peach salad that she also enjoyed. For her main course, Jan had ravioli stuffed with Parmesan cheese and zucchini flowers. Zucchini flowers are the edible blossoms of the zucchini plant. They are delicate, trumpet-shaped flowers, typically yellow or orange, and are known for their subtle, slightly sweet flavor and tender texture. She liked her dish.

I had gnocchi with duck ragu, black garlic and dill. It was also very tender and tasty. We had profiteroles for dessert. This is more of a fine dining restaurant with very good food and service.

Day 11 – Tuscany Countryside

We drove to Montepulciano, parked in lot #5 and took a shuttle bus to the top of the town. We explored the top of the town and had a wine tasting with a cave tour at De' Ricci Cantine. Parts of the cave date back to 400bc. The caves were not used for wine way back then, but the family roots go back that far, and the name of the winery is based on an early ancestor (12th century) that was a weather forecaster. He could predict weather patterns with such accuracy that he was considered a sorcerer. To save himself from the Inquisition, he decided to reveal his secret – he said that his predictions were based on the way a hedgehog looked at the sun! The man was given the nickname Riccio (hedgehog) and was the ancestor of the Ricci family in Montepulciano.

Today, the sun and a hedgehog are on their wine label.

We had lunch at [E Lucevan le Stelle](#) which overlooked the valley. We then walked down to the bottom of the city stopping for gelato near the bottom. Montepulciano is a beautiful city that had very few tourists in the heart of the city on the day we were there.

We had another great dinner on the farm (wine, bruschetta, ravioli, meatballs and green peas, and peaches and ice cream).

Day 12 – Tuscany Countryside

We drove to Siena and parked in the Il Campo parking garage because you can't drive into the city. It was a short walk from the garage to the Il Campo piazza. It is a beautiful piazza and very large. We listened to a Rick Steve's audio that explained a traditional horse race that is still held in the piazza each year.

Siena holds its famous Palio horse race twice a year, on July 2nd and August 16th. This traditional bareback horse race takes place in the Piazza del Campo, the city's main square. The Palio is a major event for the city, with festivities and celebrations surrounding the race.

The Palio di Siena is a centuries-old tradition involving the city's 17 districts (contrade). Each race features ten contrade, with seven automatically participating from the previous race and three being randomly selected. The event is more than just a horse race; it's a week-long festival with trial races, feasts, parades, and solemn ceremonies.

We walked a number of the main roads and some smaller alleyways to see various architecture. Cars are restricted in the streets here. However, you still need to watch for

traffic as residents and delivery vehicles can drive on the roads and park for up to 20 minutes.

We had lunch at a small restaurant called [Osteria La Sosta di Violante](#). Jan had a caprese salad with buffalo mozzarella - such nice tomatoes and cheese. I had a side salad and a rabbit dish. It may have been the best rabbit I have ever had. It was served in sort of a small mason jar with celery, the cooking juices and the rabbit all in that jar. It was a lot of tender rabbit meat, and it was considered an appetizer!

On our way back from Siena, we stopped for a private wine tasting and tour at [Tenuta Valdipiatta](#). The winery was hidden away off some back country gravel roads.

We chose the “old vintages” tasting and were able to taste six of their top Vino Nobile di Montepulciano wines including ones from 2012 and 2019 (all were very good to excellent). We also tasted a great dessert wine that is popular in Italy – a Vin Santo. It is a cross between a Sauternes and a ruby port – very good. We had this as a dessert wine a number of times on our trip and purchase one bottle to take with us.

We had another great dinner on the farm (wine, tomatoes and cheese on toast and zucchini flowers and cheese on toast, Spaghetti Bolognese, a salad with steak strips and cheese, green salad, strawberry cheesecake).

[Day 13 – Tuscany Countryside](#)

We drove to Montalcino to taste some of the areas famous Brunello.

The first tasting was at a very small family run winery, [Innocenti](#). The Brunellos were wonderful, especially their riserva. We had tastes of some older vintages, the most recently released vintage (2020) and the most recently released reserve vintage (2019). 2019 was a great year for Brunello. The non-reserve 2019 was excellent, but the 2019 reserve was fabulous (the 2019 Brunello vintage is widely considered exceptional, with many critics calling it one of the best modern vintages in Montalcino).

In all of our wine tasting/drinking over the years, we have never had a Brunello. They tend to be very expensive, and it is hard to get your hands on a reasonably priced wine in the US. So, we did not wish to like the wine, but we are hooked. This was such a great wine. We also were able to taste a 2012 and a 2016 – other great years. They were also wonderful. To buy these great wines in Italy is very reasonable compared to the states. Even with the exchange rate, shipping and tariffs, it is cheaper to get this wine shipped to us than to buy a lesser wine in the US for more money. I ordered a case to be shipped to us in late October. We'll see if those bottles are as good as we tasted at the winery. This may become our special occasion wine from this point forward.

