

# *A Trip to Italy*

## *Che Bello!*



*Spoleto*

### ***Two Years of Planning***

*Two Weeks of Fun, Food and Mayhem In  
Rome, Umbria and Tuscany*

*by John Perides*

*A Trip to Italy*

*Che Bello!*

*Two Years of Planning, Two Weeks of Fun, Food and Mayhem In Rome,  
Umbria and Tuscany*

*.....by John Perides*

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*...for the dreams of my parents...*  
*...Assunta and Steve...*

~~~~~



*Umbrian Countryside*

*Table of Contents*

*Part 1*

*Forward*

*Why This Book?*

*Prologue: Why Go Again???*

*Part 1 Getting to Rome and Umbria*

*Chapter 1....Our Arrival in Rome*

*Chapter 2....The Five Fountains Tour*

*Chapter 3....Finishing the Five Fountains Tour*

*Chapter 4....Our First Roman Dinner*

*Chapter 5....The Vatican and Baroque Rome*

*Chapter 6....Hello Spoleto and Thank You, BB*

*Chapter 7....The Ancient Treasure Chest*

*Chapter 8....Sunday Laundry and Lost in Space*

*Chapter 9....Madonna dei Bagni; L'Antico Food Samples*



*Tuscany*

## *Table of Contents*

### *Part 2*

#### *Part 2 Touring with Professional Guides in Umbria and Tuscany*

*Chapter 10....Assisi and Spello*

*Chapter 11....Emo Ricci and the Olive Oil Factory*

*Chapter 12....Our Special Dinner Fizzles*

*Chapter 13....Emo Ricci and the Salumificio*

*Chapter 14....Florence and the Surprise Dinner*

*Chapter 15....In Search of Angels and Ancient Mariners*

*Chapter 16....Todi and Orvieto*



*Annual May 15 Festival in Gubbio, Race of the Ceri*

## *Table of Contents*

### *Part 3*

#### *Part 3 The Joy and the Journey Continues*

*Chapter 17....A Weekend Off in Umbria / Perugia*

*Chapter 18....A Bountiful Day in Tuscany / Siena / San Gimignano / Radda-in-Chianti*

*Chapter 19....Fixing the Scratch in the Van / Deruta / Dinner with Annie*

*Chapter 20....Narni / Nera River Valley*

*Chapter 21....Santa Maria degli Angeli / The Final Fix*

*Chapter 22....Gubbio, The Ceri and St. Ubaldo's Face*

*Chapter 23....The Dash to Roma Airport / Did the Fix Work?*

*Epilogue...Thank You*



[Love Umbria Tours](#)

## *Table of Contents*

### *Appendix*

## *Web Links, Email Addresses, and Phone Numbers*

### *Appendix*

#### *Appendix Forward*

#### *A....Professional Tour Guides*

#### *B....Inns and Hotels*

#### *C....Restaurants*

#### *D....Interesting Places to Visit*

#### *E....Interesting Websites to Visit*

#### *F....Rules and Regulations*

#### *G....Transportation*

#### *H....Recipes*

#### *I.... Che Bello! Tour 2010 Itinerary*

*A Trip to Italy... Che Bello!*



*Fine Wines of Italy*

***Forward***

## *Why this book?*



*L'Antico Forziere, Casalina*

*I hope this book is useful as you make your plans to visit Italy. Perhaps our itinerary can be an outline for your plan. Each chapter tells what really occurred compared to our plan. Our lessons may help you remain calm as you meet unplanned adventures. I have added web links in the appendix so you can read more about the wonderful sights and sensations of Italy. The appendix also has names, addresses and phone numbers of the places we went and the people who helped us on our journey, as well as personal recommendations, tips and recipes (try them) to use as you prepare for your own trip. Enjoy.....*



**Dave, me, Liz, Judy, Donna & Diane in [Vatican Gardens](#)**

*Prologue... Why go again???*



*Italian Flag*

*We had just completed our 2005 Mediterranean Sea cruise, and we both knew we had missed something special in only touching a few coastal ports of Italy for half-day excursions. Florence, Rome, Pompeii and Sorrento all looked great, but our time to explore was really hampered by group schedules. To top it all, we didn't get to eat much of the heralded foods of those cities. A slice here, a sfogliatelle there, a cookie over there, in fact the only really special thing was our first tastes of limoncello at my cousin's kitchen table in the house where my grandfather was born. We had arrived unannounced in Torre del Greco that day and wound up spending two hours of unforgettable time even though we did not speak a word of Italian and they did not speak a word of English. Our limo driver was a lifesaver for that stop. He had to work through their quizzical looks as we explained in English how we were all related. It was especially difficult because we all had different last names. You see I was there in the House of Oculato with my cousin Louie Razzetti from Silver Spring, Maryland, and as you know my name is Perides. Our mothers were sisters and both Oculatos. We kept drawing imaginary family trees in the air as we tried to make clear our maternal connections to the name of Oculato, our grandfather and their great-uncle. Hey,*

they still gave us the limoncello even though they might have suspected that we were not really relatives. When we got back home I was determined to return to Italy some day. We did manage to throw some coins into the Trevi Fountain during our short excursion to Rome, so it was almost assured, right?

