

Deb's Excellent Italian Adventure



BY DEB LEHMAN

Day 1 Arrive safely in Rome after some minor turbulence. Grabbing my luggage, somehow instantly I spot my limo driver amongst a sea of limo drivers. The four star hotel is everything I could ask for. I immediately unpack, and trudge to Via Veneto when it begins to rain. With a borrowed umbrella and a recommendation of where to eat, I find shelter from the rain and enjoy the best spaghetti carbonara coupled with the best vino bianco at Vladimiro's Ristorante. After my delicious meal, I push past the tourists on the narrow winding streets to the Spanish Steps and admire the view.

Day 2 With a croissant and cappuccino in hand, I go on a Colosseum Tour – and sip my coffee while imagining the gladiators and lions fighting. After two hours of steep climbing, I hail a cab to my hotel to prepare for my evening food tour in Trastevere, a cool Roman neighborhood buzzing with young people, restaurants, and music. I meet Davide, our charming and intelligent guide, and a few other Americans. We saunter from place to place, sampling pecorino Romano cheese and prosciutto, Sangiovese wine, Pasta Amatriciana and Cacio e Pepe, Saltimbocca, and pistachio gelato. Yum!

Day 3 Three hours at the Vatican with an indifferent guide (she does three a day!) and lots of tourists in small



spaces. No disrespect to the Pope or Michelangelo's magnificent artwork in the Sistine Chapel, but my ankles are killing me, and I'm sweaty and exhausted. It takes a mile to find a taxi to Trastevere, but I sample Carciofi a la Guidia (Jewish fried artichokes) at a recommended restaurant and almost choke on the dry and tasteless leaves.

Day 4 Hop a train to Bologna and sit in the wrong carriage. Didn't know there are assigned seats and cars. Tonight, I'm invited to a Cesarina's – a home cook. Alessandra speaks fluent English. We prepare bruschetta with yellow tomatoes, zucchini "polpette," and more. We share confidences, drink bubbly, and feast on aperitivo.

Day 5 I take rain to Florence for the Uffizi Gallery tour. When I arrive at the Uffizi, I am overwhelmed by its largesse and want to leave as soon as I see Botticelli's "Venus." On the way back to the hotel (while Google Maps reroutes me a thousand times), I dodge the taxis, bike riders, and mopeds on the side streets of Florence, stop at the Ponte Vecchio, and order a Margherita pizza.

Day 6 During a sumptuous (and free!) breakfast of croissants, pistachio biscotti, and more, I find out the

Accademia is free on Sundays and dash over to the museum where the giant David takes my breath away. I order "Baccala Livornese" (cod in tomato sauce) at a restaurant Davide recommended and it's mouth-watering. I proudly find my way back to my hotel without getting lost.

Day 7 Embarking on an all-day tour of the Tuscan countryside, chauffeured in an air-conditioned SUV with four other tourists and a guide. After a fierce downpour, we arrive in Siena where I fall in love with the Piazza del Campo – its where the Palio horse race is held every summer. I sip cappuccino at a café. La Dolce Vita! Next stop: a Chianti vineyard ensconced in the Tuscany hills where we sample wines, aperitivo, and homemade pasta. I take



pics under the Tuscan sun and am bitten by mosquitos.

Day 8 Back to Rome by train and taxi to a picturesque hotel at the top of the Spanish Steps. I return to Vladimiro's for Scaloppine di Pomodoro and enjoy a glass of local white wine. It's my last day, and I'm homesick. I watch Kojak and Columbo reruns to quell my anxiety.

Day 9 Wake up at 6:30 am for my return flight and manage to survive the three hour wait at the airport. Seated on the plane, I still can't relax. I hit the bathroom ten times and try to watch movies but can't focus. Eight hours later we touch down in Newark to a smoky Martian sky caused by Canadian wildfires. My good friend Andy picks me up. There's no place like home!

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July 29 - August 5

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County Rte. 519, Harmony Twp., NJ

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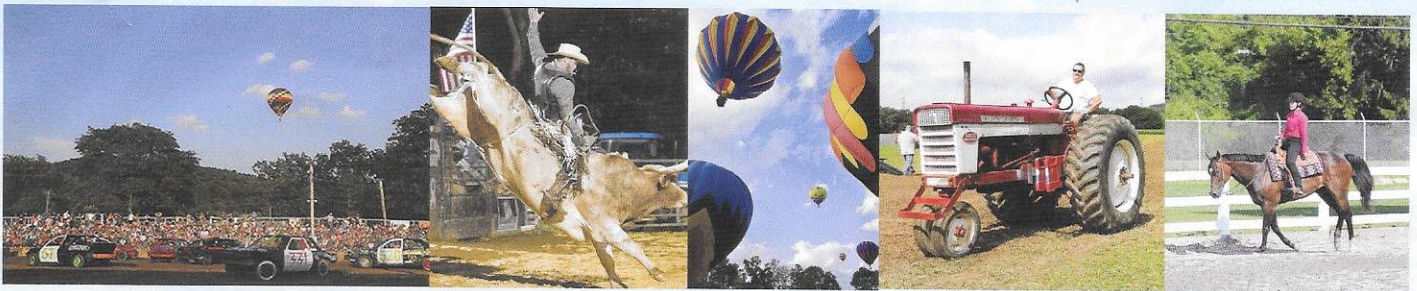
A Few Fair Highlights - see website for full schedule!

- Car/Truck and Antique Tractor Shows • Carnival Rides & Games
- Mass Hot Air Balloon Launches, Tethered Rides & Fred G. Monster
- 4-H/FFA Exhibits & Contests • Kids' Corral FREE Childrens' Activities
- Great Food • 4-H/FFA & Open Horse, Small Animal & Livestock Shows
- A variety of Free Entertainment - local bands, strolling performers etc.

Main Arena Power Events

- Demolition Derbies* (\$12) 7/30, 8/4 • Tractor Pulls (Free) 7/29-8/2
- 4WD Truck Pull (\$7) 8/3 • Rafter Z Rodeo* (\$12) 8/5

*Advance Event Tickets Available by mail order through July 15.
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