After that tasting, we drove around Montalcino and then headed to lunch at a Michelin starred restaurant, [Boccon DiVino](#). We sat on the patio with a gorgeous view of the valley below and had an excellent lunch with some Brunello wine.

We then went to another very small winery called [San Polino](#) to check out more Brunellos. This is pretty much a mom and a pop run operation. The family is from England. Their bare bones tasting room also had a gorgeous view. Their wines were good, but we liked the Innocenti better.

We had dinner nearby the farm at [Il Covo Osteria di Montepulciano](#). We were all wined out after the tastings and lunch today. So, we had a light meal of pizza and beer.

[Day 14 – Tuscany Countryside](#)

We followed Rick Steve's heart of Tuscany driving tour. On our prior days, we actually had seen about 50 percent of the area. So, we drove that other 50 percent today.

After going back to our room to freshen up, we then drove to [Bindella winery](#) and had a combined lunch and wine tasting. This was a litter larger winery than what we had been to. Off the beaten path and down a number of country roads. It is a family run business, but the owner lives in Switzerland.

They recently built a new tasting room and barrel room. The tasting room has floor to ceiling windows and a fantastic view. A nice facility like you might see in Napa, but this view was better.

Their main wines are Vino Nobile Montepulciano plus a couple of Tuscan blends. Lunch and wines were excellent.

We had another great dinner on the farm (wine, cheese on toast, cheese and prosciutto on toast, a cheese crepe, thin slices of pork in a light gravy, a green salad, a cherry cobbler).

[Day 15 – Tuscany Countryside](#)

We just relaxed by the pool and packed our things to get ready for the long drive to Salerno tomorrow.

We ate dinner at [Ristorante La Casina](#). This was our only disappointing meal this week. We initially were the only one's there and it took a long time to get the wine. It arrived shortly before the meal. The server did a good job of decanting the wine, but it was served way too close to the meal. The wine tasted average at best and was disappointing. My pici had a nice sauce and cheese, but the noodles were tough, maybe cooked too long? Jan's ravioli

and walnuts was better. We had an appetizer of sausage that was served after the meal. The sausage was a bit dry. Sort of a mini brat, but not as good as a brat. The view from the patio was nice, but it was just off the main road, so it was noisy at times.

Day 16 – Salerno and the Amalfi coast (stay here was 3 nights)

We drove from the farm in Tuscany to Salerno. It was an uneventful 4 ½ hour drive mainly on the freeway. We stopped once at a travel oasis for lunch and gas.

We returned the car at a garage just a couple of blocks from our hotel.

We stayed at the [Hotel Plaza](#). It was close to the ferry docks that we would use to visit Positano and Amalfi, and was across the street from the bus terminal which we would use to take the train to Rome. The hotel was very nice for the money paid. The bed was soft, the room size was adequate and had two dining type chairs to sit it. The bathroom was small, but larger than Florence, so ok. It had a good shower and water pressure. Breakfast was a large buffet that had a lot of items to choose from.

We had dinner right around the corner at [Binario Due](#). Jan had the gnocchi with Robiola cheese, zucchini and pistachios – very good. I had the seafood pasta. It was very good as well, but had clams. I did not know it would have clams. However, the clams were very good and were easy to remove from their shells.

A husband-and-wife team run the restaurant. Overall, it was very good, but that night they had to be mindful of their toddler daughter who was behaving nicely at a table nearby.

Day 17 – Salerno and the Amalfi coast

We took a ferry to Positano. It was a beautiful, clear, but hot day. We had arrived at the dock at least 15 minutes early, but the ferry was already boarding and ended up leaving early. We made it, but plan to arrive a little earlier tomorrow for our trip to Amalfi.

We had plenty of time to walk around and explore - more than we actually needed. We walked up from the ferry dock and along Columbo road to between the Le Sirenuse and Marincanto hotels to get a couple of iconic pictures.

There were actually a couple of great spots for pictures, but the area between these hotels has a great view of the colorful town and the beach without anything blocking the view. We stopped here and found a standup table along the fence and in the shade. We took some time to enjoy the view. From the small shop that provided the tables, I purchased a beer and Jan had a lemon slushy.

The walk up Columbo road was quick and easy. However, the walk up to the restaurant for lunch was a different story. We had reserved a lunch spot at [Il Tridente](#) (in the Poseidon

hotel). To get there, we had to climb a lot of steps. I was not aware it was so high up from where we started. Hindsight showed that there was a better walking path to the restaurant had we put that destination into Google maps a bit earlier. Oh well, great exercise! Lunch was nice and we had a great view. I had Scialatielli pasta with yellow tomatoes, clams and sea bass. Yes, clams again! The sea bass was again excellent, but not as melt in your mouth as Venice. Jan had Paccheri pasta with cherry tomatoes, burrata and basil.

After lunch, we grabbed the next ferry back to Salerno.

We had dinner at Angola Masuccio. The restaurant has seating in two buildings across from each other plus it has outside seating. The a/c was not on for seating inside. So, it was cooler to sit outside. We were in shade with a nice breeze, so not too bad, but we would have preferred a/c on this hot evening.