In 2007, I decided it was only fair to go to some Germanic regions of Europe out of respect for Diane's maternal heritage. We went to Prague. While this is a Czech region, they do have really good beer and a history of German occupation, so I figured that was German enough. Actually that was only the start of the trip. After a few days the tour company drove us through Carlsbad (Karlovy Vary) and down to Nuremberg where we departed on a river cruise through the Mein Canal and out onto the Danube River for a week-long adventure. Once on the Danube we quickly came to the German city of Regensburg, the home town of Pope Benedict XVI. From there we stopped in five cities in Austria before concluding the cruise in Budapest. Between the Czech Republic, Germany and Austria we did see seven very Germanic cities, so Diane was tickled.

By the next summer I had completed writing my cookbook, Home Cooking Parties for Eight, so I had time on my hands. We joined up with three other

*couples to rent a beachfront in Emerald Isle, North Carolina. While this was a long, long way from the green hills of Italy, it was during those lazy days sitting on the oceanfront porch and in the sands of that lovely place that we hatched the idea of returning to Italy. Everyone was psyched to go at the time. So when I got home I began the two years of planning that preceded the journey described in this book.*

*The internet is a wonderful tool. In just a moment you can go from your living room to the four corners of the world. When we returned from Emerald Isle I decided to retire from the daily working world and devote my time to traveling the world (cyber world that is) to see where the best place was that we could go in Italy. I wanted it to be land based and for us to see much, much more of the countryside than we had during our sea cruise. I looked around Rome; I looked around Venice; I restudied Florence. Eureka! Florence! We had only spent a half-day there during the cruise. That was enough to tell us there was much more to this city and region to be explored. It is in Tuscany, and who hasn't heard of Tuscany and its Chianti wine. Florence-Rome-Venice, this was the European Grande Tour for the last 150 years, and the idea of Tuscany really whetted my appetite.*

*I started to notice the Rick Steves travel shows about Italy, especially the Tuscan adventures. Then I saw the Rick Steves episode about the Hill Towns of Central Italy and Umbria, the Green Heart of Italy came into view. I studied maps and found Umbria truly was in the heart of it all and right next door to Tuscany. I also noted that the same kind of accommodations in Umbria cost about 25% less than those in Tuscany. It might even be possible to stay in Umbria and visit all of those other places for daytrips. I mean, Rome was 2 hours away, as was Florence, San Gimignano, and Siena. Granted Venice was about 5 hours from Umbria, but that might be exchanged for a visit to the Adriatic Sea which was half that time. I began to look at the cities and regions of Umbria and found a few familiar names, Assisi, Spoleto and Perugia.*

*I talked about the trip with everyone I came in contact with. One day I was sitting in the waiting room for my eye doctor and started chatting with Sandy at the reception desk. She and her husband had done the Grande Tour and she started to rattle off books I should read. I knew about Frances Mayes and Under the Tuscan Sun, but Sandy wanted me to read three books by Marlena di Blasi – who? The books were about Umbria and Tuscany, but Sandy wanted me to*

start with Marlena's first book on Venice just so I would have context for the second and third books. The next thing I knew Amazon.com had delivered 3 used beauties and I was off on a literary adventure with 1000 Days in Venice, 1000 Days in Tuscany and The Lady in the Palazzo. Marlena is a chef from St. Louis who fell in love with Fernando from Venice during her visits to that city to write some food articles for US magazines. She decided to pack up and move to Venice when Fernando unexpectedly followed her home to St. Louis to propose after they met in a café in Florence and struck up a romance. By the end of her 1000 Days in Venice she and Fernando had decided to opt for a country lifestyle and went off to Tuscany before finally settling on a perfect townhome apartment in a palace in Umbria's Orvieto. I did stop by their apartment when we toured that city, but alas, no one was home. I was very attracted to Marlena's writing because of her magnificent descriptions of the food customs of central Italy and her wonderful recipes.

