

Hello Family and Friends

Marseille, France – We struck off on our own for a walking tour of the city to get our exercise for the day. It's more of a working city than a tourist area so no pictures from this port.

Monte Carlo, Monaco – This is one of the top ports on the cruise. At only .8 square miles, Monaco is the second smallest independent countries in the world with the Vatican being the smallest. It's roughly the size of New York City's Central Park. While standing in Monaco, you can see France and Italy. The Prince of Monaco is from the Grimaldi family, royals who have ruled the area for over 700 years, the oldest dynasty in the world. The excursion to Eze, France is a highlight in this port. It's a quaint, beautiful mountain top village with narrow streets and beautiful homes and vistas. Eze and Nice, France are core cities on the French Riviera.

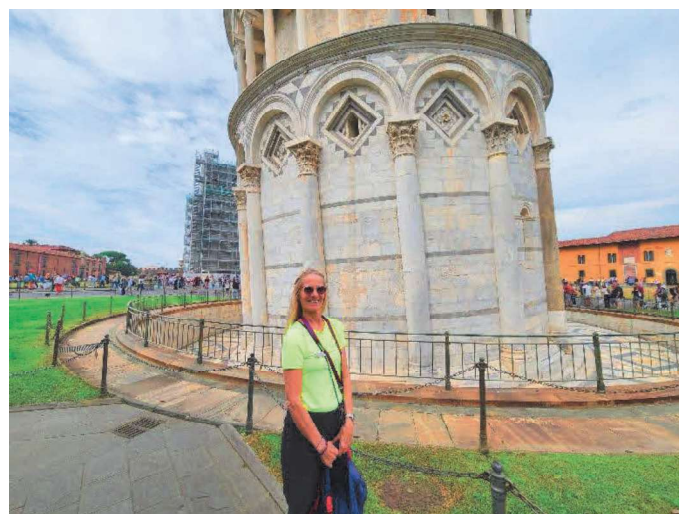


Look closely at the picture below to see part of the famous Monaco Grand Prix race route. The next picture is from the Monte Carlo Oceanographic Museum. We love the aquariums.

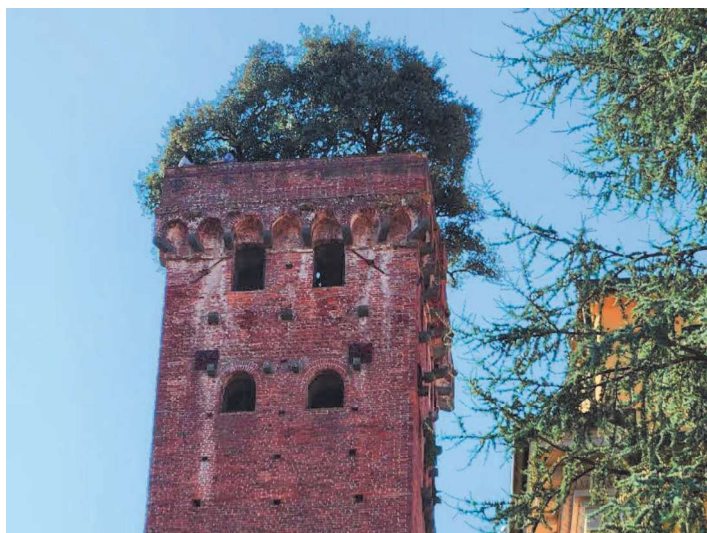


Our next port was Livorno, Italy, gateway to the towns of Pisa and Lucca. Neither of us had been to the Leaning Tower of Pisa. We were both looking forward to seeing it after hearing and reading about it all our lives. It didn't disappoint. It was built as a bell tower and immediately began leaning due to soft ground. In fact, all the buildings on these grounds have some degree of lean to them having

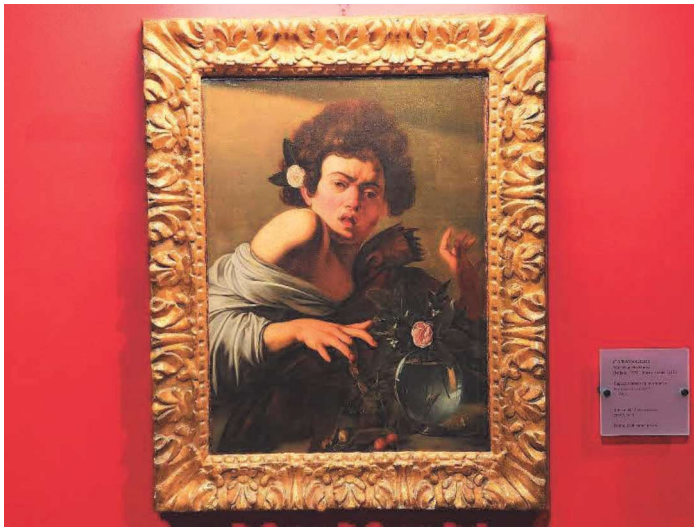
been built on a low-lying alluvial plain built up over millennia by sediment deposits from the Arno River and nearby coastal wetlands. Seeing it in person reinforced the statement that pictures just don't do it justice.



Lucca is very residential. The famous classical composer, Giacomo Antonio Domenico Michele Secondo Maria Puccini was born and raised here. Another famous classical composer, Luigi Boccherini, was also born and raised here. Cars are allowed on the streets only in the mornings for deliveries and service personnel such as repair and maintenance people. Consequently, the residents primarily get around town on bicycles. Notice the trees growing out of the roof of the building below. The main business in Lucca used to be silk trade but the artisans left in the 14th century due to political instability and wars. Christian and Jewish silk weavers fled to other cities in Italy and across Europe.

