



Sorrento, 2014

SORRENTO 2014 BLOG

Nearly one year ago, in September of 2013, a group of 20 adult students traveled to Sorrento, Italy. As expressed in the Sorrento Blog 2013, the group's two week stay was full of study, adventure and excitement. The trip was such a success, that we decided to return...Next Saturday, September 27, 14 of us will walk the wonderful streets of Sorrento, Italy once again.

This year, we will travel with 11 from the Metro area, one student from Toronto, Canada, one from south western Florida, and finally, a participant from the East Coast. As in 2013, the Minnesota contingent met on several occasions. We have viewed Italian films together, made gnocchi in anticipation of upcoming culinary adventures, and we dined at Punch Pizza, as was the tradition prior to departure last year.

We've got a great group assembled, and I hope to ask each of them to contribute their thoughts and photos along the way. We are fortunate to participate in such an extraordinary experience, and we look forward to sharing all of it with you. Stay tuned!

Siamo Qui a Sorrento!

The Sorrento group of 14 departed from Minneapolis, Florida, New Jersey and Canada, and amazingly, all of us met in the Naples, Italy, airport by 1:30, on Saturday, September 27th.

We were met by our shuttle driver, "Natale". Yes...you read that correctly. His name was "Natale", as in Christmas! It was a delightful ride, from colorful Napoli to Sorrento, about an hour's drive. Along the way, Natale serenaded our group, singing along with Andrea Bocelli, among others. He was delighted when applause followed his performance.

We checked into the wonderful Hotel Plaza, just as we did last year. The hotel is comfortable, and the staff most attentive. They warmly welcomed everyone, especially those of us who have returned for a second visit. We settled in and met as a group. With our plan organized, we ventured off to dinner at "Abate", a fabulous restaurant not far from the hotel. This was a special evening, as a surprise was in store. Fellow traveler, and ICC Honorary Board member, Elena Wilsey, was about to celebrate a very important milestone birthday. Elena was a bit puzzled by our Italian waiter's birthday greetings...but things became crystal clear when the birthday cake, complete with candles, arrived at the table. All of us sang to her, in Italian as well as English. Buon Compleanno, Elena!

Our first excursion was on Sunday, September 28th, as we traveled to the Amalfi Coast. Stay tuned for details, as the blog continues. Buona notte!

A Birthday and La Costiera Amalfitana.....Elena Wilsey, Minnesota

Our first evening in Sorrento was unforgettable for me. We gathered at a beautiful restaurant where Peggy presented me with a delicious lemon cake with one pink candle. Happy Birthday, Elena!

The following day, our first group excursion was to see La Costiera Amalfitana, probably Italy's most beautiful stretch of coastline. It runs along the southern edge of the Sorrento peninsula, a cliff edged promontory, with idyllic villages tumbling into the sea.

We had Luciano, our guide, who said he can't sing but knows many stories about the little towns we passed and personalities who live there. We also met Antonio, our able driver, who guided the bus on the precipitous corniche roads with magnificent views over turquoise waters and towering cliffs.

Our first stop was Amalfi, and Luciano told us that in the 11th century it was one of four powerful maritime republics who, together with Venice, Pisa, and Genoa, controlled all the sea trade in the Mediterranean and was governed by the Tavolo Amalfitana, the world's oldest maritime code. Today, Amalfi is a beautiful town with a stunning sea front and a very popular resort. The pride of the town is the Duomo Sant Andrea (9th century), which has an intricately patterned facade and glorious 11th century Byzantine bronze doors.

Our next stop was at Ravello, one of the most beautiful small towns imaginable. Perched on a steep terraced slope, it has a lofty position that provides stunning views over the coast. In the center is Villa Rufolo, which is a 13th century family private residence. Through the ages, it has been visited by popes and kings. Today, it is the place for the outside stage of the Ravello Music Festival which juts over the sea, surrounded by idyllic gardens. There Richard Wagner composed his opera Parsifal in 1880.

