

Sunday, 24 June

By now you probably know that we were scheduled to leave on 22 June, but that after a two-hour tarmac wait, thunderstorms at JFK prompted the flight cancellation. No way to re-book for that afternoon, although we later found that if we had driven to JFK we could have caught our connection, which left five hours late due to the same storms. But we didn't know and so we rented a car to get back home for the night (cheaper than a taxi), emailed the first hotel we were staying in, re-scheduled our Roma rental car pick up, and planned to drive to JFK instead of BWI the next day so that we wouldn't miss the very short connection they re-booked us on from BWI. Sooooo on Saturday we left with plenty of time but ended up rushing because it is INSANE to drive to JFK. The last 15 miles took us two friggin hours. Hate that drive. Anyway, we got on the flight Saturday afternoon and arrived in Roma Sunday late morning, where Hertz promptly told us we didn't have a rental car. They eventually offered a teeny tiny car in which the kids could sit on each others' laps and we could leave all luggage behind. Hand-wringing galore. Finally found us a car we could use. Urgh. Then – my bad – I had scheduled our first stop as Padova (a five-hour drive). In retrospect, I would have hung out for a day and then driven up. Anyway, Scott and I switched off constantly on the road, staving off sleep.



Into Padova, a lovely place, at 5pm-ish. Our hotel by the train station, was fine. Hungry for some yummy Italian food, we walked about 10 minutes to a small restaurant, Pizzeria al Borgo, that sat across from an old church, the Basilica del Santo.

Food was good, view was great. What'd we have? I don't remember, although Scott would. I'm sure a thin-crust pizza was involved and some sort of salad and pasta. All good. And then we went to pay. Twenty minutes after we handed the waiter our credit card, Scott went to check on things. The waiter said they were ringing it up. So another 20 minutes later, Scott checked again – they had charged our card 880 euros instead of 88 euros. And they needed a code to reverse the charge and the guy with the code wasn't working and couldn't be reached. Interestingly (!), they had enough cash on hand to make the change. Cheapest cambio we hit all trip.

On the walk back, we found a gelato stand in the middle of a park. So good. Then I took us the long way home (not necessarily on purpose), walking walking. We got back to the room and crashed.

Monday, 25 June

We slept till noon, and then walked about 40 minutes downtown. Learned quickly to stay on one side in the bike lanes cause those bikes come fast and furious. Older model bikes with riders of every age/background. Some scooters, but many more bikes. We ate lunch and at first Mo wasn't hungry but that didn't last long.

Our first church was St. Anthony's Basilica, a large, impressive building where the saint himself is buried. Here we learned that women must cover their shoulders in Italian churches. They didn't enforce the no-shorts-rule so much, but definitely the no-bare-shoulders rule. Some women

leaving the church offered us their own shoulder covering – this piece of paper/cloth that was swelteringly hot but did the job. So in we went. Romanesque, with some byzantine and gothic touches. Huge, sparkling white.



Kids had already begun complaining about the walking, but we had warned them and now told them to get used to it. They did.

On our way to the Piazza Prato della Valle, a large, circular piazza with auto traffic and restaurants surrounding the outer rim, we ventured into the botanical gardens, but the price was pretty steep and the girls were getting tired. We all revived with some really good artisanal gelato at Gela Gelosia:



watermelon, strachiatella, chocolate. Hit the spot.

On our way back to the hotel, we found a grocery store and got some basic stuff, but I was anxious to get back so I could Skype Sarah and mom and dad (had to wait until at least dawn in California – 9 hours behind) because I had heard about dad's fall and needed to check in for my own piece of mind. Glad to see him for myself. The scars just add to his character!

While I Skyped, everyone crashed. Then me too. But we woke up hungry at 11pm, so we all went across the street to this combination sports bar/fruit stand. Perfect.

Tuesday, 26 June

We actually awoke in time to hit the yummy hotel breakfast. Lots of cakes and fruit for us and meat for Scott.

Ten minute walk to the train station, which brought us to Venezia for a reasonable price. But for some reason, the credit card wasn't working.

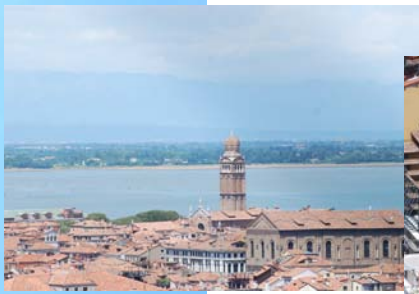
Hmmm. Anyway, this purchase ended reasonable prices for the day. Once in Venice, we waited a long time to catch the



crowded public boat to San Marco for 14 euros total, although we could have had a private taxi boat for 60 euros (!). In retrospect, although 60 euros is a hell of a lot, it would have been much more comfortable and we would have been able to see much more.



Fortunately, we didn't have to wait in line at the Capilia San Marco because I had pre-purchased timed passes (whoo hoo!) so we just walked past the gigantic line and into the church.



Most definitely, though, the Campanile next door was our Venice highlight. Way up high you can see all the canals and plenty of beautiful scenery and enjoy a cool breeze. We spent a long time up there.

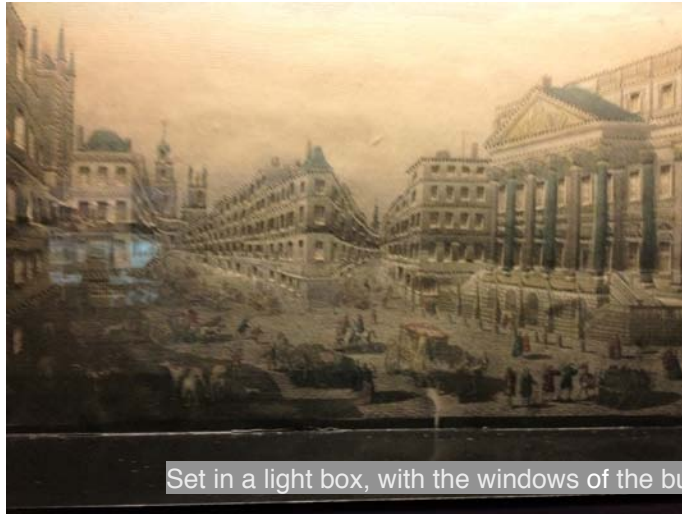
Then lunch, small panninis. After, we walked and walked around, looking at canals, looking at masks, looking at trinkets and boats in the canals and lots of tourists. I was actually pretty glad to return to the train station: Venezia isn't my idea of fun really.

From Venice, we went back to the hotel for a rest. Scott put money on the Skype account and I called the credit card company. Our \$1000 dinner worried them so they had put a hold on the card. OK, I can appreciate that. Reinstated.

