

# Italy: Pizzas, Elections and more

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## Abstract

## 1 Yes, Off to Italy

This easter holiday, i had gone with my uncle's family to Italy. Although we had stayed for a few days in Germany, Italy would be best described if if and only if i dedicate this whole mail to that wonderful place where Ceaser, Mark Antony and fellow Romans upheld the flag of the roman empire.....

We left Munich (Germany) for Venice (better known as Venezia S Lucia) at 23:40 hrs and crossed over to Austria (A much better route from Stuttgart via Switzerland was not possible due to visa restrictions), went via Innsbruck, crossed at Brenner to Italy and went via Verona, Padova, Venezia Mestre to Venezia S Lucia. Just a remainder, that the route followed by the train was, probably one of the best, as it crossed the whole of the German, Austrian and Italian alps. Peaks as high as 3700 mts were almost along the route, but then it was night and we slept...

## 2 A Merchant:In Venice

Venezia S Lucia, better known to the english speaking people as Venice, popularized by the English playwright William Shakesphere in his 'Merchant of Venice', was a popular sea port in those days. It was immensely famous as a business center that Shakespeare, sitting in Standford on Avon heard about this place and wrote one of his very famous dramas. This is not some non-detailed stuff, forget the Bassanio's and Antinio's, and the Shylock's.....

Our hotel, called Santa Marina was located well in the center of the city of Venice , but then reaching there was well, a story in itself.

Italy (this generalization, justified after the whole trip), is more like India. Go to the Information Department, after a long queue you get the answer that this is for the railways, no answers on tourisms, go to the booking center, he will not give you information on trains, you will have to do all that at the railway information office before getting on to the counter. Tourism office, just disperses maps, 'no advices please! We have just the map'.

## **2.1 Carnival, Masks and the water bus**

We purchsed a 3 day ticket ( Ofcourse, there are no buses, just water busses, and all lanes are water ways.... ) for 35000 ITL (italian lires) , took bus number 82 to reach our hotel after a bit of searching.

Venice apart from the merchant is famous for its carnival masks and glassware. A real treat to all the people who passby the narrow bylanes of Venice. Great to look at and make wonderful souviners.

The room at the hotel was not ready, we put in our packages and set off after a good coffee (Yes, Italians love their coffee, Cuppochinos, Expressos..... the list is infinite).

Mainland Venice is called Mestre, and the actual Venice is called Venezia S Lucia. It is an archepelago, just that the islands were located too close to eachother they could connect all of them into well formed bridges. It is on the Gulf of Adriatic, and the main sea there is the Adriatic sea.

The star of all these bridges is the Rialto bridge on the Grand Canal. This bridge is famous apart from the other shops due to the fact that the architect of this bridge was a young guy, whose design was choosen over the designs Michalengelo and others..... Today it is home to the numerous fake Gucci and Armani shops....

Food was never a problem in Venice. Pizza was great and for the veges like me, there was always vegetarian pizza and spagetti availiable.

## **2.2 Piazza S. Marco**

Piazza S. Marco, is a place not to be missed. There is actually the grand palace area, just beyond which the grand canal gives way to the wonderful Adriatic sea. Impressive is a church, and the clock tower. Beware, the entry to the church is free, but within the church you might end up paying 50000 ITL for visiting the various alters. Business as usual...

One can climb the clock tower at 10000ITL and the climb is worth it. You can see the skyline (wonder what it means in the Venetian Context!)

and ofcourse all the grand buildings around the city of Venice.

An infinte number of churches adore Venice, prominent among them are Chiesa dei Frari, Chiesa Della Salute....

Glasswere is famous as the masks, but beware, shop around before choosing a shop, but then this imposes another big problem. The streets are so narrow, with high buildings that make you get all pangs of clusterphobia, that you would think GPSs help. Navigation along these narrow bylanes is indeed a big issue.

We visited the Venice Mueseum at Piazza S Marco, and it is worth a visit. Students get discount and take your cards in case you have one. And dont miss the bridge of sights, just for the sake of it.....Apart from that a good knowledge of Venezian histroy helps, else you can easily get confused about the varoius douges (Kings (i guess) of Venice)....