The Amalfi Coast, Day 1----Teresa Benjamin, Naples , Florida



The first full day of our trip was a ride with Antonio to Amalfi where we saw fabulous panoramic views of the Amalfi coast. This was my first glimpse of the abundance of natural flowers and fruits growing here. I saw huge lemons, oranges, and pomegranates as we drove. Our lunch stop was at a hillside restaurant where we were served either fish or pasta. Wine was included but with all of the curvy narrow roads ahead I thought I had best wait til later for my vino. Antonio entertained us with stories of famous people he has met here. He especially loves Sophia Loren, as do all Italians, it seems. He made us laugh with the story of how Carlo Ponti had to purchase his villa for the third time in order to gift it to Sophia when they married. At the last hillside town, Ravello, we spent time roaming the cobblestone streets enjoying the vistas and the shops. I bought a beautiful large plate to be delivered when I return. It is a very abstract version of Italian ceramic work with beautiful blues and orange colors spattered about on it. After all of this excitement we drove back to the hotel where I crashed to be ready for school the next morning.

Vesuvius Debra English, Minnesota

After morning class, several in our group journeyed to Mt. Vesuvius. We boarded the Circumsviviana, which is a local commuter train that runs regularly between Sorrento and Naples with numerous stops in between. Since the route begins in Sorrento, the train wasn't crowded and all in the group were seated.

We disembarked at Pompeii Villa die Misteri station and boarded a bus to start our ascent to Vesuvius. Unfortunately, the bus was small and some in our group had to stand. The bus wound through the village, dodging motorcycles, bicyclists, and pedestrians walking along the narrow streets.



Our last motorized conveyances were very large, all-terrain vehicles. There were seats for everyone, as it would have been impossible to remain standing during this part of the trip. Riding along, it felt like being on a roller coaster that was bouncing over speed bumps and rocks. After numerous hairpin turns, the vehicle stopped at a fairly flat area, and we disembarked and continued the journey. The view was spectacular over the Bay of Naples. The area around Vesuvius is heavily populated. One can only imagine what sort of chaos would ensue should an eruption take place.

The crater is immense with jagged walls and steam rising from some of the vents. It is an amazing geological formation, as well as a huge part of shaping the history of the area.

3 Ottobre, il giorno 6 Della nostra eccellente avventura.....David Griffin, Minnesota



Come tutti i giorni, oggi ci svegliamo presto e mangiamo una buona colazione al ristorante nel albergo. Poi noi andiamo alla universita per imparare la bella lingua! A dopo, molti di noi vanno al "Trattoria da Emilia" per il pranzo. Questa foto mostra il tavolo con gli studenti. Da Emilia e' aperto dal 1947. E' famoso per suo luogo sul mare, suoi frutti di mare e il fatto che lo preferisce Sophia Loren.

Stasera, tutti gli studenti hanno voglia di andare a una festa e' vicino. Andiamo a la fermata per salire in autobus ma, purtroppo, l'autobus non viene mai. A dopo di trenta minuti, partiamo per fare altre cose. Ma, e' una bella notte! E domani e' un' altro giorno!

Ischia.....Margie Hogan, Minnesota



Sabato era il mio giorno to blog about our Sorrento adventure.

Abbiamo fatto la colazione as usual, then most of nostro gruppo boarded una barca and set sail for la isola Ischia. We

viewed the

Sorrento coastline, passed the bella isola di Capri, sailed by the

imposing Mount Vesuvio, then disembarked in the port of Ischia.

Ischia actually ha tre porti; this one was formed by volcanic eruption



and is a caldera.

With an intrepid bus driver and Martina, our guide, we set off for un giro around this large island. Lei l'ho imparato molto about the history, geology, and geography of Ischia.

