

## Travelogue to Italy

In the car, on our way to the airport, I started to have mild chest pains. I kept quiet and did not tell Ben and tried to ignore them and prayed hard that nothing was wrong with me. I have waited all my life to go to Italy and had taken a bunch of my hypertension medicines for the trip. Luckily, the pains subsided. Perhaps they were just due to excitement.

We left Manila September 13th at 3:40 P.M. in a Singapore Airlines flight. It was the cheapest flight to Rome and for \$700+ we were not complaining. It was an anniversary offering from Singapore Airlines. It was a 3 & 1/2 hour flight to Singapore and we disembarked at the huge Changi Airport. We marveled at the countless Duty-Free shops and coffee shops and restaurants. We were quite hungry but we didn't have any Singapore Dollars, but we finally spotted a Sushi Bar that accepted Visa cards. We sat and ate the tasty sushi hungrily between sips of guava juice for me and orange juice for Ben. It was long four-hour wait and we passed the time browsing at the array of attractive books on Home styles of Bali and other Tropical settings, and Landscaping and Gardening books. Ben passed the time watching football in a huge TV set.

We finally boarded a full-packed plane and I sat next to a European (American?) lady who did not as much as look or smile at me. It is as if I did not exist at all and she couldn't care less. What a snob! I likewise completely ignored her for 12 hours and 40 minutes. This was one of the longest flights I've ever experienced and for a while enjoyed watching half a dozen movies, news features and sports. But after about 6 hours of that we still had more than 6 hours to go. The trans-Pacific flights to the U.S.A. Mainland last for only nine hours. It was a rather smooth flight though, without the bumpy air pockets that I dread most in flying. After eating breakfast, lunch, dinner, then breakfast again with intermittent unsuccessful attempts to sleep, our videos in front of us finally flashed the plane's position, which was now near Fumicino Airport. We braced ourselves for a bumpy touchdown but got a smooth one instead.

It was early Sunday morning but the airport was crowded. It was surprising to note that the Fumicino Airport was just slightly bigger than the Ninoy Aquino International Airport and not modern like the Hong Kong Airport or Changi in Singapore. They didn't even have the standard tubes of most airports. We went down the steps into waiting shuttle buses and were brought to Terminal 3. There was a long line at the Health Immigration and we were all checked for SARS as our plane came from Singapore. We breezed through Immigration until the lady officer asked me how much money I had brought with me and when I said \$1,500, she didn't believe me but when I said I had a VISA card she let me go. We had a hard time locating our luggage carousel and no one in the airport seemed to know where our carousel was until we asked a American-looking couple who said that they thought our luggage had already come out and all we needed to do was to collect it.

After gathering our luggage, we waited for Mark and Juliet to pick us up. Mark was a nephew of our cook, Ester and he had been working in Italy for many years. It was 8:30 am by the time we found seats in the waiting area. While we were seated, a Chinese-looking guy approached us and started speaking in Tagalog. We were wary of him as we were warned to be careful of strangers. But he seemed nice and even gave his card. Carding told us that he ferried Filipino

passengers from Fumicino Airport into Rome. After two texted messages from Juliet, she and Mark easily recognized us. Instead of getting a taxi, we decided to ride with Carding who charged us 35 Euros to bring us straight to our hotel.



It was cool, crisp morning and in no time at all, we were in the heart of Rome. Compared to Paris, which was more spread out and had wide, wide avenues, Rome was smaller in size but it had more old buildings, monuments and archeological sites per square mile than anywhere else in the world. Almost everything was within walking distance. Our Hotel, Fraterna Domus used to be an old, old convent and it had its own small chapel with a lot of paintings including the ceiling. Sor Milena welcomed us and one of the nuns showed us our room. The rooms were rather small but neat and ours was on the third floor. We had to drag our 4 pieces of luggage up the steep stairs by ourselves, as the nuns did not have any bellman. It had no window, just a small opening near the ceiling, but it was air-conditioned, so we didn't hear the noisy traffic outside.

We decided to go to St. Peter's Basilica right away as it was just walking distance from the hotel. We passed by two Swiss guards in their colorful uniforms.

As soon as I entered the basilica, tears of joy rolled down my cheeks; after so many years of waiting, God has finally allowed me to gaze at this immense cradle of Christianity. St. Peter's was until recently the largest church ever built (it covers an area of 23,000 m<sup>2</sup> with a capacity of over 60,000). In the right aisle, the first major sight is Michelangelo's beautiful Pietà, located immediately to the right side of the entrance. The sculpture depicts the Virgin Mary cradling the dead Jesus in her lap after the crucifixion. It was completed by Michelangelo when he was just 24. After it was vandalized with an axe in 1972, the sculpture was placed behind protective glass.

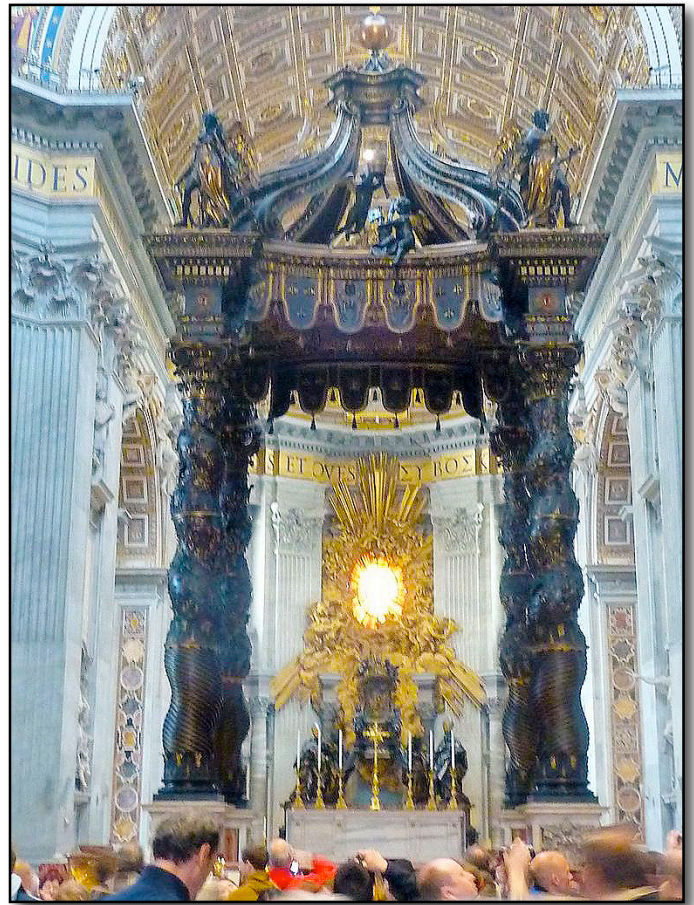


As we gazed in wonder at the biggest church in the world, we came up to the tall, huge, dazzling canopy altar designed by Bernini and were awed by the view of the baldacchino, a monumental canopy that shelters the papal altar and the holy relics of St. Peter. Made of dark bronze accented with gold vine leaves, it was created by Lorenzo Bernini from 1624 to 1633

under the direction of Barberini Pope Urban VIII, who oversaw the Baroque decoration of much of Rome.

