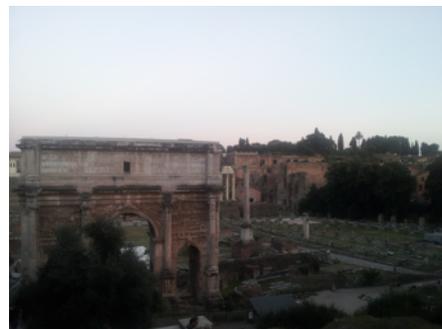


All trains lead to Rome, George's and Harry's 3 week Italian tour

After having spent the best part of 2 weeks in Italy and having endured the searing heat in Herculaneum and Pompeii, I felt confident that Rome would offer a refuge from the overwhelming sun. Instead as we stepped out into the light from Termini station, similar to Euston in its size and brutish looks, I quickly began to sympathise with why Romans, ancient and modern, seek to escape the city in the summer.

The city nonetheless stunned me, its Roman remains giving way to Renaissance art and architecture, while the huge buildings of its fascist past, namely *Vittoriano*, also known as "the Typewriter", stand proudly amongst them. In the evening we wandered around the piazzas and saw the Pantheon, so admired now yet unappreciated by its patrons who were looking for something more traditional, and eventually reached *Castello di San Angelo* and St Peter's Basilica. The ancient fascination with Eastern art still remaining in the large numbers of obelisks dispersed throughout the city, dominating each of the large piazzas.

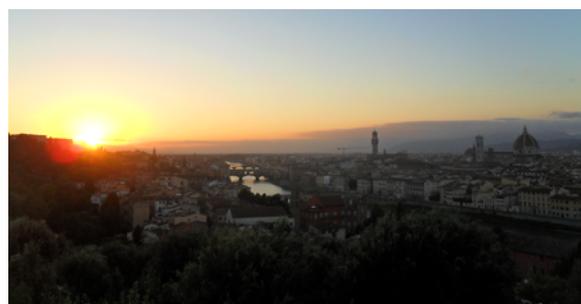


The Roman Forum was fantastic, in spite of the centuries of decline, especially as I gazed up at the *rostrum* imagining Cicero proclaiming from the platform. We decided to also visit the *Domus di Palazzo Valentini*, a vast Roman house built adjacent to the forum. This house, although amusingly presented, was still a gem for any classicist, with its artwork fantastically preserved, patterns lost in the remains at Pompeii and Herculaneum shone through and a great explanation of Trajan's Column made our €11 each worthwhile.



Our last evening in Rome, albeit dampened by the vicious crack in my phone, was wonderful as I finally saw the Mausoleum of Augustus and the *Ara Pacis* along with the *Res Gestae*, a testament to the great father of the Roman Empire yet more often than not neglected amongst the plethora of ancient sites. We spent the evening ambling through the city, enjoying the piazzas and sights by night, a memorable goodbye to such a lovely city.

Our next stop was Florence, flourishing in art and full of beautiful streets. The *duomo* was wonderful to see at last, but the €8 calamari in the central *mercato* was almost impossible to beat. The city carries a real sense of excitement and bustle, and we were able to practise more of our Italian with different people there. As we watched the sun disappear behind the city from the *Piazzale di Michelangelo*, we reflected on our ancient tour so far.



Soon we came to Bologna, somewhere that we both wanted to go to but neither of us could explain why. This unconscious choice for our next stop was fantastic as we enjoyed the Medieval streets and impressive leaning tower, not of Pisa, but the Garisenda Tower. We even managed to squeeze in a trip to the *Museo Civico Archeologico di Bologna*, providing a fascinating history of the city and full of countless pieces of Roman paraphernalia.

With a tear in our eyes we arrived on the 1st September at our final destination of Verona. A gorgeous town, full of tourists desperate to see Juliet's balcony or to touch her breast (a statue!) in



the hope of good luck or love, or perhaps just a photo opportunity. However, we were there for a different purpose, to see the Verona amphitheatre. It was incredibly impressive with its red marble and well preserved condition and even though we saw it amidst the preparations for that night's opera, it was useful to get a sense of the ancient purpose of these sights.

With an afternoon to kill in Verona on our last day, we decided to go to Sirmione on Lake Garda. This proved to be my favourite part of the holiday in many ways, unexpected and absolutely astounding in its beauty. The old town was

concentrated within the walls of an old Medieval castle, on a spit about 2km into the middle of the lake. This offered stunning views of the mountains and lake on every side yet the best part was the *Grotta di Catullo*. A stunning complex of Roman ruins, a retreat from the bustle of the city for us as well, set in one of the most beautiful areas of the north, it was truly the perfect way to end our epic trip around Italy.

Our travels then were a great success as we were able to expand our knowledge of Italy, of Italian and especially of its ancient past in the many places we visited. Thank you very much for supporting us with the Stephen Instone Fund, it was a hugely memorable experience and so special for us as we were finally able to appreciate in the flesh so much of what we have studied.