The receptionist/manager suggested a restaurant so off we went. Satch decided to be silent for the whole meal. Unbelievable how funny that could be. The food was decent, but the portions too small.

Wednesday, 27 June

Up just in time for the yummy breakfast but then we went back to sleep for a while. At 1pm, we headed toward the city center and the Museum of Precinema, which was awesome. We all loved this place. Begins with a film that they had available in English with loads of information about how low and high technology led to the moving picture. Included Indonesian paper



puppets, hand-painted glass projection slides, magic lanterns, and these really cool shadow-type boxes. The lady responsible for collecting all the items for the past 40 years, Laura Minici Zotti, happened to be in the front room, and she gave each of the girls a pin to remember the museum by. It was a beautiful and fun museum. A trip highlight.

Afterwards, we ate a small pannini lunch, returned to the gelato from the day before, and ended up at a big hall that originally functioned as the judicial center.



The hall itself is now huge but used to be divided into smaller sections. On this day, they were setting up for a large corporate reception. We were still able to look around at the incredible astrological and mythic wall paintings/murals/tapestries. Plus, they had the ultra-cool Stone of Shame in one corner, on which debtors were punished. Basically, they used to have to sit naked on this stone and then



they were kicked out of the city. If they came back and got in debt again, back to the Stone of Shame.

This ended up being MUCH cooler than the local synagogue and Jewish ghetto, consisting of a building front marked by a Jewish star.

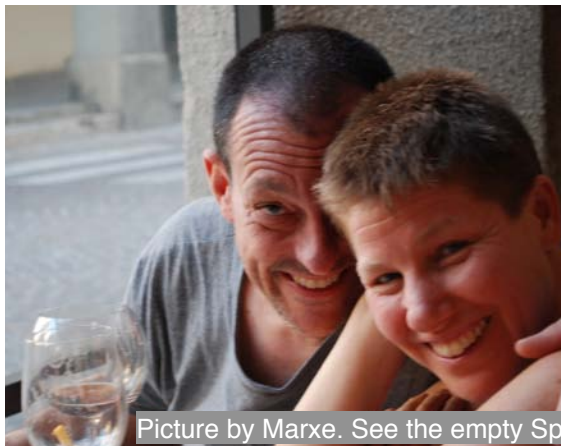
Walked to the other side of town to an ancient Roman forum, and the Scrovegni

Chapel, which was already closed for the day. Surprised to pass a beautiful 9/11 memorial set in the middle of this small park. No reason it was there, except to mark the event itself.



The 9/11 Memorial

Our 880 euro restaurant from the first night wasn't open yet, so we went a bit further up to a place called Carmine's where I had my very first Aperol Spritz (three parts Prosecco – sparkling Italian wine – to one part Aperol and a splash of tonic on ice), which I promptly devoured. Delicious.



Picture by Marx. See the empty Spritz glass?

Marx started experimenting with the camera, under Scott's tutelage. She mostly took pictures of birds, horses, anole lizards, and then branched out to her sister and landmarks.

Marxe and Satch found a friend that they dressed with varying degrees of success.

Ate dinner at the restaurant from the first night. Good.



When we travel, we play this game with the girls where they have to find the way back to the hotel/apartment for a dollar/euro/whatever. Satch tried this evening, but got a little confused.

Thursday, 28 June

Last yummy hotel breakfast before leaving Padova.

We didn't use the car at all in Padova, which was fine cause of the free hotel garage, and everything was within walking distance. But now we all piled in and headed toward Verona.

Let me just say a word here about the creative signage on Italy's secondary and tertiary roads. Creative is not always a good thing. In many places, the signs give you two different options for the same cities and then in others it skips the city all together and points you to a larger city 200 km away. This is on small roads. Using my iPhone's Google Maps GPS, we were able to hunt and peck our way around. Some wrong ways, but we survived.

So, Verona. Verona is very very cool. The Arena is beyond amazing. And when we got there at noon, teamster-like people were switching the props for that night's opera: pyramids, palm trees, dramatic collonades of *Aida*.





We climbed to the top of the seating area and down to the floor by the stage. This was a grand grand place.

Next, onto Guilietta's (from *Romeo and Juliet*) house. Scott and I weren't really interested in going inside (and paying the 12 euros), but the girls were, so we sent them in alone (although the entrance guy didn't like this so a



The girls on Guilietta's balcony



nice lady said she could go with them). This was great cause while they went through the house and came out the balcony, Scott sipped a beer and me a Spritz in the shade, relaxing and waving.

Just to be fair, we also walked to Romeo's house, but there was nothing to see.

Many cool buildings throughout the city. Would liked to have spent more time in Verona, but we had to get to the hills outside Firenze to meet Alessandro at the country house, so back in car. On the way into vinegar capital of grocery store, we grape sculpture. have been a fun



Modena (balsamic the world) to find a saw this giant This too would city to explore.

OK, so we got to the A1 and then as many wrong possible. emailed me a PDF in the hills above too small to see on

the Firenze exit off proceeded to take turns as was Alessandro had map to his house Firenze, but it was the iPhone.

Eventually, we made our way there, 90 minutes later than scheduled, but fortunately, this was Italy and Alessandro had just arrived himself! Alessandro still looks young and energetic, just as we remember him. Lots of talk and exchange of family information. We moved our bags and groceries into the house while Alessandro made pasta and sauce. Mo watched him, taking notes. We heard loud noises at the farm down the road: the World Cup semifinal match was going on, which Italy eventually won. We could tell every time they scored a goal by the loud cheers. When Alessandro left, Scott decided to check out the little tavern at the farm where they had beer, their own wine for sale, eggs, cheese, and some bread.



Friday, 29 June

I woke up around 10:30am and the only other person up was Satch. So she and I decided to find the grocery store Alessandro had talked about the night before, five km away in a town called San Casciano. We got to know the streets of this not so little town very very well! But we did eventually find the giant Coop grocery and all the food inside.

For breakfast, we had watermelon, bread, cheese, leftover pasta from last night, and meat-eaters, their meat. By the time we left the house, it was 2:00pm, which we figured wasn't too bad. Back roads and lots of small lane driving (no throwing up yet) to Volterra.

