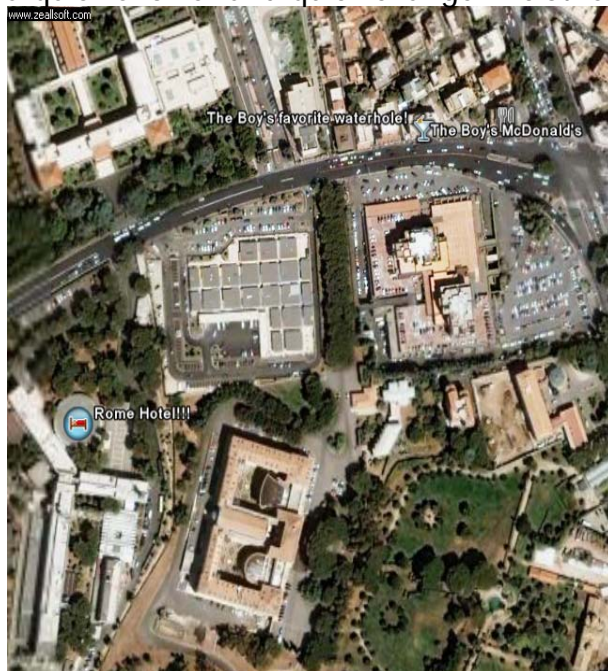


Our trip to Italy – Part II Rome.

After visiting Pompeii, Vesuvius and the outskirts of Napoli, the bus took the A3 highway north and then the A1 to Rome. At this time, most of us are very tired because the night before we said farewell to Athena, Paola and her crew! Then the visit to Pompeii and Vesuvius! We entered Rome at about 6PM via the A90, which is a highway that surrounds Rome thus the name 'Ring Road' (or AGR), then into the 'Via Aurelia' and to our hotel! By the time we arrived, it was time for dinner and to celebrate John Galdo's birthday! From here on, although we were in a group, we weren't as close as it had been in Paestum and different groups went in different ways. After a quick shower and quick change in clothes, we were ready for Rome!

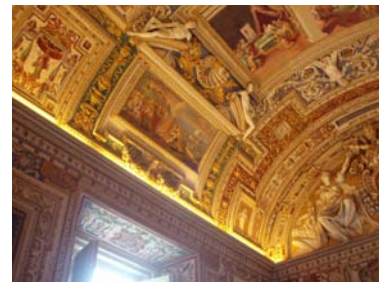
In Rome, basically there were four main groups: The parents, the 18y/o and older, the 17 y/o almost 18y/o and the younger guys! By no means they were rigid groups, as the groups formed and disbanded with frenetic speed.

Tonight, almost everyone went out to explore Rome at night and see the sights and enjoy the benefits of the Italian laws. Lots of overseas students from the USA and Canada were perched at our hotel and in no time, they were mixed with our groups. A small shopping center located right outside the hotel entrance was our



'water' depot. McDonald's was at the corner and the Green Bar in between. Mr. And Mrs. Kraut didn't stay at our hotel but rather at different hotel 'nearby'. Room arrangements were made in advance, but rooms were changed at will and we enjoyed the hospitality of the room's occupants when Rome closed down for the night.

Early next morning we got up, dressed and after breakfast, ready to go. Rome was waiting for us. We traveled to the walls of the Vatican and joined with our guide for the visit. The morning was cloudy and with thought 'great it won't be too hot'. Wrong! by 10AM the temperature was a balmy 80 degrees! and the sun had come out. Not one trace of rain fell during our entire stay in Italy and the sky was



almost invariable a beautiful blue with not a single cloud! The wait around the Vatican walls is about 4 to 6 hours but we had an appointment with our tour and we went in immediately. Buying anything in Rome is challenging as anyone tries to pull a fast one on you! The Vatican Museums are a collection of separate



buildings erected by different popes during many years. It is amazing to see the ceilings, the carvings on the doors, the statues, the maps of the Papal Empire, the tapestries! There are several rooms and I can't remember everything we saw. There is the Raphael Room, the Pinacoteca with giant paintings And to think that all of this is thousands of years old! We visit Philadelphia's