They have a small wine list. We chose a red wine, that when served was too warm. The owner gave us an ice bucket to quickly cool it down. That did the trick.

I had another very good sea bass. Jan had a black truffle pasta that was fantastic. At the time, this was the best pasta we had on the trip. Over the entire trip, we had various black truffle pasta entrees that were all wonderful. This dish ended up being one of our favorite choices the entire trip. The pasta was very tender and had LOTS of black truffle flakes. We've had truffle pastas in the states, but nothing like this – so delicious.

The owner (and our waiter) tried to get us to buy an appetizer and a dessert. This was a lot more pressure to purchase than any place during our trip, but he took our “no” without issue. There were similar comments from others online. So, we knew he might try the hard sell.

Service was ok. The entrees were great, but other things were lacking. Probably not a place we'd go back to despite the great food we had.

The walk to get here from the hotel was a nice walk down the “Nicollet mall” of Salerno called Corso Vittorio Emanuele.

Day 18 – Salerno and the Amalfi coast

Today we took the ferry to Amalfi. As soon as we left the boat, we grabbed a taxi to take us up to Ravello. It is a 20–25-minute ride including the time to wait at the traffic signal where the road is only wide enough for one car at a time. So, the light holds traffic at one end while traffic is allowed through from the other end.

It can be a bit hectic driving up, but the traffic was light in the morning, and we made good time. We were dropped off at the Ravello town square and walked a couple of blocks to tour Villa Rufolo.

The town was quiet and relaxed. It has a ZTL zone so no cars are allowed in the center of town. Far different than the large crowds and noise in Amalfi.

Villa Rufolo was a gorgeous property of beautiful gardens and majestic views over Amalfi and out to sea. The pictures do not do it justice.

We then walked to Villa Cimbrone. Another gorgeous property of well taken care of gardens and statuary. The view from here is also over Amalfi and out to sea. Glad we came for the views above the town.

Don't believe Google when it says the walking route to get here is mainly flat. We had a lot of steps to walk up to get to the villa. Glad there was some shade much of the way.

We then headed back to Amalfi for lunch. The taxi we took to get up to town was a typical van style taxi. Our transportation down was a golf cart. Going down in the golf cart was much easier to see the views during the ride, but you are much closer to the oncoming traffic.

We ate lunch in Amalfi at [Taverna Buonvicino](#). It was off the main drag down a quiet side street. It had tables inside and outside in a small square. You definitely must be looking for this restaurant or you would likely not find it. We are glad we found it as the food was excellent. I had linguine with lobster that was very good. It was half of a small, local lobster. I had to work at digging out the claw meat, but the main portion in the shell came out easily. It was tasty and a bit sweet similar to a Maine lobster. Jan had fusilli with pumpkin and shrimp. Excellent as well, maybe her new number 1?

We both had a glass of Brunello and Jan also had her first orange spritzer - very cold and refreshing.

We then walked the town a bit and took pictures of the cathedral. We also wanted to visit the cemetery as it is supposed to be interesting. We did find the small elevator to take you near the top to get to the cemetery, but it was closed for the next 2 hours, and we could not wait. I had not read anything in my research about it closing for part of the afternoon.

So, we walked back to town and had a gelato and found a place to sit in the shade to wait for our return ferry.

We ate dinner at [Al dente spaghetteria](#). It is a busy place with people waiting to get in. So, glad we had reservations. We started with a buffalo bruschetta that was 3 types of cheese on a warm piece of toast. The cheeses had started to melt, so it made for a tasty appetizer.

We both had the Scarpariello entrée. It was a spaghetti dish with San Marzano tomatoes and Parmesan cheese aged for 2 years. It was a nice tasting dish overall, but we have liked

a lot of other pasta dishes much better.

Our Tuscan wine was pretty good. The meal was definitely the best value so far – an appetizer, two entrees and a bottle of wine for €59.

Day 19 – Rome (stay here was 6 nights)

We traveled from Salerno to Rome on another high-speed train. The train arrived at the Salerno station 5 minutes late. On its way to Rome, it made one stop in Naples and travelled up to 186mph.

We did not get our seats upgraded this time. So, we were “stuck” in business class that I reserved earlier. We were in an enclosed seating area that had four seats. The other two seats in the cabin were not occupied. So, we had the entire cabin to ourselves – nice and quiet.

We took a taxi from the train station to the [Rome Suites hotel](#). It is a boutique guest house that has 5-6 rooms on the 4th floor of a building in the center of town, a couple of minutes walk from the Pantheon.

A breakfast was included each day. They offered a nice spread of meats and cheeses, fruits, cereal, bread, bakery as well as made to order omelets or scrambled eggs.

Our room had a patio with two chairs that had a view of the top of the Pantheon. However, due to the heat (upper 90s and 100 one day), we did not sit out there at all.

The bed was comfortable, and the shower was updated and had good water pressure. There was a small elevator available.