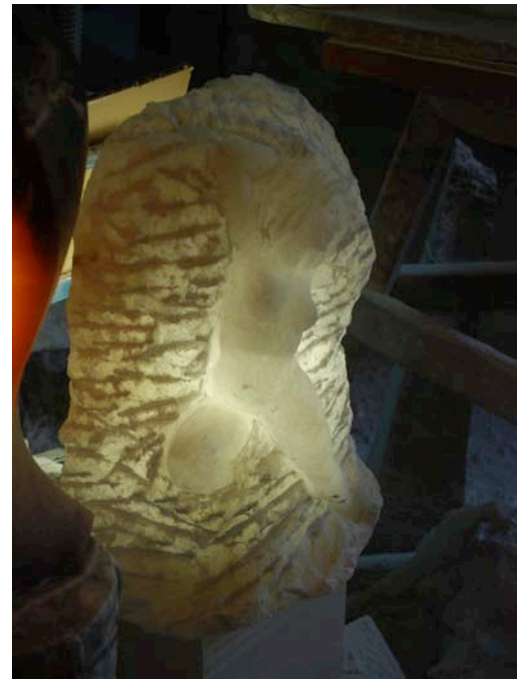
There are so many beautiful towns in Tuscany, and Volterra certainly fits the bill.



What we enjoyed most about this town, though, was all the amazing alabaster artisans.



Scott found a side street studio of Robert Gitli, who had three rooms filled with large and small alabaster sculptures of every kind. We



talked to him for quite a while and he ended up allowing me to try etching a few designs into alabaster. I asked him



to show me his favorite piece: he took us to a gorgeous, large bowl, made of alabaster treated three



different ways. One was dark alabaster, which was highly polished, another was white alabaster, polished so that it was semi-transparent, and the top layer had unpolished brown alabaster in its original state. Hundreds of euros. Below it, though, was a smaller example of the same idea and I loved it. We walked out and then the kids convinced me to go back and get it. I'm very glad they did. They purchased some little alabaster-carved dogs, and Robert gave each girl a small, unpolished alabaster carving.

On we walked. Found a 2000+ year old fort that was still being used as a prison. On our walk back to the car, we bought some bookmarks and saw the cool front of old church.



By the time we arrived in Pisa, it was 7:30pm. Found parking directly by the walls surrounding the Piazza dei Miracoli (wherein the leaning tower sits), but we ended up walking completely around the walls (about 3 km) before finding the opening -- yes, we went the wrong direction. Anyway, admission into the Tower was 60 euros a person, so we felt fine just looking from the duomo steps and watching others take pictures. This was fun. The

tower and its church and campanile are completely white and very impressive.



We had a beautiful drive back, much faster than going there,. Stopped at a laundromat Satch and I had found earlier on our adventurous ride through San Casciano (our laundry had been traveling with us since that morning). While everything was rinsing, we went up the road for dinner, which was really good. Pizza crust was thin, salads fresh and tasty. However, the 3 euro/ watermelon slice soured us on the owner, whom had intimated that she was giving us the watermelon for free.... 15 euros, \$18 for 5 small watermelon slices. Geez. Anyway, the watermelon and dessert were responsible for one of Mo's sugar attacks, wherein she laughs uncontrollably for hours. We finally got our laundry done, and returned to the house at midnight.

Saturday, 30 June

I woke up and went to the grocery store alone. This meant I got to drive as fast as I wanted along the curvy country roads. Yeah! When I returned, everyone was still asleep, so I made brunch. By the time we ate it was 1pm, and by the time we got to Firenze and parked, it was 3:00.

We walked past Alessandro's house to the synagogue, but, duh, it was Saturday. Closed to visitors. So then we walked to L'Accademie and waited online, which wasn't too long. Just enough time for a gelato. We paid 55 euros to go see the *David*: the end of our cash from the Padova restaurant. I think the kids were really impressed with *David*, and we tried our best to appreciate the other religious paintings all over. Easier to appreciate the sculptures in that outer room. Strange that they had a couple of very modern pieces among the antiquities.



"David" parody sitting outside the gift shop.



tried a couple of cafes, but they didn't take credit

cards. Finally found a tiny

pub that accepts credit cards, a hole in the wall-type which was great. A spritz for me, beer for Scott, waters for the girls, free wifi, and free happy hour food, which made everyone happy. It wasn't far to Piazza Spirito, where we

We visited the Duomo. Tried to change some money around there, but no go. Ridiculous exchange rates. Still looking for a decent cambio, we crossed the Ponte Vecchio. Gold and jewelry. Still nowhere to change money, and Scott thought people would accept dollars. No go. By this time we were wary and needed a rest, so we



were to meet Alessandro later on and then to the front of the Pitti Palace, where we sat and watched lots of people going by. Drunk guys from some northern country were very excited about the upcoming World Cup final, and asking anyone passing about it. They were funny.

So then we went back to Piazza Spirito and met Alessandro, Licia, Francesco, and some of their friends at a restaurant for dinner. Licia is as beautiful as ever, and Francesco has grown -- taller than me and scraggly. Pizza and some good food, and



then all went out to the Piazza for some entertainment. A couple had just finished setting up their props and had begun a cabaret of sorts: singing, dancing, puppets. Very European/gypsy-ish. Very fun.



Francesco left to meet some friends, and the rest of us eventually left the piazza to head back to the Mannoni apartment/our car park. We stopped at one of their favorite gelaterias where Licia treated the girls to gelato and granita -- a kind of slurpee made with ice, sugar, and fruit. On our way from there, we ran into Francesco, who began negotiating with Licia to stay at his friend's house (whose parents were out of town) that night. Yelling in the street, a stereotypical Italian family scene. We don't know how it ended because we finally got tired of hanging around. Saw some really bad karaoke before hitting our parking lot and car.



Driving back to the country house through Piazzella Michaelangelo, where a copy of the *David* looks over the city, took a long time -- many people hanging out on a Saturday night. Returned to the house about 1am.

Sunday, 1 July

Scott woke up with me and drove to the Coop to get bread, meat, fruit, and cheese. We tried the ATM there. No luck. One man told us it was because we didn't have some chip in our card -- unsure about that but in any case it didn't work.

Back to the house, the kids were still sleeping, except Satch, who was quietly playing in her room. Scott and I fixed a brunch for all. We ate, showered, and prepared to go out. Left the house, again, at about 2pm.

For the past day my phone (the only one we brought) had abandoned service. Was the bill paid? The GPS wouldn't work of course, and the terrible Italian signs didn't give us much help, and the only map we had was in the back of the one guidebook we had brought. Not detailed enough to show us the area. On we drove anyway, feeling our way through the Italian countryside. Everyone started getting nervous when the fuel tank indicator lit up empty. We tried two different gas stations, but the credit card wasn't working again, and it wouldn't take an ATM card. So then we stopped at a small hotel, and the women told us about a bank not too far away. The first wouldn't accept our ATM card and we were really getting nervous now. But then, the second worked. Whoo hoo! We did a victory dance and headed straight to the gas station. Filled up that baby (because of course the machine at the gas station accepts cash).

Driving on through Tuscany, we stopped at a small roadside restaurant. Old farm house building with neat oven in the backyard. They didn't have pizza but did offer us pannini. Hard Italian-country type of bread that can cut your mouth with its edges, but the cheese was good. We ate up.

