



ITALY 2022



Francesco of Assisi

From all accounts Francesco must have been a top bloke. Born in 1181, he spent his formative years doing what testosterone filled young guys normally do, including a short stint as a soldier, before he had some sort of a revelation - or what the religious experts call “a conversion experience” (sounds a bit sus to me). This epiphany inspired him to renounce his family's wealth and devote his life to God. Francis of Assisi died in 1226 and was canonised 2 years after. He became the patron saint of Italy and whilst the rest of his compatriot monks were acting pious, Francis spent a more fulfilling time looking after animals and living close to nature. We visited Assisi today - his home town. His cathedral.



Francesco's Tomb

Unfortunately for us, the main edifice — the church containing Franciscos tomb - was at the opposite end of the old town from where we entered. We arrived about 9am when it was still relatively pleasant. We followed the well signposted, narrow laneways, passing two open forums. It was so peaceful at that time of day. The disadvantage was that we were slowly trending downhill. When we reached the St Francis's basilica, we entered with many others and were immediately herded in a slow moving line around the tomb. Even though we are not religious, we were pleased to be amongst the numbers paying respect to this man. His tomb is very simple, being made of stone arches. We watched quietly as many genuflected and/or knelt on the side of the tomb. We then gradually, slowly, heaved our way back up the hill. One could literally smell the stone baking under and around us.



Yea naa!

Given that Assisi is the home of St Francis - the patron saint of animals - it should not be a surprise to find animal carvings around and inside churches. Here's one - a lion "face-scraping" a sinner. WTF? Note that the human's arms have already been torn off and eaten, with the head next in line to be consumed. My view is that this particular sculpture was created by an apprentice working without supervision. But hey, the concept is rather novel. Mind you I can't get the image out of my head. Face scraping indeed!! And lions? They too must as evolved!



Rigor mortice?

Another commission gone awry - Mary cradling her dead son. Very poignant. Carved lovingly out of one piece of wood. Emotion and pathos all there for the audience to see. Background lit up to highlight the artists intricate creation. A centre piece for the altar. A focus for any occasion. Death comes to all of us one day. The stiffness of rigour mortice is patently obvious. This is one really ugly piece of work!!



When size does matters.

All over Italy what strikes us is the size and number of small vehicles. Our hire car is tiny which is great because we can fit into any little parking space and can drive on very narrow one-way roads without stress. Small cars come into their own in most Italian walled towns where the alleyways are so ridiculously skinny Heather has been known to breathe in to help get us through. So it did not surprise us to see the local Assisi rubbish truck - a 3 wheeled junior with a one man cabin collecting trash, putt-putting along with its 500cc engine.



Occasional tourist.

Who cares what you look like! Best to feel comfortable. A floppy hat to shade the sun, a bag and a camera, sunglasses, a good pair of walking shoes, shorts and lightweight sun proof long sleeve shirt. And a change of undies (when the sweat pours out as you climb, climb, climb up and up the hot narrow streets). At least we amble, to where and when we want, unlike those sad bus tours where you are captive and have to follow the leader or you will get lost. Heather and I have always taken our own path and always chosen the slow road. The oppressive heat this time around means we wisely head home before the middle of the day for a swim and cool drink.



Cool dip? Not!

You could hear the dripping tap echoing a long way away. Such a cooling sound. Then you saw it - a lovely pool in a grotto. So inviting, looking so refreshing, sounding so nice. Better than a beer, better than ice cream, better than lemonade. We could have jumped in clothes and all - except it was behind bars!!



Rich and Famous

It's interesting to note how money and power have always been around and how tourism celebrates this excess in all its glory. Religion in particular shows us the hypocrisy of men who preached simplicity and lack of worldly material things yet gathered together every cent of their community's meagre income to create opulent edifices. Every church, every mansion, every massive monument here today has been hand built by artisans and craftsmen whose legacy is seldom acknowledged. It is the benefactor or the senior clergy who are always celebrated.



Harry Potter in Assisi?

To ensure the widest appeal to a consumer market (and to no doubt draw passing kids inside) this boutique gift shop cleverly stocks a wide range of the famous wizard's paraphernalia - all loaded up on shelves next to the usual cheap plastic christianity artefacts and trinkets. You never know who you might snare - religious or spiritual or even a wannabe wizard.