Betsy Ross' house and marvel at the age. And it's only 200+ years old! Here in the Vatican we are seeing artifacts and walking the halls and chambers that are 500+, 1000+ almost 2000 years old! One curious note is that most of these museums aren't air-conditioned and the windows and doors are opened to let the breeze flow in as it was done in the 9th century. From the museums we stepped on to a plaza and view the Vatican Gardens. Time was of essence! We

were on our way to 'La Cappella Sistina'. 30000+ people visit the Sistine Chapel daily! The frescoes and the chapel's interior were explained and illustrated by our guide in an outside 'theater' because silence and respect are still expected inside as the chapel is an active church where mass and the sacraments are still performed. Once inside, no pictures are allowed. The guards are on the ready to yield at you if they see any attempt and you are pushed thru as fast as possible. As we crossed the chapel, we marveled at the ceiling and wonder how Michelangelo could have done what he did when he wasn't even a painter! Some of the arcs and



protuberances in the chapel are all painted yet it gives you the impression that they are actually built! Regrouped at the back wall (in the picture) waited for our guide to take us out of here! We walked to our bus for the trip to the Coliseum and Ancient Rome. We'll see Benny's house later that afternoon! There is so much to see at the Museums that I can't really remember nor would I do any justice to it. To remember what we saw visit the Vatican's web site at http://mv.vatican.va/3_EN/pages/MV_Home.html

On our way to the ruins, we passed the Transtevere neighborhood which was the 'new' Rome 1500 years ago and now is a place full of boutiques, shoppes, outdoor cafés and at night it turns into the 'place' to be for the young at heart! We spent some time here at night, relaxing! We crossed the river Tiber via the "Ponte Palatino", which is a modern structure, from which we could see the remnants of the old bridge (Ponte Vecchio) long time destroyed. We got dropped



several blocks back from the Arc of Constantine and the Coliseum. As we walked we could see the millions of people waiting to enter the ruins! But since we also had a preset time with our tour guide, we entered soon after we arrived. The view from the Coliseum is truly marvelous and to be standing there and touching and feeling the walls of a structure that is thousand years old is awesome. Here we saw the 'pits' where the captives were kept, we learned about the arrangement of the seats and we learned that the capacity of the Coliseum is about 150000+ people, most standing. Women were allowed in to see the shows, but there were no seats in the women's section. The marble seats of the Emperor and his guests are still in the same place as they were in 80AD when the

Coliseum opened. Its original name was the 'Flavian Amphitheatre" in honor of the Flavian dynasty who were the rulers at the time. At one point, it had a retractable roof to protect the public from rain or extreme heat. From here we grabbed the bus for a short ride to the center of Rome and lunch. We walked the small streets from where we were dropped off towards the Trevi Fountain.

Probably the most well known fountain in the world was completed in 1762. It marks the end of the aqueduct that brought water for Rome 22Km north of the city. The water that fed "la Fontana dei Fiumi" in the Navona Plaza will flow to Trevi by gravity. The aqueduct is still in operation although it was encased, to protect it, many centuries ago. Bernini designed both fountains at the request of the popes, but died before Trevi was actually built. Legend says that if you throw a coin with your right hand over your left shoulder you will be assured return to Rome. I guess some of us will



be back because I saw several guys throw a coin in! It is estimated that USD\$3500 daily are recovered from the fountain and that people have tried many contraptions to get the coins out of the fountain. Lunch was pizza by the slice! Delicious. Pizza is cut and weighed. So really is pizza by weight! Upon refreshing ourselves and having some pistachio ice cream, we started walking



down to catch the bus. In our way we crossed the Navona Plaza, the Italian Senate building and the Pantheon. This is an awesome building and the locks used to closed the doors still work after 1200 years!!! . The heat is quite oppressing and the comfort of the bus very welcome. This time we are going back to St. Peters!

Early in the morning while we were at the Vatican, we didn't go to St. Peter's Cathedral because it was Wednesday and the weekly Papal audience is held on Wednesdays. We can only imagine the number of people that were there in the morning. We got off the bus on the Via de la Conciliazione and walked about three blocks into St. Peter. St. Peter Square is impressive. Watching in on TV is one thing, standing in there is another completely different. Now we can see why some many people can fit in there for the Papal audiences. We stood in line to enter the



Basilica and saw in operation one of the most prevalent business in Rome, and indeed in Italy, Pick pocketing! There was one guy kind of checking his victims while two or three run a few steps behind him. The 'scout' will literally look inside the bags and purses and check where the guys had their wallets. One moment of inattention and you are done! These people are all over Roma and according to John our guide, they could net about \$1000 a day!!! Not bad for a \$30.00 investment in the ticket to enter!!! Fortunately none of us got pick pocketed!



Inside the Basilica of St. Peter there are thousands of things to see. The 'Pieta', the altar, the statues, the naves, the chapels. Too many!! We spend sometime inside and the first thing that hits you is the sheer size of the building! .The writing along the top "**You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church**" is written in several new and old languages and each letter is 6.5 feet tall! Yet it doesn't look that big when standing on the floor!