Many detours trying to find it, but we finally got to Pitigliano and went into the Orsini fortress/palace. Lots of passageways and stairs, painted walls and ceilings, torture equipment (!). The guy staffing the front desk seemed supremely bored, as did his big boxer dog. Upon exiting, Scott found that the free wifi was extra strong, so he went to work trying to get Verizon on the phone through Skype. Yes, they did turn off my phone because of 'fraudulent' use in a foreign country. They didn't seem to get how ridiculous this was, especially because the week before we had gone into the Verizon store to add on Global Calling. Idiots. Scott got them to promise to turn it back on within the hour. Didn't know if that would happen, but while he was becoming frustrated with them, the girls and I explored the town. We saw some really cool Etruscan ruins and were drawn into a shop by innovative, interesting, wonderful fiber art pieces. Agatha owns and stocks the



shop with her work: she boils sheep's wool, then forms the wool around self-made molds to create art pieces as varied as small birds, large fish, shoes, handbags, etc. She was really neat.



Met up with Scott again, and we walked some more, possibly finding another Jewish ghetto. The town locals started flowing into the central piazza, preparing for the Spain-Italy World Cup final. We tried to grab something to eat, but everywhere was completely filled with locals who had brought TVs and projectors in for the event. So on we went.

After about 45 minutes on the highway (all the promises were for nought -- no phone service

still), we stopped at a restaurant: the only one open and not completely packed with people watching the game. Decent food. After, we got on the A1 and made it to the country house without getting lost (whoo hoo!). Home at midnight. Yes, Italy lost.



Monday, 2 July

Scott and I awoke at 8:30am to a tractor in the olive tree fields outside the house, aiming to accomplish something, but what we couldn't really tell. Everyone else still slept. The tractor would start, then stop, then start again. Over and over. I lazed around while Scott went to find some wifi (to get back on the phone with Verizon), some bread, and a bank. He came back with nothing, having some difficulty navigating the town, as Satch and I had a couple days before. So then he and Satch went across the road to that farm/pub and came back with fresh eggs, chianti, and bread. We ate breakfast and were very pleased to get out of the house by noon.

Back down to Firenze. We parked again near Alessandro's house. Mo found a really cute white tank top with mesh/lace overthrow on our way to the synagogue, which was open to visitors this time. We had to leave all water, my purse, and the camera in the lockers outside the entrance. A

woman who identifies as a Reform Jew (but still comes to this Orthodox synagogue to pray) gave us a short tour. She explained how Orthodoxy is the only Jewish sect recognized in Italy, even though many would follow a more liberal movement if possible. Mo wasn't feeling so hot, so she went to sit outside while the rest of us visited the museum part of the synagogue, which wasn't open the last time Scott and I came through Firenze.

We walked from the synagogue to the Galileo Museum, which the



girls had decided they wanted to visit. On the way, we kept trying to find wifi so Scott could yell at Verizon some more, but no luck.

The BEST shoes in which to play violin!



Mo LOVED the Galileo Museum. I think this was one of the trip's highlights for her. The museum included all kinds of ancient simple machines, with a number of instructional videos about the physics behind their construction and use. Marx and Satch were pretty bored after a little while, so they sat down with Scott's

phone. There were lots of original instruments in the museum, and we even saw Galileo's finger preserved in air-proof chalice with windows.



Crossed the Ponte Vecchio again, with the intention of visiting the Boboli Gardens, but on arrival we found that it was closed on the first Monday of every month. Oops.

So back we went to the bar we had visited two days ago. Not open, but their wifi still had the same password, so Scott went to work. Still no luck. I also used the time to download maps for our journey to the Amalfi coast the next day.

The girls had read about this candy store called Gilli in the guidebook, and they were ready for it. But once we got there (via a detour to the Medici Capella and the leather market and dropping Scott at a restaurant with wifi), we discovered a horribly overpriced place with nasty service

people. So we went back to the restaurant, where Scott had ordered a pizza that the girls promptly confiscated. The waitress was really great -- she created a makeshift Spritz for me even though she didn't have Prosecco. And she had to keep going back to the kitchen cause the girls kept ordering and ordering. They were hungry. And, Victory for Scott! Verizon turned my phone back on. Whoo hoo!

Alessandro met us at the Duomo and we went for more gelato, which was yummy, of course. We walked back to the carpark together and had a quick trip home. No traffic. It was nice to have internet again, but we learned that people were trying to reach us. The power was out in Chevy Chase due to the derecho storm. And we had a mess of a fence with a big tree down on it. Thankfully, we have good friends who emptied the fridge and took extra special care of the lizards.

Tuesday, 3 July

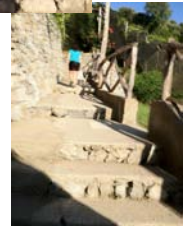
We aimed to leave the country house for the Amalfi Coast by 10am, and did pretty good -- leaving by 10:30. No wrong turns until about 2pm; this one easily amended. The landscape changed to more dry and mountainous. And then we got to the Amalfi coast and 'the drive,' which is where Marxie made our trip official by promptly throwing up. She's a pro by now, though, and did it straight into the bag. We pulled over into a small parking lot so she could recover.

If you've been to the Amalfi coast, you know why someone with a weak stomach had a bit of a problem. It's gorgeous. The road is very narrow and winds around the jagged cliffs along the water. Locals drive it like a race track, which, even if Marxie wasn't sick, I wouldn't have done. This road was narrow with constant sharp turns. And of course it was wide enough to fit one of the tiny Italian cars, but somehow two had to pass (one going each way) while trying to navigate around parked cars as well. The most amazing part of it, for me, was watching a giant tour bus idle while little cars ran around it. They didn't back down though. No one did! I followed their example.

Minori is a small town on the water, rising vertically into the mountains, where terraced lemon farms dot the view. Navigating up the narrower lanes, we finally got to the base of Agriturismo il Campanile at about 4pm. While everyone piled out of the car to look at the amazing view, I started climbing the stairs. Tons and tons and tons and tons of stairs. Salvatore met me at the 'restaurant' level (really a kitchen with some tables under a tarp) and offered me lemonade, in stilted English. It was wonderful and cold. Real lemonade. This was a lemon farm, and Ornella and Salvatore make a lemon syrup with the gigantic lemons they grow. While I enjoyed the view, Salvatore and his son traipsed down to the car to get everyone else and help bring up the luggage. We all sat around catching our breath and drinking lemonade. Mmmmm. Then he brought us to our apartment, up another hundred or so stairs. The apartment was nice, a



A complete view of the stairs to our apartment in Minori, with one picture taken every turn. This is the top! Our apartment is at the top left.



little funky smelling though, with a tiny kitchen, bedroom, a loft, and a living area. Ornella had provided wine in the fridge. Exhausted, we all rested for a couple hours.