The spiral columns derive their shapes from the columns in the original St. Peter's Basilica first built by Constantine. Legend had it that they came from King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. Cherubs are repeated throughout the entire monument, giving an overall effect of the Ark of the Covenant. Symbols of the Barberini family can be seen throughout, including a golden sun and bees.

In addition to being a beautiful work of art, the monument serves to symbolize the union of the Old Testament Wisdom of Solomon, the Christian tradition of Constantine, and the rebirth of a triumphal church under the guidance of the Barberini family.



After passing through the Baldacchino's breathtaking columns we moved on towards the farthest end and beheld a heavenly scene. With the sunlight streaming from the left, the vision of the altar, a beautiful piece with the Holy Spirit surrounded by cherubs with its three gold sunbursts which reminded me so much of the silver sunburst design of the Holy Rosary Parish Church in Angeles. We sat there for a while when suddenly a priest and an acolyte came out. There was going to be a Mass! So we attended the Mass, received Holy Communion and we again thanked God for this trip.

In the north western corner of the nave is the bronze statue of St Peter Enthroned.

Its right foot is smoothed down due to centuries of pilgrims' caresses. There was a long queue and waited for our turn and gently touched St. Peter's foot so that our wish of going back to Rome would be granted.





After the Mass we walked round the small side altars and gazed at the beautiful paintings scattered above them. As I looked closer, it turned out that they were made of colorful tiny mosaic tiles and were not fresco paintings! We then walked together with Mark and Juliet and went out of St. Peter's and took a bus for the Termini, which is the main Train Station in Rome. We went down by escalator to the lower level where there were lots of Italian fast foods and had a quick lunch of Panini sandwiches washed down with *caffè Latte*. There was also a grocery store where we were able to buy some milk, bread and cheese and some fruits. We came up to the main level and saw lots of Pinoys milling around. We smiled and said hello to them in Tagalog. We went out of the Termini and walked down the street. We went up to a hotel to look around but it was too expensive.

Juliet and Mark then brought us back to the hotel and after depositing our purchases went out again, back to the Termini's lower level and this time had an early dinner at Spizzito's, which is just like McDonald's but served different kinds of Pizzas instead. At first we had ½ slices each with a glass of Coke but it was so good, we decided to order one more slice for each of us this time. Later, we walked around the Termini again and then took a bus to Piazza de Venezia where we sat near the staircase and took photos. We then hopped to another bus that



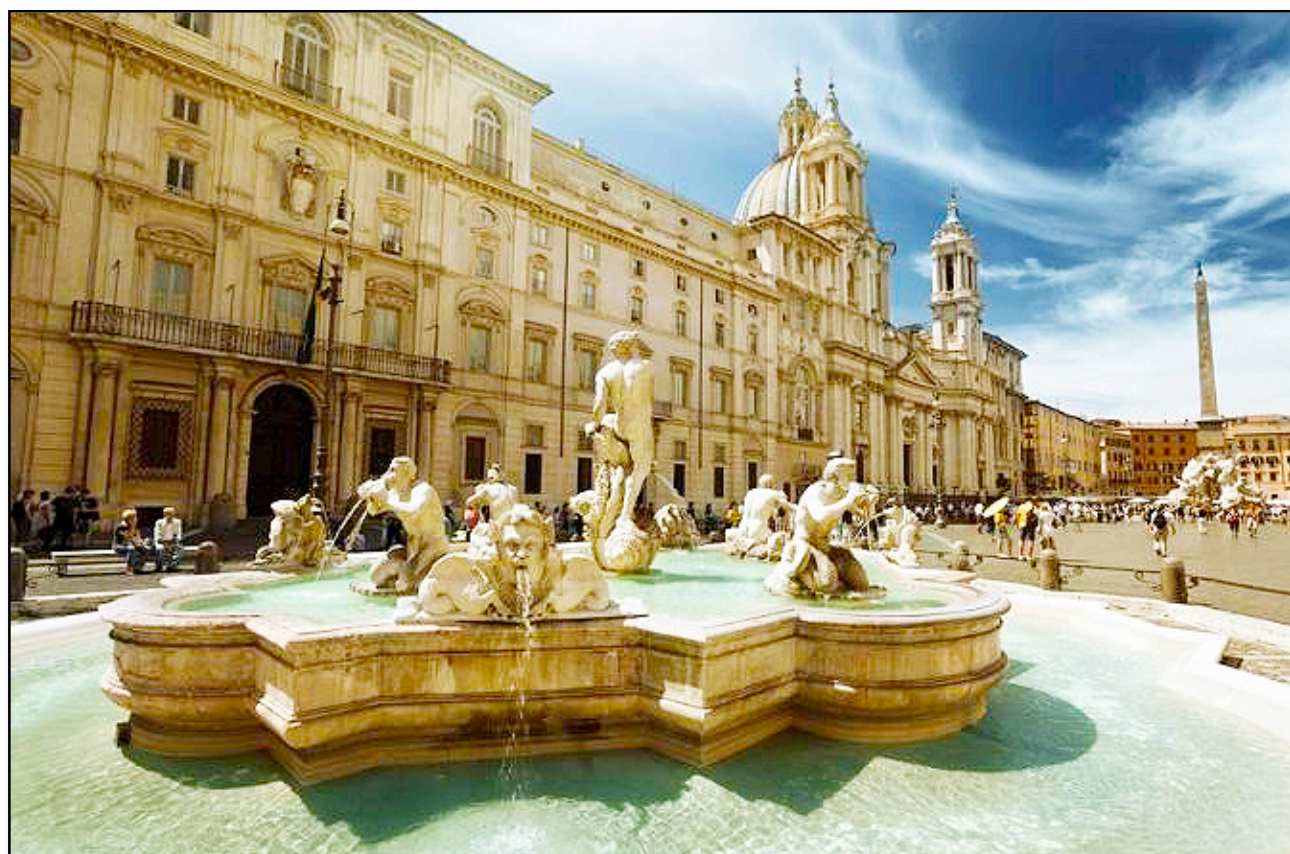
went to Via Nazionale and window shopped at the nice shoe and clothing stores. We then proceeded to Piazza Navona, one of Rome's favorite hangouts for locals and tourists alike. There were three beautiful fountains done by Bernini and a magnificent church. This area was formerly a racing oval for chariots during Roman times with no traces of the steps of the stadium of Domitian which once occupied this spot and could hold 30,000 spectators.