Marlena created a yearning in me for more so I read her book about her summer in Sicily and finally noticed a book by Michael Tucker of LA Law fame. He and his wife Jill Eikenberry, also of LA Law, decided to buy and renovate a home in Umbria near

Bevagna after they fell in love with the region on a vacation. His book, Living in a Foreign Language: A Memoir of Food, Wine and Love in Italy captured my imagination to the point where I sought out the experiences he described in the book and began planning them into our trip. You'll read later about "...eat anything they serve you roasted on a stick."

Next I took a new direction and looked at two historical books. Francis, the Journey and the Dream by Fr. Murray Bodo and The Prince by Niccolo Machiavelli. St. Francis was born in Assisi and Machiavelli was a citizen of Florence. With all of this under my belt I returned to the internet and began identifying the stepping stones upon which I would build our journey. I knew we would both be retired by the 2010 time frame I had selected for this trip, so we could extend it to two weeks or more. We eventually and coincidentally wound up with the same 17 days we had spent on our Mediterranean Cruise a number of years earlier. This would give us two full weeks based in Umbria and a few days and nights in Rome, our gateway city in Italy.

I settled in on my two-year journey of research and planning for our trip. It was a glorious time. I read so many websites, tried so many recipes, watched so many YouTube videos and studied so many Google

*Images pictures of our planned destinations that if someone conked me on the head and I woke up in a stupor, I would have believed that we had already made the trip. Everything was so vivid that when we really did show up on top of all of those mountains, the views were familiar and comforting. I found the most wonderful tour guides, hotels and bed and breakfast places to build a tour around. The feedback from the six people who eventually went on the tour with us was great.*

*Things went so well and we were all so excited on the first few days of the trip, I immediately began sending blog notes about our daily experiences to friends back home as we traveled. This book is the diary of our trip based on those blogs.*

*As you go through the book be sure to refer to the links and references in the Appendix if you are interested in more information. The links are website addresses on the World Wide Web. I am pretty sure with all of these references and the insights I provide from our actual experiences you will be able to plan a pretty good customized trip of your own to this land of great food, beautiful sights and enticing history.*

*Here is the note I sent to our friends the night before we left. It is followed by the itinerary for our trip.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Our bags are packed and ready to go....*



*We'll be somewhere beyond the sea....*



*So long home sweet home.....*



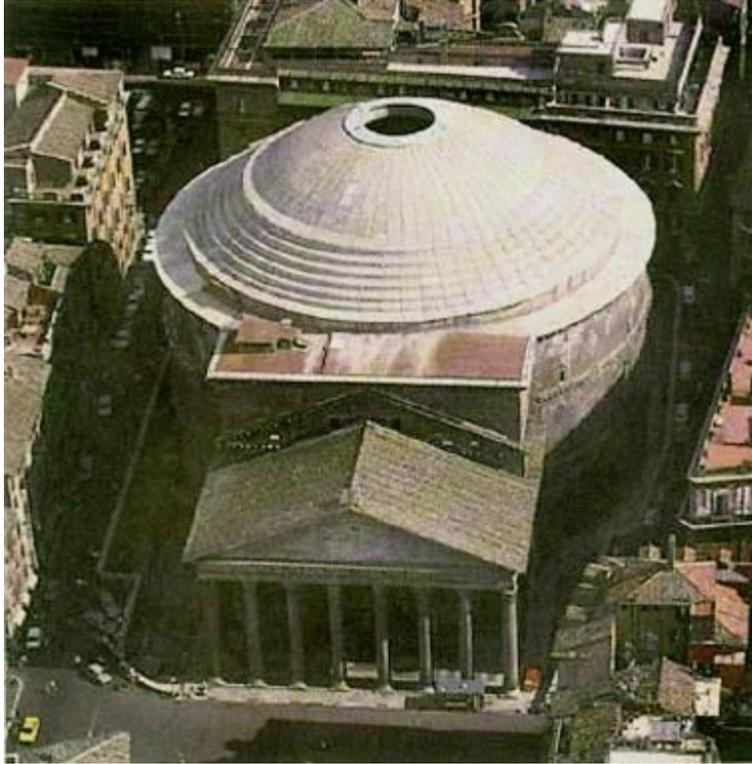
*Hello sweet Italy.....*



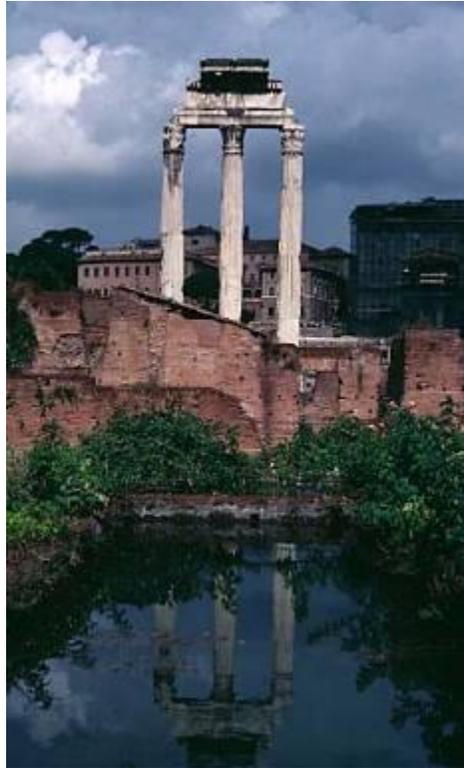
*Riomaggiore, Cinque Terre, Italy*



**Colloseum**



**Pantheon**



**Roman Forum**



## **Piazza Navona**

Our love and good wishes to all of you who eventually decide to undertake this journey. J+D

*A Trip to Italy... Che Bello!*



*Trevi Fountain Photograph ©2010 D Walters*

***Part 1***

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***Getting to Rome and Umbria***