After unpacking, we started off our many days of walking by visiting the Trevi fountain. It was crowded, but many people were actually not in line to get close to the fountain. We got in line and within 10 minutes we had a primo spot at the edge of the fountain. The new queueing mechanism they started in December seems to be working well. We both threw a coin over our shoulders into the fountain.

We had made such good time getting to the Trevi fountain, that we decided to walk over to the Spanish Steps. The sight here was similar - lots of people at the bottom of the steps near the fountain, but not many people on the actual steps. It was probably because of the temperature, 98 degrees! The forecast was even hotter for the next few days, 99..100. So, we walked up both sections of the steps to get to the top. Two iconic stops and pictures on our first day!! 10,000+ steps – and that was in half a day.

We had dinner at [Miscellanea](#). It was a 3 minute walk from our hotel. They had a very large menu. Many times, that means a tourist spot and a lower quality meal, but that did not

seem to be the case here. We sat at a small table right on the cobblestone street (waiter had to adjust one leg on the table to keep it from wobbling). The burrata was excellent and was partly prepared tableside. It was brought to our table, and the lemon juice was added by the waiter slicing a lemon with a huge knife and letting the juice run down the knife onto the salad. He then did a similar thing with the olive oil by pouring the oil onto his knife and letting it drizzle onto the salad. The burrata also had a lot of shaved Parmesan cheese. Jan's four cheese gnocchi was very good and my spaghetti with sheep's cheese and black pepper was very good. Service was above average. In Italy, gratuities are typically included in the meal prices. However, this was one of the few places that asked for tip. It was a nice first meal in Rome.

Day 20 – Rome

We walked to and toured both the Colosseum and the Roman Forum. The entrance and security at the Colosseum moved quickly. You could not enter until 15 minutes before your ticket time, but it took no more than 10 minutes to enter once our time slot was allowed in. You did need to confirm your tickets with your passport.

We listened to a Rick Steve's audio tour here and learned a lot about the history of the Colosseum.

I would have liked to stop back here at night for a photo op, but since it was a long way from our hotel, we never made it back to the area.

The main Roman Forum entrance is just across the street from the Colosseum. We initially went to enter there, but there were long lines. So, we walked to the side entrance and were in with no wait at all. Plus, the restrooms and water fountain at that location also had no lines. It was worth the short walk. 98 degrees again today.

We had lunch at [Osteria Agrippa](#) which is on the corner by our hotel. It was nice to get in some a/c. We shared a salad and a Margueritta pizza and a couple of cold beers. Lunch was fine, but nothing special. They had a large, interesting menu though with lots of wine choices. It never seemed to be too busy throughout our stay.

We took showers and relaxed rest of the afternoon.

For dinner, we went to [Hosteria Romana](#). Most of the restaurants we ate at for dinner were within a 10 minute or so walk. This would be our longest walk to a place for dinner, 18 minutes.

We had reservations for the first seating. They initially could not find our reservation, but after someone talked to the owner, she found our name. We were fortunate that we got to sit in a smaller, special room with handwritten items on the wall (Jan added our names to

the wall).

The service was excellent, and the food was very good, especially the free appetizers. The beans and meat were yummy, and the eggplant had chunks of garlic, that I like. A couple of risotto balls were gratis as well.

We had a caprese salad as an appetizer. For her main entrée, Jan had the mushroom fettuccine that she liked. I could not decide between the three lamb dishes they had, but I ended up choosing the grilled lamb chops.

Well, the waiter brought me the chops and the Roman style lamb which was one of the others I was debating on. Wow – there was no charge for this extra, full-sized entrée.

I am sorry to say that neither lamb was very tasty, and they both were from lesser cuts of meat. I would not order those again. The Roman lamb was served on the bone and was the tastier of the two.

We had panna cotta and a Vin Santo wine for dessert. The waiter gave us something like chocolate chip biscuits that he said we should dunk in the wine. We did, and they were great.

A nice dinner overall, but a great experience.

With the tours we did, plus the walk to the restaurant for dinner, we walked about 16,000 steps today (about 6 ½ miles).

Day 21 – Rome

We visited the Pantheon, Vatican museums and the Sistine Chapel.

We listened to more of the Rick Steve's audio tours. He does a good job at describing things and leading you thru the exhibits.

The Pantheon is the oldest building in the world that has been an active church. It has been a Christian church since about 609AD and still conducts services today.

We had planned on walking to the Vatican (40-minute walk), but due to the heat, 100 degrees, we took a taxi back and forth.

We had a mid-afternoon reservation at the Vatican. So, we first ate lunch a few blocks away at Forno Feliziani. This was a buffet style eatery that had all sorts of options such as flat breads, meatballs, lasagna, vegetables and desserts. You basically asked for which items you wanted and how much. You then paid by weight. We had a couple of different flatbreads and a couple of beers. It seems a lot of locals come here to eat. It was a very nice lunch spot, even if it was a bit too hot inside.