The most prominent landmark is the Fountain of the four rivers designed by Bernini as a base for the Egyptian obelisk that was brought there by Emperor Maxentius who ruled Rome from AD 306 to 312. We then had a delicious pasta dinner in one of the outdoor restaurants and enjoyed watching various artists painting portraits and landscapes and other groups doing antics, juggling, dancing, or just simply posing without moving for hours on end. After a tiring night we were ready to hit the sack.

In the morning, we asked Sor Milena to call the Green Line in Via Farini for us (the tourist center near Piazza Navona gave us this address). We took Bus no. 70 for the Basilica of Maria Maggiore and got down there. After asking around, we finally found the location of The Green Line. We booked for a one-day tour of Florence for \$120 each. After a quick pannini lunch at a nearby Trattoria we headed for the hotel and rested. After a long nap, we headed back to Piazza Navona for another pasta dinner and later had our first taste of

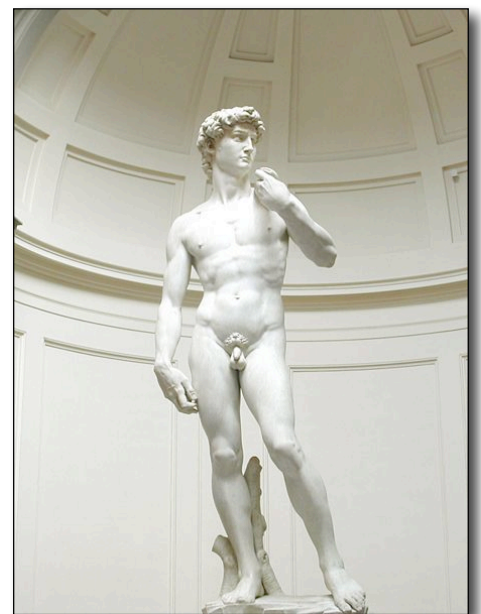
delicious Gelato. We found out that a few steps from our hotel there was a small Gelateria and from then on, we were regular daily customers.





The next morning we woke-up early at 6:30 a.m. to get ready for the mini-bus that would pick us up at 7:00 a. m. We transferred to a big tourist bus and had our first sight of the Roman suburbs which gradually turned to fertile fields and verdant hills that reminded me so much of the landscape of Brisbane, Australia which we visited the year before. There were newly plowed fields whose soil was as dark as the one we saw on the way to Toowoomba. There were fields of tobacco plants interspersed with groves of olive trees and vineyards with ripening dark red grapes. After more than an hour's drive, the guide said that we just passed by the medieval city of Orte. After another hour or so, we were on the lookout point of a plateau-like promontory and the bus stopped for us to alight. We soaked-in the breathtaking view of the city with the duomo, the famous landmark of Florence, in the horizon.

Near our bus, we noticed a group of newlyweds and their entourage. They looked Asian and we were informed that they were indeed Chinese factory workers from the leather factories in Florence. We tramped back to the bus and we drove first to the outskirts where our guides purchased tickets for us for the Museum so we didn't have to line up to enter the museum that housed Michelangelo's masterpiece, the statue of David. An Italian guide named Giovanni met us and he spoke in fluent English with a slight and cute Italian accent. He said that Michelangelo sculpted the colossal 14 foot and 3 inch tall statue of David from a single piece of white Carrara marble when he was only 24 years old. He did not have a model. The statue is magnificent and gazing at his back, one could see the veins and muscles of David with the slingshot dangling at the back of his right hand behind his right leg. Michelangelo's "David" was carved from 1501 to 1504 and originally stood at the entrance of the Palazzo Vecchio on the Piazza della Signoria. Not long after the statue was unveiled, a particularly



rowdy fight taking place in the Palazzo led to a chair getting thrown out of a window—directly onto the David's arm, which broke in three places. The statue was moved to its present home in 1873 to further protect it from damage, and a replica was placed outside the Palazzo Vecchio in the spot where the original first stood. Next to the statue, metal scaffolding was being assembled and we were told that David was to be cleaned for his 500th birthday anniversary the next year --- 2004. Giovanni further explained why some of the other sculptures were left unfinished. It was either the Pope who commissioned them changed his mind and wanted something else, or the marble was not good enough.

We went outside and walked towards the duomo. The guide told us that unlike other cathedrals, this one was ornate outside because Florence was once upon a time Italy's most prosperous city having been its main trading center. The rich merchants' money was spent putting ornate and multi-colored marble outside while the inside was left rather simple. The baptistery was built separately across the street but had the same style of architecture as the duomo.

We walked further and found ourselves in the Piazza de Signoria where the city hall was located. There was a replica of David in front. The city hall was also full of scaffolding ready for a complete renovation. We proceeded to a restaurant and sat on the same table with a couple from Barbados and an American couple. The food was two kinds of pasta (penne) with a marinara sauce and a tasty chicken fillet with fresh green salad. For desert we had delicious Tiramisu.

After lunch we were on our own and we decided to go to a leather shop. We were met at the door by two Filipina salesladies and one Filipino guy. Ben got two belts and a golf carrier for 3 balls and I got a leather wallet. We both had our initials in embossed in gold leaf embossed. I tried on a light yellow leather jacket that fit me to a tee, but I didn't buy it as it was so expensive (\$600) and it would just hang in my closet! The trip back home was smooth and uneventful. We were brought to our hotel by the tourist bus and alighted near a trattoria where we again had Panini sandwiches of ham, cheese and arugula. We stopped by the gelatteria where I had my favorite nocciola and Ben had mocha pecan flavor.

I waited until 11:30 p.m. for Elisa and John's arrival from Vancouver that was supposed to be at 10:30 p.m. I thought I heard Elisa's voice outside the passageway, but when I peeped out of the door there was nobody. We slept quite soundly and after we woke up, at breakfast the next morning, we were greeted instead by Rodrigo and Maria (John's cousins from Vancouver) who explained that Elisa and John were booked at another hotel just for last night, as there was some mix-up (Elisa and John were actually at our hotel that night, that's why I heard her voice, but then they left for the other hotel right away). Elisa came after breakfast and we finally met in our room. We had a warm big hug, as we haven't seen each other for so many years.

After a good night's sleep we had a sumptuous breakfast, and Elisa started our tour. We actually began by going up to the Campidoglio. The Capitoline Museum was to the right and the building to the left was Rome's City Hall, so the government is still using it. From the Piazza del Campidoglio we walked behind where we found the passageway to the Forum and walked all the way to the Arch of Constantine, which is beside the Colosseo. We then went to the Colosseo. We were all so tired that we sat on the Spanish Steps to take in all that we could see (it doesn't matter how many times one sees these buildings, one is always left in awe!). I remember that from there we went to have lunch somewhere and then went for a nap at the hotel...we were all so TIRED, especially Maria and Rodrigo.



