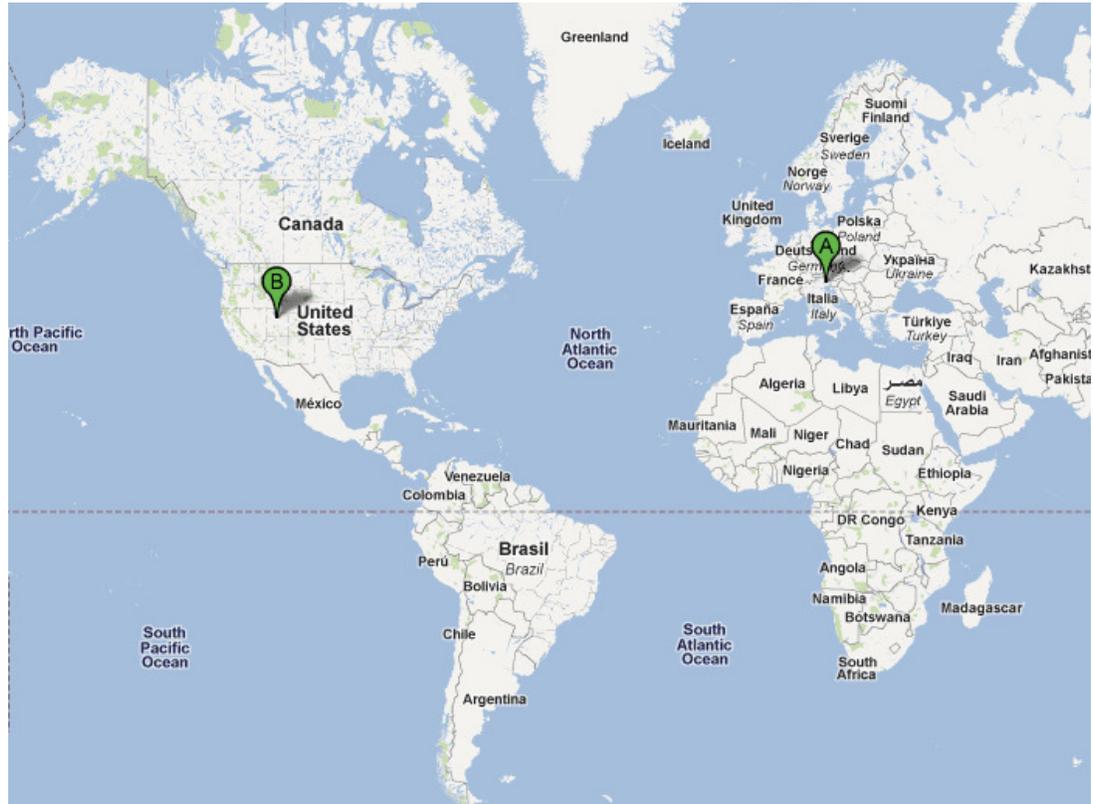


Day 13 - Wednesday, May 11

Today we travel back home.

Gary picked us up at the hotel at 7:00am. By 8:20am we were at the Marco Polo Airport in Venice. It was time to say goodbye to Gary until the end of the year.



The long lines we had to stand in, which moved painfully slow reinforced why we were here three hours early. We had learned that this is part of the Italian culture, to not get too excited about such things.

When we finally got to the baggage check-in we learned that our one big bag was 3 kilos over weight. “How much will that cost?” The answer shocked me. “250 Euros.” Yea, right! The contents of that whole bag isn’t worth 250 Euros. I quickly shifted some of the contents to our smaller bag and everything was fine again.



We passed through security and made our way to the gate. This was a crowded area... standing room only. I did the “bag sitting” while Vallerie and Amelia went off for one more look through the airport souvenir shops. She came back proudly displaying a tee-shirt, “I Love Venice”. It was true. She truly loved Venice.



It was a surprise when they started boarding our plane a full hour early. But they were in no particular hurry, and by the time we were all boarded, it was time to go. As a final gesture of Italian culture and personality, the Italian family seated directly in front of us sprawled out in such a way that they even covered Vallerie's dinner tray with a coat flung over the back of their seat. I understood the message very well. These Italian's aren't reserved in personality, like I am. Their very nature is to be direct and in your face. Their body language boldly declares, "My space is your space and your space is my space."



