

The unbelievable experience in the Matese Land



As foreign travel company representative I've been invited to an Italian Travel Show in Rimini (a well famous Summer holiday City on the Adriatic sea), hosted in one of the most beautiful and historic hotel of the "Riviera Romagnola" managed by Batanis' Family, the Grand Hotel (where I've been for the second time in my life after more than 30 years). After three intensive days of trading some of us, eligible for additional experiences, were invited to educational tours in different place in Italy.

Mine was Naples and Caserta and I was thrilled about it. Those tours are arranged by the different Italian Regions, so that I meet the promoter at the Campania (Region) desk. We left the show place at 1,30 p.m. to get the bus through Bologna and from there the (fast) Train to Naples with *TrenItalia*.

Surprise #1

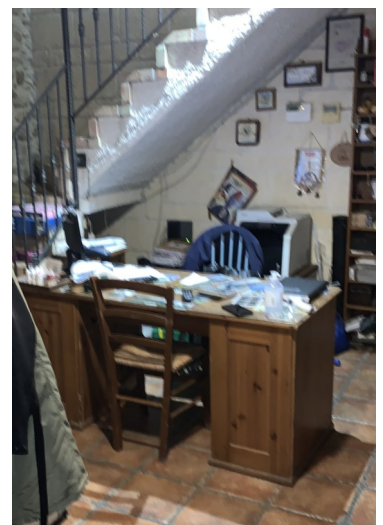
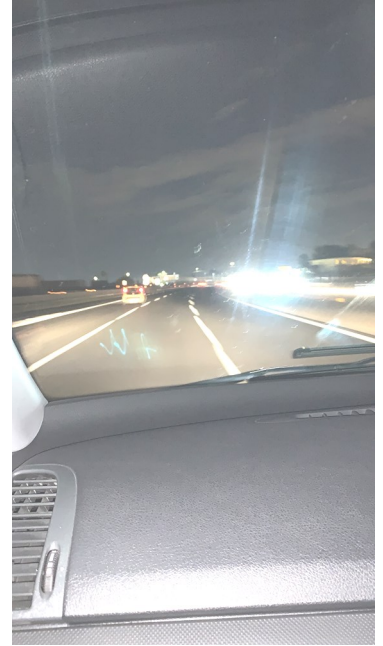
Now whoever work in the travel business, with American people, knows that we (they) don't travel light. Therefore I was a little bit surprised to saw we got a problem with baggage, which were too large to be contained all in the bus. This inconvenience implicated a delay of 40 min and we literarily kept the Trains door opened to let people get into. That was an experience even for me! But finally we were able to reach our destination in Naples.

Surprise #2

During our transfer (better say rise) with the bus to Bologna we learned about variation of the tour program, so we will not be accommodated in Naples, as I thought reading my program, nor in Caserta, as some others did reading their program (different programs). And definitely we will not end the tour on Sunday morning, as everybody of us thought, but in the afternoon!! So we had to change our Train ticket for the way back.

Surprise #3

Once we reached Naples there were our drivers waiting for us for the three different destinations, now we were destined to an agritourist place in Piedimonte Matese, which is an old City at the bottom of the Appennino Mountains (that's way is called pie di monte were pie is a short form for piede, as to say foot. At that very moment in front of the Van someone realized we missed one of us and it came out the lady lost the Train in Bologna and trying to take the next one she did a mistake and took the one going in the opposite direction. Not really a skilled travel agent gotta say, but who knows, someone start to think that maybe she was lucky to skip the experience. We arrived at night after more then one hour by car from Naples, in what we considered at the moment, the middle of nowhere, there was only one lady to provide us with the room keys and the surrounding area was not what we may define a luxury place, even the room furniture and the bathroom were minimal and poor. But at the end we were too tired and it was too late to do or go somewhere else. The mattress were not the maximum of the comfort but as said before, no chance to escape.



I woke up early in the morning and because all I need is coffee I went out looking for it, no one around, doors closed, no lights inside, just silence all around. Looking through the glass of a window I saw our driver seated on an armchair he opened me the door, he was desperately looking for a coffee too. Now the bar was there and coffee machine turned on, and, because I did many things in life, I just jumped inside and made two coffee. Surprisingly the coffee was amazing, now I'm Italian and I gotta say that few place, among the best, are able to do a coffee like that. I promise my self to investigate and I went back to my room in order to be ready for the day program.

The first day

Our first day program took us to Capua, visiting the Campano Museum of Capua, located in the beautiful frame of Palazzo Antignano (Antignano family was an important family of the Campania area during the XV century under the reign of King of Naples Alfonso I).

