

TRAVELLING WITH TARGET

PART I OF V

TRAVELLING WITH TARGET: THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT TOURING EUROPE

... In Milan, Italy

Travelling to Italy has a great deal to offer the enquiring and adventurist tourist:

- a. The cuisine can be mouth-watering;
- b. Generally, the people are exceptionally friendly, although, for the most part, the majority of the residents do not speak or understand the English language very much;
- c. The sights and sounds can, at times, just about take your breath away;
- d. History is around many corners of the major cities and even in many a quaint, old village;
- e. Shopping, for the most part, is par excellence;
- f. Corrupt practices abound – Beware! and,
- g. Relative to the prices, demanded by retailers of the Hongkong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, Italy offers a great deal to the Hongkong traveller.

From the point of view of **TARGET** (泰達財經), one would be advised to consider renting an apartment (flat) if one intends to stay in the country for at least seven days.

The experience that one obtains in renting an apartment – where one feels much more at home than staying in a single room at a luxury hotel – leaves even the best hotels way back in the dust of expectations.

With regard to Milan, renting a fully furnished, two-bedroom apartment, complete with a fully functioning kitchen and all that goes with it, a washing machine, two bathrooms, oodles of towels and cleaning utensils, just about everything that one would require in a well-equipped home, measuring about 1,000 square feet, being within the walking distance to the centre of the city, costs about one tenth of the price of a single room in one of the city's five-star hotels, such a room, measuring less than 200 square feet.

There is a number of very negative aspects, however, concerning travelling to Italy, as this peripatetic traveller discovered, soon on arrival.

Banks in the HKSAR require credit-card, verification codes in respect of certain cash transactions, regardless of the amount of money involved.

Without a verification code, which is only sent to the registered Hongkong telephone number of the bank's customer, a credit card could become virtually useless as a medium of exchange with regard to many types of purchases.

If one, therefore, purchases a sim card in Italy and adopts the temporary Italian telephone number that is given in the package, along with the sim card, as most tourists are prone to do soon after arrival, one could well be in trouble, regarding material purchases if a Hongkong verification code is required in respect of the transaction.

This is especially true when one travels in Europe via train because on-line booking requires a verification code from the registered cardholder.

Another nagging problem is the plethora of beggars that appear on many streets, especially in front of restaurants and shops, as well as the many corrupt practices that become only too evident soon after arrival.

These abound in most Italian cities and they can be a real pain in one's neck.

Many of the beggars are refugees from the African Continent and Middle Eastern countries.

But not all beggars are refugees: Some are homegrown, lazy good-for-nothings, looking to take advantage by tugging on the heart strings of any unsuspecting tourist.

And, in addition, many of these beggars are very adept in picking tourists' pockets.

So, be on your guard!

It is strongly suggested not to be generous to mendicants, even those sleeping near the doorways of shops, due to, among other things, that, for the most part, they are part of groups of highly organised beggars that have been taught to prey upon the generosity of people, passing by, with tourists, being their principal targets.

In Milan, locals are not too often approached for money from beggars that festoon streets in certain areas of the city, but approaches to tourists are another matter.

When a local is accompanying a tourist and the tourist is singled out with an approach for money from a beggar, the local only has to intercede with the curt, Italian sentence, '*No! Thank you!*' ... and that could well be that.

In addition, some of the seeming beggars are, literally, criminals – and this is especially true in Rome as well as in Milan, two of the major cities of Italy.

These criminals proliferate, and the Italian police just appear to tolerate them – even when armed with prima facie evidence of their crimes.

As an example, on a day trip to visit a museum in Rome, **TARGET** was accosted by a gang of four burly Italians, all dressed in what they hoped could fool an ignorant and unwary tourist.

Members of this small gang wore the garb of that which loosely resembled the uniforms of Roman gladiators of the First Century AD.

Surrounded by the gang members, it was strongly suggested by **TARGET**'s tour guide to pay each of these criminals 10 euros, '*in order to avoid trouble*'.

(One can only imagine what was meant by the female, tour-guide's statement: '*In order to avoid trouble*'.)

At major airports in Italy, especially at Milan's Malpensa Airport, the main international airport of Lombardy, organised gangs of dark-skinned '*refugees*' have taken over the distribution of trolleys, charging €2 – about \$HK20 – for the use of one trolley.

Policemen walk up and down the many entrances to the airport and they appear to have grown accustomed to the illegal activities of these crooks, preferring not to pay attention to the crimes, perpetrated by these gangs.

One is advised not to deal with members of these gangs if at all possible.

(To Be Continued)

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