## Piazza del Campidoglio

Our first stop for Elisa's private tour was the Capitoline Hill, one of Rome's famous seven hills, and in Italian it's called the Campidoglio. The Piazza del Campidoglio is the trapezoidal space atop the hill, with buildings on three sides and a grand staircase on the fourth. Michelangelo designed the piazza and the other surrounding buildings in the mid-1500s. Michelangelo employed several visual tricks to give the space a balanced feel, despite its lack of literal symmetry. He



designed facades for the existing buildings, made the staircase more of a gradual ramp, and crafted a pattern to be inlaid in the piazza that deceives the eye into thinking it's a perfect oval (it is



actually egg-shaped). The buildings once served as government buildings, but they now housed the Capitoline Museums at right and Rome's City Hall on the left. At the center of the Piazza del Campidoglio is a replica of an ancient Roman bronze statue of Marcus Aurelius on horseback. The original bronze is nearby in the Capitoline Museums.

Admiring the views from the gardens, it's easy to understand why it was so sought after for the villas of emperors and other members of the aristocracy. We learned about the role Palatine Hill played in the legend of Rome's founding as the location where Romulus and Remus were found and nurtured by the she-wolf.

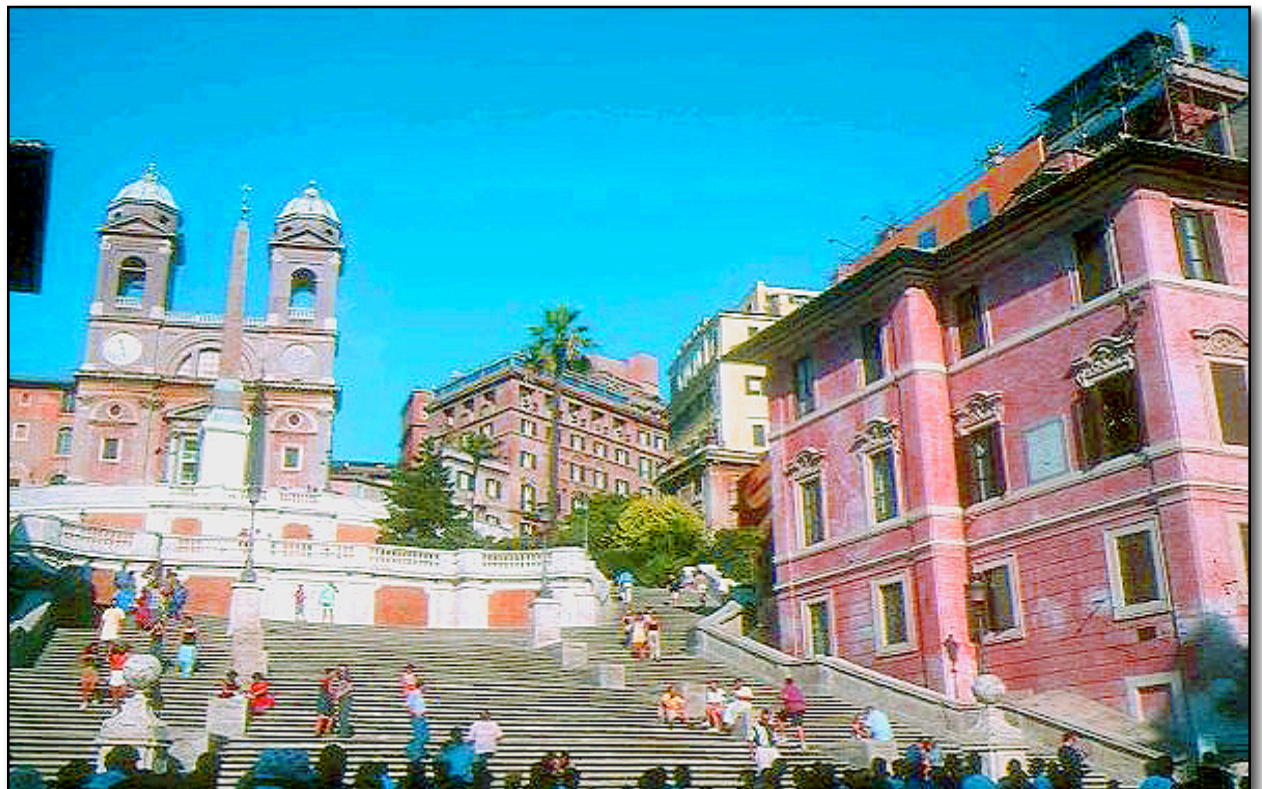
We then walked over to line-up for the Colosseo where the queue was rather long, but we were able to get in and see for ourselves some scenes reminding us of Luna's Spoliarium. It's amazing how the Romans were able to preserve this *Colosseo* or *Anfiteatro Flavio in Italian*. It is one of the world's best-known sites from antiquity, and for something built in 80 AD, it's holding up very well.

It was here that the Roman emperors watched gladiators stage battles to the death and hunt wild animals. The Colosseo set the model for all modern-day stadiums — the only difference being that today's teams survive their games.



The stadium was built so that both royalty and the public could enjoy the violent spectacles, although viewers were seated by social rank and wealth. While gladiatorial games were banned in 438 AD, the wild beast hunting continued until 523 AD. The Colosseum is also known for its complex and advanced architecture, much of which is still intact despite the site being used as a quarry for building materials at various points in history. Today, visitors can see the tiered seating, corridors and the underground rooms where the animals and gladiators awaited their fate. To complete our walking tour, Elisa guided us to the Old Roman Forum nearby with its slender columned ruins and walked along its ancient cobblestone streets. We saw the ruins of structures such as the Temple of Saturn, House of the Vestal Virgins, Basilicas of

Julia and Maxentius, and more. We walked all the way to the Arch of Constantine. We learned about pivotal moments in ancient Roman politics as we walked through what was once the epicenter of the Roman Empire. From there, we were all so exhausted we walked over to the Spanish Steps nearby to rest our tired feet, and just stayed there and had photo opportunities like the other tourists nearby.



