



Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



A taste of Tuscany!

by Amaru & Suzanne, Aug 27th 2007

After a few days in Venice it was now time to move on to our next stop in Italy, Florence.

We caught the train from Venice and three hours later we arrived in Florence, the train was fast, comfortable and had power outlets where we could keep our computer connected while we were on the train... perfect to write blogs =)

On arrival in Florence we walked the 5 min it took us to our hostel. We were staying at a place called "Locanda Starlight". And it was more a mix between pensione and hostel. It was a long corridor in an apartment that contained five rooms. Our room was huge compared to the tiny one we had in Venice and the best perk with this place was that it provided free internet.

The other good thing about it was the fact that it was located no more than 5 min from one of Florence main sights, the Duomo.



Great trains here in Italy
Perfect to sit and write blogs in



A normal street in Florence
Very beautiful!

Not long after checking in we decided to go for a bit of a walk, and walked through all the hawkers selling cheap and tacky souvenirs on our way to the Duomo.

The Duomo is quite an impressive building, I had read about it, I had seen photos and videos about it... and it still fascinates you when you're actually standing in front of it. So many small details to look for in such a big building, and all of it built out of marble.

After gazing at the Duomo and its Cathedral for a while we continued along some of Florence's narrow streets down towards the river, along the way picking up some more gelato (how anyone can eat a normal ice-cream in this country is beyond us).

We eventually made it down to Palazzo Vecchio and the famous statue in front of it, David, by Michelangelo. But it's only a replica, the real one is inside a museum (more about that later). So here we are standing in front of it and we know that it's not the authentic one, and it doesn't matter.....it's still an impressive work of art.

After gawking at the statue and getting photos from all angles we moved on and walked past the Uffizi Gallery. This is one of the most well known art galleries in Italy. Normally you'll have to queue outside for about 4 hours to get inside. We were not going to queue for that long so we tried booking tickets online, that way you can bypass the queue. Tickets are normally 10€ each, when we tried to book online they wanted to charge us 22€ each (about 12€ in booking fee)!!



Suz enjoying a gelato
in front of the Palazzo Vecchio



Photo taken by Suz
... need I say more?

No thanks, we're not that keen to see an art gallery.... no matter where it might be situated.

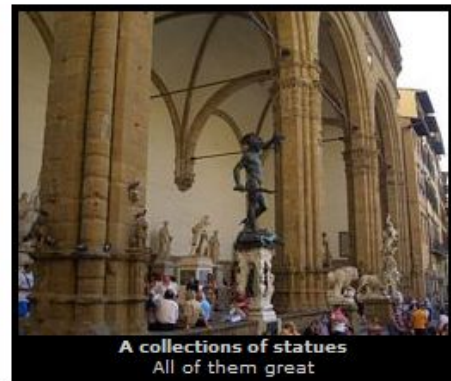
So we just kept doing what we do best, just strolling around the city discovering its sights. Coming up now was Ponte Vecchio, the most famous of all bridges in Florence. It's not only a bridge though, along its sides it contains many shops, and almost all of them selling some sort of jewellery.

At least it provided us with some great views of the river. After all this sightseeing Suz and I went back to the hostel, got ourselves some cool drinks (beer and diet coke) and just relaxed for a few hours. When dusk was approaching we decided to take a bus that took us to the top of Piazzale Michelangelo for some great views over the city.

Here we just sat and watched Florence during sunset, and we also had some free entertainment by a local artist who was playing the guitar and singing a few cover songs by Sting, Elton John, Paul Simon and many more. He was quite good and eventually quite a group had gathered around him. It was a great way in which to sit and watch the sunset.

So, after covering some of the main sights Florence has to offer, deciding that we were not going to do the Uffizi Gallery we thought that we had to see if we could see the authentic David. The original statue is located inside Galleria dell' Accademia.

The first time we walked past, it had quite a line, not anywhere as big as the Uffizi but still too long for us, so we just strolled the streets of Florence without aim for a few hours.



A collections of statues
All of them great



That's the Palazzo Vecchio
and the Uffizi Gallery

Eventually we went back to Galleria dell' Accademia and at this time there was no line and we managed to get inside straight away.

And we could now gaze upon the original statue of David by Michelangelo. And it's quite a sight, just looking up at it and remembering that the artist was only 29 years old when he did this, our age... what a work of art it is!!

It's mesmerising standing there looking up at the statue, even though the statue is not to scale (he is a quite a bit bigger) it's still so very life like that you can almost visualize him springing to life. Every little detail on him is made to perfection, and it's all also very proportionally to every other body part (the first thing he would do if he came to life would probably be to cover himself up).