Our skilled guide Sonia was very proud to show us the content, which is truly very reach starting from the Sannita period (the Sanniti were the ancient inhabitant of the Campania Region as far as 2500 years ago and more, not easily defeated by the Romans). Even the Roman period itself was very interesting with its multitude of statue and funeral graves (most of theme coming from the Ancient Appia road) without speaking about the terracotta collection and the ancient coins. We had no time to visit also the Pinacoteca with its operas of artistic interest going from XIII to XVIII century, because we were in late, to go to the next site (to many thing to see I guess) which was Santa Maria Capua Vetere.



OMG that's what you would have heard being there once we arrived to destination. Most of the people doesn't even know about its existence or just never was there, the Amphitheatre of Capua is second only to the Colosseum in size and probably the model for it. It may have been the first Amphitheatre to be built by the Romans and was the location of the first and most famous gladiator school. We had no time to visit it as it will have deserved but definitely a must see place.

On our way back we had to stop for something I came for, the Buffalo Mozzarella experience. Guys, it is called the white gold, and now I know why. This small artisanal production managed by Giancarlos' family showed us the process of production (it is also possible to handle some pasta to make some mozzarella yourself, but not during the production process). At the end of the experience they offered a tasting table of the different product, from Mozzarella to Stracciatella, several different kind of cheese, bread and some wine. That was something I'll never forget (and trust me I had many Buffalo Mozzarella before!!!) I spoke with him personally, he's on the line to get retired and he knows a lot about his grandfather job. First of all the water (here you go the coffee reason), then the soil (Buffalo eat the grass) then every morning when they get milked classic music re-sound in the shed and the cows relax. Believe it or not the tasting was AMAZING.



Back to agritourist place

Finally we left Giancarlo (not without a provisions of groceries) and our great driver Roberto took us back. Arriving with daylight the place seems to be different, the countryside is charming and also some part of the residence has its charm with all this stone façade and the old wood porch and roof tile, my room is always the same, but gotta say it's very clean and it come with a large patio where to stay outside to admire landscape.

Surprise #4

Later in the afternoon we had a meeting with our naturalistic guide Angelo, a nice guy living in Piedimonte Matese very skilled and proud of his territory. He explained the bike program of the next day during a short trip up to the mountain, were he brought us, to get one of the most amazing view ever. On the top of this mountain we were able to see at the very bottom of it, the whole valley, the lake and many smaller mountains all around. But, (it was a little cloudy) when the sun came out O MY, the two line of the horizon (front and rear), suddenly kept shining it was the sea, we were able to see the Tyrrhenian see west and Adriatic see east looking west, it was possible to clearly define the Vesuvio Vulcan, the archipelago and all the isles, from the largest one Ischia, to Procida, Capri and also the smaller Ventotene. What an experience, it takes a little to reach the top, but it definitely worth. Angelo (and his wife Claudia) did really a gift to us, and not only, he also brought with him a picnic basket with artisanal bread and cheese (local factory production), made by his friends, as well as artisanal brew.

Surprise #5

It was a nice day, though we were tired after long car rides and walking, with a lot of things on our heads. It's time for a shower and few moment of relax with a cup of wine before dinner. Below the porch with my glass of red wine I was thinking to the next day and the bikes, I mean this is not really a 5 star vacation how can I eventually suggest it on our website, and the bicycles? With this thought on my mind I went to have dinner inside, meeting the others. Well what I can say, it was seriously unexpected. They reserved for us one of the private space with fireplace and it was very welcoming and cozy. But it was only when they served the dinner that became outrageously nice, oh boys, in that place the food was so good and well done I couldn't believe it.



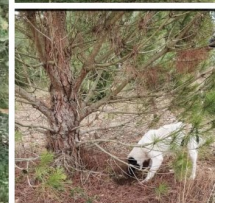
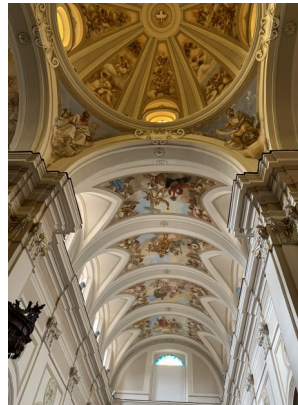
The Bike excursion