Ornella offered us dinner half way down the stairs at the makeshift restaurant. I think this was the best meal of our whole trip. She made everything, beginning with a delicious bruschetta and a carafe of homemade wine. Caprese salad. Then we had pasta pomodori and pork/sausage for Marx and Scott. For Satch, Mo, and I, she lightly fried zucchini, which was delicious. Dessert was sussini (a small plum-like fruit) and figs. Mmmmmm. Perfect. As we finished up, she brought out some limoncello and lemon cream.

A couple from Utrecht, Netherlands sat next to us. They were riding around the country, camping out.

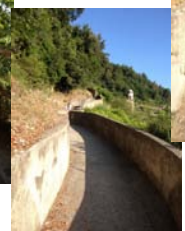
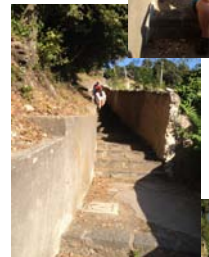
That night, the kids watched the first Star Trek movie on Scott's computer.

Wednesday, 4 July

I got up fairly early, down down the stairs, and headed to town for cash as well as bread/cheese for breakfast. Took me a good 20-25 minutes to just get the car turned around. These roads are SOooooo narrow. I tried taking the road forward, but it dead-ended at a cliff. So I backed up and finally got to a spot where maneuvering a three-point turn was possible. Quadriceps popping from balancing the manual transmission/acceleration. Deep breath.

Down to the town, already jumping. I got our items and went to a bank, which would not let me extract money from the credit card, but I kept trying. Maybe change money? The teller inside assured me that there was no cambio anywhere nearby. A block away, another bank, with.... a cambio! Whoo hoo!

When I got back to the apartment (and parked in the reverse direction) and climbed all those stairs, everyone, except Satch, was still asleep (!).



bottom of the stairs, by the street

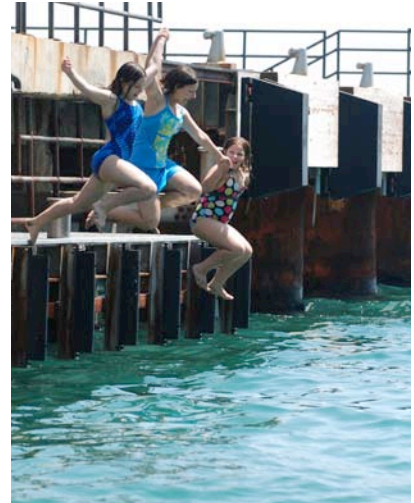
our view from the Minori apartment



I sat outside reading, watching farm workers harvesting lemons all up and down the mountain, and enjoying the gorgeous view. Eventually, everyone awoke, and we sat around laughing and eating bread, cheese (and some of us meat). Marx went after Scott's meat and thus began a bet with Marx saying she could go longer without meat than Scott could without offering it to her.

We decided to go down to the water, against Marx's protestations. She wanted to hang out at the apartment all day. She, and all of us, ended up having a great time at the beach, which was rocky, but refreshing. There was a cool pier for jumping off of: we swam for as long as we could stand to be outside in the hot afternoon sun.

We dried off, jumped into the car, and drove to Amalfi. Sat down for some lunch at a touristy place with eh food (all we could find), and Scott offered Marx meat. After much



discussion, we all decided to give him a second chance in the bet. Once again, our credit card was declined. Ugh. So cash it was. I Skyped the credit card company to get things back online (they hadn't liked when I tried to get money from the bank earlier, but then they said it was ok). Then we were walking around and found an AMAZING granita place. Strawberry and lemon. Sooo good. While we sat in this small alley chowing down, a photographer popped out of a door, started making a big fuss. A bride and her father walked down the stairs and started heading down more stairs to the street and into a carriage. The girls were taken with her -- very lovely. We followed her down the street and watched as she ascended a different set of stairs into this gorgeous church.



We were tired at this point, and our meter was running out, so we headed back to the car and the apartment. No throwing up this time.

We all hung out, reading and resting while Mo made dinner, following her notes from watching Alessandro a few days earlier. Marx and Satch went to visit the horses and dogs down through the lemon orchard. Dinner was delicious. We ate and talked and laughed for hours, unfortunately keeping the child in the apartment above us awake. But we were having too much fun to care.

Thursday, 5 July

We woke up, ate breakfast, and packed. Down down the stairs. Ornella and Salvatore gave us a bunch of giant lemons to take with us. Marxer purchased a 5 euro bottle of the lemon syrup.

We had an easy drive to Herculaneum and then parked at an iffy place, but a place all the same. Herculaneum was destroyed along with Pompeii in



AD 79, but Herculaneum was right on the waterfront and was comprised of a more wealthy population. Smaller than Pompeii, and in a lot of ways, better preserved. When Vesuvius erupted, Herculaneum was buried under 20 meters of ash and mud. Modern discovery in 1709 initiated an excavation that continues today.

Hot day. We saw lots and lots of neat stuff. No human bodies, to Marxer's disappointment, although she was very sad when we found a pigeon carcass.



Driving from Napoli to Roma along the expressway was fine, but once in Roma, streets became confusing. We did eventually get to our apartment, and Scott double parked the car while I went in to meet with the landlord's representative, receive keys, etc. Scott found a spot on the street, everyone brought their bags up to the third (fourth) floor (taking turns in the two-person elevator). The apartment is nice, with three bedrooms and a patio for eating.

We had to pay right away, in cash, so it was off to another ATM. This time we took money off both the credit card and bank card. You can only withdraw 250 euros at a time in Italian banks, so I had to make 4 withdrawals to make the week's payment. I knew this would affect the credit card yet again, so I pre-empted their putting a hold on the card by calling them this time first. It worked!

Scott and I walked to the grocery store, about 10 minutes away. We got a bunch of food, including ingredients for a Spritz, and then Scott cooked a delicious dinner that everyone gobbled up. He took Satch out for gelato because the other two had eaten up all the gelato that was already in the fridge. It was very nice to just hang out in the apartment. I took a shower and found only cold water. Ugh. Emails immediately sent to the owner. She emailed back that she would send someone out tomorrow afternoon.

The kids found a board game called Articulate, similar to Password I think, which they played forever. They had a great time. Eventually, we all went to sleep.