After our lunch, it was not quite our time to enter the Vatican yet. So, we found a place to wait in the shade that was close to the entrance. Once our time slot was called, we quickly entered the museum and went through security. It took no more than 5 minutes.

Before heading down the main corridor toward the Sistine Chapel, we first toured other areas of the museum and spent time viewing the Pinecone courtyard, Octagonal Courtyard, Laocoön sculpture, and the Apollo Belvedere statue. We also then viewed paintings and sculptures in the Pinacoteca room.

Next, we headed down the main corridor and walked through Candelabra Hall, Tapestry Hall, Maps Hall, and the Raphael Rooms before getting to the Sistine Chapel.

Michelangelo's ceiling is certainly something to behold as is the wall with the "last judgement". Michelangelo painted the ceiling in about 4 years. He used scaffolding so he could stand up and paint, contrary to some thinking that he painted on his back.

We ate dinner at [L'Angolo Divino](#) mainly because it was a wine bar. However, while they had a huge wine list, there were only about 5 reds by the glass...disappointing.

The wine the sommelier chose was a good bottle from Umbria. It paired well with the food and was better after it opened up a bit. Jan started with the beef carpaccio, and I had the beef tartare which was very good with some spicy French mustard and capers as well as some sun-dried tomatoes. They have more of a snacking menu, but they served us a nice carbonara that was not on the printed menu. Nice creamy sauce and pasta with bacon.

We walked about 10,300 steps today. Just think what the count would have been if it was cooler and we walked back and forth to the Vatican!

[Day 22 – Rome](#)

We toured St. Peter's Basilica and climbed the dome.

We had planned on walking here as well (30-minute walk), but due to the heat, 95 degrees, we took a taxi back and forth.

Since early this spring, you could buy a ticket to the dome in advance. I was fortunate enough to do that a long time before our trip. We had a special line to enter and were one of only a few people in that line. We quickly entered and went thru security bypassing hundreds in the general security line. Well worth the few extra dollars.

The elevator ride halfway up to the dome was quick. Walking the rest of the 300 steps was a bit strenuous in the 90 plus degrees by mid morning. Plus, it was a narrow, steep climb up

the steps on a circular staircase. At one point, the walls around you and the steps were angled so you had to lean a bit to the side. One of the final, small sections was even narrower. A rope from the top was hanging down near these final steps that you could grab onto to help steady yourself. We had to stop a couple of times to catch our breath or to have a drink of water. However, the view at the top was great. You could see a lot of the city even though it was hazy.

The walk back down was not as bad.

We then toured the basilica and were even able to walk thru the Holy door. That door is only open in the Jubilee year which is every 25 years.

The basilica is huge and beautiful.

We had lunch back near our hotel at [Enoteca Corsi](#). We each had a glass of wine and shared a buffalo, prosciutto salad with tomatoes, green olives and carrots. It was very good. We also went here for dinner that night.

The dinner at [Enoteca Corsi](#) was very good. You definitely need a reservation here as shortly after we arrived, it was full. The waitress that helped us at lunch took me to the bar section to pick out a wine. We ended up with a nice Amarone reserve. We had a green salad to start - very plain, just iceberg lettuce. I added olive oil to mine. I had the roasted lamb with rosemary potatoes. The meat on the bone was tasty, but it was overwhelmingly fat. I loved the potatoes. Jan had a bucatini pasta with bacon, tomato sauce and pecorino cheese. We had a millefeuille (puff pastry with cream and strawberries) for dessert. It was one of the best desserts we have had.

We had to wait a bit for our check, but told the waitress no hurry. She rewarded our patience with two limoncellos.

[Day 23 – Rome](#)

We walked and toured a couple of neighborhoods as we listened to the Rick Steve's "Heart of Rome" audio tour. Among the more well-known areas, we walked thru was Campo De Flori and Piazza Novona. We ended up back at the Trevi fountain.

For lunch, we back tracked to Campo De Flori and ate at a small restaurant called Fiore. They were supposed to have a great Neapolitan pizza like one may get in Naples. We chose the buffalo mozzarella, tomato sauce and basil. It indeed was excellent and looked like the pizza you would expect in Naples. It was the best pizza we had on the trip. It went great with a couple of cold beers.

For dinner, we ate at [Da Francesco](#). You definitely needed a reservation here as well. We saw that our name was first on the list from the reservation I made back in April. This was a tad more upscale with prices to match. The food, wine and service were very good, but the prices were the highest we had seen up to this point. Plus, the wine list, while huge had many very, very expensive wines...some over €2,000! Not many under €100 here. We had the buffalo caprese salad to start. It was a huge dollop of cheese, tomatoes, sun dried tomatoes and yellow peppers. It was a different presentation than we had seen - tasted very good. Jan had the stuffed tortelli pasta with carbonara sauce and black truffle - excellent. I had the veal saltimbocca. It had nicely done slices of veal with a light sauce. We also shared a mixed salad. For dessert, we had a millefeuille similar to last night – a puffed pastry with cream and strawberries...excellent.