Now, you are not allowed to take any photos inside the gallery, not even if you take them without flash. But where is the fun in that, if I have paid big money to see something I DO want a memory of it, and that does not include a souvenir postcard or such.

So I had to play some "hide and seek" with the ladies standing there shouting "no photos" to every person that tries to snap a shot of David. Luckily they were quite busy talking to each other so I could sneak past them and stand on another side of a big pillar and snap away. I also managed to get a few photos when I was hiding behind a big tour group.

Since Suz wasn't watching my back I eventually got caught by a lady coming from behind who said "no photo", "no photo".



Ponte Vecchio
Another famous landmark in Florence



Suz and I
with Ponte Vecchio in the background

Well, what can you do, I just said "Scusi" and moved away from there..... I had already managed to snap away around 20 photos of David by then so Mission Accomplished =)

Besides Florence we also managed to do a day-trip away to Siena, a small little town around 90min by train from Florence, as Suz had not been there the last time she was in Florence. This town is known for a horse race by the name of "Il Palio".

The race takes place twice a year and the race is around the Piazza del Campo, which is not a very big square. It's supposed to be quite a brutal race and you don't have to stay on your horse to win the competition. If you fall but your horse still comes first you have won. Fair to the horse I guess.

10 riders compete and all of them ride bareback, and the only rule.... don't touch the other horses reins, it must be quite an event to watch, specially once we stood in the square and realized how tiny it is. 10 horses competing here in less space than half a football field.

Anyway, the town is absolutely gorgeous with small narrow lanes everywhere containing small deli's, gelato stores, cafés and restaurants. We even found some places selling "Sexy Pasta". It's fun to watch the reaction of some of the elder tourists that don't see at once what the pasta resembles =)

After a few hours of just walking around Suz and I headed back to Florence and eventually got ourselves ready for the next part of our trip, we are now going to Riomaggiore in the Cinque Terre....can't wait!!



Suz checking out some
"bling-bling" on the bridge



Looking out from
Ponte Vecchio



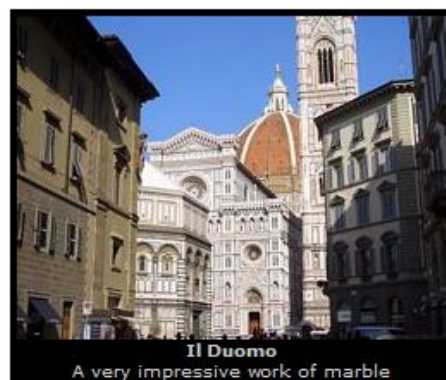
Suz and I
on the bridge



The view in
the other direction



Plenty of markets and many
of them selling things in leather



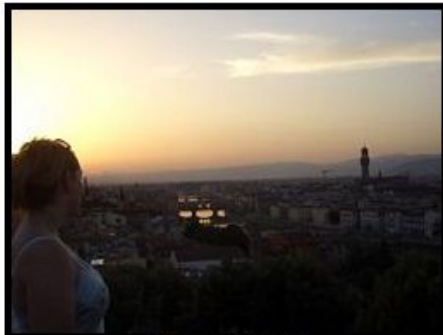
Il Duomo
A very impressive work of marble



Suz is loving
all the water fountains



Listening to some music
on top of Piazzale Michelangelo



Quite a sunset!
Suz is really enjoying it



The landmarks
of Florence



Suz and I
at Piazzale Michelangelo



Standing on
Piazza del Doumo



Michelangelo's David
One of the replicas



Not sure what there two
guys are doing...



Ponte Vecchio
at sunset



Looking out over
the river in Florence



Palazzo Vecchio
Too bad about the crane in the background



Another shot of the replica that
stands in front of Palazzo Vecchio



Part of the
Ponte Vecchio



On our way
over the bridge



We quite like the
legs of the lamp posts



Different angle
... same bridge



Part of the Duomo
... the Baptistery



Now this is the authentic
statue of David



We found him inside
Galleria dell' Accademia



More statues
or at least prototypes



Some melon and Prociutto
Mmmmm....what a combination!



We made it to Siena
a small town about 90min away



It is said that the city
was founded by the son of Remus



On Piazza del Campo
Where "Il Palio" takes place



**It's such a hot day
and that fountain looks very inviting**



**The symbol of the wolf
feeding the twins is everywhere**



**Inside the
Palazzo Comunale**



**Found an Owl
...Hooters?**



**Palazzo Comunale is located
on the Piazza del Campo**



**Great views
can be found everywhere**



**We love these small
Deli shops**



**Refilling our water
Fresh and cold water**



Piazza del Duomo
The one we found in Siena



Sexy Pasta!
You can find an array of things here



More and more gelato
We're averaging at least one a day



On the train
back to Florence

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