Friday, 6 July

Scott and I returned the car to the closest Hertz office (happened to be in the Waldorf Astoria hotel), which isn't a far drive, but is a 20 minute walk back downhill to the apartment. Nice bikes and hundreds of scooters rode past. We did our best to make it a 60 minute walk, though, because we were convinced that there was a shortcut from this hotel back down the hill to our apartment north of the Vatican. Wrong. We rushed back to the house (quickly detouring into a neat wholesale flower warehouse) but the girls were fine. They had found a DVD of *Hairspray* in the apartment and were watching away.

Scott cooked a nice breakfast and I cut fruit for a salad. At about 2:00 pm, we made our way out of the apartment and were going to the Trastevere area. At the Metro, we met locked gates and this sign: One Day Strike. Change of plans.



Vatican time. Stood in line to get into St. Peter's Cathedral, forgot about the no-bare-shoulders rule. Tried to fake our way in. Caught. So we all came back out into the hot sun and tempers flared. Family discussion time, which was good, cause we all got things out and everyone was then ready to move forward. We walked back toward the apartment, stopped and got Mo

a dress. Scott decided to get each of the girls a nice dress in Rome.

Then we had some not-so-great pizza from a place on the street, before getting back to the apartment. Scott and the girls played more Articulate. The landlord's boyfriend arrived and fixed the hot water for one bathroom, which was better than none.

I did some research to find the best rated gelato places in Rome. One mentioned wasn't so far from the apartment. It *was* the best. Flavors like rice and soy, which sounds kinda gross but are absolutely delicious.

We saw a Chinese restaurant next door to the gelateria, which made everyone laugh, but we thought that all the other food in Italy is so good, maybe the Chinese would be as well. Wrong.

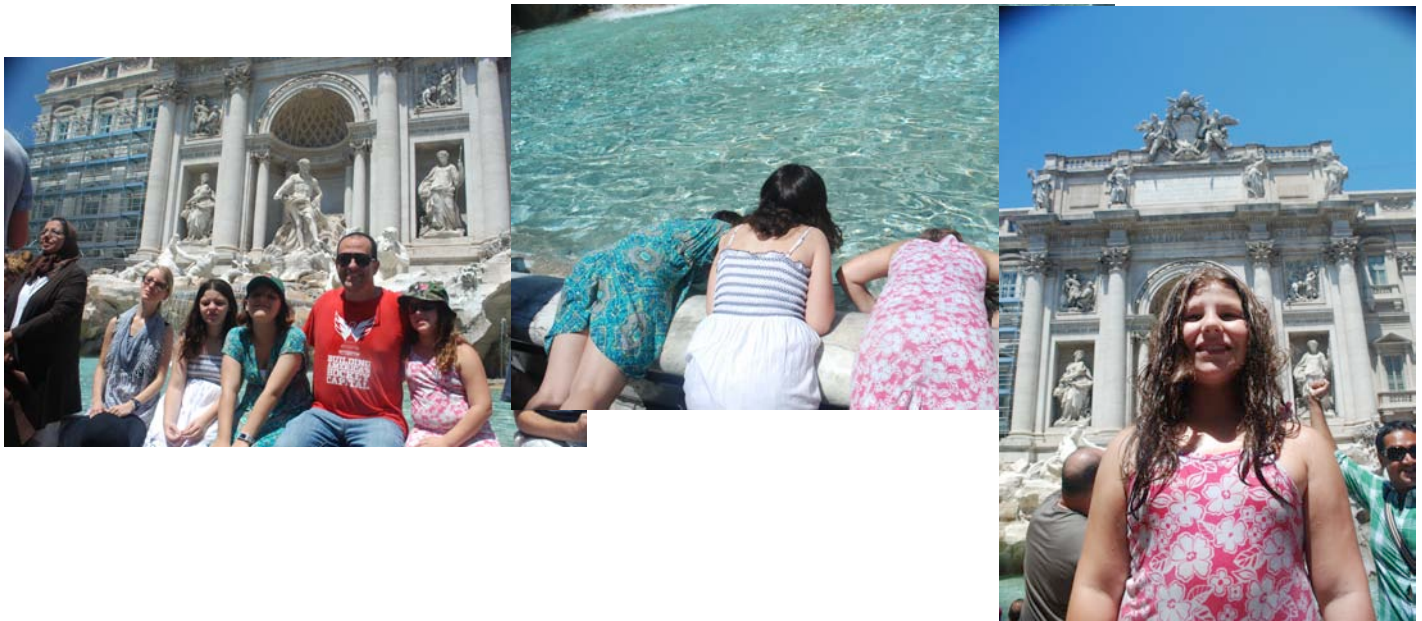
From this spot, Satch transversed the way back to our apartment, without any help. Earned a euro.



Saturday, 7 July

Another wonderful breakfast. Cheese, fresh bread, fruit salad, and meat for the two carnivores. The meat bet between Scott and Marx had ended amicably. We began this day knowing it would be a walking day, but again, we didn't start until about 1pm.

Got to the metro, and the strike was over! Metro'd to Spagna (the Spanish Steps), where we encountered the most annoying vendors of the trip. People trying to get you to buy flowers, scarves, etc., coming right up into your face. The kids were much more impressed by the Trevi Fountain. Dunking our heads helped to cool off another hot day.



Then we went to the Pantheon, a temple to all the gods of ancient Rome built in 126 AD. Its unreinforced concrete dome is still the world's largest!

After the Pantheon, we tried to eat at a place, but it was way expensive. We had immediately ordered water, but then we saw the prices, decided this wasn't for us, left a 5 euro note, and headed out. The waiter stopped Scott though and insisted he take back the money. Nice people.

All was not lost, however. One of the best gelato places was close by. Yeah yeah yeah. Really good chocolate.

After this nutritional enrichment, we walked to Piazza Navonne, wherein artists set up their hack, mass-produced looking wares amid beautiful architecture. On the way, we found the perfect dress for Marx.

Hopped a bus back to our apartment, but didn't have the right ticket. A wonderful woman gave us two of her tickets, which was really sweet. In Italian, she told us to drink the fountain water because it is safe and really cold and good and free! We took her up on it for the rest of the trip.

When we got back to the apartment, everyone kind of crashed, but I went out to get more food. Scott then cooked and we had another very nice dinner.

Sunday, 8 July

I got up early to run down to the Metro and buy us tickets for the day, so we could take the bus close to the house. We Portese flea market -- actually got everyone 10am! On the bus ride, transgender women doesn't believe were Provided us all with

So we walked walked flea market. IT IS much of it consisted of hawking knockoffs the end did we find with everything from made jewelry to a used circular saw. We did get Satch a cute little dress, though.



were set for the Porta so much so that we out of the apartment by we saw some who Marx still originally men. food for thought.

walked through this HUGE. However, middle-Easterners from China. Only at true flea market items, ducks for sale to hand-

Finally, after a couple hours, we sat down for some pizza. The crust here in Roma is thicker, for the most part. Still good.