We also had a glass of a Moscato dessert wine - also very good and refreshing. I would not go back only because of the higher prices. There are many other cheaper options that are just as good.

[Day 24 – Rome](#)

For our last full day in Rome, we listened to another Rick Steve's audio as we walked and toured the Jewish ghetto. "Ghetto" is a word first used in Rome hundreds of years ago to mean an era segregated to one type of people, in this case the Jews. About 13,000 Jews were arrested here during WW II and sent off to concentration camps pretty much ending the life in the ghetto. Bronze stones exist in parts of the road honoring some local people that died in the camps.

We ate lunch again in Campo de Flore at Romoletto. Jan had a calzone (it was huge) and I had a spicy sausage and salami pizza. We had a couple of cold beers as well.

We then walked to Castle Sant'angelo which was near the Vatican and on the River Tiber. We did not tour the castle, but just took some pictures.

Castel Sant'Angelo was initially commissioned by the Roman Emperor Hadrian as a mausoleum for himself and his family. The popes later used the building as a fortress and castle, and it is now a museum.

We ate dinner at [Cucina del Teatro](#). They have some patio seating, but since it was still very hot, we sat inside. We ordered a 2019 Brunello. While it was good, it was no where close to as good as the Innocenti. I started with the Lime-marinated Angus carpaccio, with arugula and shavings of Grana Padano cheese topped with a little olive oil – very good.

Jan had the spaghetti carbonara as her entrée and I had the black truffle fettucine (excellent as was any truffle dish). For dessert we had a glass of dessert wine and a dark

chocolate lava cake with a warm, raspberry center. A very good meal overall.

We walked about 11,500 steps today.

We did a lot of walking in Rome. Over 57,000 steps / a bit over 20 miles.

Day 25 – Cruise (8 day/7 night cruise from Rome to Athens)

We took a private transfer from our hotel to the cruise port. We cruised on Voyager of the Seas (Royal Caribbean Lines). It is a 26 year old ship (refurbished in 2014) and in very good shape for its age. There were about 3,500 passengers on board (capacity is 4,200).

We arrived earlier than our assigned time, but were able to check-in right away.

Check-in was quick and easy. We could not get into our cabin for about an hour. So, we went to eat lunch in Windjammer – the large, buffet dining room that is open during embarkation.

We had an outside cabin with a balcony on deck #9 (room 9262). The balcony was nice to sit on for breakfast and while we were pushing away from port.

The cabin had a king bed and a sofa. There was plenty of storage for all of our clothing and luggage. The bathroom was small of course, but not as small as the one we had in Florence! The shower water pressure was excellent.

We got to our room about 1pm and talked with our cabin steward about the process to get our laundry done a couple of times during the cruise. We spent some time walking around and getting familiar with the ship. We found our assigned dinner table and loved the location.

Our luggage arrived at our room a couple of hours later – by 3pm. So, we had plenty of time to unpack and relax until we pushed off at 5pm.

We went to the bar in the ship's crown to have a drink and watch the cruise ship depart port.

We had dinner in the main dining room every night. We felt no need to spend extra for any of the specialty dining venues. The main dining room food, as well as the food at the buffet, was good to very good. Not fine dining by any means, but no real complaints either.

Day 26 – Cruise (docked in Salerno, Italy)

We visited the ruins of Pompeii today. We booked an excursion from the ship to take us to/from the site. We then toured on our own as we listened to another Rick Steve's audio tour.

It was a fairly clear day, and we could see Mount Vesuvius in the distance.

The ruins are very large. While we could not explore all of the ruins, we were able to explore the key exhibits thanks to the Rick Steve's audio.

It was a hot day made even hotter by the heat reflecting from the cobblestones and stone buildings in the ruins.

To top things off, near the end of what we wanted to explore, I fell down on those cobblestones and twisted my right ankle and scraped my right arm, elbow, knee and leg, and scraped my left elbow just a bit.

Some nice tourists saw me fall and tried to help me get up, but there was an employee of the ruins nearby and he helped me get back on my feet.

Fortunately, I was able to walk by myself the rest of the way and back to the bus.

When we got back to the ship, we went to the ship's clinic to get me checked out. We wanted to be sure there were no broken bones.

They took x-rays and cleaned and bandaged my scrapes. The x-ray showed nothing broken – likely just a sprain. They gave me an ankle support, additional bandages, ibuprofen and some bags for me to be able to ice the ankle. They kept checking on me for a couple of days to make sure I was feeling ok.

Using the ankle brace for the next number of days, we were able to go on all our planned excursions. Thank you, Lord, for not letting it be a serious injury.

They did not charge us anything for the medical services as the injury happened on an excursion sponsored by the ship.

Day 27 – Cruise (docked in Messina, Sicily)

We docked in Messina which is located on the northeast corner of the island – just across from “Italy's boot”.

