

TRAVELLING WITH TARGET

PART III OF V

THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT TOURING EUROPE

... In Pisa, Italy.

On arrival in Florence at nine o'clock, **TARGET** was met by a female tourist guide whom this medium had contracted for the entire day.

The drive to the town of Pisa from Florence took about one hour on a concrete-paved highway and, during this short journey, the guide – quite obviously well-versed in her duties – gave a short history of the area and pointed out various historical sites along the way.

Pisa is the home to about 91,000 residents, but the town is, also, the magnet that is a draw to many millions of Asian tourists, annually, all of whom want to take photographs, alongside the leaning tower that is, of course, world famous.

The '*Leaning Tower*' (the bell tower of the Pisa's cathedral) is a sight to behold!

It was completed in 1372, about 645 years ago.

To ascend to the top of Leaning Tower, there is a fee of €18 (about \$HK180) that must be paid, prior to entering the building.

But the Leaning Tower pales against the backdrop of the Romanesque, striped-marble cathedral in the Piazza dei Miracoli. Also, in this piazza (public square), is the Baptistry.

The 14th Century of Europe was the age of the renaissance; and, these timeless Italian constructions pay homage to this important period of history.

After spending some pleasant hours in Pisa, it was back to Florence for a steak luncheon – **TARGET**'s first (real) meal of the day.

Having viewed Florence from the highest point, overlooking the city, it was time for luncheon.

At Trattoria Ponte Vecchio, at a cost of €174 (about \$HK1,740), **TARGET**'s team plus the tourist guide sat down to try to eat about a 2.20-pound, T-bone steak luncheon.

The steak was about two inches thick and, for the most part, it was prepared medium rare, being the tradition for cooking steak in this part of Italy.

(Gluttony, one may describe this quartet's attempts to finish this meal, but it was the T-bone steak that, ultimately, was the winner, by the way.)

Having wolfed down a bottle of Chianti with the steak meal and an assortment of five different desserts, all prepared by the restaurant, **TARGET** vacated the restaurant, thanking the skeleton staff of two males, one, being the owner, for their services.

A ten-minute walk to the Florence railway station (Stazione di Santa Maria Novella) from the restaurant, passing through another crowded piazza, this one especially designed to lure the many tourists, intent on shopping in this part of Tuscany, and it was onto the train, bound from **TARGET**'s pied-à-terre – and back to the hustle and bustle of Milan.

... In Venice, Italy.

Exactly eight days later, on Sunday, December 10, 2017, it was off to the magical '*kingdom*' of Venice (Venezia in Italian).

This is not the magical kingdom of Walt Disney's theme parks, but the original '*theme park*', conceived in the 13th Century in the north-eastern part of Italy, in the Veneto Region.

TARGET had arranged the trip via the Internet at the cost of €129 per person.

The journey to Venice takes about four hours aboard a modern coach and, for the most part, the journey was comfortable and, completely uneventful.

The view of the December countryside of this part of Italy is, in a word, drab, and completely uninteresting – unless one enjoys viewing barren fields, small, concrete commercial factories and the grey-coloured facades of numerous larger factories.

At about 1100 hours on this Sunday morning, **TARGET**'s team arrived in Venice to a welcoming sun.

The water transportation from the landing area to the historical city of Venice took about 15 minutes and, along the way, the tour guide pointed out the many churches, having been built on some of the 118 islands that constitute the Comune di Venezia.

(One cannot help but ponder as to the reason that some 265,000 people, mainly Catholics, require so many elegant churches, the financial upkeep of which must be in the hundreds of millions of euros per annum.)

The City of Venice (Centro storico) is the home to about 53,000 people, today, and, in years gone by, it was very wealthy, being a trading hub, a major financial and maritime power from the 11th Century to the 14th Century.

The human population wilted from about 120,000 people in 1980 to about 60,000 people by 2009 and, today, as already stated, it stands at about 53,000 men, women and children.

There are good and valid reasons for this situation, but it is not for **TARGET** to cast aspersions on the Government of this part of Italy.

An appalling situation, today, however, is that Venice is bankrupt!

That is despite, claiming to lure more than 20 million tourists, annually, to its shores.

Case in Point: In June, last year, two banks – Banca Popolare di Vicenza and Veneto Banca – had to be bailed out by the Italian Government in order to prevent their respective bankruptcies.

The Italian Government had to bite the proverbial bullet that is likely to run into about €12 billion (about \$HK120 billion).

Sadly, also, Venice is widely considered a tourist trap, also for good and valid reasons.

The city is in a state of that which has been called ‘*elegant decay*’, a nomenclature that has been cited, over and over.

Other than visiting restaurants, catering for the numerous throngs of tourists, expecting to eat the traditional cuisine of the region (which is not served, in fact), there is little else to do in Venice except admire the antiquities of yesteryear.

But the antiquities, themselves, are good and valid reasons for a visit to St. Mark’s Basilica, the Doge’s Palace, and the Piazza San Marco.

It is highly unlikely that anything, even remotely resembling these historical treasures, could compare in today’s world.

(To Be Continued)

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