Quick check on the ATAC website showed that the street car would take us to Trevestere, which is an area we had wanted to explore. Found it to be nice, kinda hipster-ish. We came upon the



Santa Maria church, with an entryway of ancient graffiti plaques to greet you. Inside (we did bring



shoulder coverups) was a really beautiful church embellished in gold and with an incredible ceiling. This might be our favorite church of the entire trip.

Seemed about time for gelato, and fortunately a gelateria nearby had made my list. It was goooooood.

We caught a bus back to the apartment and everyone rested. I went to the grocery store, which was empty on Sunday evening. Scott cooked a wonderful dinner that we ate on the patio outside. Delicious.

Monday, 9 July

Satch was awake first, as almost always. Scott and I took her with us to find some bread. She did and then found the way back, with her great sense of direction. We made breakfast while she set up the patio table. Left the apartment at about 12:30pm.

Purchased a RomaPass for four of us (they said Satch didn't need one). Best deal and so happy we did it.

Metro'd to the Colliseum, which is the perfect way to go: location location location. The entrance line snaked all around and looked to be





an hour long, but RomaPass holders entered a different place, with no line at all. Already paid for itself. We walked through the place for a couple hours, and then passed other parts of ancient Rome, including the Arco di Costantino, the Comune the Musei Capitolini, Roman Forum, etc.



Made our way to the Jewish ghetto and the Synagogue, no pictures allowed. Basement was another museum, displaying the ghetto history. Interesting. Learned that the synagogue itself, unlike any others in Italy, had been closed up and basically protected during WW II due to a deal between the Pope and Roosevelt. Rome was to be spared any bombing campaign by the Allies. Another Orthodox building, women separated from men.



The next gelato place on our list was absolutely excellent. So good that we had to get seconds. Then, as became our trend, we found pizza nearby to eat, which was also good.

After touring the ghetto, we headed to Tiber Island, which sits (as you would imagine), in the middle of the Tiber river. Accessible by a walking bridge on both sides of the river, it's a small, boat-shape island with some apartment buildings, many riverside restaurants, and an art-house cinema. Supposed to be a funky-type flea market going on, but my sources were mistaken! So we walked around the island once, going behind the scenes at the cinema but exiting just as quickly. We crossed back over the bridge, took a bus to the apartment, and had dinner.

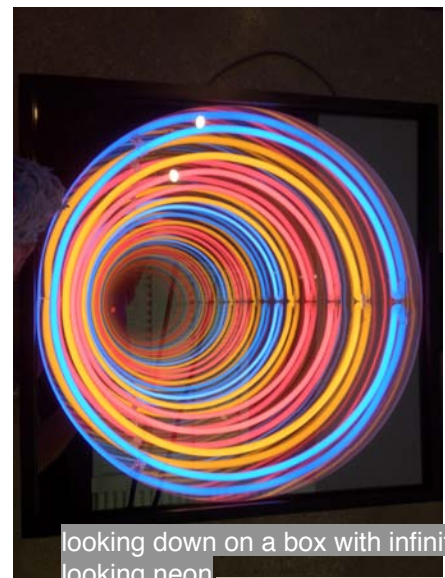
Tuesday, 10 July

It was definitely time for Mo to take another shower, but she just couldn't get it going right. Kept coming out only cold water -- poor Mo. Ended up being her last shower of the trip...

On day two of our RomaPass, we took a street car to MACRO (Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma) on the other side of the river. For me, this was the best museum of the trip. Super cool exhibits, including neon, fiber arts, a completely dark maze structure, and the best bathrooms ever.

This maze was a closed 20 by 30 foot black box within a large room. You enter the box, which is completely dark inside, from a small opening. On either side of and above you, as you go through the maze, is a soft fabric covering a mushy something attached to the walls. You feel entirely enclosed, except for two small rooms spaced at the middle and end of the maze. The first is still completely dark and offers a surprise when you walk into a large rubbery object. The second room has a dim light that reflects off a large tear-drop shaped rubber balloon in the room's center. Then you exit. We went through this again and again and again. Loved it.

Architecturally, the building is a wonder as well. It's glass ceiling over the main building (originally a distillery) was covered with multi-colored tissue paper, so the sun poured down in various colors all

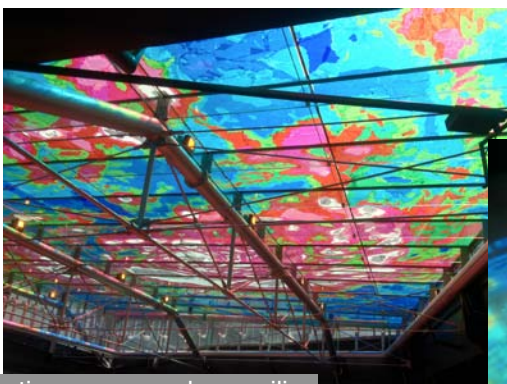


looking down on a box with infinite-looking neon

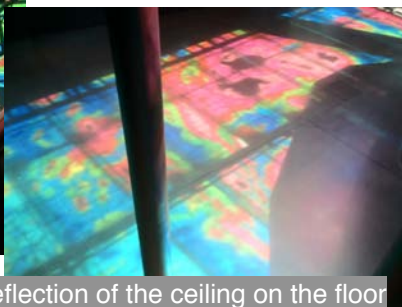


over the floor.

And there was a catwalk through the neon exhibit room, which ended on the



the tissue-paper glass ceiling



reflection of the ceiling on the floor

roof. Another building, which provided temporary exhibit space, connected to this main part.

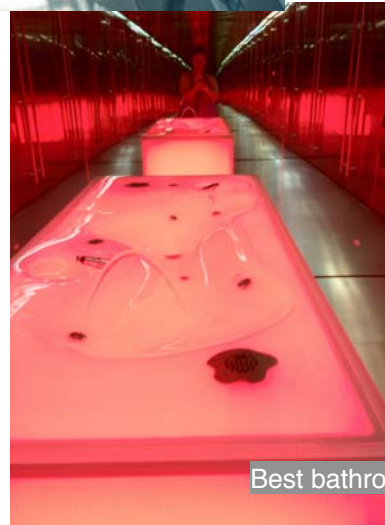


The courtyard joining the two had a huge sculpture of plastic shopping bags. Amazing.

The kids loved the bathroom best, easily among the coolest bathrooms we've seen anywhere. Mirrors. Colors change from white to red, depending on sink use.

I loved this museum.

