

Rome 25.10.2009 – 31.10.2009

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25.10.2009 Thal to Rome

Today I shall leave for Rome. I am not feeling very well. The flu threatens to return for a third time.

I catch a train to the airport and notice that the trains have obviously wrong departure times, an hour early. Then I remember that in the night there was the change between summer- and wintertime, which I have missed entirely. I am an hour early at the airport and have to keep myself busy until the departure time. The flight is without any notable events, they even serve a sandwich, which is not common on short flights, where usually everything is charged. Arrived in Rome, it makes little sense to take the train to the city centre, as it is very uncertain if there are still buses to the 8.7 km outside the city centre situated hostel. I have to take a frightfully expensive taxi (€ 40) to the Plus Camping Aurelia, at least a Mercedes of the latest generation. I check in to a nice and quiet bungalow and fall asleep. The night is freezing cold, my thin sleeping bag much too cold.

26.10.2009 Rome

I get up early and want to, as I was asked to do last night, complete the formalities at the reception desk. But it is still closed. It is still surprisingly cold. I take bus 246 to the metro station "Cornelia" and from there the metro until Ottaviano, where I walk to the Vatican city. There I get stuck in a several hundred meters long queue for the Vatican museums. Touts try to get people to follow them with the promise that they could enter immediately with a guided tour, but for 40 instead of 14 Euro. I make good progress and after an hour, I am able to buy an entrance ticket. The museums are unfortunately not very well organised and not prepared for the huge masses of visitors. Thus maps and recommended tours are not available and it is difficult to find your way in this labyrinth. I end up seeing only a part of the museums, because one cannot turn back and do the missed parts. I see the Egyptian Museum, which is a bit weird here, as a different religion is depicted. What I don't miss are the Stanze de Raffaello, the paintings collection with works of famous and some Jewish artists such as Lionel Feininger or Marc Chagall. In the end I visit the Sixtine Chapel, which is so crammed with people that the experience suffers quite a bit. I then visit the St. Peter's Basilica. Impressive is the baldachin cast from bronze. A mass is read in Dutch. I walk to the Castle of Angels, which is perfectly illuminated by the noontime sun, but unfortunately closed. I continue to the Palazzo di Giustizia, which seems still to be used by the Supreme Court. I return, on the way I buy in a shop, which I notice is frequented by many locals, a big piece of Pizza for little money. I then return to the St. Peter's Basilica, where I climb to the dome, about 550 steps. The view is breathtaking; the time of the day is right, the St. Peter's Square is perfectly illuminated. I return and explore St. Peter's Basilica a bit closer. With the travel guide I notice the details. I then visit the Treasure Chamber of the Church. By metro and bus I return a bit exhausted to the Plus Camping, where I get some supper at the supermarket. I eat it in front of the bungalow, where I meet some Australians, South Africans and Colombians which are on one of those "Europe in 10 days" bus journeys.

27.10.2009 Rome

By bus No 246 and underground to the Piazza di Spagna. There I visit the Spanish Stairs. A little bit further is the Piazza Mignanelli with a massive column and the Palazzo Spagna, which still houses the Spanish Embassy. On the Via del Corso, along the Palazzo Ruspoli and the government building Palazzo Chigi to the Piazza Colonna with its huge column and

down Via del Corso to the Vittoriano, which sits high above the Piazza Venezia. On Piazza Venezia there is a Venetian Palace, the Palazzo Venezia, which gave the square its name. From here to the Pantheon, whose huge cupola, which has a opening on top, is very impressive. To the Palazzo Madama, the church Sant' Agostino, the Piazza Navona where next to the wonderful Fontana de Fiumi (by Bernini) some Communist party or trade union has set up its pathetic stall. Visited the church Sant' Agnese, built by Borromini. The Fonte Pasquino, where one can stick satirical notes on, is hidden behind boards because of renovation works. Back to the Piazza Venezia and to the Foro Traiano with the Traian Column. To the Capitolio, where I visit the Iglesia Santa Maria Aracoeli. Visited the Monumento Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele II. As I climb a bench in order to take a picture, I am whistled at. Inside the monument is a very patriotic museum. Along the Carcere Mamertino I walk to the Forum Romanum, which I enter from the Via dei Fiori Imperiali. On the Via Sacra I walk to the Antoninus Faustinus temple, which houses a church nowadays, to the breathtaking Maxentius Basilica with its huge arches. Today, it is all held together by massive steel braces, in order to prevent it from collapsing. To the Arch of Titus, which celebrates the victory of Emperor Titus over the Jews in Palestine and shows him carrying the Menorah from the temple. I climb the Palatin, where emperors used to live where there are many deep subterrestrial structures. It is sometimes hard to tell what is new and what is historic. Back to the Via Sacra, past the Basilica Aemilia to the Curia, where the Roman Senate used to convene and which is quite well conserved, housing a museum of stone sculptures. To the arch of Septimus Servus, where also the Umbilica Urbis, the building of the centre of town and the Phokas column are found. Further up are the remains of the Vespasian- and the Saturn Temple. I turn back and walk along the Basilica Julia (this was a market hall, not a church) to the Castor and Pollux Temple and the huge Atheneum Hall, whereof only two walls remain. I climb the Palatin again and visit the houses, whose inside is not accessible to the public, as well as the Palatine museum, the gigantic construction of the Domus Augustana, which extends several levels into the earth, the Stadio Palatino and the Terme Severiane. Then I quickly visit the Arco di Constantino and the Colosseo which is illuminated by the evening light. By underground and bus back to the Camping, where I have to notice to my horror, that my room has been cleaned and all my stuff removed. I complain at the reception desk, but nothing happens and I have to complain again until a worker returns a bag with all my stuff to me. As soon as I have my stuff again and eat my huge salad, a teacher of a German school class asks me to swap my bungalow with some of his pupils, so that they can all be together. As my bungalow has been cleaned and all my stuff packed into a garbage bag, I agree. We still have to notify the reception desk and then I take all my stuff from bungalow 189 to 175. But the shock of the cleared bungalow still sits deep.