Each little corner has a statue or a figurine and there are countless of naves and little chapels dedicated to every saint in the alphabet! The 'Holy Sacrament' chapel along with that of Michelangelo's 'La Pieta' are the most visited. Under the main altar you will find the burial plots of several popes and the chapel and naves honoring them. The altar itself is a master piece and you can spend hours just looking at it. But time is of essence and we must run to the bus and get back to the hotel as it now time for dinner and our second night in Rome.



After dinner, some of the boys decided to try their luck in Rome and went downtown by bus. Some of us stayed at the hotel and enjoyed an almost quite night. During the day, the athletes participating in the Maccabiah games had arrived and the hotel was really a noisy place to stay. Today is the 4th of July and it is time to celebrate! And celebrate some of us did!

Early the next morning we packed up and after breakfast we went to Florence. This trip was scheduled for Friday, but for unknown reasons went on Thursday.



Once again, we took the ring road and later the Roma-Florence highway. After 2 ½ hours and after stopping along the way, we entered Florence. There were as many tourists in Florence as there were in

Rome and it was hot!! We stopped for lunch and shopping by one of the hills that surround Florence with a perfect view of the

famous Brunelleschi Duome Santa Maria del Fiore. After lunch we visited several of the historical buildings and we couldn't miss Michaelangelo's 'David' in the "Accademia di Belle Arti Firenze". Much has been said about it, and the guards are like furious doberman dogs waiting to take a chunk of you if you try to photograph it. (flash apparently will damage the marble) The statue was unveiled in 1504 just a mere 503 years ago! Some experts believe the statue shows King David as he decides to battle Goliath while others think is David *after* he pounded Goliath. We just saw what we saw! Is he or isn't he? There are many copies of the statue including one in Philadelphia's Museum of Art! Who would have known! and we traveled 3000 miles! There is also an outstanding collection of 15th and 16th century Florentine paintings. Then we took on a tour of Florence by foot! We visited The Santa Croce Church, Piazza della Signoria and the famous 'Ponte Vecchio' (old Bridge) over the Arno river with all its little shops. We run from



point to point and really coming back home and reviewing the pictures is when you realize the magnitude of Italy and our trip. Florence is the capital of Tuscany and one of the cities in Italy that still retains its medieval flavor. Since Florence is the 'leather capital of the world', we went shopping. We had our very own fashion show with the scouts (and Mr. Nowell) as the stars!

Angela, a gal from Los Angeles that has been living in Florence for three years explained us why the jackets are so expensive and the many different kinds of leather there are! After a nice cup of Café, gelato or simply acqua, Bruno picked us up and we returned to Rome. Those who didn't go to Florence, enjoyed an extra day in Rome, exploring and visiting other parts we had not seen.

As it has become our 'modus operandi' we had dinner, we got changed and some us went out to explore Rome, some of us stayed in the hotel and enjoyed

the attention of **Luca**..... Luca....Where are you?..... Luca.....I need another one....Luca....The next day will be our free day to explore the 'Eternal City'.

Having a free day in Roma was a good idea. Some of the guys were very tired (Why?) and a bit of down-time was needed. Most every one went out



somewhere. A nice large group went to the catacombs of St. Sebastian. We took several cabs to get there and our cabbie decided to show us how they drive in Rome. He

actually drove on the tram's tracks! **Greg says: Please tell me we are not where I think we are!** Yes, Greg, on



the tracks we were! The catacombs were where the Romans were interned as it was the law (I imagine still is) that no one was to be buried within the city.

They are cold, musty and deep down below the surface yet very interesting! Upon our return to the hotel, we took public transportation, first the 218 to S. Giovanni and then the metro to Aurelia. And for lunch we stoppedat McDonald's! A group of brave scouts and scouters took off for Tivoli. Other groups stayed at the hotel and some other guys went back to the main historical places. In the afternoon, we took the metro back to ancient Rome and revisited those places that we had seen before but at our own pace. No push, no

Still was hot and full of were doing!! But not pleasant. On the way we got another taste Crossing a big Aurelia Station, we crossway when the The cars rushed out we were in the middle yelled at us....but they love in Rome!.



shove, no whispers and no guides. tourists doing exactly what we having to rush made it very back as we stepped off the metro, of they way our hosts drive!. intersection right across from the were already on the pedestrian light turned green!... Dear God!! like the start of a 500m race! and of the road. They honked, they didn't stop! There is no pedestrian