



Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



The Vatican, a day filled with queues!

by Amaru & Suzanne, Sept 3rd 2007

Realizing that the Vatican is actually a sovereign state (it might be the world's smallest one but it's still one) we figured that it deserved its own blog, so here we go!

As we mentioned in our last blog, during one of our walks of Rome we ended up at the Vatican City. Originally the plan was to just stroll the area and its impressive square, the Piazza San Pietro!

But after arriving and walking around on the square (which is magnificent by the way) we also noted that the queue to enter St Peter's Basilica was very short and jumped on it. We were not entirely sure if we would be allowed to enter since the top that Suz was wearing might be a bit too revealing (her shoulders were showing...)

So first we lined up for about 5min to reach the metal detectors, no problems here, we passed and further ahead, just before the church itself we noted a "decency check" by a few men in suits. As we reached them they gave Suz a quick look and then just waved their hand as if to say "no-way" and showed us where to leave....



We have arrived at The Vatican
Standing on Piazza San Pietro



St Peter's Basilica
THE Catholic church

These people are very prude I must say, sure I can understand that they might not want someone with miniskirt or similar revealing attire, but a bit of shoulder showing, come on! Get off your high horses....

Well, no harm done, we hadn't really planned for it anyway and it would just have been a bonus. So with nothing else to do that afternoon we just decided to come back early the next morning.

The next morning we made it to the Vatican Museums to start with. We reached the place around 9.30 which isn't early but it's not late either. On arrival we saw that the queue was massive, it went on for ages and ages. We walked all around the city walls of the Vatican to get to the very end of the line.

As we reached it we realized we weren't that keen in entering after all and decided to get up really early the next morning to try again.

We were now going to try and enter St Peter's Basilica (take two), the queue this day though was immense, but it actually was moving quite quick so after around 20min we passed the metal detectors again and strolled up to the men in suits performing the decency checks.

This time we were allowed to enter and it was really worth it! The Basilica is first of all a massive and very impressive building (these Catholics really want to impress whoever visit it), but it also contains some impressive work of arts (Jeeezz, never saw that one coming) by among others Bernini and of course, Michelangelo who is responsible for its dome.



A long queue
to the Basilica



It's said that the dome is his masterpiece, and there are no disagreements from our side, at a height of 119m it's an impressive sight..... and we couldn't wait to climb it.

Before we did that though we did a quick tour of the Vatican Grottoes which are located under the Basilica and contains the tombs of several popes, among others the previous one, John Paul II. We saw his tomb but unfortunately they had a serious looking man standing guard in front of it preventing people from taking photos.... I tried to find an angle from which I could get a photo but since the area was dark I knew that I could not do a good sneaky photo anyway so I didn't bother. So, instead I snapped away a few photos of some other popes....

Ok, it was now time to climb the dome, we made our way to the entrance and it's not hard to find where to go.... just follow the long queues (another one!?!?).

After a good 40-50min we finally reached the ticket counter where we purchased our elevator tickets, but it only gets you so far and then you still have to climb 320 steps to get to the top. On our way up the steps we passed along the balcony of the dome facing the inside of the Basilica, and if we had a problem realizing how high the ceiling is we could now see how tiny the people on the floor were.... it really is high up!

After 320 steps we finally made it, and it is really worth the effort!



These views over the Vatican City and Rome must be hard to find anywhere else, and we could now how Piazza San Pietro is said to resemble a giant keyhole. We spent a bit of time just looking over the city, the square and also the Vatican museums. After a bit of reasoning we managed to pick out which one was the Sistine Chapel.

We were now ready to head back to our room but on our way to the Metro stop we noticed that there were no lines at all to get into the Vatican Museums, so instead of having to get up really early the next morning we walked up, saw that we had at least another 3 hours before they closed and decided to do it!

The museum is massive and would take forever to explore it all in details....

We knew what we wanted to see though, and it was the Sistine Chapel, but before we started off that way we had a quick look first in the other direction (you can't backtrack once you get to the Sistine Chapel).

Here we found the standard gold plated religious art (boring....) which really isn't that interesting so we just decided to start walking towards the Sistine Chapel. And it's quite a walk to get there.

Along the way we passed several interesting rooms, one of them is called the Pius VII's Braccio Nuovo and it contains hundreds of marble statues and busts, most of which where the male states have had their privates removed or replaced with fig leaves (again, prudes....what do they really have against nakedness).





The church is very ornate
Inside and out

We passed room after room with everything from marble statues to Egyptian mummies to rooms that were so ornate that we just didn't know where to look, our eyes kept going all over the place, it's difficult to focus on one single thing.

Room after room we kept seeing signs directing us to the Sistine Chapel, but we didn't seem to be getting there. We just kept passing other pieces of arts, many and many paintings as well, some of them good, some absolutely fabulous and some.... well, boring and ugly.

Finally, we reached the Sistine Chapel! This is where the cardinals are locked in for the conclave, to elect a new pope, but everyone knows it for the paintings by Michelangelo (yes, we do like his work).