We stopped first for una bella vista e le foto at the Castello Aragonese, a beautiful, very old castle on a rocky prominence. Then, we stopped to see molte belle spiagge; at one, we had fresh orange juice - a major crop in this verdant isle. The island grows an array of crops, from citrus fruits to pomodori to grapes for wine. The volcanic activity has made the soil very fertile.

We spent molte ore in the grandissimo, bellissimo Giardini La Mortella, a botanical garden of immense size with a variety of flowers, plants, trees, geological formations and water features. Che bello! The garden was created by William and Susana Walton in the mid-1950s and is a treasure. He was a famous British composer and she was una giardiniere, originally from Argentina.



We sailed back to our Sorrento home at the Plaza Hotel, tired but felice. We had solo una domanda ... dove dobbiamo cenare? Penso che pasta e vino rosso.

Scene Bellissime!.....Dianne Heins, Minnesota



Ogni giorno vediamo ed apprezziamo le viste panoramiche della costa Amalfitana: Vesuvio, i golfi di Napoli e Salerno, le colline di Ravello, i villaggi pittoreschi sulla costa, gli scogli, e le grandi ville bianche, gialle e rosa. Ma anche vediamo le scene intime della vita quotidiana, come un cane addormentato alla fermata dell' autobus a Positano, il muschio su una pietra vecchia nel giardino della Sant'

Anna Institute, o una barca piccola nel porto d'Ischia. Grande o intime, tutte queste scene sono bellissime.



Vado a scuola.....Bob English, Minnesota

For me, a typical school day is to arise at 6:00 a.m., be dressed and ready to go when the hotel restaurant opens at 7:00 a.m. By 7:30, I am back in my hotel room to study for an hour before walking to the school. The Sorrento Lingue classes begin at 9:00 a.m.

From 9:00 a.m. To 10:40 a.m. Is grammar class. There are four other students in my class, we are of comparable competency because the school gave each of us a written test and an oral interview.

Our instructor, Domenico, is a native Italian who speaks in a near musical manner. Domenico knows English, but will only speak in Italian. Students are only allowed to speak in Italian.

At 10:40 a.m., there is a 20 minute break for time to mingle with other students.

From 11:00 a.m. to 12:40 p.m. Is conversation class. There appears to be a lot of free flowing Italian conversation, but it is really well-directed in topic, grammar and vocabulary by our instructor, Lucia.

At 12:40 is lunch, with literally dozens of restaurants available. Randomly walking into any of them is a culinary delight.

Band of the Carabinieri.....Lori Kimmet-Mobley, Minnesota



On our second Saturday evening in Sorrento, band music drifted up to our room on the fourth floor of the Hotel Plaza. It was irresistible! Several members of our group were drawn to the nearby Plaza Tasso (Sorrento's main square) where earlier in the day we had seen a large stage being erected. Here we were treated to the precision music of the famous Musical Band of the Carabinieri Corps. This military-style band played a wide-ranging repertoire of music. Selections included John Williams' "Olympic Fanfare," stirring music by Russian composer Alexander Borodin, and a swinging Benny Goodman jazz medley with solos that featured several of the band members' musical abilities. A Beatles medley of songs that concluded with "Strawberry Fields Forever" and "Hey Jude" was popular with the overflowing crowd of both Sorrento home-town residents and tourists. At the end of the concert the band members donned their carabinieri hats to cheers from the crowd for the Italian national anthem and "La Fedelissima," the Carabinieri anthem. What a privilege it was to be able to see and listen to this wonderful band in the beautiful setting of Sorrento's main square.