# *Chapter 1*

## *Our Arrival in Rome....*



[Fiumicino Airport Rome](#)

## ***The Plan...** Thursday, August 19*

- 8:45 a.m. Arrive at Rome Fiumicino (FCO). Go through customs, take the shuttle to Hotel dei Consoli and leave bags with bellman.*
- 11 a.m. Wander the streets of Rome. Grab lunch or a snack (freelance). Have fun in any way you want, or you may join John and Diane for a subway ride on the Metro to Piazza Baberini for an informal, self-guided walking tour of the Five Fountains of Rome. We'll eat real Roman pizza and gelato along the way.*
- 3 p.m. Check into Hotel dei Consoli. Relax in your room if you want or wander the streets of Rome. Our hotel is right down the block from the Vatican.*
- Later We will eat dinner at a medium-priced restaurant (freelance), at no particular time, and do some more spontaneous evening touring and gelato eating. If you decide to take your RomaPass and go off on your own, we have a long list of restaurants in Rome for all price ranges.*
- 11 p.m. (Recommended) Return to hotel to rest up for next day in Rome.*

***The Reality...** The flight over to Rome from Philadelphia was uneventful. Typical airline food, but ahhhh, we had the great anticipation of eating in Italy in just a few hours. We landed a few minutes early. In keeping with Italian tradition, they had us wait until our exact arrival time before allowing the plane to pull up the last 3 feet to the gate and let us off. The Passport Check at Fiumicino is not very rigid. A quick glance into your eyes and they send you on your way to the Baggage Claim. Great news for us, not a single piece of our luggage was delayed or lost even with two of our party coming from distant cities and making their connections in Philly. I had anticipated the worst since these members of our party were first-time European adventurers. But hey, we were good.*

*Right through the exit is the arrival hall – more like an arrival hallway - but there was our driver, Alexander on the other side of the crowd displaying PERIDES on his hand-held sign. We asked where the ATM machine was and it was right behind him. No problem there, as 3 of us took out the daily max. Out the door to his waiting Mercedes van, a fast 30-minute ride and we were in our Vatican City neighborhood standing in front of the Hotel dei Consoli.*



**[Hotel dei Consoli](#)**



*Consoli is a boutique hotel only 400 meters from the Vatican. It was highly rated, reasonably priced and so convenient. The pictures of the hotel on the internet were enticing and did not do it justice. It was beautiful, but they must have shot the pictures with a fish-eye lens. The entry lobby was so tiny, I accidentally set off the printer twice by leaning on it while our group was checking-in. I tried to stand off to the side like a "father" hen as our group signed in for their pre-paid rooms. I just let my right arm rest down on the surface next to me and whamo! Off went the printer, knocking out blank registration statements. I did it twice in two minutes. Fabrizio, the daytime front desk manager was an absolute pearl of a gentleman. He was not flustered at all and took the misprints right in stride. He was decked out in very formal attire like it was the Ritz Carlton and he certainly knew how to treat guests.*

