

Grand Italian Adventure – Sicily to Lake Como

It's a cold and rainy day in early October, sat in the departure lounge at Luton airport, finally the flight is called, and we board the plane to Catania. As we descend into Catania airport, we pass a smoking Mount Etna - the adventure has begun!



Catania was an interesting place, not the sort of place you want to drive, the Sicilians seem to have a law of their own regarding safety on the roads, scooters everywhere and very few people wearing crash helmets and not even seatbelts in cars.

Whilst staying in Catania we took a local train out to [Taormina](#) and enjoyed the lovely views of Etna from this very beautiful small town, well worth a visit, although we would definitely recommend taking a taxi from the train station to the town, the walk is very steep and tiring! Everywhere seems to be uphill!

We stayed in a quaint hotel, [Hotel Regina Margherita](#) even if breakfast was in fact taken in a cafe around the corner.

The hospitality in Catania, as with much of our Italian adventure, was outstanding, order a drink in a bar during the day and you got served free snacks to go with it!!

We had the best espresso ever at Catania railway station - I would recommend a visit simply for the coffee. Following two nights in Catania we took a local train across Sicily to visit Palermo.

We stayed in a typical, for our grand adventure, hotel, [Hotel Alessandra](#), where the reception was located on the third floor of an old building which also housed residents' apartments. The room in our Palermo hotel was very spacious, enabling us a choice of four beds within the one room!

Whilst in Palermo we visited a street market and I found plenty of interest to photograph, with the locals selling fish and Italian delicacies.

We also came across a Sicilian wedding whilst we were there, creating impressions of a Mafia wedding which made for interesting photographs.

Whilst in Palermo we visited the [cathedral \(Duomo\)](#) and took the steps to the roof to get a good view over the city.



Once our time in Palermo was completed the next part of our adventure was to travel by [GNV ferry](#) overnight to Naples. The queueing to board the boat was somewhat frustrating, unfortunately we seemed to get in the way of a herd of Italian buffalumps who decided that we were to be pushed aside in their rush to join their friends. Although the cabin on board was small the atmosphere was good, and we enjoyed a dinner on board as the ship sailed out from Palermo harbour.

After a smooth crossing we arrived in Naples early the next morning and took a pre-arranged taxi direct to our hotel, [Le 4 Stagioni Dante Suites](#), while it was too early to check in, they were happy to store our luggage to enable us to get on with exploring Naples.



Naples was probably one of our favourite places on the whole trip, we found the hospitality there outstanding, although the sight of a dog riding on the back of a scooter was something to behold.

The fish served at the local restaurant, [Al Vecchio 53](#), closest to our hotel on Dante Square was delightful and we spent a lovely evening in the company of an American lady who invited us to visit her should we ever go to USA.

Whilst in Naples we took the sightseeing bus around

some of the nearby coastline, although the views were good, there was no real options to get off the bus and so this was not the best option for photography, should we visit Naples again we would probably aim to hire a car and drive out and visit some of the beautiful scenery along the Amalfi Coast.

Whilst in Naples we also took a guided day out run by [Project Napoli Service](#) to visit Pompeii and climb Mount Vesuvius (a hard climb but well worth it), whilst currently officially inactive there was steam coming out of a couple of places in the crater.

The next stop on our grand adventure was on to Rome - somewhere that we have always wanted to visit. We travelled by train from Naples in first class and had a very comfortable journey with refreshments served. On arrival into Rome, we discovered that the queue for taxis at Rome Termini station was exceptionally long and so as our hotel, [Hotel Ferraro](#), was about a 10-minute walk away we opted to walk. This was one of the strangest hotel check-ins we have experienced. Our hotel reception was in one building on the third floor and our room was in a completely different building about 200 yards away, with breakfast being taken at a third location, all very Italian it seems and all very quaint once you get used to it.



Rome was one of the most awe-inspiring destinations we have visited - to walk in the footsteps of the ancient romans throughout the Roman Forum was fascinating. We also paid a visit to the Colosseum (a must



for any visitor to Rome for the first time) and visited St Peters Square in Vatican City. Whilst there is a bit of a walk the entire city centre sights can be reached on foot and most are at most about half an hour apart.

The only downside in Rome were the queues, even though we were visiting in mid-October there were queues everywhere for all the tourist sights. We booked in advance for the Forum and Colosseum, through [City Wonders](#) with an option to jump the queue (certainly worthwhile). On a future visit we would also book advance tickets for the Vatican, the queue here was too long for us to wait, especially as we only had two nights in Rome in which to fit everything in!!

The food and service in Rome though was probably the most disappointing on our trip, prices were higher and there were no free snacks given when purchasing drinks at a bar.

From Rome we set off on the final leg of our journey to visit Varenna on the shores of Lake Como. This involved a first class train journey as far as Milan (different carrier to the Naples to Rome run which was not as comfortable and served the worst coffee ever!) From Milan we continued on a regional train to Varenna.

Varenna is a beautifully scenic small town on the shores of Lake Como, a lovely relaxing place to end our grand adventure. Our hotel was [Hotel Montecodeno](#), a very nice hotel situated in the centre of Varenna, just a short walk from the lake.

Whilst here we opted to travel around by boat and visited a couple of other towns along the shore of Lake Como, including Bellagio and Mennagio. A day ticket on the [ferries](#) is certainly worth purchasing and means that you can hop on and off as you wish.

There were many lovely options for restaurants in Varenna and we enjoyed some delightful meals there.

The views on Lake Como were

stunning and compared with the majority of the rest of the adventure which was in cities with cityscapes made for a refreshing change.

Our final leg of our journey was a return from Varenna to [Milan Malpensa airport](#) for the late afternoon flight back to [London Luton Airport](#).

Our adventure was over - time to start planning the next one..... maybe Venice that we missed out on this Grand Adventure!!