We decided earlier to not visit Mt. Etna – the island's active volcano, because we have seen volcanoes before in Hawaii. Instead, we took a small bus tour that went to Castelmola and

Taormina. The drive each way from/to the ship was about 45 minutes. Our first stop was the small town of Castelmola. It was located high above the port and the views while driving here were beautiful. The view from the city was also beautiful. You could see Mt. Etna from here. During our free time in town, we walked the town, took pictures and had a gelato.

We were then dropped off at Taormina. This was basically near the bottom of the hill below Castelmola. Taormina was a pretty, little town with a nice piazza overlooking the sea and a nice boulevard of shops and restaurants.

We walked pretty much from one end of the town to the other to get to our lunch reservation at [Bar Timeo](#). I had made reservations here because it has a gorgeous view overlooking the sea and the port. We had some beers, and Jan had a salad with sliced chicken breast, and I had the calamari appetizer. We ate on the patio while relaxing and admiring the view. The food was not cheap here, but the service was excellent, and the view is what this lunch was all about.

We watched a show in the theater in the evening.

[Day 28 – Cruise \(day at sea\)](#)

We slept late and spent the day by the pool.

We watched the sunset tonight. It was one of the best nights for this as there was nothing blocking the view and the sun set right into the water.

We watched a show in the theater in the evening.

[Day 29 – Cruise \(Santorini, Greece\)](#)

We anchored at Santorini and took a tender for the excursion we booked - “Village of Oia On Your Own”.

I chose this excursion because it did not require us to use the cable cars at all. This excursion tendered us into the new port, Athinios, where we hopped on a tour bus for a 45-minute ride to Oia. We then had about 90 minutes on our own in Oia. We had time to walk the small town and get pictures of the famous blue church domes. Since we were the first cruise ship in port and we had one of the first tenders off the ship, we arrived in Oia by about 9:00am. There were no more than 2-4 people at the location for the best picture of the domes. We were able to quickly get our own pictures without waiting in any long lines – it was wonderful.

Since we only had a quick breakfast in our room, we stopped for a bite to eat in Oia at a small café that had a great view.

We then met back at the bus which next dropped us off in Fira. We also had about 90 minutes there to explore. We took some pictures here as well and then stopped for a drink at a restaurant along the edge of the cliff in Fira. We had a wonderful view from here as well. Other than the view, there really was nothing else of interest for us in Fira. We met back at the bus again and were taken back to the Athinios port where we tendered back to the ship.

We had a late lunch on the ship and relaxed for the rest of the afternoon.

Day 30 – Cruise (Ephesus, Turkey)

We scheduled a private tour with [Levent Solmaz](#). He is a licensed guide that was born in Turkey and studied in the states. He speaks excellent English. He met us at the dock with his driver. We drove to Ephesus, and he conducted a wonderful tour of the Ephesus ruins and the Terrace Houses. We particularly enjoyed his pictures of various items that showed how things looked or likely looked, back when Ephesus was a large, port city. The city was very interesting. They have uncovered a large part of the city, but much yet is still buried.

He then took us to Lotus Ceramic gardens where they make handmade pieces of art that glow in the dark. We had some Turkish taffy and coffee while we looked through the art gallery.

He then drove us to lunch at a small family run restaurant, [Selcuk Koftecisi](#), where we had some tasty meatballs, lamb chops and lamb kabobs. Very good meal with a cold beer.

He then drove us to the Basilica of Saint John where we did a quick walking tour to see the grave site of John the Baptist.

He then dropped us back at the ship.

Day 31 – Cruise (Mykonos, Greece)

Our ship docked at the new port. So, we took a “Sea Bus” from that port to Mykonos Town.

We walked through the heart of town to get some pictures of the windmills.

The windmills were built by the Venetians, primarily in the 16th century, to grind wheat and barley. They were an important source of income for the islanders, providing flour for local consumption and trade.

We had lunch at [Nice n Easy](#), a restaurant on the water next to the windmills. We shared a plate of very tasty meatballs. We liked these meatballs better than all of the other ones we tried in Greece.

There was nothing else we wanted to see in Mykonos. So, we took the Sea bus back to the ship.

[Day 32 – Athens, Greece](#)

Our cruise ended in Athens.

We had reserved a taxi through Welcome Pick-ups. The driver met us at the cruise ship terminal, and we were quickly on our way to the lodging for the next couple of nights, the [Acropolis View hotel](#).

It was too early to check in. So, we dropped our luggage at the hotel and ventured out to explore the town.

We walked to the entrance of the Acropolis, so we knew where to go for our timed entrance to the site tomorrow morning.

Just across the street is Areopagus Hill (AKA Mars Hill). The Apostle Paul delivered a speech here to introduce the Athenians to the God of Christianity (see Acts 17:22-31).

We walked up the hill to get a nice view of the Acropolis and the city of Athens.

From there, we did sort of a circle, walking tour down Adrianou street ending up back at our hotel. During that walk, we stopped for lunch at Eugenia. It was a restaurant with a small inside dining room as well as some seats out on the patio. We ordered some meatballs and a local beer and enjoyed our first taste of Athens.

