

MEDITERRANEAN

SIGGY AND HEATHER | TRIP AROUND THE MEDITERRANEAN | TUESDAY, 21 MAY 2013


Three Towns

What an interesting day. We traveled through a beautiful rural area, got lost at least three times because we couldn't go where "Emily" directed us (roadworks, too narrow and one way lanes) and saw three fascinating towns.

The day started with a bit of cross country driving through golden fields of wheat and the stubble of others that had been shorn for hay. These areas alternated with olive trees waving silver leaves in the morning breeze. They were in small holdings separated by rock walls made from the local stone. It was really very tranquil. Tranquil but for the number of times we had to squeeze through small villages with narrow streets!

On one of these sojourns we finally found our first Italian "Super Mercato". It was quite an interesting experience. They had a great range of deli items including cheeses of all descriptions. We were even encouraged to buy a cheese that, in the attendant's words, "was born yesterday" (it tasted really yummy). The Italians also insist that you don plastic gloves before choosing your fruit and veggies. Not a bad idea really.

The first town we visited was Locorotondo. The guide book gave it a great rap as "one of the most beautiful towns in Italy".

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JESUS CHRIST! Narrow road. Car turns and stops. Driver gets out to go shopping. Car is now parked!!! Road is blocked!!! Not even enough room for a bike to pass through. Who cares!!!

TRAFFIC ISSUES Can't get over how selfish Italian driver are. Today I wanted to turn left but I was in the wrong lane on the right. I nudged over to the left cautiously at the stop lights. A car pulled up beside me on the right indicating he too wanted to turn left. Just as the lights turned green, incredulously, another driver on the FAR right zoomed in front of us all and did a very rapid U turn scaring the shit out of everyone. Bloody hell!!!



Wedding Bikes

The wedding photographer said something in Italian, beckoned to me and gave me a wink. I knew immediately what he was on about. I called out to Heather. She did not know what was about to happen.

I told her to get off her bike and give it to the bride while I gave my bike to the groom.

And so our bikes will become part of an Italian wedding album. Only in Italy!!



LOCOROTONDO



Locorotondo certainly was picturesque. Most the buildings were a brilliant white and were beautifully set off with masses of flowers. Narrow streets linked the tightly clustered dwellings. From our level, the only thing lacking was a view. The town is situated on a plateau and when we went outside the village area to the public garden we got a panoramic view of the surrounding valley. We could look down to see the strange houses in the next village we wanted to visit - Alberobello.

What a unique place that was! It is a UNESCO World Heritage site for very good reason. The building style here is called "trulli". The houses are made of dry stone (hard limestone or tufa) with vaulted roofs. In most cases the vault (or vaults) have a funny little knob on the top. The sides are painted white and sometimes parts of the vault are white or decorated with symbols. Most of the roofs were of unadorned rock. It looked "otherworldly" - Moorish even.

Heather did some research to try to find out why this area spurned such strange buildings. The most popular theory is that due to high taxation on property the people of Puglia created dry wall constructions which could be easily dismantled when inspectors

were in the area. These "pugs" were a very clever lot. We loved the place.

For our last stop we headed into the region of Basilicata. The landscape changed to gentle hills and set the scene for Matera.

It also has a unique style of housing called "sassi". Essentially centuries ago, people started to live in caves dotting the gorge. In fact Matera is said to be one of the world's oldest towns, inhabited since the Paleolithic Age.

Over time these cave dwellings became much more elaborate structures. In the 1950s the government forcibly removed the population from what was then regarded as slums. Yesterday's slums have become today's tourist boon!

We have to say that it was not what we expected. The dwellings really just looked like very dirty houses piled one on top of the other. I suppose it was hard for our untrained eye to see where the walls of the ravine stopped and the man-made structures began.

We walked a very long way around the area wondering if we had missed the "caves".

The place was interesting but could never top Alberobello.





PHOTOS



MATERA