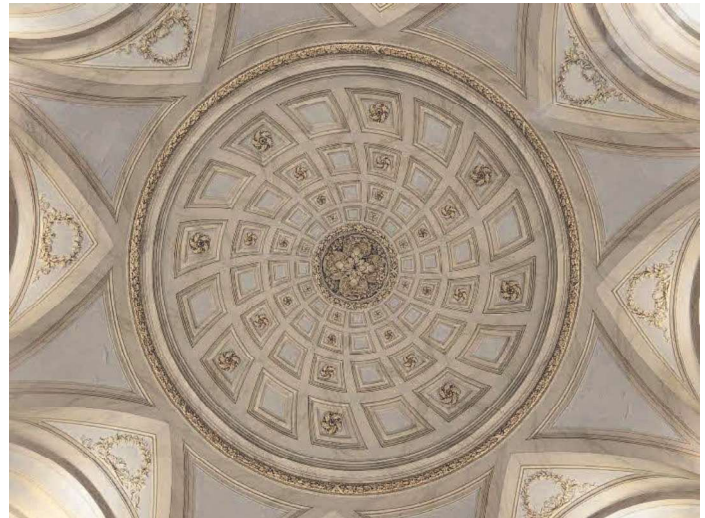


Porto Santo Stefano was our last port before ending this 10-day segment. We walked the town of Porto Ercole, a town of 2,500 residents. Highlights on the tour included the Convento dei Frati Passionisti Monastery with its exquisite views of the lagoon below and the Chiesa di Sant'Erasmo Church which houses Caravaggio's famous *Boy Bitten By a Lizard* painting. Caravaggio is called the Michelangelo of Puerto Ercole. The truth of the matter is that he was an outlaw who was involved in questionable activities, killed a noble in a duel and ended up in prison.



Civitavecchia was our second disembarkation/embarkation day with the third segment beginning. We chose not to explore the town and instead used our time to catch up on other responsibilities.

Naples was our next port. The weather caught up with us and we had heavy rains. The guests on the Panoramic Naples excursion never got off the bus to tour anything or to take panoramic pictures. The entire busload of guests voted to return to the ship an hour early. The guests on the Palace excursion were treated to a royal experience. The Caserta Royal Palace was inspired and modeled after France's Palace of Versailles. Building began in 1752 and took several decades to finish. There are more than 1,200 rooms, 1,742 windows, had the first passenger elevator (called a "Flying Chair"), what is believed to be the first bidet, indoor plumbing with hot and cold water and 365 acres of gardens. It cost more than \$335 billion in today's currency to build. The Bourbon Royal Family believed they were descendants of Hercules. Two "Star Wars" movies were filmed here (see the 2nd picture below).

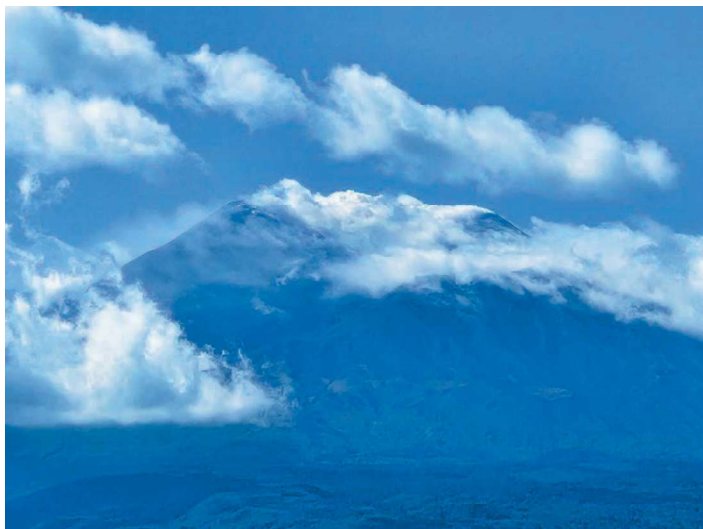


The next port was supposed to be Amalfi but the weather was so bad and with Amalfi being a tender port, the captain cancelled that port. We stayed a second day in the rain in Naples. Very few people went off the ship and we had our biggest port day bridge attendance.

We woke up this day to a burning stench and smoke in our hall. The ceiling tiles were removed and eight men in white jumpsuits had their heads up there searching for smoke. It smelled like an

electrical fire and it turned out to be a smoldering wire. By the time we were finished with breakfast, everything was back to normal and the smell had virtually dissipated.

Sicily (Giardini Naxos) was next. We chose to skip excursions this day to tour the town on our own and do some gift shopping. The beautiful mountain picture below is Mt. Etna, an active volcano spewing smoke and surrounded by clouds. The day was perfect for swimming, laying out on the beach and building sand castles.



Valletta, Malta is no more than a big rock in the Mediterranean. It has no natural resources. Over the course of history, it has been territorialized by many countries and empires. As a result, it is surrounded by layers of huge walls to thwart enemies and pirates. We toured the city and went on a dghajsa boat ride. Dghajsa boats are traditional, hand-built wooden water taxis that hold six guests each. The weather was perfect and it was really cool to see the walled city from the harbor. Many movies were filmed in Valletta due to its resemblance to ancient Rome and Jerusalem, including Gladiator I and II, World War Z, Game of Thrones, Season 1 and Captain Phillips.





For eight years, I have told Dianne about how beautiful the sail in through the canyons to Kotor was and how much I wanted to share it with her. We had plans to walk Old Town Kotor and make the 280-meter climb to the Castle of San Giovanni (St. John's Fortress). This is a special place with a beautiful view of the city and harbor. Much to our disappointment, the port was cancelled due to high winds.



Love and hugs from the Mediterranean.

David (Dave/Dad) and Dianne