



# Amber Road Tours

Small group journeys through the best bits of Italy

*Life In Italy*

January Newsletter 2012

*... the arrival of barbarians gave rise to the miracle that is Venice*

## 2012 Available Tour Calendar

### Veneto/Alto Adige

May 18-29  
Sept 7-18  
Sept 28-Oct 9

### Sicily

April 12-23  
Sept 20-Oct 1  
Oct 4-15  
Oct 18-29

### Week In Tuscany

Sept 2-8

### Tuscany/Umbria

May 3-15  
May 17-29  
May 24-June 5  
Sept 6-18  
Sept 20-Oct 2  
Oct 4-16

### Tuscany/Liguria

June 6-14  
Sept 12-20  
Oct 3-11

### Amalfi/Puglia

June 1-13  
Sept 7-19  
Sept 21-Oct 3  
Oct 5-17



The history of Venice began in the 5th century when hordes of murderous Goths and Huns swept down the Italian peninsula, laying to ruins 1200 years of Roman civilization. With little possibility of escape frightened inhabitants along the northern coastline of the Adriatic Sea fled to islands in the lagoon where barbarians, ignorant of seafaring, could not follow.

Over the following centuries, as more and more refugees arrived, millions of posts were sunk into the shallow lagoon and used to support an artificial surface that would connect most of the 117 small islands. While the rest of Italy receded into the Dark Ages Venice grew into a powerful and prosperous seafaring republic. Enduring one thousand years the republic at times teetered but did not fall until the arrival in 1797 of the forces of Napoleon, who personally never saw the place.

For most of its long history the only entrance to the city was by sea and transport was through its 150 canals. Train service was initiated in the 1860s and the auto causeway completed in 1933. Both take you only as far as Piazzale Roma from where you have the choice of entering via water taxi or by crossing a pedestrian bridge into the maze of winding alleys and additional 400 bridges.



Venice is a not-to-be-missed destination for any traveler. We are pleased to show it to you not only on *terra firma*, but especially by sea with an historical guided boat tour through the Grand Canal, visits to the colorful islands of Burano and Murano along with a delightful gastronomic adventure on the island of Torcello.

*see the complete Veneto/Alto Adige itinerary*

#### Language Corner



#### ***I'm from 1951. When are you from?***

To ascertain the age of someone we inquire, "How old are you?"  
 You ask the same in Italian, *Quanti anni hai?*  
 Often, however, they use a different expression for age:  
*Tu sei del?* meaning "You are from (which year)?"  
 The answer, in my case, is *io sono del '51*, I'm from 1951.  
 It's as if the year we are born represents a particular vintage.  
 Very cute, *molto carino*, don't you think?



#### **The Canals of Milan**

Milan, the Italian capital of finance and fashion, once had over 90 miles of canals. Begun in the 12th century these canals connected northern Europe through Switzerland via Lakes Maggiore and Como down the Adda and Ticino rivers to Milan and then to the Adriatic and Venice. **Leonardo da Vinci** designed the intricate system of dams throughout the city. **Shakespeare** in various plays mentions travel by boat from Milan to the sea. **Stendhal**, the 19th century French writer, admiring its canals, declared that "Milan is more beautiful than Venice!"

#### *Did you know?*



Trains, trams and cars spelled the end of the canal era - most were filled and asphalted over in the late 19th and 20th centuries. *However*, there is a massive project underway to restore the 140 km, 14th century waterway from Locarno, Switzerland to Milan. The restored canal system would eventually allow visitors to travel all the way to Venice along the River Po, by way of Pavia, Cremona and Ferrara.



**The Pinacoteca Ambrosiana in Milan**



Perhaps the oldest public library in the world (1609) and built square on top of the old Roman forum the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana houses one of the finest art collections in Italy with works by **Caravaggio**, **Raphael**, **Botticelli** and **Titian**. It also contains the *Codex Atlanticus*, a twelve volume set of drawings and writings of **Leonardo da Vinci** and 30,000 manuscripts, the earliest dating back to 170 A.D.

We were fortunate to recently have a private tour with a family friend who is one of the museum directors, Marco Ballarini. In the photo Marco is showing a massive 10th century manuscript to Claudio, Sonya's brother-in-law.

Marco also let us in on many of the stories behind the paintings, like our favorite here of two sisters locked out of school - the older, worried one knows she's in trouble for having arrived too late while the *I'm-not-responsible* younger one is gleefully anticipating a day of freedom. She holds a lunch basket that her mother has prepared for the artist (Emilio Longoni, 1887).



**Ricetta** (recipe) from Milano (Lombardia)

## Risotto alla milanese

recipe for 4 persons

*Ingredients:*

300 gr rice (Carnaroli or Vialone nano)  
1/2 level tablespoon of saffron powder  
2 tablespoons bone marrow  
70 gr butter  
1 small onion  
1/2 glass dry white wine  
1 liter beef stock  
4 tbs grated parmesan cheese



*Preparation*

Simmer the beef stock

Finely chop onion

Use a large good quality thick based frying pan so you will NOT have to stir constantly.

Add half the butter to the frying pan with the (optional) bone marrow and let it melt on medium heat.

Add the chopped onion and fry gently for a couple of minutes. Add the rice and stir continuously for two minutes until the rice is translucent. Add the wine and stir until the wine has been absorbed by the rice.

After five minutes add the saffron and keep on ladling stock (2 ladles-full at a time) until the rice is cooked (around 20 minutes), stirring only a few times. The rice should be soft but still with some bite to it.

Remove the pan from the heat and add the Parmesan cheese and the remaining butter. Stir thoroughly for 30 seconds or so, cover the frying pan and leave for 2 minutes.

Serve immediately, topped with a generous sprinkle of black pepper.

*Buon Anno!*  
*Happy New Year!*  
*Amber Road Tours*

Visit our website:

[www.amberroadtours.com](http://www.amberroadtours.com)

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