28.10.2009 Rome

This time I take bus 247 to Cipro and take the underground until Repubblica. The warm baths of Diocletian are still closed. I walk to Termini Railway Station where I find out that the first train to the airport leaves at 05:50, far too late for the 06:50 plane. Walk to the church Santa Maria Maggiore, which is still built in the Roman Basilica-Style, with a straight ceiling. Past Bernini's Church San Carlo alla quattro Fontane to the Palace of the Quirinale, which is situated on one of the hills of Rome. To the Fontana de Trevi. Nearby I find a café with wifi internet, where I can send the most important mails with a dreadfully slow connection and update the webpage. I continue to the Colosseum, which I want to view from inside. The long queue at the entrance I can skip, as my ticket from the Forum Romanum is also valid here. The Colosseum is very impressive. Hard to imagine, that it has served as a quarry for centuries. Below the arena there were two levels with cages and rooms for the gladiators. Today, the wooden floors are missing. From the Colosseo I walk to the church of San Giovanni in Laterano. The church is still the Bishops' Church of Rome. Also here a straight ceiling, in the style of a basilica. They are celebrating mass, I listen to the singing. I then visit the monastery. From here I walk past the Scala Santa and through the city walls to the Piazza le Appio and down Via Magna Grecia to the Mercato, where I get a big cheese

sandwich for almost nothing. From here along Via Gallia back through the city walls to the Terme di Caracalla. They are immensely impressive, everything is xxx-large. The warm baths were able to house 6'000 visitors at the same time. They were made with modern technology, such as swimming pools, hot baths, gyms and sewerage. 2'000 years ago! I walk along the Circus Maximus to the Jewish Ghetto, where I visit the museum and the two synagogues, the Sephardic and the "Roman" Synagogue. I then visit the Isola Tiberina, which is reached via a bridge built in Roman times. The other Roman bridge, even much older, the "Ponte Rotto", only one arch is left. The rest was swept away by a flood in the 16th century. Walk back to the underground station Circus Maximus, from where I return to the Camping.

29.10.2009 Rome

By bus and underground to „Spagna“ from where I explore the area of „Villa Borghese“. A walk past the Museum Canonica up to the Bioparco, the zoo. It is, as described in the travel guide, a green oasis, a recreation area. All deserted in the morning, with the exception of a few joggers and some dog owners. From the zoo I walk back to town, where I first explore the Piazza del Popolo with the church Santa Maria del Popolo. As the mass is going start, we tourists are expelled from the church. This Square is also adorned by an obelisk which was taken from Egypt. At the end of the square are the twin Churches Santa Maria dei Miracoli and Santa Maria in Montesanto, which are under renovation right now and may not be visited. From here I walk down Via del Corso, visit the churches S. Giacomo as well the church across the road and the church S. Carlo al Corso. I then turn right, but to my dismay, the Mausoleo di Augusto is cordoned off. The Ara Pacis Augustae, an impressive marble monument, was put for the purpose of charging an outrageous entrance fee into an incredibly ugly building by the American star(?) architect Richard Meier. I won't have to mention, that thanks to this nuclear-power-station-like building it is pretty difficult to view the monument from the sides. From here I walk past the Palazzo Borghese to the Fortress of Angels, which I may now visit from the inside. It is reached via a spiralling ramp from Roman times, which was buried for many years and only rediscovered recently. One gets to Hadrian's burial chambers before entering the fortress, which the popes made out of the mausoleum. Some rooms are elaborately painted. The museums are not all that interesting, but from the terrace there is a good view over Rome. From here I walk to the underground station Lepanto, from where I travel by underground and suburban trains to Ostia Antica. There a German, a former history lecturer, offers her services as a guide at a decent rate and I accept. I am introduced into the roman residential houses, as well as the difference between Roman and Pompeian style. She explains why the mosaics look like carpets and how it looked in the olden days. After an hour the guided tour is over, but I continue to explore Ostia Antica. Of all the ruins I have visited here, these are the most interesting, because one may enter anywhere. The houses of Ostia Antica had two to three storeys and were more or less like modern houses, built of bricks and with running water even in the upper storeys. Some had hypocaustic heating, at least in some rooms. WC with water flushing was standard in the better houses, even in the upper storeys. Almost all houses had an Atrium with a well inside. A reception room at the end, to the sides bedrooms. Interesting was also the amphitheatre with the adjacent guild offices, the central forum, the thermes with the hypocaustic heating. By train I return to the Camping, where I notice that I have a roommate, an Albanian lady looking for work.

