

## Sally and Olivia's Visit to Rome



**Tuesday, May 22, 2012**

Arrived at Fiumicino Airport late in the afternoon and stood in the taxi line for a cab to the Hotel Domus Paci Torre Rossa Park, 94. We ended up taking a lot of taxis during this trip and I think it made it easier and gave us more time to spend sightseeing.

After getting oodles of instructions from Dani the clerk, we found our room of twin beds and a bright bathroom. The hotel has a garden with chairs and tables to sit on.

### ***Bus***

We asked Dani if we could arrange the Night Tour of Rome. He said not for tonight, it would have to be for tomorrow. So we asked him to call them to reserve two places for tomorrow night's tour.

One of the instructions we got is that there is a bus stop 40 meters away on the other side of the street. Dani gave us a list of buses to catch with different destinations. We went first the opposite direction to the Crown Plaza hotel down the street to get some euros for Sally. Everywhere we went and asked, no one took American Express. Earlier Sally had called Dick from the apartment to ask him to transfer money into the VISA debit card so she could use it.

We then walked to the bus stop, braving incredible traffic without a cross walk. We took the first bus that came. I followed it along the map and saw that it was not going to take us into the inner city of Rome so we got off and looked for a Metro station. We were in the town or neighborhood called Cornelia. Someone pointed us in the right direction and we walked down many stories of steps and escalators. Sally found it a little "scawry." The trains were probably 3 to 4 stories below ground. I got directions to the Vatican and once on the train I asked someone else who verified we were on the right train and which was the correct stop for Vatican City.



The Metro stop took us within sight of St. Peter's Basilica. We walked around St. Peter's Square, looked at Bernini's graceful colonnade and the two gorgeous fountains and the obelisk. The sky was getting dark and ominous and the sun was setting with nice color. We set out to find a restaurant. Immediately around St. Peter's all the little shops were closed. We found a Restaurant Opera and settled in. By this time it was raining hard but we were prepared with umbrellas.

The restaurant filled up with locals, there was a tenor who wandered in periodically with an accordionist and they played Italian favorites, Volari, Sorrento, and other familiar songs. Both were excellent musicians and they really added romance to the ambiance. We ordered Pollo Romano and Saltimbucca that came with either salad or potatoes. I started with simple ravioli that Sally shared. We had a half-liter of the house vino tinto. It was a wonderful dinner for our first night in the eternal city.

When we got out, the rain had quieted to just a mist and we wandered the street looking for a taxi. No luck. We were near the river and across from us was a beautifully lit round building that was very imposing. I later learned it is the Castel San Angelo, the fortress that has been a refuge for the Pope since it was a tomb for Hadrian in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD. Then I spotted a hotel and went in to ask where to catch a taxi. He pointed us to the Piazza Navona on the next street where there was a taxi stand. We were back in our room in a jiffy.

### **May 23, 20012 Wednesday**

We were up about 7 a.m. and wandered over to the bright dining room for our included breakfast. The sun was bright and streaming in through the numerous windows of the eating area. It was vast and the spread was impressive. We had to wander around the serving bar a few times to take it all in and decide what to have. There were several sweet things, cakes, tartes, a variety of breads, sometimes croissants, always scrambled eggs and bacon and sausage. There were fruit, stewed prunes, cereal, yogurt and a couple of machines to make your own coffee by pressing the right button. Also juice and water.

This time we waited for the correct bus and were dumped out at the Via Rorgamiento in the heart of the city. We decided the best idea was to take the Open Tour bus. We found the ticket booth in a curio shop and then were told to catch the bus at the Piazza Venezia. We kept finding piazzas and wondered if we were there, but no. Finally when we found it, we were surprised at how immense it is. There is the Vittoriano, a huge white building with sculpture of horses pulling a chariot at the top. It houses a wonderful



museum but we avoided museums in order to see as much as we could in the 3 days we had. We walked around it, past the Roman Forum and near the Coliseum (the opposite side of the Piazza.) There we found the stop and waited for the bus.