Leaving here, we walked past another public water spout, filled our bottle, and ended up in a pet shop, which had some cute cats, puppies, birds, and a recent Holton Arms (Bethesda) School graduate who was in Italy with her grandmother for the summer before starting at U Maryland. Really nice, and the best thing about her was that she could point us to one of the best gelaterias in the city. Whoo hoo! We walked to the place, which



Best bathroom in the world!



happened to be right next to a pizzeria, and decided to break tradition by eating pizza first this time. Then we had the gelato, which was divine. It was definitely our favorite gelato of the trip so far.

Took the street car back to our apartment. I reserved tickets for Museo de Borghese for the next day. We rested up until about 9pm, when we headed over the next block to a hole-in-the-wall restaurant called Taverna Roma for dinner. It was good! Bruschetta, yummy pasta, etc. Everywhere we went, our dinner's seemed to cost 100 euros. So even though prices were decent (with the dollar against the euro), dinners were not cheap.

Wednesday, 11 July

Early morning (not so early really, around 9am) grocery run, and then breakfast for all. Because we had to be at the Museo de Borghese for our timed entry, we were out of the house before noon. Hopped the bus to Borghese Park, and then walked to the Museo. In a terribly inefficient manner, we waited in one line to pick up tickets, crossed around and through that to get to another line to leave our bags (none at all allowed), and then another line to get into the museum, which they opened to us at exactly 1pm.

So this was quite an interesting place. Bernini, Raphael, Titian, Rubens, Caravaggio. My favorite was Bernini's *Apollo and Daphne*, an exquisite marble sculpture with amazing detail of Daphne turning into a tree. Incredible. Each room on the first floor, and many on the second, are dedicated to individual Roman gods, so there are paintings and sculptures by various artists concerning that/those god(s). Really neat. We spent almost exactly two hours there, the maximum allowed before they kick you out so the next group can come in.

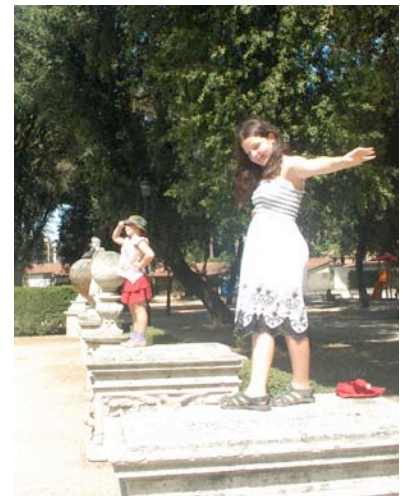


The park surrounding the gallery was also originally owned by the Borgheses. Other museums, gorgeous fountains, and memorial structures dot the grounds as well, very cultured. Until we rented bikes. Mo and I rented a bicycle each, and Scott, Marx, and Satch rented a *riscio*, which is a four-wheel, two-person vehicle with a steering wheel and covering: a land-based

paddle boat. We breezed through the gardens, but then Marxé started driving and promptly fell off on a steep turn, which (after we found her not hurt) was hilarious. Later though, Scott missed a turn coming out of this one area (somehow, I don't understand how, this became my fault), and the three of them ended up going part-way down a staircase. Scott was able to brake, but Marxé was sore and Satch's wrist hurt some. They got over it, but Mo and I took some time to stop laughing. I almost peed. So funny.

After returning the bikes, we decided to head back to the gelato place from yesterday. It had been sooooo good. Bus ride got us close, and then we had wonderful, creamy, dreamy gelato. Mo spent the rest of her trip money (they each got 20 euros or so) on a ½ kilo tub of take-home gelato. Four flavors.

We stopped by the pet store again, and took the street car back to our apartment, Mo slurping on gelato the whole way and being quite generous with her sisters. Rest, rest, and then Scott cooked dinner again, which was delicious. Ahhh, spritz!



Thursday, 12 July

Because our flight leaves at 7am on Friday, we have to be at the airport by 5:30ish. The metro doesn't open until 5:30, and no companies would let us reserve a cab at that time, especially because we're not in downtown Rome, per se. One limo place wanted to charge us 200 euros for the 45 minute ride. Eek! So Scott reserved a rental car, which he and I walked to pick up this morning while the girls slept on.

After our 25 minute hike uphill to the Waldorf Astoria, of course, they had no record of our reserving a car. And they had no cars. The single reservation agent called the big boss, Augusto, who hemmed and hawed and then got to work on finding us a car. Finally, after more hemming and hawing and you-should-know-better-than-to-reserve-a-car-in-Rome repetitions, Augusto came up with a car with a window bashed in the night before. We said, cool, no problem. So they cleaned it up, taped a piece of paper over the empty window space, and handed it over. We got back to the apartment, put our euros into the meter to keep the car parked on the street during the day, and went up to find the kids still sleeping. So we went out again, got bread and made breakfast.

By the time we left to visit the city, it was about 2:00 I think. Walked to the St. Peter's church in the Vatican for a second try, carrying our shoulder coverup shirts, waited in line, and were honestly disappointed inside. It was so much. Gold everywhere, very ornate, huge, and frankly overwhelming. Maybe if we had seen this place first instead of last, maybe if we were Catholic, maybe if we weren't kinda beat up with churches. But it just wasn't for us. We contemplated going to the Sistine Chapel, which I know we should have done. It's Rome, you have to see the Sistine Chapel. The kids have to see it, etc. But I think we knew we were through and just called it a day.



By way of Gelato. Yes, the final stop on our best gelato of Rome happened to be semi- on the way back to the apartment. Oh, so

good. The mango gelato was superlative. Next door was an aroncina (lightly fried rice balls with various stuffings that all three girls loved) place that pleased everyone as a supplement to the gelato. Back to the gelateria afterwards, though, cause Satch was on the ½ kilo gelato train today, and brought her four flavors back to the apartment, where she was unable to finish it (even with sharing as much as her sisters could eat). Some of it actually made it home to Maryland with us, in liquid form.



Anyway, we took the bus back to the apartment, packed up, went out for dinner to the place on the next block again, where we were greeted warmly, and then went to sleep, only to wake up a few hours later.

Everything leaving Italy was smooth sailing. Tape did not hold the paper to the windowless window, but we dealt with it. We did have to RUN through CDG in Paris to make our connection, but it was worth it. The kids LOVED having business class seats on the A380. I loved it too. Now they only want to fly Air France forever.



One strange thing: when we got home, there was an email from the Rome apartment landlady: someone had broken in after we left (at 4am) and stolen a bunch of stuff. We really don't know how this happened, because we did lock everything and I distinctly remember having Scott stop the car

so I could check that the front door to the building was shut when we left. It was.

Anyway, that was our trip. Coming home was bittersweet, and not just because we will miss all the amazing things about Italy. ZZ Zilla, Marx's oldest and original bearded dragon, died while we were away. She was able to get her friends over within a couple hours of our walking in the front door -- the funeral was held that afternoon. ZZ will be missed.