

Dear Jennifer and Stewart

We wanted to add our comments about our travels with you!! It seems a long time since we spent many happy Sunday or Saturday afternoons at your “Operatif” concerts, your “Madam Butterfly” production and various New Years Eve celebrations. Always delightful and so much fun.

Our first tour was, of course “Viva Verdi” in 2017 – which was amazing! Having visited a few major cities in Italy on our own (and even ventured in a hired car to explore Montepulciano and surrounds! Never again!) – this tour provided us with so many new experiences between the Verdi Festival operas “Nabucco”, “Jerusalem” and “Falstaff” plus the Requiem we visited tiny exquisite theatres tucked away in small villages, walked in Verdi’s steps in Busseto and his home (Santa Agata), then in our free time we wandered the streets of Bologna, Parma, and Milan – exploring. We had very good company for our many lunches and dinners and in Milan rediscovered Aperol Spritz!

Your organisation and attention to detail in all this was (and continues to be) exceptional – and you dealt with any problems with grace and good spirit. Always cheerful and encouraging, it was a delight. We thought this was our best experience ever!

So much so that when we noticed you planned a visit to Sicily, we jumped at the chance to visit a place we had wanted to see, but were concerned about travelling on our own. It was supposed to be a celebration of our wedding anniversary in 2020 – but COVID intervened! So, we eventually embarked on that adventure in 2022. A different experience, with more local music and a few concerts (a memorable one was in Palermo in Teatro Massimo, where we had the special concert and Jennifer joined in with the last aria!). Also the wonderful I Bedi – Sicilian music sung in dialect, plus a range of instruments! Memories of a fantastic bus driver who took us up and around tiny roads, into magical mountain villages shrouded in mist (Erice) where we walked around and found a small café offering fresh vegetable soup – which was so good! Our memories of agriturismo hotels, wine makers and cooking classes, alongside sitting on our balcony in Taormina each evening as Mt Etna produced a display! Another highlight was Agrigento and sitting in an amphitheatre watching “Agamemnon”. You had so much to cope with on this tour – COVID, the cone recalcitrant and dealing with some locals who made life extraordinarily difficult. For the people travelling, it all went very smoothly, but not without you both putting in an extraordinary amount of work to keep things afloat. We agreed, this had to be the best trip!

That was supposed to be our last trip – but then – up popped “Viva Verdi 2023” and we couldn’t resist! A lovely relaxing introduction in Reggio Emilia and the added enjoyment of the Hotel Posta! We could unwind slowly (and exercise daily up and down a few stairs if we declined the lift!). Then to Parma, Milan and Venice – with a focus on the Verdi festival in Parma – which was absolutely amazing. In all we saw six Verdi operas in various locations, including Busseto and La Fenice (I Due Foscari), opera in a palazzo using three different rooms (La Traviata), plus concerts (Simone Young conducting Messiaen, a Vivaldi concert, and a showcase for young conservatorium student graduates). A wonderful variety, interspersed with museums, cathedrals and artisan workshops – it was amazing. In addition, we had many wonderful dinners and lunches, sampling the specialities of the region – plus the wines! We explored the small islands around Venice, found out how to make Parmesan cheese, Bevilaqua textiles, gondolas and balsamic vinegar – old techniques and old recipes still used today. In our free time we wandered around the streets and took in the local atmosphere. We decided this was the best ever..... (but you never know! Scotland awaits!).

Thank you so much for making all these trips so memorable for us. Long may you continue. (Please!)

Here’s to the next time

Cheers Kathryn and Ifor