According to various articles on the internet, the Band of the Carabinieri is known all over the world for the variety of its repertoire, for the formal perfection of its performances, and the appeal aroused by its orchestra members with their splendid uniforms and musical accomplishments. The band was founded in 1820 when the Royal Carabinieri Corps assembled a group of 18 buglers for the first time. Today, with its 102 musicians, who are recruited and selected through open competitive exams, the Musical Band of the Carabinieri Corps interprets the most celebrated compositions. Its very rich repertoire ranges from traditional military marches to classical pieces, to modern and contemporary. The band performs to rave reviews in concert halls, theaters, radio and television, and town squares. Since July 1, 2001, the band has been conducted by Maestro Massimo Martinelli. The band is currently on a tour of Italian cities as part of the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Carabinieri, which were formed in Turin in 1814. The Carabinieri is essentially an Italian military unit with some of the same tasks of the police.



Apparently since we are the shortest ones, someone decided to call us the "short perfects"

The 'Short Perfects' - Nancy, Joyce, Lori and Sarah
Italian Class Day 11--Andy Mobley
Buon Giorno!

This is day eleven of the Italian Cultural Center Sorrento language excursion. This trip has been a wonderful experience in Sorrento and the surrounding towns.

The language classes have been excellent and now the bar has been set much higher for me :-)). The teachers are very dynamic and supportive of the students. They have provided a number of activities and exercises to assist the learning process. Italian is spoken almost exclusively; this leaves very little opportunity to fall back on English. One activity in our class was role playing in which a meeting was being set up among Sophia Loren (Nancy), Connie Chung (Rocky), and Silvio Berlusconi (Andy). Berlusconi had a bad day, among many.



Finally, our class had a conversation on the politics of Italy. The political structure is similar in some ways but also very different from the United States' structure. The current Prime Minister is Matteo Renzi, who took office this February. He is tasked with developing a new senate structure. Prime Minister Renzi, at the age of 39, is the youngest Prime Minister in the history of Italy and his rise to become Prime Minister was widely seen as a sign of a much-needed generational change. Renzi proposed several reforms, including the abolition of the Senate, a new electoral law and the reduction of the costs of politics.

There are twenty provinces in Italy, and Sorrento is in the Campania Province. The population of Sorrento is approximately 16,500 people. The rich natural sights of Campania make it highly important in the tourism industry, especially along the Amalfi Coast, Mount Vesuvius and the island of Capri.

Outside of class, there have been many interesting things to see around Sorrento; the history, the culture, politics, music, etc. I found our visit to a family farm/Bed and Breakfast/cooking school brought a bit of nostalgia, after growing up my first thirteen years on a farm. The farm we visited grew olives and was experiencing a problem with a major pest infestation of the trees. Their crop will be reduced by 90% or more. Not a good year for their

farm. During this visit we prepared rabbit (Coniglio Cacciatore)

Student Undici signing out (Aliases Rabbit Chef and Silvio Berlusconi)

A Jewel Around Every Corner.....Peggy Bocchi Hansen, Minnesota



Today is the 16th of October, and Elena and I are on a plane in Amsterdam, making our way back to the United States. I have not contributed to the blog since early on, but my fellow travelers have shared their colorful perspectives throughout our journey. The past two weeks have been rich with experiences of all kinds. Italy is full of history, it is bursting with culinary delights, the country contains a landscape which, at times, is breath-taking, the artistry is astounding....and then, of course, there is the wine! It seems a jewel exists around every corner, but what has impressed me most are the Italian people.

There were many. There was Stefano, the cab driver who drove Melissa and I to the sagra in Priora. When he learned we were language students, he refused to speak English, corrected us kindly, and then made certain we would be safe and able to find our way back. There were the Italians, at the sagra, who...somehow...knew we were foreigners, and approached us with smiles. One after another, they gave us advice..and encouraged us to step up and stomp on the grapes! There were shopkeepers, like Giovanni and Lucia, in the ceramic and linen

shops, who had no other customers and so spent 20 minutes speaking Italian with me. Or Donatella, at the Tourist Information Center, who was delighted to hear I have a cousin who shares her name. There were amazing tour guides like Ilaria, whom we loved so much last year, we requested her again...and Marco, who would like to teach Italian to Americans in the U.S. The historical intelligence the two of them possess is phenomenal. We cooked with Anna Maria, for the third time, and enjoyed her standout personality even more than last year. And then, we created lunch with Francesca at Fattoria Terranova. This was scheduled for the final day of our adventure, and all of us agreed, it was the absolute highlight of the trip.