*The hotel had our rooms ready for us 5 hours in advance, so we were able to get in, clean up and get going to our first informal tour. I had one problem; I told Fabrizio that we were heading off to Piazza Barbieri to see the first of our Five-Fountain Homemade Tour. He was puzzled and kept stroking his beard, saying "Che?" and "No, no, no, no!" I thought he was just playing with me. He finally made himself understood. He told me we were going to Piazza Barberini and if we went to the Barbieri we would be going for a haircut or beard trim. That explained Fabrizio stroking his beard as he gave me*

*his no, no, nos. We went upstairs to our room and found everything was in miniature from a floor space standpoint, but everything was upscale and beautiful from a taste and function standpoint. We quickly adapted and found a place for everything. Kind of like the first hour of moving into a cruise ship room.*

*When Diane and I made it down to the lobby everyone was on the sidewalk outside (they couldn't all fit in the lobby) and ready to go off on our Five Fountains Tour.....*



## Chapter 2

### *The Five Fountains Tour....*



*Fountain of the Four Rivers in the Piazza Navona*

***The Reality...** We did not take the time at the airport to buy our Roma Passes so the first stop was the news stand outside of the Ottaviano Metro Station. That's where they sell Roma Passes. Twenty-five euros each and we were ready to take on the public transit system of Rome! Well first we had to read the hefty portfolio they hand you when you buy a Roma Pass. Ten minutes later we were ready to take on the public transit system of Rome!!*

*Having been a veteran of the New York City Transit System, I was prepared for the dankness of the underground. What I wasn't prepared for was that they had cleaned off the graffiti from the walls and subway cars quite thoroughly. From my YouTube rides through the Roma Metro I had seen massive amounts of graffiti everywhere – not on our ride from Ottaviano to Barberini (Barbieri – NOT!), and very little of it mussing up the walls of the city buildings as we walked from one site to another.*



*Gone...no more graffiti.*

*We easily negotiated the turnstiles by walking over to the attendant's booth, showing our Roma Passes and being motioned through the handicapped entrances which were open. No putting the little cards through the automated turnstile card processors. A short ride later we found ourselves right in the middle of Piazza di Barberini. There was the Fountain of the Triton.*

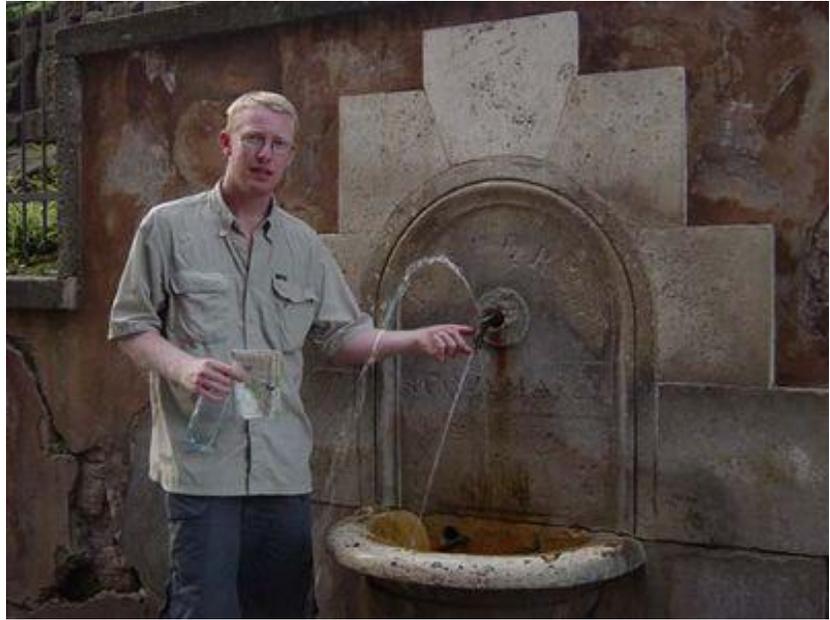
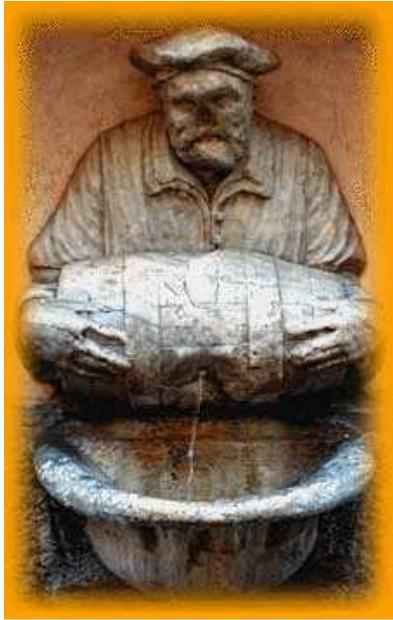


**Fountain of the Triton**



**“Nasoni” Public Drinking Fountain**

*It was only a few minutes later that we were drinking our first water from one of the many, many public fountains of old Rome. You generally don't drink out of the fancy statue laden fountains but out of spigots that come out of the wall or cast iron Nasoni (Big Noses) fountain heads coming out of the sidewalk.*



## **More Drinking Fountains**

*The water is always running fresh, clear, cool and free from these spigots. Everyone indulges. Of course you could always step next door and buy a plastic bottle of Poland Spring water from the nearby Tabacchi Shop for 2 euros. HA!*

*After a little while of snapping shots by the first few fountains we saw we were off down the block toward Trevi. We didn't have to follow my detailed walking maps. We just fell in with the flow of humanity moving out of the piazza we were in. It seems like the magnetic draw of the Trevi Fountain causes a stream of people to move from all quarters of the city toward it – at least in the summer when all we tourists are in the city.*

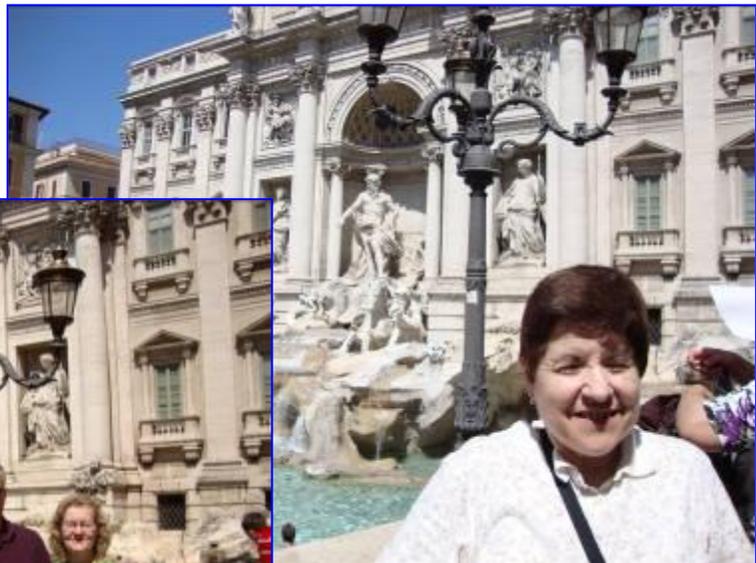


