

# 10 Days in Italy FLORENCE

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Ledger Publisher Cody Sossamon recently returned from a 10-day trip through Italy – from Venice to Rome – along with 13 family members and friends. This is the fourth in a series.*

On Day 7, Tuesday, July 6, our plan was to take a train to Florence, “home of the Renaissance and birthplace of our modern world,” according to travel guru Rick Steves.

Things, however, do not always go as planned. Despite being advised by locals to take the train (heavy traffic and tough parking) we decided to drive. We reasoned by the time we got to the train station, bought tickets and waited for the train we could be halfway to Florence.

Wife Sherry, daughter Abbie and bonus son Paul did not make the trip, opting instead to relax and enjoy the villa for the day. Sherry said she did laundry for 12 hours. The washing machines are VERY slow in Italy and dryers – if you can find one – are almost useless.

Our decision turned out OK and we arrived in time for some in our party to get to the museum for which they had a reserved entrance time. (If you ever go, reservations for main attractions are highly advised unless you like standing in line for hours.)

After about a 90-minute drive, we parked at the Piazzale Michaelangelo, a park which overlooks Florence and has incredible views of the city below. We took a city bus to the train station, which is near the city center. A tour group of high schoolers from Connecticut made the bus very crowded for the 30 minute ride, but we survived. We discovered we were supposed to have purchased tickets before boarding, but no one ever checked, so we escaped the 100 euro fine!

Florence is perhaps best known for its extensive art treasures, most of which are in the Uffizi and Accademia (Michaelangelo's David) museum. Since we only had a few hours, we skipped the museums, and opted for a walking tour of the city.

After pizzas at a hole-in-wall joint (best pepperoni pizza I ever had), we started at the Duomo (church) which is topped by Brunelleschi's magnificent dome, an architectural wonder. The Duomo was built over a span of 135 years (1300 to 1435) and had the third-longest nave in Christendom. The facade of pink, green and white Tuscan marble was added in the 1870s. Adjacent to the Duomo are Giotto's Tower (bell tower) and the Baptistry, with its bronze doors Michaelangelo said were fit to be the gates of paradise.

Most of the Duomo's art is stored in a museum directly behind the Duomo. We did visit it as there are never any lines and it is well worth the few euros it cost for a ticket.

From there we walked a few blocks to the Piazza Della Signoria, which is ringed with cafes and statues, one of which is copy of David, in the famous statue's original location.

Leaving the piazza through the Uffizi courtyard, which is lined with statues of famous Italians, we arrived at the Arno River and a spectacular view of the Ponte Vecchio, Florence's most famous bridge. It is lined with shops selling, gold, silver and diamond jewelry.

Before crossing the bridge, we stopped for gelato (ice cream – wonderful ice cream!) Gelato shops are everywhere in Italy and we found at least two a day. Our first-time travelers learned how to order quickly. Point at the flavor you want and say “due,” or two, for the number of scoops. No one wants just one!

After making a few purchases (not at the jewelry shops) we walked back to our cars. The first part was a very pleasant stroll along the Arno River. Then we had to turn and head up a steep, very steep, hill to reach the Piazzale Michealangelo. We made it, but I was dragging.

After a few more pictures, we headed back to our villa and picked up some sandwiches (panini) for dinner at a little mom and pop shop near home.

After dinner, we all enjoyed another cool evening on the porch and sitting by the pool admiring the views and rehashing the day's events.

NEXT: Sienna



A view of Florence and its Duomo from Piazzale Michaelangelo



Giotto s Tower



Walls around old Florence



Katie, Cody and Lou in front of the Duomo



Baptistry with its bronze doors



Ponte Vecchio bridge over the Arno River