Early morning 8 am after breakfast (and my coffee yehaa) ready to go. The Van with the bicycle arrived in time and the guys downloaded to show their functionality. I mean, are you gonna explain to me how to bike? But.... Those weren't simple bicycles those bicycles were electrified so that, going up and down the slopes, it's possible to use the power to reduce the efforts as much as once wish. It may be not very sportsmanlike, but it works great. After few moment of training the tour started, we left the agritourist place with direction Piedimonte. Same road of the day before, but completely different. The breeze on the face and the scent of the places passing by made it different, it was like being in an Italian movie, everything was slow and intensive. When we reached the City (more a large Town) it was like a splash in the past, lights, color, scents, people saying hello, amazing churches and buildings. We stopped at the civic museum for a 30 min explanation of this ancient building that once use to be a convent, where inside is possible to admire finds and tolls of the Sanniti people then we moved forward to visit a couple of old churches containing impressive frescos and statues. We also stopped in front of the house where Caruso (the famous singer) family use to live and last but not list the water springs of Piedimonte, visiting inside the place where the water spring out and it's token to many different City, including Naples and the so far Isle of Ischia. A small fountain at the entrance where you can drink it and realize why coffee and mozzarella are so good of there.

Surprise #6

Once back the lunch was even better than the dinner of the day before, not only because of biking, but also because that area is rich of truffle and during the morning Marco the owner went out with his dog to hunt (and he found it). White and black truffle just 3 miles away of the place!!!! He told me they may also arrange private hunting with dogs and open air tasting for our guests. That's a miracle :) But he also told me, and it really matter, that in the next season will be ready 5 new rooms more refined and comfortable. GREAT NEWS. I also discovered that eating in this place require a 20 days reservation for people coming all over Campania Region. Here you go!!!

Angelo left us for some rest. Meeting were scheduled at 5p.m for a vineyard visit in Sant'Angelo Town where Giandomenico family is growing up an old historical grape called Pallagrello.



The vineyard

Ready at 5 pm we moved through Sant'Angelo with our driver Roberto, Angelo his wife Claudia and Emanuela, Mela for her friends who has the hard work to translate the technical terms in English for us (well not for me) she use to live in Veneto but when she came of there was so witched by the place that won't move anymore. Once we reached the place Giandomenico was already standing in the vineyard, he started to narrate the story of this grapes. It belong to this area since the beginning of time it's called Pallagrello from a diminutive dialectic term of palla (ball) because the grapes are very rounded and so close one to another. This peculiarity generate a sort of mildew between the grapes themselves that gives particular notes to the wine. Not only this, the great peculiarity of the Pallagrello wine in this area is the process of production, in fact the must is preserved not in wood or steel but in terracotta amphorae. Giandomenico was very exhaustive in his explanation meanwhile his family were arranging the tasting area on the top of the hill around a sort of bivouac with fire and food.

Surprise #7

The experience was amazing the wine has an incredible tasting, both the wine and red, and a great structure. During the wine tasting they served some bruschetta with local olive oil and some cold cuts. One of this was the famous salami made with the Nero Pigs Casertano so precious and refined (and expensive). Now we (I) know that this kind of Pig is just little more than a legend so few kind remaining and to many product sold with such denomination. Giandomenico 10 years sun brought us in the rear of an old building close to our location. I couldn't believe to my eyes there where few Nero Pigs and 6 little puppies of few weeks right there !!!!! The day was almost gone we had great time just few moment to admire the incredible light of the sunset pinky painting the whole valley and wine yards for the perfect epilogue of it. Thank you Giandomenico family for everything it worth a lot.



Last day in Paradise

So it is, next morning leaving in the direction of Caserta for the last stop before going home. The Reggia di Caserta (Caserta Royal Palace). Leaving 8 a.m. to be ready for the visit 9;15 (if you miss the time you loose the admittance) one hour driving thinking to this incredible experience, how much was terrified at the beginning and how much sadness living this place now.

The Caserta Royal Palace

At the main entrance of the Palace we met once again our guide Sonia for a three our guided tour of a must visit place. It was great, such prominence and beauty, together with Sonia's' story tales of the Realm life of the age. The visit of the garden was also an experience between an incredible variety of plants and trees , pools, rivers and lakes statues and hidden secrets like the Venus bath. It was also possible to get some light lunch inside, including cappuccino (coffee for me please).

It's time to say good by, arrivederci, I just want to mention the welcome dinner we had on our arrival , before the agritourist place. Angelo took us to an historical and very famous pizza place called Pepe in Grani and owned by the chef Mr. Grani, the guy is superb he's running his grandfather company with a mix of tradition and innovation and since that time the wood oven was never, ever, turned off!!!!

Thank you every body and thanks to Campania Region for this beautiful experience I'll be sharing with all my customers and follower

Ciao

Marcello Mazza

CEO