*Upper photo: The Old Roman Forum; Above: The very famous Spanish Steps where people love to sit*

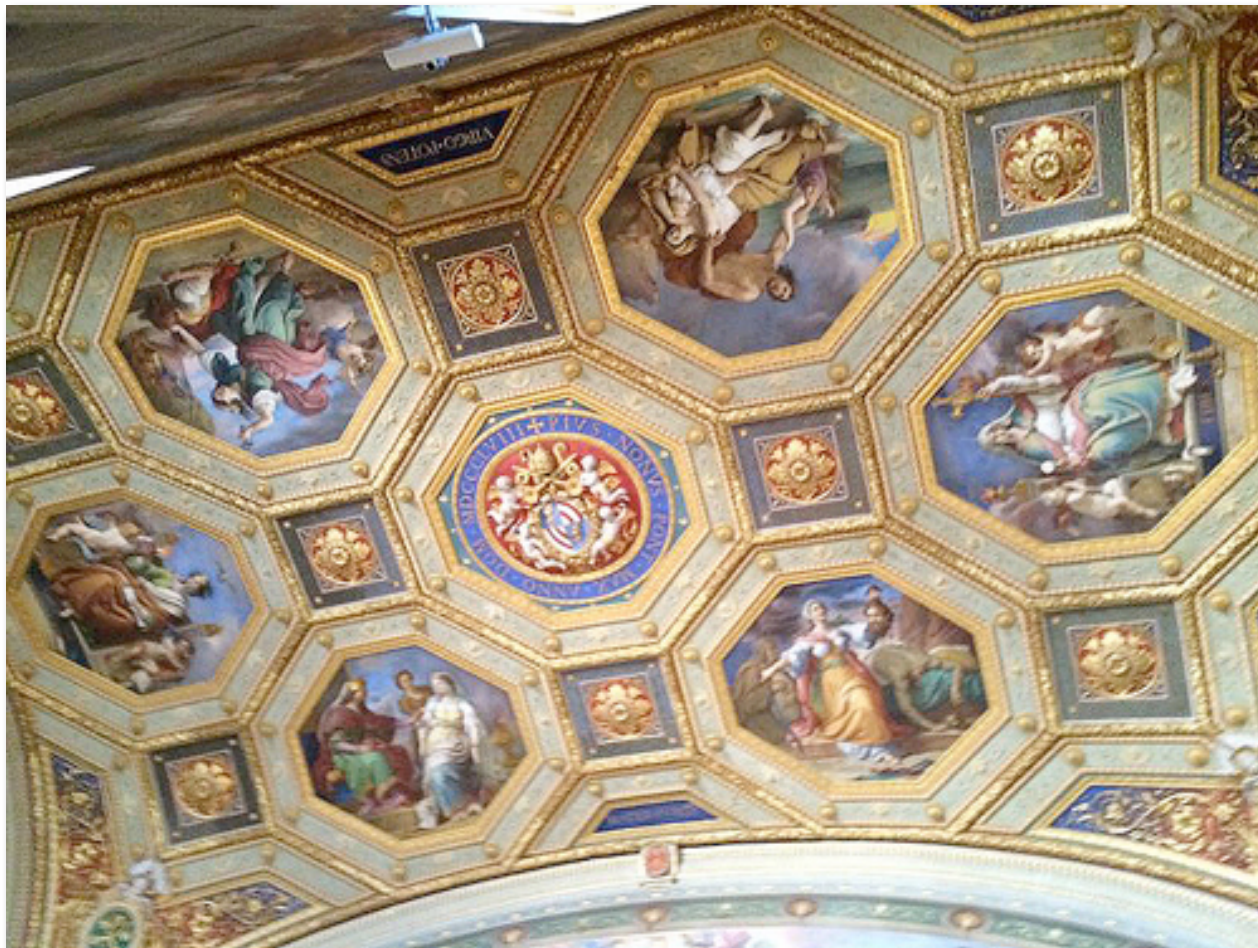


## The Pantheon

A trip to Rome is not complete without visiting The Pantheon. Elisa said that the visit to The Pantheon in Rome is a remarkable building architecturally. Basically a cylinder with the floating dome on top of columns, it is the largest masonry vault ever built. In the center of this dome is a hole bringing in a shaft of light to show the beauty of this building and its relatively simple, open interior. We all marveled as we gazed in wonder at the unique round center dome on top of the Pantheon.

Originally built in 27 BC and rebuilt by Emperor Hadrian in 120 AD, the temple has been damaged and plundered over time. In 609 AD it became a Christian church dedicated to the Madonna. In the 17th century some of its bronze ceiling was taken and melted down for use in St Peter's Basilica. Important figures such as King Victor Emmanuel II and the artist Raphael are buried in the Pantheon.

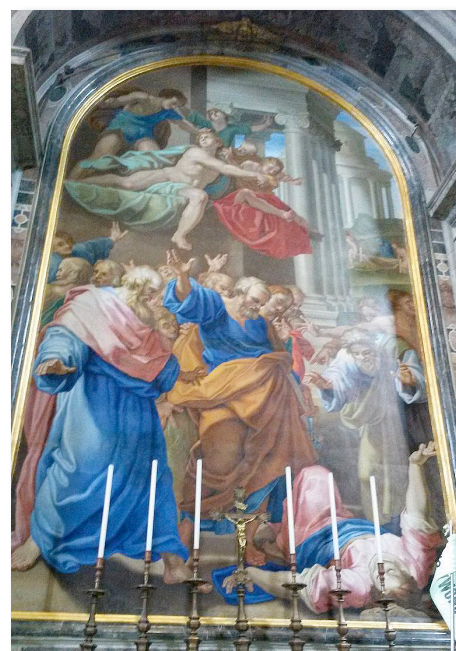




The next day, the 6 of us went to the Vatican Museum. We gaped at the various displays of sculptures and colorful mosaic paintings. Then we lined up to see the Sistine Chapel. The crowd was so huge and by the time we entered the chapel, Ben was nowhere to be found! I would have wanted to gaze with him at the masterpieces done by Michelangelo but I lost him. We just, jostled with the crowd and we finally found him at the Exit. That evening we watched the operatic concert we enjoyed so much. Ben and I got tickets while we were strolling along one of those streets that lead to Piazza di Spagna. But Elisa, John, Rodrigo and Maria didn't have any so, they walked the same street where we found this guy selling tickets, but they didn't find him. So they went to the Spanish Steps and while we sat there waiting, John and Elisa went to the Anglican Church where it was going to be held and bought tickets Elisa, John, Mary and Rodrigo.

On the third day, Elisa wanted to give us a personal tour of St. Peter's Basilica. We went back to touch the foot of St. Peter and take a look again at the very impressive Baldocchino Altar. We passed by the side altars and Elisa explained that the paintings hanging there were not fresco paintings. As I looked closer, it turned out that they were made of colorful tiny mosaic tiles and painstakingly glued together. From afar they looked like fresco paintings!

We went outside and saw another long line and when we inquired, it was going to go on top of the dome. Elisa said she has been up there before, so Ben and I decided to go up as on our next visit, we might not be able to climb the Steep steps anymore. It was more than 300 steps and I had to at least six times before we finally reached the top. What a fantastic panoramic view of the Vatican! It was unforgettable!