Venice, Italy to New York-Kennedy, NY

Carrier Flight #	Departs From	Departs Time	Arrives To	Arrives Time	Equipment Type	Flight Duration	Miles
Delta 87	Venice (VCE)	12:40pm	New York-Kennedy (JFK)	4:10pm	Boeing 767	9:30	4154
Total miles: 4154							



So after take off, and after our final glimpse of Venice, this time from the air, as we circled up into our skyway to New York, New York, I settled in for the nine and a half hour flight. I had plenty of time to sit and relive the previous two weeks. This flight over the North Atlantic was during the day and I wouldn't be sleeping away the time.

I have asked Vallerie her thoughts and compared them to mine.



What was the highlight of the trip?

Vallerie said, "Highlights??? That is a very hard one to even try... because this trip was the highlight of my life. Everything was just so wonderful."

For me it was all the fascinating people watching and increased understanding I gained of the Italian culture. Being able to actually put my foot into the history of a place and people that I had learned of and read about my whole life.

Best place to see?



Vallerie said, “I think the best place to see for me was Venice. It just had such an old world romance to it.”



For me, it was all the narrow cobblestoned streets that branched out in spider web patterns in the cities of Rome, Florence, Verona, and Florence. I didn’t get my fill of wondering through these streets.

Biggest surprise or unexpected experience?

Vallerie said, “As far as unexpected... that was just arriving in Rome. I couldn’t believe how many people, the way they drove there, and the vast amount of ruins to see. I can only imagine how it must have looked back in the day at its full glory.”

I would agree with Vallerie on her assessment. I think our arrival in Rome and all the festive activities happening in the city associated with the Pope’s beatification really intensified our cultural first impressions.



Favorite eating experience?

Vallerie said, “Of course trying all the food was wonderful to me. I would have liked to try a lot more. But my favorite was that heavenly lasagna by the Vatican. I’ll never forget it!”



I enjoyed trying the many different Italian dishes as well, but in time I tended to gravitate to the Italian pizzas. In the end I ordered a lot of pizzas.



What do you wish you had a chance to do more of?

Vallerie said, “I wish I had more time to see the museum in Pompeii. I wish I had more time to slow it down and meet



and talk to more people there... have those lazy days seeing the different places and cultures.”

As much as I enjoyed the big cities with all they had to offer, I would have liked to have wandered more into rural Italy and seen more of the slow paced side of Italy that our train rides whisked us past.



What do you wish you hadn't done or had done less of?

Vallerie said, “Hadn't done???? Nothing... I wouldn't take back anything.”

For me it always centered on poor food choices. I wish I hadn't eaten on the plane on the way over or at the railway station.

What were your most favorite cultural experiences?

Vallerie said, “I think listening to all the Italian speaking going on was awesome. I loved being in Rome to really FEEL the culture. Like walking down those streets, all the scooters.” She laughed a little here and continued, “I did enjoy all the artwork... but at times it was so overwhelming... so much of it. I loved eating gelato. Probably the best cultural thing for me was the outdoor dining... I loved it. Maybe it was perfect weather for us to do that... but it really made me FEEL so happy!”



For me, I really enjoyed people watching, eaves dropping on all their local radio stations, traveling from place to place on the trains (and people watching there), listening to the street music, and people watching on those culturally filled streets.

What were your least favorite cultural experiences?

Vallerie said, “Most uncomfortable? THE TOILETS! Not a big fan of holes in ground and squatting!!!!”

For me, it was the beach. I’m not a big fan of seeing too much of the sun bathers! (And no, I’m not posting a picture of my least favorite.)



To do it over, how would you have prepared differently before leaving?

Vallerie said, “Doing it over? Better shoes! Also, I’d not worry about the compatibility of electric hair things, so I wouldn’t cut my hair. All that stuff worked out fine. Also, I’d pack my bags a little differently... just in case they lose my luggage again.

“And prepare differently? Take more Euros!”

For me, I wished that I had all our key destinations and attractions we were to visit written down in the Italian version as well as the English version so I would recognize the places I was trying to find. And I wished that I had down loaded the Austrian GPS maps to make it easier to get around on that day. So yes, I guess for me the better prep could have centered around navigation.

Three movies (I only watched part of one of them), two meals and two naps later, our approach to New York was announced on the PA. I was actually surprised at how quickly the time passed and we were landing in New York.



Here we received our luggage, went through customs, rechecked our bags, passed through security again, and found the gate for our 5½ hour (1987 miles) flight to Salt Lake City, Utah.

By the time we took off it was evening. So it wasn’t too far into the flight that they dimmed the lights and made sleeping a very comfortable prospect. I succumbed to the temptation with the knowledge that even before I had arrived back home, I’d be dreaming of my next travel adventure.



Quote of the Day:

*While in Venice preparing to board our flight home, Vallerie said,
“I had the best time of my life here.”*