*Trevi Fountain is eternally beautiful, but we didn't throw coins in it this time. Last time we did, and sure enough there we were standing in front of that fountain five years later just like the legend says. Those few coins in the fountain the first time around cost me thousands in 'Return to Rome' costs! I am out of frequent flyer miles after this trip and we weren't thinking of paying for tickets to fly over there again just because some silly fountain wanted us to do it!*

*When you stand in front of Trevi Fountain you really need to turn around and watch the crowd. The scene is an amazing carnival of human emotion and motion. That is as amazing as the fountain itself.*



*A few more Trevi photos, a bit of extended gawking just like everyone*



*else and in about 30 minutes we were ready for*

*fountains 3 and 4. We moved off in the direction Piazza Navona.*

*One thing you have to understand before you visit this city is that it is old. Most of the pathways were laid out without City Fathers poring over plans and denying building permits. The city is buildings built over rubble that is on top of rubble that is on top of garbage that is on top of rubble – several thousand years worth. So the streets are crooked, the surfaces are uneven cobblestones and there is a bit of captivating griminess to the whole environment, but wow! What an impact it makes on your five senses, your sensibility and your sense of history. This is no American theme park with Disney-like perfect-perfect everything. It wrenches you from your complacent position of having everything, everyday within your control to a realization that you are on new turf – beautiful for some, scary for others. If you get sore feet or legs easily – go to Disney World.*

*We marched off to Piazza Navona.....*



**Aerial View of the Piazza Navona**



**Fountain of the Moor**  
(foreground)

*What a great place is Piazza Navona – a wild menagerie It is the grand gathering place for all tourists to the city. If you are one of those who says, “I like to linger with the locals,” this ain’t the place! Wall-to-wall touristas!! The only locals in Piazza Navona are the gypsies trying to sell you everything*

*under the sun and a lot of stuff made in China. We walked into the southern end and immediately came upon the Fountain of the Moor, but we were hungry. So off down an alley we went in search of my carefully selected restaurant for price and quality. I was sure everyone would love lunch in this charming side-alley hosteria. After some difficulty we found it – CLOSED! Wait a minute this is lunchtime in the peak tourist season. Closed? We didn't know if it was closed for lunch today or forever, but the dark interior told me we weren't going to get our Wheaties here. Back down the alley and back toward the Piazza Navona. We agreed to eat in the first place we passed.*



*In a few more steps there was a nice little sidewalk café, Mimi e Coco with no one beckoning us to sit down, yet it was almost full. We later found out from one of our tour guides that we had stumbled onto the right formula quite by accident. He told us to not eat in any place that there was a pushy barker out front trying to whisk you in – for surely he would not be*