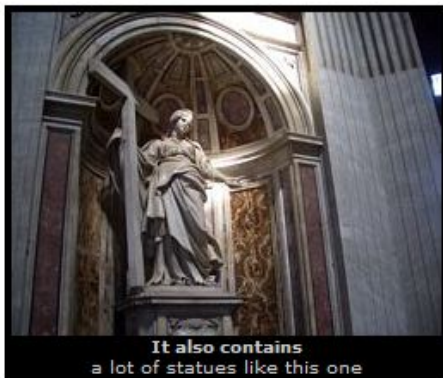
For some reason I thought that this room would contain just one large painting on the roof. Was I ever wrong.... There are paintings after paintings covering every piece of the walls and ceiling.

This is another room where they have stern looking guards all over the place who walk around and prevent people from taking photos. They are also hushing everyone to be quiet while inside the chapel.

I didn't come this far and not take a photo though, so while Suz was whispering "no, don't take a photo" and later on discreetly walking away from me, I managed to find a good position and got some decent shots of the place so that we all can see what it really looks like.... pretty impressive isn't it?



Bernini's Baldachin is made
from bronze taken from the Pantheon



It also contains
a lot of statues like this one

I honestly can't understand why I wouldn't be allowed to take photos, I'm not using flash, I don't set up a huge tripod and I don't use my photos commercially. But then as you continue walking you do see why, first of all they have gift shops all over the place and secondly they all show photos from inside the Sistine Chapel.

And they sell them at some outrageous prices.... Doesn't the Vatican already have an immense sum of money? And what do they need all that money for....avoiding lawsuits maybe?

After viewing the Sistine Chapel we just strolled along trying to find an exit and walked through areas with modern religious art. I'm not an art connoiseur, but seriously, I can paint better paintings than some of those we found.

We eventually found the exit and made our way home...

Now, do they have to charge that much for everything? Sure, the church itself is free but for everything else you have to pay quite a lot. And like I mentioned earlier, all the souverier and gift shops everywhere (and I'm talking about the ones inside the Vatican Museum not the ones on the outside) are tacky and just.... well, wrong. Didn't Jesus throw out the sellers from the temple because it was a holy place....hmmmm!

The Vatican is an interesting place to visit though, its architecture and art is amazing, the Swiss soldiers look hilarious in their costumes and it's always fun to be able to say that we have visited the smallest country in the world =)



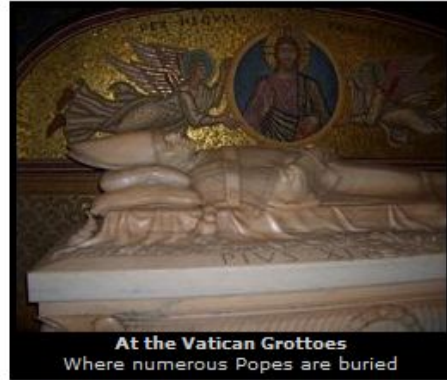
Looking down onto
St Peter's Grave



Part of the roof
inside the Basilica



**Well, it has a few
different roofs**



At the Vatican Grottoes
Where numerous Popes are buried



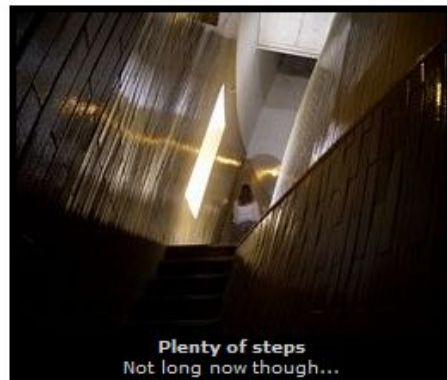
The Swiss Guard
and their colourful suits



Suz at the start
of the 320 steps to the Dome



Halfway to the top
Watching down into the Basilica



Plenty of steps
Not long now though...



We've reached the top
of St Peter's Dome



Some great views over
the Piazza and Rome from here



Piazza San Pietro
as seen from the Dome



Suz and I
at the Vatican



Those are the Vatican Museums
We'll head over there next



The Dome
on top of the Basilica



The viewing balcony of the Dome
doesn't have a lot of space



The statues
on top of the church



Musei Vaticani
Time to visit the museums



Another statue
by Michelangelo



Adam and Eve
in the Garden of Eden



These statues have had their
privates replaced with fig leaves



In the Braccio Nuovo
Filled with famous statues



A globe in a globe?
Not sure what it means



The Laocöon
A Trojan priest of Apollo



One of the ceilings
inside the museums



We found a mummy as well
Not sure if she appreciates lying there



Room of Maps contains among
other things old maps of Italy



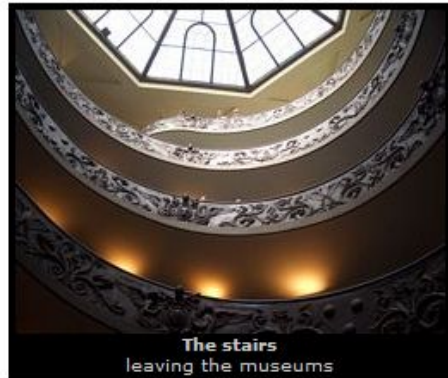
The Sistine Chapel
Where the new Pope is elected



It also contains these
famous paintings by Michelangelo



And for something entirely different
a very ornate room



The stairs
leaving the museums

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