It was hard to stay on the bus. Our plan was to stay on it and see the main sights and then get off and explore what hit us the most. It had an audio system in it so we had a running commentary on what we were passing. That was where Sally heard about the statue of Moses by Michelangelo in a little church that we passed on the tour, but didn't catch its name. So we had to do some research to find the correct church. At the stop past the Coliseum we decided to get off and go back to the Coliseum. It took us forever to get back to it. We didn't realize how far away the bus had taken us from it. We did stop for a drink - Fanta and Coke Light. Sally kept asking for Diet Coke, but they only had Coke Light. They charged us 4 euros each drink.

At the line into the Coliseum we were solicited for a tour and decided to join it. It was a 45-minute tour with a wonderful, vibrant guide who made it come alive. I was tickled as she described the activities on a typical day when she pointed to the entrance for the Gladiators and said, "And then, here come 36 Russell Crowes," all the time gesturing as if she had big shoulders and strong arms.



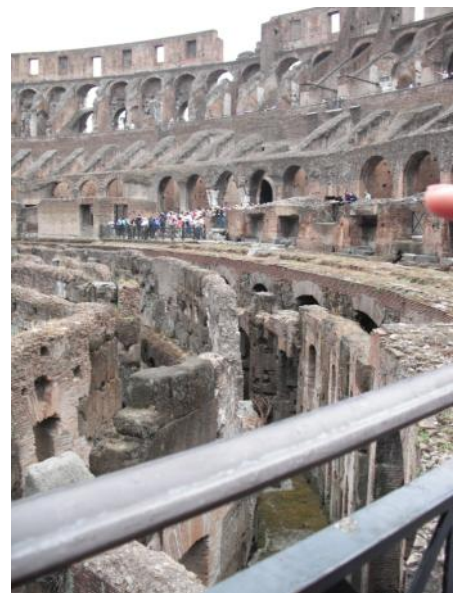
The coliseum was four stories high and held 50,000 people. Because there were 80 entrances all those





people could be seated within 10 minutes.

The tunnels underneath the arena were probably the most impressive concepts to me. There were several levels of tunnels. In them were wild animals and the gladiators. There were elevators that would





bring up whatever happened to be running in that tunnel when the elevator came up – a lion? Tiger? Nothing? The gladiator had to deal with what showed up in the arena with him.

She told us about a time when the tunnels were deliberately filled with water to hold naval exercises, but the people found it boring. So they added alligators. Then the gladiators had something to combat. The people liked that excitement better than just plain water and floating ships.

Gladiators had 3 years of training and were chosen because of their physique and ability to fight. They also could choose to go into training. It was a possible way to change status. If the crowd saved the gladiator after a good performance, he could marry above his status and become a part of the higher society. The sign of a thumb up meant to save the gladiator's life, a thumb down mean to kill the gladiator.

She described it as an all day affair starting at 9 a.m. and going on into the night. There were orgies in one of the sides of the Coliseum – all very discrete. It was an exciting day for the Romans who went in the tens of thousands.



After the tour, it was afternoon and so we took a cab back to the hotel. We had to decide what to do about dinner.

I think we laid down for a short rest and then went to the bar at the back of the reception desk. We had the bartender fix us a pannini and a glass of red wine, which we ate outside in the garden.

It was just the right amount of food. It was very early. We were being picked up at 5:45 p.m. for an 8:00 p.m. tour. We were picked up by a van and deposited somewhere at an office in central Rome. We went into the office with our reservation form, stood in line and paid. We were the only two of the entire bus full who had opted out of the dinner option. We were told that a car would be waiting to return us to our hotel at the last stop before dinner.

At 8 p.m. promptly everyone was on the bus and our hyperactive tour guide, Marguerita, started explaining in three languages. She started in English, then repeated the statements in Spanish and ended in French. She called us her family, her friends. When she counted she used Italian. She was pregnant and

very loud and lively. She said, and we believed her, that everyone at home breathed a sigh of relief when she went to work. At 8 p.m. there was still a lot of light so we drove around the city and made a stop at the Fontaine de Trevi and Margarita gave us lots of instructions about not wandering off and being ready to get back on the bus.

She told us the tradition of turning your back to the fountain and with your right hand, throwing a coin over your left shoulder into the water. Only if you perform that successfully, will you return to Rome. When we arrived, after a march of about 3 blocks through narrow streets teeming with tourists, we came on the magnificent Fontana di Trevi.