concerned about your pleasure, where there were pictures of the food posted outside – for surely they would be fake, where there was mixed cuisines like Italian, Chinese and Bulgarian all in one place – for surely all of the food would taste Bulgarian, or where there was no menu outside to be seen before you sat down – for surely you would be broke as you left that place. We sat down and had our first truly wonderful Italian meal. Wine, cheese, salume (salami), bread, scrambled eggs with black truffles, pizza Margherita,



pizza with prosciutto and mozzarella. Oh yes, and several bottles of water – “Gas or No Gas? No gas, please.”

For those of you who have been in Europe before, you are very familiar with this little dance you have with the waiter each time you try to get

some water. Of course you pay for water and bread in these restaurants, but keep that in perspective. You already spent thousands in airfare to get to the restaurant – a few bucks for water and bread aren't going to break the budget!

Well satisfied our group arose with money in our pockets and off to the Piazza Navona we went carefully retracing our steps that got us to the restaurant, but not going back past the closed restaurant of my dreams. As we approached the Piazza we were surprised by these very large statues

*of Jesus and John the Baptist inside a corner building just at the edge of the Piazza. We wandered in not knowing if it was someone's private front yard or not – no grass to give you a clue in this town.....*

## Chapter 3

### *Finishing the Five Fountains Tour....*

#### ***The Reality...***

*Did I say, "Finishing the Five Fountains Tour?"*

*Well, not quite.....*

*As we neared the Piazza Navona there were these very large statues of Jesus and John the Baptist inside a corner building at the edge of the Piazza. I wound up next in line for a baptism.*



*We wandered in not knowing if it was someone's front yard or not. Unknowingly we had stepped into the Roma Museum in the Palazzo Braschi.*



**Palazzo Braschi behind the Fountain of the Moor**



**Interior staircase of the Palazzo**

*It took us 5 minutes to figure out we were in the portico of the palazzo. We admired these huge statues of Jesus and John the Baptist and a few other notables, and then wandered through the doors. We found out we had the stroke of good fortune that the Roma Passes we had purchased earlier entitled us to free entry into the Roma Museum. So past the ticket booth, velvet ropes and the guard we went. We found room after room after room of spectacular Renaissance art. Each room had ceilings that vaulted up to 20 feet over our heads.*



*The décor of the ceilings was just as mesmerizing as the art on the walls. This was an early lesson in what would stand us in good stead during our all-too-brief stay in Rome – LOOK UP! This is not to be on the lookout for pigeons but for the masterful work that Renaissance artists*

*seemed to be prone to create lying on their backs! There were so many rooms we were amazed, but what was more amazing is there were several thousand people right downstairs in the Piazza*

*Navona, and it seemed like not a soul knew this place was right over their noses. We were virtually alone in the museum, just a few guards to tell us not to lean on the fabulous tile and wood inlaid tables which we did, and yup, we got caught. We went all the way to the end and in the last room found two magnificent and very, very large paintings of past popes with their cardinals. These life-size Cardinals seemed to jump right off the canvas and surround us. Alas, we had no time for confession. We departed the Roma Museo thoroughly delighted and stepped into the zoo of humanity that is Piazza Navona.*



*End of Sample.....*