Of course, there were other familiar faces, like the staff at the hotel. Salvatore, greeted me with a perky "Come va, Peggy?" each time I passed his dek, and Giuseppe who automatically prepared my cioccolato caldo every morning. I received a personal note from the housekeeper upon my departure. And never has it been such fun to attend school! The entire

group, from those in administration, to the insegnanti in our classrooms.... are a passionate bunch, and they do an exceptional job. How wonderful it was to broaden this experience by sharing it with classmates from Sweden, England, Poland and Germany. The world is not really so big.

An finally, there were 14 people who, for two special weeks, studied the language, toured the countryside, ate delicious Italian food, and drank robust Italian wine together. New friendships have been made, and the memories will live on.

A Day in the Country

Agriturismo Visit to Fattoria Terranova.....Elena Wilsey



Our last field trip took us to the hills of Sant'Anna Sui Due Golfi outside of Sorrento. Located in the heart of the land of the sirens the Fattoria Terranova sits on top of high terraced hills with a stunning view of the bay and li galli islands down below. The sirens are the mythical musical mermaids who lured Ulysses and his crew and many other sailors with their melodic but deadly songs. Their home were the rocks of li galli islands.

More recently movie stars and other celebrities built their villas on the islands; one was owned by Rudolf Nureyev, the Russian ballet dancer.

The tour bus dropped us off on top of a high terraced hill and we began to descend 145 steps to the farm house below. These were no ordinary steps; they were big pieces of unevenly spaced rock incorporated into the hillside. Francesca, our chef, explained later that her grandfather had bought the land and cut a series of terraces into the hills for the purpose of farming. The Terranova farm now sits on graduated terraces of olive groves, vineyard, rose garden, flower and vegetables gardens.

Our terrace dining room looked absolutely stunning. It had a thatched ceiling from which flowers and vegetables were hung upside down for drying. Bougainvillea of various shades of red hung over railings and sides, purple and white statice, lavender, herbs for beauty and flavor were on the ceiling. Small red tomatoes hung in bunches, as did onions, garlic and small red peppers. Incredibly beautiful, as were bowls of small yellow sunflowers to decorate our tables.

First we took a walk in the vegetable gardens with Francesca and Anna, her assistant, to harvest small, beautiful eggplant, basil and mint for one of the appetizer dishes we later prepared. We discussed the produce the farm

grows, organic growing methods, the effects of climate change on plants. Francesca showed us wild prairie plants that are also used for food, herbs and medicinal purposes.

When we came back to our terrace we promptly put on a green apron and a chef's hat and under the able direction of Francesca and her assistants, we managed produce a 5 course dinner. We started with a tiramisu, followed by two types of appetizers made of thinly sliced eggplant and zucchini rolls stuffed with a small amount of mozzarella and baked in fresh tomato sauce. Next we made ravioli filled with mozzarella, then cooked strips of tender beef in red wine – flambé!. We were served lovely home made bread, plenty of wine and of course limoncello. We also watched a mozzarella making demonstration. It was a busy time and a very happy time in beautiful surroundings on a lovely family farm.

We climber the 145 steps and were met by our bus driver. Two weeks earlier it was the same driver who met us at the Napoli airport and brought us to Sorrento "with a song". He has a very good voice and likes to sing accompanied by a CD of Andrea Bocelli. On this day he returned us to Sorrenta from Fattoria Nerranova "with a song" to pack our belongings for the 3:30 AM departure the following day.