After lunch, we finished our walk through the Plaka neighborhood on Adrianou street to Kidathineon street.

We were then able to check into our room. It was a great, little hotel a few blocks away from the Acropolis.

We could see the Acropolis from our room. The hotel had a roof top patio where they served a large breakfast. You could also relax on that patio with a snack or a beverage at any time. The patio had a great view of the Acropolis.

We had dinner at [Dionysos Zonar's](#). This was a fine dining restaurant about two blocks from our hotel. The main dining room had floor to ceiling windows so you could get the best view of the Acropolis. It had a large amount of outside dining as well. We ate inside because of the heat. We found out that those large windows were actually on sliders. As the sun

started to go down, they slid those windows fully open so now there was only open air between the dining room and your view of the Acropolis. Just gorgeous.

For our dinner we shared a Greek version of a caprese salad, and we both had the rack of lamb with sweet potatoes and grilled corn – very good. We also had a bottle of a Greek shiraz. It was very good – much better than I expected. For dessert, we had a chocolate lava cake and a glass of Vin Santo (gratis).

Sometime after dinner, we bought a couple of local beers from the lobby of the hotel and went up to the patio to enjoy the evening sky. The Acropolis looked even more beautiful at night when it was lit up.

Day 33 – Athens, Greece

We had a 10:00am reservation to tour the Acropolis. As we walked up the hill and toured the Acropolis, we listened to our last Rick Steve's audio tour.

The highlight of course, was the Parthenon. This temple was dedicated to the goddess Athena. The view from this high overlooking the entire city was wonderful. It was a clear, but hazy day (due to the heat), but you could still see a long distance including out to the Adriatic Sea.

We stopped and ate lunch at a tiny deli/bistro a block from our hotel. We had a chicken gyro and a pork gyro. We found out that a lamb or lamb/beef gyro is a creation made in the US – not in Greece.

We relaxed rest of the day and started to pack for our trip home tomorrow,

It was so hot today, that the Acropolis closed from noon to 5pm. We are glad we were able to get our visit done in time.

We had our final dinner of the trip at [Seawolf Athens](#). It was also a small restaurant about a 7-minute walk from our hotel. They specialized in seafood dishes.

I had an appetizer of mackerel and potatoes. Jan had a large melon salad that had some type of fresh, raw fish in it. She ate a lot of it, but I helped eat some and together, we could not even finish it. For our entrees, I had freshly caught amberjack and potatoes. Jan had a risotto with scallops. We had a flaky type of dessert with cream/custard filling and shared a dessert wine.

Day 34 – Fly Home from Athens, Greece

We had a reserved taxi that drove us from our hotel to the airport. The check in and security were very quick. However, our departure gate was located in a new extension of the airport that was a long walk from the main entrance. We had to use a number of moving sidewalks, and our IDs were checked at 4-5 different points along the way. We've never had our IDs checked so many times.

Our flight to Chicago was 12 hours. We arrived on time and cleared customs in just minutes.

When I initially purchased our tickets, we had a good connection from Chicago to Milwaukee. However, American had changed that connection so we would now have a 5 ½ hour layover in Chicago.

There were thunderstorms in the area when we landed, and we thought our connection might get delayed getting us home even later. (yes, it was delayed about an hour). So, while we initially thought that we might just wait in the airport, we instead decided to take an Uber home. I had done some research about long Uber drives, and it seemed like while there may be some risk we would not be able to get a driver for the long distance between Chicago and West Bend, we thought it was worth a chance. Worst case, we would have to go back through security and then take our connection.

The Uber worked out fantastic. Our ride was quickly accepted, and we ended up home about 5 hours earlier than we would have with the connection.

It was a great, great trip, but there is no place like home!

Modes of Transportation Used

Jan prepared the following list that shows all of the different modes of transportation we used during our trip:

1. Airplane
2. Private Water taxi - speed boat like George Clooney uses - Venice
3. Vaporetto - water bus – Venice
4. Tour boat to Venice to Islands of Murano and Burano
5. Gondola – Venice
6. Train - high speed and local - Venice to Florence, Florence to/from Pisa, Salerno to Rome
7. Tram to airport in Florence
8. Bus to car rental in Florence

9. Rental Car - Florence to Tuscany to Salerno
10. Ferry to Positano and Amalfi from Salerno
11. Golf cart taxi from Ravello to Amalfi
12. Taxi - Florence, Amalfi to Ravello, Rome, Athens
13. Private car service - Rome to cruise port
14. Cruise ship
15. Tender in Santorini
16. Tour bus in Salerno to Pompeii, Sicily (Messina) to Castelmola and Taormina, Santorini to Oia and Fira
17. Private tour bus - Ephesus and Basilica of Saint John
18. Sea bus to old port in Mykonos
19. Justin's car service to MKE
20. Uber from O'Hare to home
21. Walking