



# Amber Road Tours

Small group journeys through the best bits of Italy

Life In Italy

November Newsletter 2010

## Tour Calendar 2011

### Sicily

April 7-18  
May 5-16  
Oct 6-17  
Oct 20-31

### Week In Tuscany

May 29-June 4  
July 3-9  
Sept 4-10

### Tuscany/Umbria

May 5-17  
May 19-31  
Sept 8-20  
Sept 22-Oct 4  
Oct 6-18

### Tuscany/Liguria

June 8-16  
Aug 31-Sept 8  
Sept 14-22  
Oct 5-13

### Amalfi/Puglia

May 20-June 1  
Sept 9-21  
Sept 23-Oct 5  
Oct 7-19

## **The hearsay of history**

When we moved to our medieval hamlet on the side of Monte Castellone three years ago the common story we heard "around town" was that the village grew up during the 12th century. On a visit last spring to the Vatican museums in Rome we walked through the 120 meter long *Galleria delle Carte Geografiche* (Hall of Maps) and were pleased to find it on one the 16th century maps of Umbria. Surprising since it is such a tiny village (now about 50 houses). This summer we had another surprise when we visited the National Museum of the Duchy of Spoleto. The Duchy of Spoleto existed from 574 to 1231 AD. It was founded by the Lombard peoples who had migrated from Scandinavia and ruled most of Italy from the 6th to the 8th centuries. On a map of the Duchy dated 600 AD we once again found our little village, meaning that it had to have also existed during Imperial Roman times.

Recently we found a clue as to why a place so seemingly insignificant deserved note on ancient, regional maps. During the 1700's the Catholic Church, who ruled the Papal States (stretching from Rome to Ravenna, including Umbria), conducted a census of their territory. They didn't bother to count actual persons, the method of that time was to count fires (chimneys) and then multiply by the average number per household. Our village was listed as having 250 fires! Multiplying conservatively by 8 or 10 persons (these were poor families whose homes consisted of a couple of rooms that were shared by three generations) we come up with a no mean population of 2,000 to 2,500 inhabitants.

What happened to all the houses? Many were consolidated into present-day larger homes. The rest are rubble lying beneath dirt and weeds higher up the mountainside where now are visible only the remains of the ancient church.



## **The wealth of Florence**



The above photo is not from a museum. It's of the rarely visited chapel *Cappella dei Pittori o di San Luca* - Chapel of the painters in the Church of the Santissima Annunziata located in the historic district of Florence. It's also called The Chapel of Saint Luca, who was the patron saint of painters.

The fresco is by [Giorgio Vasari](#), *San Luca che dipinge la Vergine* - Saint Luca painting the Virgin. Vasari was a famous 16th century painter and architect. He was also the author of *Lives of the Artists*, a fabulous account of all the leading Italian artists of his time and still a bestseller today.

The statue to the right is of Cosimo I de' Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany. In 1562 Cosimo gave to the Compagnia of San Luca - the confraternity of Florentine painters - the Chapterhouse of SS Annunziata as a burial chapel.



An altar was constructed as well as a common grave for the members installed in the center of the floor. It was consecrated on the Feast of the Annuciation in 1562 when forty of the most distinguished Florentine artists ceremoniously reinterred the body of Pontormo, an icon of Florentine art.

The text on the slab that seals the grave is FLOREAT SEMPER VEL INVITA MORTE - *Let him flourish eternally, even despite death*. Subsequently were buried here the painters Cellini, Pontormo, Franciabigio, Bartolini and others.

While the church is open daily this chapel is open to visitors **only one day a year** on the celebration of Saint Luke. In any other Italian town it would be one of the main attractions.

*How did we get in?*

Sonya's sister Cristiana, a well-known restorer of frescoes in Florence and currently working at the Santissima Annunziata, opened the doors for us. In our next issue she'll show us her current project and explain the how of restoration.



Sonya visiting *la sorella restauratrice* Cristiana at work in the Chioostro dei Morti, SS Annunziata. At right, one of the frescoes in the chioostro restored by Cristiana and her associates.



### Why it's difficult to translate from one language to another.

Imagine that you receive a telephone call. You want to say hello so you translate and say *ciao*! But that doesn't make sense because you don't know who is calling and you only say *ciao* to friends (you say *salve* to everyone else).

In Italy, when answering the phone, you say *pronto*, which means *I'm ready*.

Turns out it is a friend calling so she responds to you *Ciao, sono io* which translates to you *Hi, I am me*. You think she's telling you that *she is herself*, which is probably a good thing or just maybe you're missing something.

Do you think that our English *It is me* makes better sense? Who is *it*?

By the way, *ciao* originally derives from the Venetian word *sciao* or *schiaivo* which means slave. It roughly translates as *I am your slave* and was used as an expression of respect. Now *ciao* is universal so we are all someone's slave.

### Language Corner



### Did you know??



In Italy the surname that you are born with, regardless of gender, remains yours for your whole life. That means that **women who marry do not take the name of their husband**. Children take the surname of their father but have the option to use their mother's name. At birth they are issued a *codice fiscale* (tax number) with their name, date and place of birth and all of that information never changes.

Until two years ago there was no legal age for drinking alcohol. A recently passed law now makes it **sixteen**. The driving age is 18. Wine, usually watered, is available to children at the dinner table at an early age, but from what I've seen they don't care much for it. Happy hour doesn't exist here though the liquor companies are trying to popularize it as well as sweeter alcoholic drinks for young people. Most adults drink only at meals and not until they have tasted the bread.

**Ricetta** (recipe)

*Rossella is our simpatica neighbor and a fabulous cook. She and her family are Romani, they live in Rome but spend weekends at their second home in our village, so here they are called villeggianti. Rome is 90 minutes from here, but it takes another 90 minutes for them just to get out of Rome's heavily trafficked center.*



***Pasta alla Gricia di Rossella***

recipe for 4 persons

*Pasta alla gricia* comes from the village of Grisciano, a part of the township of Accumoli, located east of Spoleto. You can find Accumoli on the old map at the top of the newsletter.

The absence of tomatoes indicates the ancient origins of this recipe: pasta alla gricia was eaten before tomatoes were introduced to Europe from South America.

Other traditional Roman pasta dishes like *all'amatriciana* and *spaghetti alla carbonara* were inspired by pasta alla gricia.

The traditional recipe calls for *guanciale* - cured, un-smoked pig jowl, but you can substitute un-smoked bacon. Rigatoni is a very popular type of pasta from the south of Italy - rigatoni are large, ridged, and sometimes slightly curved tubes of pasta with square ends (unlike diagonally cut penne).

**Ingredients:**

320 gr. (11 oz.) rigatoni pasta

5 oz diced un-smoked bacon

4 Tbsp pecorino romano cheese, grated

1 large onion

Freshly ground black pepper

**Instructions:**

Cook the pasta in salted boiling water.

In a saucepan over medium heat sauté the onion until golden, then add and sauté the bacon until crunchy.

When the pasta is *al dente* (slightly chewy) drain it and reserve about ¼ cup of the cooking water.

Toss the pasta over the bacon, add the cheese, freshly ground black pepper, and the reserved starchy water.

Stir on low flame for 2 minutes and serve!

*Voilà!*

***Buon Appetito!***  
***Jonathan & Sonya***  
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