*Our panoramic bird's eye view of the Vatican seen from the Dome of St. Peter's Basilica*



## **Fontana Trevi**

Wanting to visit Rome again someday soon, Ben and I headed for the the largest and most famous of all of Rome's fountains, the Trevi Fountain (Fontana di Trevi) which s a Baroque masterpiece, towering 86 feet (26 meters) high, and fed by the Aqua Virgo aqueduct. Some of the nearby sights are the Spanish Steps and Piazza Navona, our favorite Piazza. An impressive sight, the structure features water spilling over a dramatic travertine façade and a large pool crowned by



marble statues of the gods of ocean, abundance, and health, all flanked by Tritons and seahorses. And the legendary fountain is more than just a photo opportunity—coin-tossing tourists, thanks to its popular superstition that says throwing a coin into the fountain will ensure your return to Rome always surround it. Soldiers leaving for war who would leave a coin as a gift to the gods first upheld the tradition.

## Amalfi Coast

And so it came for us to leave Rome for the Southern part of Italy, which to my mind is the most picturesque in all of Italy. But first we had to visit Rivello, the old hometown of my uncle Lino, Elisa's Dad. From the Termini in Rome, Elisa got us the tickets for the express train ride to the Southern Province of Potenza. We soaked up the scenery along the coastline of Rome, through the Provinces of Latium, Campania and along the coastline of Naples with a vantage view of Mt. Vesuvius from afar until we reached the town of Sapri in the province of Salerno in Basilicata where the Medieval Mountain town of Rivello was located. Elisa's cousin, Zaccaria, met us at the Train Station. For more details go to: [www.josiedizonhenson.com](http://www.josiedizonhenson.com) and select "The Silver Connection" in my list of Downloads in my Website.

While spending 7 glorious days in Rivello, Elisa took us on side trips around the area. We visited the mountain-top church of San Biagio with its enormous statue of Christ the Redeemer (just like the one in Rio de Janeiro) overlooking the most spectacular view of the Tyrrhanian Sea and the coast of Maratea on one side and below.

*il-cristo redentore Christ the Redeemer in Maratea*



Another evening we went to visit Elisa's god-daughter's parents in Maratea together with her cousin, Zaccaria and his wife, Rosa, and had a pizza dinner at a pizzeria in Praia a Mare, another nearby coast town. Ben & I could hardly finish our pizzas, as each one of us had a whole pizza.

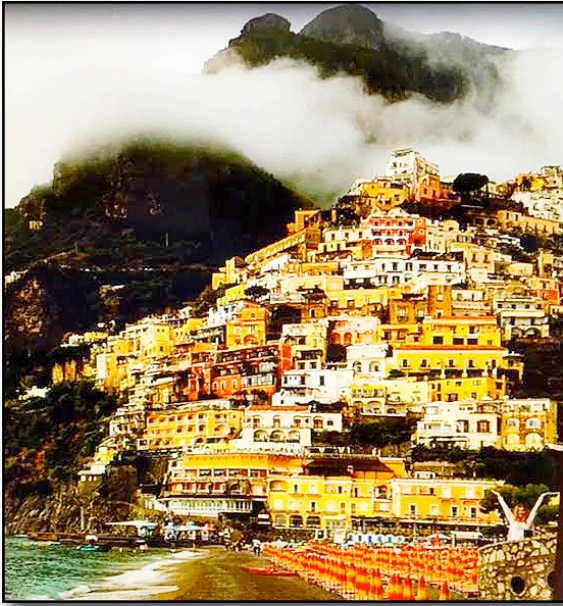
Elisa said it was a must to visit the Amalfi Coast. So, we took the bus from Rivello to Lagonegro and from there to Salerno. Elisa's cousin, Maria Rosaria, made reservations at the Hotel Plaza and we stayed there for 3 days. We checked the schedule of the "traghetti" (boats) for the Amalfi Coast and Capri and had lunch in a fast-food place that had delicious food. That evening, Maria Rosaria and her husband, Mario, met us at the hotel. Having misunderstood that we were meeting after dinner, we had dinner in a restaurant near the hotel and then met them.

The next day was our tour of the beautiful Amalfi Coast. We passed the towns of Vietri sul Mare, Maori, Ravello and others before reaching Positano. During the first half of the twentieth century Positano was a relatively poor fishing village. It began to attract large numbers of tourists in the 1950s, especially after John Steinbeck published his essay about Positano in *Harper's Bazaar* in May, 1953: "Positano bites deep", Steinbeck wrote. "It is a dream place that isn't quite real when you are there and becomes beckoningly real after you have gone." One of the most picturesque towns on the Amalfi coast, Positano, Italy often is billed as the "Jewel of the Amalfi Coast." Thanks to its setting on the Italian seaside, its precariously-perched pastel houses, and its church's gleaming dome, Positano has charmed visitors for decades.

As we got down at the jetty, we were greeted by this breathtaking and picturesque panorama of colorful stone houses sitting on top of each other, as if hanging precariously. We all walked into the town proper and marveled at the lovely gardens and various shops with lovely dresses and

colorful blouses hanging out waiting to be bought. We stopped and had lunch at an outdoor restaurant shaded by lemon trees in full fruit.

*Panoramic view of Positano at left and at right, the lovely restaurant set among fruit-bearing old lemon trees whose luscious yellow fruits we felt like picking while waiting for lunch to be served*



In the afternoon the "traghetto" took us to the lovely town of Amalfi. It became a very popular tourist destination since the 1920s when the British aristocracy started to enjoy the beauty of its sea. A walk starting from the port full of colored fishing boats will take you through the center to the beautiful cathedral of Sant'Andrea. The church, overlooking the lively Piazza Duomo, was built in the 12th Century and has a beautiful cloister where you can see the influence of the Arab culture on this part of Southern Italy. In Amalfi we had a leisurely delicious lunch of Pasta a la Vongole at the lovely restaurant below the church. We went up the steep stairway later to marvel at the church interiors which were just as impressive as the uniquely Arabesque façade.



