

TRAVELS WITH TAMA

Aviano

Wednesday was our transfer day, but Roberto managed to fill it with activities. One, though, was unplanned. We had the use of a double-decker, but because of the excessive amount of luggage, they had provided a small trailer. But our luggage was so excessive we didn't get far down the road when there was this horrendous noise. The hitch on the trailer had broken. This was a prime example of how great a group we have. Quite a few members of the group got off the bus and assisted the driver and Roberto in loading the luggage into Roberto's van and spread out through the bus. We were back on the road with little delay and lots to joke about.

We stopped for lunch at an Autogrill where we were able to pick from a variety of items. Plus there was the usual tourist stuff to buy. Afterwards we drove on as far as Verona where we had a quick bus tour and then there was a walking tour for those that wanted to attend. I sat that one out with a small group in this little shady park near the bus stop. I have seen the pictures, and the walking tour included some excavations, Romeo and Juliet's balcony and a Roman coliseum. After the tours, we continued on to our hotel in Aviano, the Policreti. After check in, there was a cocktail party and then we were free for dinner. The two free nights we had at the hotel in Aviano, the restaurant attached provided some low cost specials for the attendees as well as a full menu of goodies. The hotel was also next to the golf club and looked out over the golf course.

Thursday was a tour to Asolo and Castelfranco. Gary and I decided to take the day off, so someone else will have to report on that. Gary instead, spent the morning walking to and from downtown Aviano and buying us some goodies for lunch. It was a real treat for him, getting his sausage, bread and cheese for lunch. I love the stuff, but since I had planned on spending the day trying to get the swelling out of my ankles, the parmesan cheese and prosciutto ham were rather counter-productive.

Friday, Ben had arranged for a tour of the base. It is the first time the group had been back since 1998. It was amazing how much had been accomplished in 10 years. The base provided buses and we were taken to the theater where Col. David Slade and his people gave a Power Point presentation about the base. I never realized that technically, Aviano is still an Italian base and the Americans stationed there are just a portion of the people that work on it. We were all very impressed with the current way that they are handling the housing for families in the local economy. The new schools, hospital and other amenities were topnotch too.

They followed the presentation with a tour of some points of interest. First stop was a hangar with an operational F-16 on display. Next was another hangar, this one housing a "hangar queen," or at least that what Gary called it. It is a plane that is used to train maintenance crews. Then we stopped at a mounted F-100 Super Sabre on display outdoors where we made the group photo. By then, it was time for lunch and we were taken to the Italian Mess Hall where we were

able to pick and chose from their wonderful cafeteria style service. Not too many times you find bottles of olive oil out in the condiment section.

The tours continued after lunch starting with a demonstration by the fire company. They took us to this fake plane, set it on fire, and then two fire trucks came and put it out. It was all very impressive with personnel in fire retardant suits going into the “plane” to put out the interior fire. Next was a stop at EOD. They showed some of their equipment, including a couple of robots and, believe it or not, a little red wagon. They followed up with a demonstration of blowing up a small device. Our last stop was at the BX where we had a few minutes for shopping, and then we were taken to the school area to be picked up by our bus and taken back to the hotel.

Friday night was the final dinner. Ben had set up a Power Point presentation that ran while we ate showing pictures from the old reunions and such. We didn’t have a meeting, but we did take the time to accept Ben and Lynn’s bid to host in 2011 in Italy using Tours by Roberto again. We also had a few presentations. At my request, the money collected for the host gift this year was sent to the Air Force Museum Foundation. But they didn’t want to leave it at that, so I received a very pretty Murano glass wine stopper. Plus, Rodger, my VP, gave me a frog. (He knows I collect them.) This one sings and does some up-and-down movements better left to your imagination. However, the most involved and funny presentation was from George Hughes to our reigning Princess Pocahondee, Dee Davis. George had a friend of his make Dee an Indian dress with matching headband and he included a pair of moccasins. The good sport that she is, Dee put on the dress and danced down the aisle for us. There was much more merriment after dinner and there are pictures to prove it.

Saturday was the day to say goodbye to the reunion. Most were delivered to the port for the after-reunion cruise. Ben will do an article about that in the next issue.

I cannot commend Roberto and Tours by Roberto enough for how they handled the entire reunion including all the details and planning. It was outstanding! Our group is lucky to continue our relationship with them.