### **3 Adriatic to Apenninen**

After about 3 days in Venice, we left for the city of Florenze (known as Firenze Santa Maria Nova (Firenze S M N)), by the EuroStar. The trains goes via Padova, Bolgona and cuts thro the Apenninen Mountains. Wine drinkers known this area as Tuscany, famous for the wines, but the drive is worth the visit. It is a lovely 2 hrs drive where in the train cuts across the numerous tunnels along the mountain.

Florenze, lovely to the core, is a city located along the river Arno, one hour from Piza (leaning tower of Piza) and two hours from Rome... The city is in the bed of the mountains and the sight is lovely. Once again the tourist office was not in the railway station but across it... Information offices can be misguiding.

We had very little time in Florenze, but still we did visit all that we could. The piazza del dumo is an impressive place and no one can miss it. Florenze was the home of Philosopher Dante (Divine Comedy), Michelangelo, Galelio and many others. Things not to be missed are the Uffizi Gallery, Ponte Vecchio bridge among other. A slight mention as we could not render enough justice to this city.

The church of Santa Croce is worth mentioning. It is the churches that houses the tombs of Michelangelo, Dante, Galilio, and others. Actually one walks over many tombs as the church is a church of tombs..... It is worth admiring the wonderful decorations associated with these tombs.. What was unique was that it was not a cemetery of the chruch, but the walls and the floors of the church that housed the dead...

Later we went to the Galleria Del Accademia where we could see the

unfinished works of Michelangelo, and the David a wonderful sculpture of David's victory over Goliath. (Amazingly most of these statues were nude... Don't know why! I am not an historian....)

### **3.1 Lean, lean all the way, just never to sway**

We left Florence and went to Pisa to see how far the leaning tower leaned. It is about 30 mts from the Station by walk and the walk is nice. Again, there is a walk along the city wall near the leaning tower area and it is not worth it. BTW: it was at this leaning tower Galileo demonstrated that the force of gravity acted equally on all bodies... It is about an hour's trip from Florence.

## **4 Caesar, I am coming**

Later on Friday, we left for Rome. We had just one day and we wanted to make the fullest use of it. We got into a 'Stop and Go' tour and visited the Vatican first. The Vatican has the St. Peter's Cathedral, which houses apart from the wonderful massive paintings, tombs of various Popes. It is from this gallery that the Pope conducts the Christmas mass. Impressive structure by all accounts...

If you want to see Michelangelo's famous paintings this is not the place. The Sistine Chapel is where you must go, and to do that one has to shell out 18000 ITL, enter the Vatican (theoretically another country) and walk through the whole of Vatican Museum to reach the Sistine Chapel. Set aside 3 hrs for this.. For me though, I would say, on a short trip it was a waste of time.... But then you learn from mistakes...

We then went to the Colosseum, the famous Roman theater, for which you actually pass the area of Roman excavation, marvellously and wonderfully preserved. After this we walked through the ruins of the Roman Empire imagining ourselves in the likes of Caesar and Mark Antony to reach the Piazza Veneta, wonderful place in honor of the first Roman Emperor, but again this place was adored with wonderfully sculptured nude figures.. (Dangling Question of Dress always remains in my mind....) (A part of this was designed by Michelangelo..)

Italy was as disorganized as India. Too many two wheelers, no lane discipline, too much of running around, and of course the Strikes... We saw two of them in the span of 15 days, and reaching the airport was a story in itself...

Incidentally Italy has yet another election on May 13th.....Probably we do

have strange connections :)

## 5 Tips

1. Plan your trip in advance, Italy is not a linear equation..
2. Information at stations can be deceptive, check the right tourism map.
3. Have a mobile phone, atleast in venice....
4. Check the menu card before you eat, hotels levy a service charge
5. Beware if you have to drive, in most cases try to avoid it.
6. Police men are extremely helpful, ask them when ever you need directional help.
7. Bargain before you buy souviners
8. Books train trips via Eurostar, they tend to run, if not on time , atleast..... Ordinary trains can be cancelled :(
9. Ask people, they are very helpful, and courteous
10. Italy is always expensive.....