To All Caravaggio Fans! E. Wilsey 11/2014

Peggy Hansen and I were fortunate to see three Caravaggio paintings during this year's Italian Language School trip to Sorrento. In Naples we saw The Flagellation of Christ at the Museo Nazionale Capodimonte on a tour with a very knowledgeable guide. The second Caravaggio, The Seven Works of Mercy, is an altar piece in a mid 16th century chapel, the Pio Monte della Misericordia (Pious Mount of Mercy) which is in the historic part of Naples (Via Tribunale). In Sicily on the island of Ortigia (Syracuse) our landlady accompanied us to the Church of Santa Lucia to see Seppellimento di Santa Lucia (Burial of Saint Lucy).



All three paintings have Biblical subjects, are important religious works of art of the 17th century, but were difficult to understand at first. Nevertheless, the composition of the figures, the light and shadows across the canvas, and the physical reality of the scenes portrayed were completely mesmerizing.

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610) was a celebrated artist who painted in Rome, Naples, Malta and Sicily. He led a volatile life; his works are brilliant, sometimes blasphemous. He was arrogant, rebellious, and a

murderer. A characteristic of his paintings was to use a focused light source from up high, as though in a room with a single window, and the walls painted black. In this fashion the lit and shadowed areas are very light and the surrounding areas very dark. This gives an enormous 3-dimensionality to his paintings. He painted from posed nudes, violating the premise of Renaissance theory, and promoted a new relationship between painting and the viewer by breaking the conventions that maintained paintings as a fiction rather than extension of everyday experience. He used ordinary working people with characterful, irregular and rough faces for his saints and showed them in contemporary surroundings. He posed a prostitute as a model for the Holy Virgin - in other words, he used unholy models for holy figures.

The Flagellation of Christ (1607) is part of the Passion of Christ, a short period in the life of Jesus leading to his execution, the usual prelude to the crucifixion under Roman law. The three figures in the Flagellation are likely servants of Pontius Pilate. The event is mentioned in all four gospels and is a popular subject in religious art. In the iconographic tradition the Flagellation precedes the Mocking of Christ, The Crowning with Thorns and leads to the Crucifixion.

The Seven Works of Mercy (1607) hangs over the high altar of the small octagonal church which was commissioned for the painting by a charitable organization Pio Monte della Misericordia. The charity was founded in 1601 by a group of seven young Neapolitan nobles, inspired by the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy. In traditional Catholic belief are a set of compassionate acts of mercy concerning the material welfare of others i.e. to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless, to cure the sick, to bury the dead, and visit the imprisoned. Originally the work was conceived for seven separate panels, but in a stroke of genius Caravaggio combined all acts in one composition. At the top the Madonna and the child with two angels look at the scene. The gallery also features an impressive collection of 16th-19th century works by other important painters working in Naples.

The Burial of Saint Lucy (1608) is in the Church of Santa Lucia alla Badia in Ortigia, Sicily. Lucia was a patron saint of Syracuse who gave her wealth to the poor and was denounced as a Christian. She refused to recant and was tortured and died in 304, pierced by a knife in the throat. The church was built on the spot where the martyr died and is interred in the catacombs below. All the figures in the painting are huddled at the bottom of the canvas, leaving two thirds of the canvas an empty space. The dark monochrome over the body are presumably the catacombs where saints were customarily buried. The lower portion is given to the hulking gravediggers and an armed soldier. The only color is a red scarf worn by a central figure as a ray of fading light falls on the body.

In conclusion I would like to share that Peggy's Italian cousin Fabrice Rabarin, who lives in France, is a hand surgeon and has done research and written about the hands in Caravaggio's paintings. In the article he refers to the following paintings:

"Vocazione di San Matteo" The Calling of St. Matthew 1599-1600 in the St. Louis of France Church, Rome

"La cena in Emmaus" , The Supper in Emmaus 1601. The National Gallery, London

"Cartomanti", Fortuneteller, 1594, The Louvre, Paris.

If you are interested ask Peggy to send you Fabrice's research paper (in Italian) and take a look at the paintings. You will be amazed at the beautiful hands.