



Tom's Message Board



Buongiorno!

As you'll recall, last month my message was about our upcoming bike trip to Tuscany, Italy. Well we went, we're back and we wish we were still there. For us, it was the trip of a lifetime!

Given that this was a delayed 50th birthday present for Sue, the chances of living up to our expectations were risky at best. I'm happy to report that this epic adventure did not disappoint. This was a Vermont Bicycle Tour and I'll take this opportunity



to go on record to say that they did an exceptional job, delivering a world-class product every step of the way. We booked the *Tuscany by the Sea* package which included all travel, accommodations and arrangements for our entire stay. That alone set the tone, both planning and trip-wise, for a stress-free and fun-focused endeavor. Upon landing in Rome we transferred to the hilltop and walled city of Orvieto to meet our group of

20 VBT'ers and our tour guides for the coming week, Sylvia and Marcello. There was an instant connection amongst us all.

From here we bussed to our home for the next three nights at the rustic Antica Fattoria La Parrina, an Agriturismo Inn situated within its own vineyards, olive groves, livestock, and crop fields which they harvest and serve to their guests. After that we went to another more spectacular place called Fattoria di Magliano. The view was amazing and the Bruton beer served was the best! We found the foods of this region to be very simple, healthy, and all about the freshness and integrity of the ingredients; including the wine which is so revered and never in short supply.

As for the biking, to me there's no better way to visit a new area, than on a bicycle; but for Sue, it's not so second nature. This is where strength in numbers (other *casual* cyclists in the group) and our friendly and good-natured tour guides calmed the storm within. After a hearty breakfast, each day started with a riders meeting where we learned a few select Italian phrases, a few of the *hand gestures* the Italians are famous for, and an overview of the day's route to help us from getting lost. We then hopped on our bikes and headed out to rendezvous 3-4 hours later for a typical Italian lunch of salami, cheese, prosciutto, salad, and sometimes pasta, sometimes a stew, or most anything more than we'd ever eat here at home. And oh, our guides rule of the week - *no diets!*

Every day was more spectacular than the previous. The weather was perfect, 70's and sunny each day, as we pedaled to medieval towns surrounded by stone walls, coastal villages on the Mediterranean, and through pristine and sculptured farmlands. One of the week's highlights was visiting a regional olive oil press facility where the local farmers brought their olives to be pressed into oil. We were there during the height of the harvest and pressing season...so we watched oil being made from beginning to end, then enjoyed it for lunch at the end of our tour. Bellissima!

If I had to pick one peak moment, it would be Sue's decision and accomplishment tackling the week's serious mountain climb leg. After our olive oil tour and lunch, the return back to our inn was a 12 mile uphill climb on a classic European switchback road. You could bike it or take the van back. She opted to bike it and though no speed records were set, she pumped her way up, up, up with the constant encouragement and companionship of our guide Sylvia. And what words of inspiration did Sylvia repeat over and over and promise to Sue it was waiting for her at the top to help her overcome the torture of the ride... gelato!! Priceless. I'm so proud of her accomplishment! When in Tuscany...

Arrivederci!

Tom