

# Girls Abroad



Just as the new school term was starting and when fares are cheap I left Greenford for Italy with my daughter, Camilla, my daughter's friend, Lucy and my friend, Gloria. I was going to stay at my old school friend's apartment in Italy. I'd been there the year before, the difference this time was that none of the party spoke Italian.

We flew from Stanstead with a few incidents, like at one stage thinking that we were going to miss our Ryanair flight. We arrived at Ancona airport and waited for the bus to the train station. This was also mostly uneventful, - although there was a period when we thought that the bus was never going to arrive. At Ancona we bought our tickets for San Benedetto del Tronto. The train was like something out of Agatha Christie especially when we were plunged into complete darkness almost as soon as the train left the station. However we realised when the ticket collector came in that this was because the lights in our compartment were turned off.

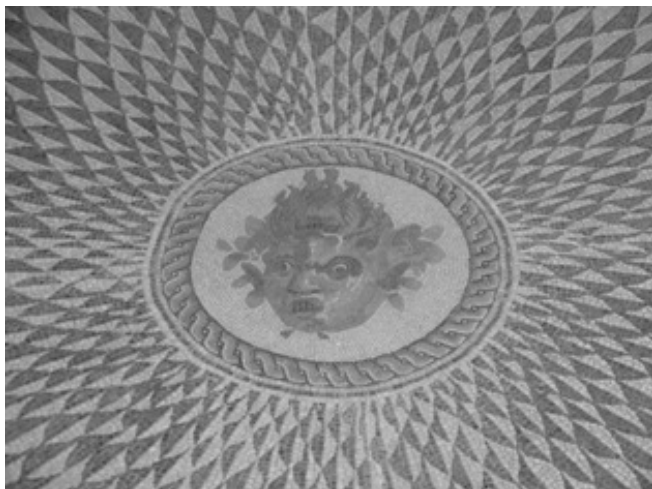
At San Benedetto we waited for a taxi and eventually found Luciano. We arrived at Aquaviva Piceno. Aquaviva Piceno is a mediaeval town with a confusing one way system. Luciano was determined to get us to the apartment even driving the wrong way up the extremely steep hill that leads there. I hadn't mentioned the hill to Gloria.

The next day we ventured out to San Benedetto on the bus. I have an Italian uncle who at one time taught me to count to ten in Italian so I was able to buy eight tickets. I also managed to ask where the bus stop was. Unfortunately I wasn't able to understand the shopkeeper's reply. Gloria kept on saying in amazement 'I'm really surprised that no-one speaks English' although the rest of us weren't that surprised as we were in a remote village in Italy.



We visited the beach at San Benedetto and then took the last bus back to Acquaviva at 6.15pm. After climbing up the hill to the apartment, we had to go back down again to have something to eat. When we realised that a quarter of a litre of locally produced wine cost one euro, less than a bottle of coca-cola, there was no stopping us. On the way back to the apartment we passed a local talent show – my favourite act was the wannabe Tina Turner who sang 'Simply the Best'.

The following day we went to Ascoli Piceno, a much larger mediaeval town and visited the museum full of Roman and much earlier remains including a strange mosaic face. We also visited the cathedral and the nearby Catholic bookshop where a Catholic priest tried to convert me to Catholicism.



After going to the famous Art Deco café we took the train back in time to get the last bus. Another meal out and this time the village entertainment was a jazz band.

By now the younger members of the party were starting to get restless. They left Aquaviva armed with my AA phrasebook to hit the bright lights of San Benedetto. They apparently roamed the streets of San Benedetto asking everyone where the nightlife was. They claimed that they never found it.

The next day we all met up in San Benedetto to begin our trip home. We had decided to stay the night in Ancona and found a hotel opposite the railway station. Gloria was relieved because at last there was someone who spoke English. We set out for the town. We were persuaded to get off the bus at a square whose name bore no resemblance to the one we had been told to look out for. We walked for about half an hour - there was no sign of any shops or more importantly restaurants. Eventually we passed a bus stop where Gloria overheard somebody speaking in Twi (a Ghanaian language) and promptly asked for directions. We then discovered that though we had got on the right bus it was going in the wrong direction.

When we arrived at the town centre we found lots of shops but no sign of anywhere to eat. We finally asked directions from a man who was happily talking to himself (no he wasn't speaking into a mobile phone). However he directed us to a restaurant that was just about to open. By the time we left the restaurant, the owner and his staff had bemused looks on their face. We got the bus back to the hotel without incident as by now we had deciphered the timetables.

The next morning we caught yet another bus to the airport and got our plane back. The only incident in the airport was when an elderly American overheard Gloria saying that she had no money and promptly gave her €5. Gloria was mortified but we thought it was amusing and yes she did tell her husband all about it when he came to pick us up.

On arrival in London, Lucy stated that for her the holiday had three major highlights: Gloria's face when she first saw the hill to the apartment; the karaoke evening in the village; and watching me and Gloria singing and dancing to 'Smooth FM' on the way back to London.

Ciao!

CHRISTEEN GEORGE