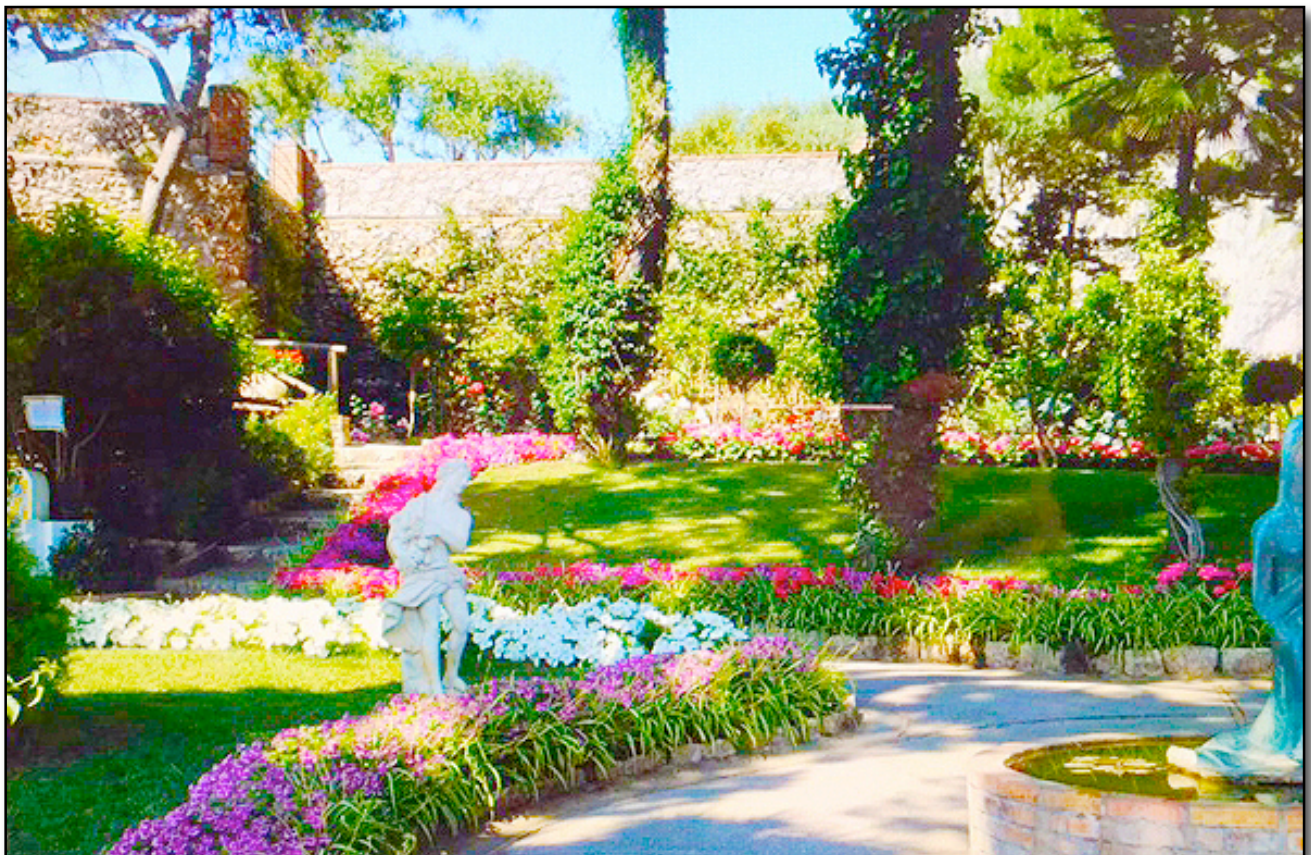
That evening Maria Rosaria and Mario took us to her sister Angela's, place. They were celebrating Angela's feastday and prepared a delicious dinner and for dessert Angela's daughter made "Torta Caprese", which was so delicious! While we were walking along the piazza, on the way to Maria Rosaria's house Ben and I were talking in Kapampangan and we were surprised when a group of Filipinos greeted us also in Kapampangan! That's where we met Bong Aquino who hails from Arayat, Pampanga. He said he had been working in Salerno for a few years and was just awaiting the arrival of his family. We have been facebook friends for a few years now and he has since moved to Milano.

It was the next morning that we took a 40-minute boat ride to Capri and hired a six-seater convertible so Elisa and her husband John, Maria (John's cousin) and her husband Rodrigo, and Ben and I could all fit in quite comfortably. Along the way we stopped at Anacapri, where Ben and I took the chair lift up the mountain while, Mary, Rodrigo, Elisa and John went to visit Villa

