

" Viva Italia' – Venice to Sorrento - 2015

" It was simply a wonderful trip...filled with so many unexpected extras Bob & Christine, Sydney

Flying into Venice was an exciting beginning but we all knew we had to wait a few days before exploring the delights of this unique city. Our first stop was Lake Garda, and the picturesque little town of Desenzano, where our hotel, right on the lake, was the perfect place to unwind from our travels. After three nights we had to tear ourselves away..but Verona beckoned with the magnificent Zeffereilli production of Verdi's Aida. We enjoyed great seats in the 'stalls' area and were treated to a simply thrilling performance. The Chinese soprano, Hui He, was the perfect Aida and her singing, Jennifer declared, the best she has heard. It was then off to Venice, where many saw a wonderful production of Tosca at La Fenice opera house, following an earlier tour of this



beautifully restored theatre. We enjoyed a lovely hotel in a great location, just steps from St Mark's square. Venice is always wonderful and she certainly didn't disappoint as we explored her various museums and galleries and rode her canals.

Tuscany beckoned so it was on to Florence and our hotel right on the river Arno. Everyone followed their heart in Florence, some visiting as many galleries as they could, others just sitting in a square, living la dolce vita! It was then on to Chianti and our three night stay in the beautifully restored little hamlet called La Vescine. A family lived here as recently as the 50s when three brothers bought and lovingly restored the property. We stayed dotted all over it...some down steps...others up steps...some in one building, others in another. It was like moving into our own little town. The food and wine here was wonderful and the pizza night, when an expert pizzaiola came and created endless pizzas for us was great fun. Stewart had organised for a three piece band to come and entertain. They were excellent, particularly the singer, a baritone who could sing traditional Italian song and modern American ballads with equal flair and proficiency. We all had a great night! Whilst in the Chianti region we visited the wonderful formal garden on the La Foce estate and also the winery of Ferenc Mate, author of "The Hills of Tuscany." Leaving Chianti, it was time to travel to Cortona, the pretty little town made famous in the novel and film, " Under the Tuscan Sun." This little jewel didn't disappoint and we all enjoyed wandering her cobbled streets and browsing her interesting shops.

Our next stop was Naples where we had a wonderful taste of this incredible city. We visited the famous museum and saw the many treasures taken from Pompei, we dined in a funny little typically Neapolitan eatery in the Spanish Quarter, we toured the Palazzo Reale and to cap it off, we saw Zubin Mehta conduct Tchaikovsky at Teatro San Carlo!

We then travelled by ferry from Naples to sunny Sorrento..and sunny it was! In fact, all of Italy was unseasonably warm and seemed reluctant to cool down after a hot summer. We were blessed to stay in a hotel up the hill. It boasted the most incredible vista of the Bay of Naples and Vesuvius and afforded us lovely, cool breezes. In Sorrento our group chose from a number of activities, visiting the Isle of Capri, Pompei, Herculaneum or all three!

The final stop was bella Roma where there was a night visit to the Vatican (without the crowds!), a tour of the Colosseum a walking tour of key sights (again, our hotel was very central, just steps from the Trevi fountain) and a wonderful dinner where we ate like kings.

Overall it was a wonderful tour, with many highlights!

JUST A FEW OF THE MANY GLOWING TESTIMONIALS.....

..."I did not like Florence the last time we were there, but this time I loved it. The hotel location was just great and made it very easy to get around. Everything you said about Naples is true! We went from the sublime to the

ridiculous all in one day. All the hotels were just so central (even Sorrento) and the staff always helpful. All our local guides were so interesting, friendly and considerate. It was simply a wonderful trip...filled with so many unexpected extras!" Bob & Christine D, Sydney NSW

" A quick email as I know you are both flat chat right now. Mum and I want to thank you both for a great trip...culture shock is hitting us very hard now that we are back home! "

Jennifer F, Woolongong, NSW.

"I have been very remiss in not contacting you earlier to say what a wonderful tour you organised to Italy in August/September this year. Thank you so much for a wonderful experience - it was so well organised. I found it hard readjusting to my own company at home after the camaraderie of the lovely people on the tour. I did miss them! F.Turner, Port Macquarie

I must say the hotels you chose were fantastic. My favourite would have to have been the Hotel Saturnia in Venice - great location, great city, lots of character and friendly staff. However the Berchielli in Florence also had similar attributes! In fact they were all superb in some way or other! Loved the luxury of the Radisson Blu in Dubai - such a special treat at the end of the trip! J.Wagner, Flaxton

One of the highlights of the trip was Aida in the amphitheatre in Verona. Such a special experience.

There were many other highlights and special experiences on the tour -too many to mention so I wish to congratulate you both!

Have you any places left on the Opera on the Harbour tour as I may have a friend interested in going? I have been recommending you to music/opera lovers I have met at functions etc who were extremely interested in the Italian tour. I hope some of them got in touch! You're a hidden treasure!

Thanks again for a fantastic trip!" Pam G, Toowoomba