It is truly magnificent with a huge amount of water gushing out from a wall of a building that was left blank to accommodate the fountain. The water that feeds it is from an aqueduct. Apparently, when new water was brought into Rome there arose a tradition of building a new fountain to demonstrate the new water supply. That is the case with the Trevi Fountain. (next page)

The figures are Abundance on the left: Good Health on the right; Ocean in the middle, controlling the sea horses, with Tritons riding on their backs.

There were so many people huddling at the fountain that I decided not to even try to throw a coin. Instead I went into the corner Gelato place where she told us we were allowed to use the bathroom. I bought myself an ice cream and enjoyed it near the fountain where there was a show of tourists, men posing as gladiators for photos and hawkers selling all kinds of souvenirs to the tourists.

Marguerita got her entire bus full back and was very relieved that we all showed up. By this time it was getting dark. They drove us past the Coliseum, the Piazza Venezia, past many churches, past the imposing Castel San Angelo and then turned up into a hilly place. She explained it is where a lot of important and wealthy people live, so her buses are allowed to only stop for a short while to let us out and take pictures of Rome at night. It is rather high above the city and the verdant vegetation keeps it relatively dark. The view from there of the entire city of Rome was breathtaking. I took some photos but they are puny given the scope of the subject.







Then back on the bus and to the Piazza Pio II (St. Peter's Square.) We had seen it the night before but under threatening skies. This time it was more comfortable since the weather was good and we didn't have to worry about getting rained on. Marguerita found us and took us to the car waiting to take us back to our hotel. It was well past 10 p.m. when we arrived back. Dani was behind the desk and inquired if we enjoyed the outing. We were exuberant and he seemed relieved. He finally explained that it was a new service and they didn't know how good it was. We recommended it highly.

That night we had a good laugh because we mistakenly thought it our last night in Rome. But when we called the reception they told us we were checking on May 25. After we got over our laughing fit, Sally took out her diet and started to try to understand what she needed to do for her return Jet Lag prevention diet.



**Thursday May 24, 2012**

We went directly to St. Peter's Basilica. A basilica is a church that has a repository of bones. St. Peter's sits on St. Peter's tomb and I think all the rest of the popes are also buried there.

We opted to take the guided tour and went into the audio guide office where an English speaking tour was being organized. There were toilets there. So we paid and then waited about 30 minutes and then a lovely young woman named Antonia took us out and into the entry of the Basilica. It was quickly appar-



ent that she is a person who studies her history of the church and gave us immense amounts of detail to enhance our appreciation of the sheer scale and beauty of the place. She pointed out the different types of marble on the floors and the meaning of the details on the massive doors. The sculpture and art on the chapels and alcoves were all immense and very impressive. The tour lasted 45 minutes and she announced that she would be conducting another tour at 2 p.m. if we wanted to join her. It was in a different part of the Square.

We wandered out and then realized that we still had the audio guides. She hadn't told us what to do with them. We tried to go back to the tour office but that was a huge undertaking and we gave it up. We ended up leaving them on a ledge, after we offered them to other tour guides but were refused. That was unfortunate.



As we walked along the wall that connects the Vatican to the Castel, we came across a bunch of little restaurants and settled down in one. I had a glass of red wine, water, we had cannole and lasagna and Sally and I shared a mixed green salad that was huge and better for two than for one. The tomatoes were red and luscious.

We kept walking on to the Castel San Angelo but found it closed until 3. So we walked across a magnificent bridge - the Ponte Sant'Angelo. It is adorned with statues of Saints Peter and Paul and later Bernini was contracted to sculpt eight angels carrying the symbols of Christ's Passion. The statues were actually executed by his assistants. We walked a little down the other side of the river and decided to just sit in the shade. So we hiked ourselves up the wall and enjoyed the cool breeze under the shade of the trees lining the river Tiber. Then we walked back to the Castel and waited in front a few minutes until the place opened. It wasn't over run with tourists. But it is an immense place.

It is indeed a fortress. There are cannon and cannon balls stacked in corners of the Courtyard of Cannonballs. These are from the olden days but they seemed ready to defend the Pope. We walked down a flight of stairs and eventually started to walk up a ramp that circles up through the round building. It looks like a giant cake made of stone and dirt and marble. Some of the wooden ramps were actually drawbridges to keep enemies from entering the upper part of the fort.