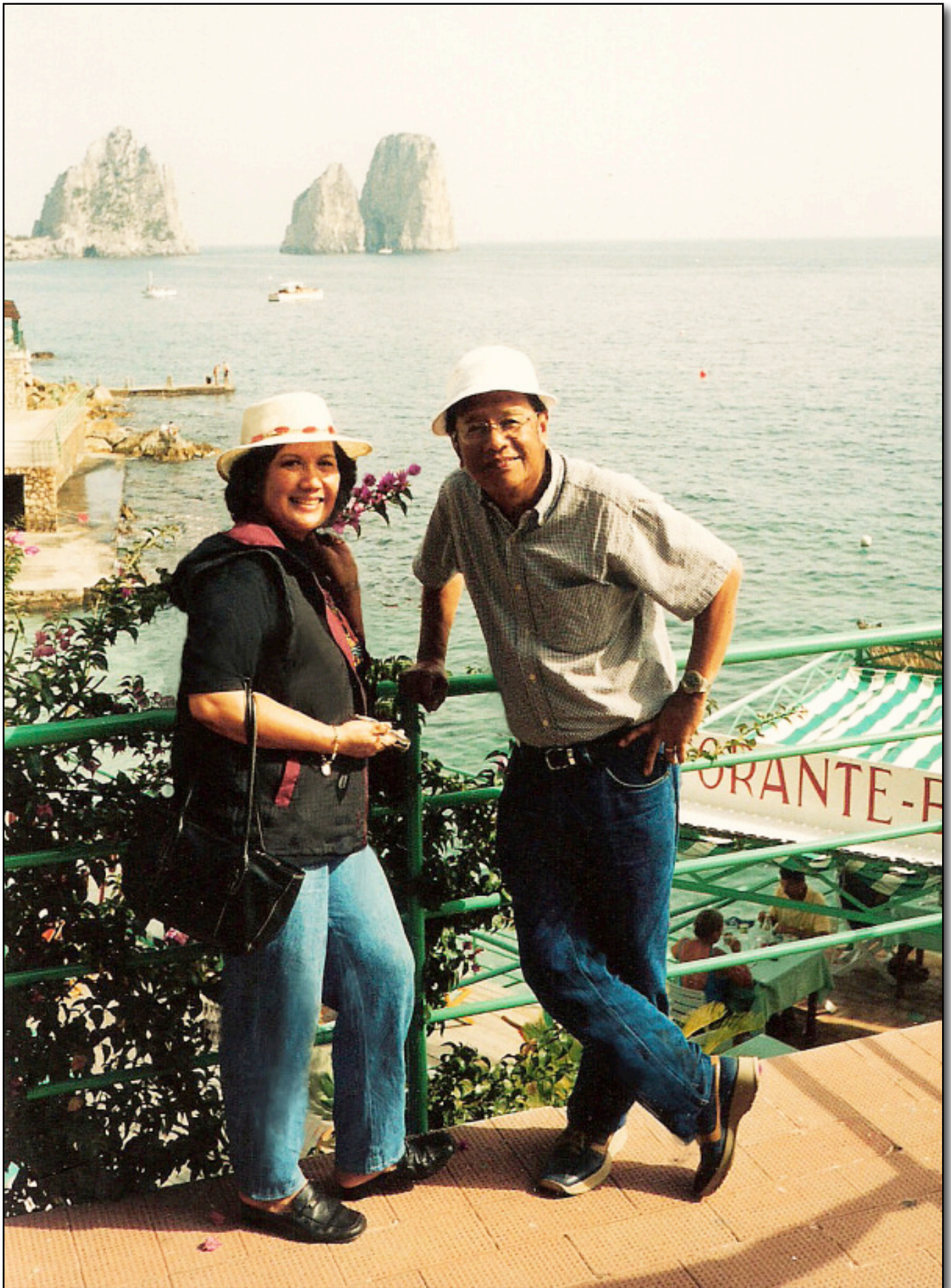


San Michele, which was owned by a Swedish poet, doctor. They waited for us at the piazza and then continued to the Faraglioni, at a beautiful restaurant “All’aperto” in a picturesque fishing village overlooking the most stupendous view of the Faraglioni.

We stopped for lunch there and had Spaghetti a la Vongole (they mixed some soft wilted zucchini flowers into the clam sauce making it uniquely tasty). And then for desert, I had my second taste of Torta Caprese (a chocolate butter cake made of ground almonds and no flour at all). Elisa then took us for a leisurely walk around the beautiful gardens of Emperor Augustus who developed Capri. Caesar Augustus was the first to discover the charm of Capri when he visited the island in 29 BC. So taken was he with the island's beauty that he traded the nearby fertile Ischia for it with the city of Naples. This marked the beginning of Augustan rule. He was subsequently followed by his successor Tiberius who embarked on an intense building program between 27 and 37 A.D, resulting in the construction of 12 villas, temples, and planted gardens so he could enjoy his private garden paradise.



Upper left: The Peninsular Map showing the famous towns of the Amalfi Coastline; Right: the 6-seater taxi



*Above: Ben and I posing at the Balcony of All'Aperto restaurant after lunch, with the breathtaking view of the famous Faraglioni in the background*



*Two views of Capri from a mountaintop showing the famous Faraglione Islets jutting out in the horizon in the upper photo. Above: a street-side view from a balcony filled with dark fuschia pink Bougainvillas.*

## The Fountains of Villa d'Este in Tivoli, Italy: Renaissance Estate and Gardens from the 16th Century

The visit to the Amalfi Coastline took three days. On the fourth day we decided to take the train back to Rome instead of the bus. Elisa and John have been to Villa d'Este so Ben, Maria and Rodrigo and I decided to go there on our own. I still recall the bus ride from Rome. It's about an hour's drive up the hills and from the bus window one can have a sweeping view of Rome including the Dome of St. Peter's in the distant horizon.

When we reached the Villa D'Este, we were awed by the 500 fountains. There are numerous walks to meander through – one of the most impressive and my personal favorite being the Hundred Fountains walk. One could sit on the long concrete seats and enjoy the rustling waters spouting from stone monkey's mouths. Later, we visited a ceramic factory with lots of colorful plates of various sizes, bowls, pitchers etc. displays, which we all wanted to purchase but were afraid they just might break (and they were quite pricey) inside our luggages. We contented ourselves in admiring the potteries and the view around the piazza. There were so many tourists and tourist buses, we had a hard time locating our bus. We reluctantly rode it and before we knew it, we were back in Rome.

Tivoli Villa d'Este near Rome is included in the Unesco World Heritage list. The masterpiece Italian-style garden, the innovative and tasteful landscaping, the bewildering 500 fountains, water jets and water plays (*giochi d'acqua*), the troughs and pools, the cascades, the grottoes, the views, made it a world-acclaimed sight, and an early much-copied model for the development of European gardens.

The villa and its wondrous gardens (*Giardino delle meraviglie*) were built from 1570 AD by Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, who illustrated in an exceptional manner the principles of Renaissance design and aesthetics. Since WWI it belongs to the Italian state. Due to particularly unfavorable environmental conditions, the restorations continued practically without interruption during the past twenty years (among these, the recent renovation of the Water Organ Fountain and of the Owl Fountain, or "Birdsong").

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The Villa d'Este was commissioned by **Cardinal Ippolito II d'Este**, son of Alfonso I d'Este and Lucrezia Borgia, and grandson of Pope Alexander VI. He had been appointed Governor of Tivoli by Pope Julius III, with the gift of the villa.

After the disappointment of a failed bid for the papacy, he revived the magnificence of Hadrian's Villa (from which he drew many statues and marble used for construction).

The gardens were realized in the hanging cliffs of the *Valle Gaudente* (Gay Valley), with the aid of the painter-architect-archeologist **Pirro Ligorio** and **Alberto Galvani**, court architect-engineer of the Este family.

Tommaso Chiruchi, one of the most skilled hydraulic engineers of the sixteenth century, and by a Frenchman, Claude Vernard, an experienced manufacturer of hydraulic organs assisted them. Together they revived the Roman techniques of hydraulic engineering. They also brought back to life an ancient Roman tunnel diverting water from the Aniene river, to supply water to the sequence of fountains.

From 1605 **Cardinal Alessandro d'Este** began a program of interventions not only to restore and repair the vegetation and the waterworks, but also to create a new series of innovations to the between 1660 - 1670; these involved no less a figure than Gianlorenzo Bernini.

Back in Rome, it was time to say goodbye to Elisa and John, Maria and Rodrigo. Maria and Rodrigo left ahead of us and returned to Vancouver to be with their families for a Canadian Thanksgiving. Elisa and John went to visit Lisetta Marchi (her husband was Pellegrino, I remember him during their stay in Manila) and they stayed with them in Viareggio (which is a beautiful city by the sea and popular with Italians on summer holidays) for 2 or 3 days and met with Maria Angela De Vincenzi and her husband (she is based in Genoa). Maria Angela was a schoolmate of Elisa in St. Paul's, and I met her when she was in Manila for many years with her family in the early 60's. From there they returned to Rome and went back to Vancouver. So Ben and I were left alone in the hotel and it felt kind of lonely, and the weather was getting colder. We walked at night looking for great places to eat pasta and we found a few places near the hotel. But it didn't feel the same...we missed Elisa, and John, Maria and Rodrigo...so with heavy hearts we decided to pack-up and fly home to Manila.

After this trip, we decided that if ever we would go back to Italy, September is the best month. August would be too warm. October would be chilly, so we are looking forward to our next visit to Italy in September 2017. It's been 14 years since our last visit but all of the memories and experiences we've had are still so clear in our minds. Hopefully, we're looking forward to a trip to Northern Italy this time...



*The Hundred Fountains Walk with the countless stone monkey heads spouting water from their mouths*

