

Italian Tour – Summer 2009



Day 1

After a very early start we drove to the channel tunnel. Our first destination was Metz in France where apparently our hotel was situated. We are not yet convinced that this was in fact an hotel, we think it was rather a sleep factory housing the most comfy beds in the world. It was a very welcome overnight stop on our trip to Italy. We always have an interesting group of people on our tours. Adult chaperones included Mhoira, Hugo, Emma, Heather, Moira and Una. Our driver was Ray. Roger and Rosemary as always had set us a punishing schedule with long distances to travel with many concerts and performances.

Day 2

We drove. From Metz we were on our way to lake Garda in Italy. We drove some more. It seemed like eternity but apparently it was only for twelve hours or so. Worse was to come! The DVD Player ceased to function. It got stuck on Random play! Oh dear. Buzz lines you let us down real bad. We have many girls who are totally confused about the correct running order of several feature films. After watching a truncated version of Mamma Mia and an attempted sing-a-long karaoke version many girls suffered long and seemingly psychological damage. There was nothing more that we could do. We had to resort to the old art of conversation.

This forced us to communicate with the strangers around us, who we have now discovered are fellow members of the Southend Girls' Choir, many of whom by this stage were wearing dark glasses.

However, determined to salvage a glint of hope from this dire situation, Roger imposed yet another compulsory Mamma Mia sing-a-long with the DVD player skipping to random scenes of the film for approx to keep our ailing spirits up. Finally and wearily we arrive at our hotel. The night life is buzzing. We get fed and suddenly all is forgotten. We come to life again!

Day 3

Some of the girls find it difficult to surface for breakfast. With some persuasion they are pointed in the direction of the restaurant. The plan is a trip on the lake. A hearty breakfast is a must. Swimming in the lake first with a bit of shopping to follow is just the ticket. We make our way to the ferry and fight our way on board to get a seat on the top deck. Windy journey but very hot.

Our destination Malcesine, this was not a disappointment. Full of charm and character its winding streets and delightful shops kept us busy and engaged all afternoon. Before long it was time to rejoin our fellow passengers to return to Riva.

Day 4

It seems that it's another sunny day in paradise and we can all look forward to a day of sun bathing and swimming.

The morning was spent swimming and sunbathing in the glorious sunshine on the banks of the Riva del Garda. For lunch we split up- half opting to stay at the beach whilst the remaining girls decided to depart on a legendary 'Roger Ramble' to a non-existent market in the blistering midday sun. Great fun was had by all. We then paid a visit to Parco Grotta Cascata Varone where we were gratefully drenched in the refreshing spray of the cascading waterfall. We proceeded to head back to our hotel, although not before making a pit stop in another local town where a dog called Tobia ate our ice-cream from a plastic cup much to our amusement. Dinner was followed by rehearsal and instructions to pack our suitcases for tomorrow and the next leg of our journey.

Day 5

It was time to leave Lake Garda, but before we did some of the older girls sang *Irish Blessing* at a vigil being held outside our hotel for a biker who had tragically died in an accident there. Then it was off to Verona to see one of the world's largest amphitheatres and Juliet's Balcony. After a very hot day of sightseeing and travelling we arrived at our hotel closed to Venice. Mhoira entered into tough negotiations with the hotel after they said that we could not have free jugs of tap water with our food. We are pleased to report that she was successful and has now been headhunted by the UN for Middle East peace talks.

Day 6

As our coach driver had his mandatory day off, the choir spent the day relaxing in the local area of Jesolo de Lido. After a trip to the beach in the morning, we returned for time by the pool and exploring the shops surrounding the hotel. Following dinner, we had a rehearsal to gear us all up for the two days of singing ahead of us. Afterwards some girls continued practising with a karaoke performance in the hotel.

Day 7

We had an early start in order to get to the International Christian Fellowship in Padua. We sang two sets of songs as part of their lively before heading to Venice for an altogether different singing experience: The choir had the special opportunity to perform at St Mark's Basilica during their evening mass. We returned to the hotel on a boat chartered especially for the girls.



Outside of St Mark's Basilica, Venice



The boat we chartered to take us from Venice to Lido de Jesolo

Day 8

We spent the whole day sightseeing and shopping in Venice before meeting up at the Rialto Bridge and singing at a service in the beautiful Chiesa di San Salvatore in the evening.



Inside Chiesa di San Salvatore

Day 9

We said "Arrivederci Venezia" and "Bonsoir Dijon", as we began our journey back to the UK. We arrived at Dijon, our overnight stop, after 13.5 hours of travelling.

Day 10

Wednesday consisted mainly of driving and climbing. After a morning of driving, we arrived in Paris. Una and Ray provided us with a guided tour of the city's iconic landmarks by coach. The choir then walked up the steps to the top of L'Arc de Triomphe for one of the best views of the city. The choir got back on the coach (after the usual mandatory stop at McDonalds - it wouldn't be a girls' choir tour without the golden arches making several appearances!) and then climbed up to Montmatre and the Sacre Coeur. Dinner was at Flunch (Parisian

cuisine at its best) followed by a brisk walk around Centre Pompidou and a coach ride to our next hotel.

Day 11

After a night at a strange little hotel, we travelled to Disneyland Paris where we were performing at midday. For only the second time in fifteen years at EuroDisney the safety curtain refused to go up, but the show had to go on and so we sang in front of the curtain instead. Then we were let loose into the park for rides and all things Disney until 5pm when it was time to board the coach for our final journey home. What does a choir do to entertain themselves on the shuttle when the DVD player on the coach is not working? Perform an impromptu concert for all the other passengers of course! Who knew the acoustics were so good? We finally arrived back in Southend around midnight. As Gordon Ramsay would say: Southend Girls' Choir Tour of Italy - DONE!

Emma Turnbull.