We came across several chambers, some decorated, some not. There often were murals, not well maintained and wooden furniture. There is a chamber of the Pope's apartments. The rooms are sparse but the descriptions say to imagine the walls groaning with tapestries.

There is a Treasury room with a large metal trunk that at one time was filled with gold, precious jewels and sculpted silver spilling out over the top.

We went up the stairs to view all of Roma from the very top deck, next to the sculpted Archangel Michael. An interesting note, it is the setting for the finale of Puccini's opera *Tosca*, when the heroine jumps to her death from the parapet.

We had passed a terrace on our wandering and found our way back to it. Its wall has arches showing





views of Rome and providing breezes. There were vines growing over a trellis that made it shady and cool. It was very pleasant to sit and have a drink.

Eventually we walked down. I enquired where to catch a taxi and was directed to the Piazza Cavour. The map we had was adequate and it wasn't far.

We walked along the river past some very grand, ordinary administrative buildings. Trees lined the wall from the river and there were several stands selling all kind of curios.

Sally began to look for shot glasses for Ernie as a curio from Rome. We found the Piazza Cavour and took a few minutes looking at the variety of shops along that road. There was a bright white church Church de Vincenza that we walked to and looked it. It is not very old but was so bright we had to check it out.

We caught a cab and went back to the hotel. By this time we needed to get our boarding passes. We asked at the reception but they needed for us to download the boarding pass and send it to them in a PDF so he could simply print it off an email. We went to the room and called Dick to ask him. By



this time it was late enough so he would be awake in Phoenix. He managed to email it to the reception desk.

We asked at the desk if there was anywhere



nearby to have dinner and were directed to the Crowne Plaza. As we walked there we saw just beyond the big hotel and big ad for Ristorante da Arturo so we walked to it. It was not quite 8 p.m. but close enough that there were other diners, mostly tourists, I am sure.

We were seated in a lovely room with windows open all around the room. It was decorated in a way so that I remember it being trellised with vines growing on them, but the room actually had a ceiling. It felt as though we were outside with a perfect temperature. Behind Sally's chair was a trellis with a flower bearing vine.

We shared a pasta dish farfalle with gambas and zucchini. We both had grilled fish. Sally had sea bass and I had sole and we shared a demi of a white house wine. The fish was light enough that we had appetite for a dessert. Sally had an orange flavored dolce and I had a Tiramisu dolce with coffee.

It was wonderful. All for 69.50 euros.

Back at the hotel, Sally decided to buy the little shot glasses at the curio shop for Ernie. They have blue design and Rome on them. She had seen that at the apartment he doesn't have shot glass for drinking his Grappa that he enjoys so much.



## Friday, May 25, 2012



We slept until 8 a.m. and then went to breakfast. We had organized the night before so were able to pack and check out after breakfast. We left the baggage in their storage area and then took a cab to San Pietro in Vincoli to see the statue of Moses. It was worth the effort to find it. I was able to locate it in the book on Rome loaned to me by Barbara Stickler. This was Michaelangelo's first effort at sculpture.

We were near the Coliseum and found a little cafe to sit and drink tea and a coke. We were then not far from a taxi stand



and took one to the Piazza di Mattei to the Fontana di Tartuphs by Lading. It is a fountain of young boys standing on dolphins and throwing small turtles into the water. It was lovely and light and joyful, just like it looked in the photos I had seen of it.

So Sally and I managed to find the two special places we wanted to see in Rome on our last day there. Then we took another cab back to the hotel and requested a cab to the airport. At Fuimicino airport we had time so we found water and a fruit cup and Olivia had a salad with tuna for lunch. I called Ernie to alert him that everything was on as scheduled and to tell him what a wonderful time we had. He met us at the airport.

All in all, it was a very successful sight seeing tour of Rome in 3.5 days. We caught most of the icons of the city, saw it at night, in the rain, in the sunshine. Our hotel room was comfortable and roomy, we had a couple of wonderful meals with lots of romantic atmosphere, got to eat in a garden, and saw beautiful graceful fountains. Yes, it was a good tour of Rome.

