

## Italy 2005

Journal: Day 3

I can report that Venice has been officially overrun by tourists. Tourists are everywhere and I don't think there is a local population related to anything but tourism. We're having a good time except for one small mishap: Delta lost our luggage. Everything was packed in one suitcase, and we haven't seen it since we checked it three days ago. Good thing I wore an outfit that Lori likes. The only good thing about it is that the crowds seem to clear away when we approach due to the smell of our clothes. We don't hold out much hope for ever seeing our stuff again, since even if they find our suitcase it will probably be empty, judging by the look on the face of the clerk at the baggage claim office when we replied that our suitcase wasn't locked. I guess the theft of suitcase contents is pretty common in Italy. Tomorrow we'll go shopping for a new wardrobe, likely some fancy Italian designer clothes (e.g., Armani, Versace, etc.).

For anyone planning a trip to Italy I can tell you that there is no reason to brush up on your Italian. Most people can speak English, and for those that can't I've found that speaking English slowly and loudly makes it easier to understand. For some people I've had to practically scream at them, and just when I thought they'd never get it and I wouldn't be able to yell any louder, they understand. Unbelievable.

We've tried arranging for a meal with the pope when we get to Rome. I've left about 15-20 messages for him but still haven't been able to get him on the phone. I have spoke to the Swiss Guard, though, who have threatened to hunt me down for harassment. Wait until they find out I'm a presidential candidate for 2008!

That's all for now. Ciao.

Steve

## Italy 2005

Journal: Day 5 – The Eagle Has Landed

The highlight of our trip occurred this morning when our suitcase with fresh clothes finally arrived. Apparently we made history in the process, being the first people in Italy to ever be reunited with their lost luggage since the introduction of air travel here over 80 years ago. In Italy there is absolutely no system in place to get lost baggage to their owners. Our suitcase arrived in Rome on Wednesday morning, the day after we arrived, and sat there for another day and a half before anyone did anything about it. By that time the baggage handlers were on strike and plane traffic was grounded throughout the country. I was able to get Delta to drive the bag to me in Venice, about a six hour drive, after refusing to accept any further delays, and 15 hours after they agreed, the suitcase showed up. Utterly amazing. Thank you to Alex Valdes for all her help working the situation from her side of the Atlantic.

After initially thinking that wearing the same clothes for four days and one entire night (we slept in them on the plane ride over here) would be a problem, there were some advantages. For one thing we fit in perfectly. It seems that the Italians here also do not change their clothes on a regular basis, at least judging by their aroma, so we were often mistaken for locals. We also learned how long you can realistically stretch one change of clothes, so packing for future trips will be significantly lighter.

Let me clarify one thing: I only wore the same clothes for so long because I had to. In any normal town I would have simply gone out and purchased new clothes. However, Venice is such a tourist town, 100% of the shops are devoted to merchandise that tourists buy. Unfortunately for me, socks and underwear is not one of those things.

Yesterday we traveled to Murano, the namesake of our Miramar community. Murano is home to the famous Murano glass. We watched glass blowing and bought six glass objects that will likely become a few hundred pieces by the time it reaches us in Florida.

I'm writing this on a train from Venice to Portofino. Of course it left late; nothing runs on time in Italy. Still no word from the pope, but I keep leaving messages.

That's all for now. Ciao.

Steve

## Italy 2005

Journal: Day 9

We're now well into our trip and everything has been terrific, other than the delayed suitcase, which we've put behind us. That episode has left some emotion scars, however, as I now feel I must change my clothes at least two or three times a day just because I can. Needless to say I'm going through clothes very quickly. Good thing our clothes did catch up to us, as I still haven't come across an underwear store in three cities so far.

We're now in Firenze (that's Florence in Italian) after stops in Portofino and Venezia (Venice). We're going to Roma (Rome, though I'm sure you could have figured that one out) tomorrow afternoon, then back home on Saturday. The food throughout Italy has been delicious. The Italians have really picked up on the concept of American pizza, which is now served everywhere. What they haven't picked up on are pizza cutters, the sharp rolling wheels we use to cut them. They serve their pizzas uncut on a plate with a dull knife and a fork, and it's up to the eater to try and cut the thing into pieces. Someone is going to make a fortune introducing pizza cutters to this country.

The other object of convenience that can be sold here, which apparently has very low market penetration, are tape dispensers. We've observed that people here have a roll of scotch tape and then actually bite it with their teeth to break it off. Given their level of hygiene here, including their lack of dental care, the older generations really have a hard time cutting their tape.

My other conclusion is that we have nothing to fear when it comes to Italy rivaling the US economically. They simply don't want it bad enough or aren't willing to work for it. All the shops, even those in the heavy tourist areas, close between 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm, the prime retail part of the day. I can't image anyone eating lunch at their desk in this country.

Additionally, they still haven't figured out how to take credit card orders over the phone. We bought some leather items in Portofino and realized when we got to Firenze that we should have bought more, so we called the store to place another order. Rather than use my credit card, which they even have on file from our previous order, they want me to wire them the money. And this isn't a big order, a couple hundred bucks.

Things haven't changed in the twenty years since I've been here: Italy still doesn't keep up their national treasures like you would expect. We visited the Boboli Botanic Gardens yesterday which is part of one of the palaces in which the rulers lived during the Italian Renaissance. The grass was brown, the plants were unmanicured and it had the greenest pool I've ever seen. Other than that it was beautiful.

The pope finally called me back and we're supposed to hook up for lunch when we get to Roma. That should be interesting.

That's all for now. Ciao.

Steve