30.10.2009 Rome

By subway only to Valle Aurelia, from there I take the train to Trastevere. The station is not in the centre, but far outside. I take a tram for some stops, but get out too early and find myself still outside the city walls. I walk on Viale de Trastevere (Trastevere translates "across the Tiber") to Piazza Mastai, from where I seek out the Church of Santa Cecilia. All too soon, because it is, of course, still closed. So I walk to Piazza Santa Maria in Trastevere, however,

also this church is still closed. So I climb the Monte Gianicolo, first visit the church of S. Pietro in Montorio, donated by a Spanish King at the end of the 15th century, but the chapel in the courtyard of the Spanish Embassy is still closed. Then I go to the Mausoleum Garibaldi, a huge marble structure with a space in the underground. From here on to Fontanone or Acqua Paola, a magnificent fountain that was erected by Pope Paul V to his own glory. Then to Piazzale Garibaldi, with its equestrian statue of Garibaldi and four allegories on the sides. The view of Rome is good, but unfortunately obscured by haze and the sun is not exactly in the back. It is interesting that the dome of St. Peter's appears close enough to touch. I walk back to Trastevere. On the way I visit the now open Chapel of San Pietro in Montorio, the Temple of Bramante, which is supposed to be on the spot where St. Peter was crucified. Today we know that this is certainly false. In Trastevere, everything has opened now. I visit the Church of Santa Maria in Trastevere, which was built as a Roman basilica, with a straight cover. The mosaics in the apse were made in 1140. Then I continue to the Church of Santa Cecilia, whose mosaics in the apse are from the 9th century. The interior has been remodelled baroque, unfortunately, losing the basilica style. In the catacombs there are the remains of a Roman Insula, i.e. an apartment block, even with a grain store. The prayer room in the apse was designed in 1900 in the Art Nouveau style. I visit the Church of Santa Maria dell Orto, founded in 1492, which is not particularly noteworthy. I continue to the Church of San Francesco a Ripa, where there is a statue of the Blessed Ludovica Albertoni, a late work of Bernini. In a supermarket I buy pizza, hot dogs and cookies and eat them on a public bench. Then I walk over the Ponte Sisto, which is in fact a Roman bridge to the other side of the Tiber, rebuilt by Pope Sixtus after a flood. I visit the Palazzo Spada and Palazzo Farnese, before I get to the flower and vegetable market in Campo de 'Fiori. Past the Palazzo della Cancelleria to Piazza Navona, where the Communists still run their stand, playing loud music and apparently distributing food to passers-by. Back to the Largo Argentina, which is opposite the Teatro Argentino, an excavation site with three Roman temples. It is visible that the level of Rome has raised by about 15 feet since the construction of the first temple, probably because of the debris of the many destructions, which was simply filled in. To Piazza Mattei, where the Fontana delle Tartarughe (Tortoise Fountain) is under renovation. Visited the Jewish Ghetto (Via del Portico) again, then to the Capitolio. My feet hurt, but more when I am standing. So I decide to cancel the planned visit to the museum, it would be only a schlepp. I look at the Forum Romanum in the flat afternoon light, once again climb the Monumento Nazionale a Vittorio Emanuele II and then decide, because it's my last afternoon, making a "best of" tour. I walk past the Palazzo Pamphilj up Via del Corso. Turning right to the Trevi Fountain, then to the Palazzo Chigi and the Colonna, the gigantic big pillar. Then again to the Pantheon, which is now full of school classes, so that one can almost not move. Across the River Tiber to the Palazzo di Giustizia, past Castel Sant'Angelo to St. Peter's Square and along Via Ottavia to the subway station. On the way I see an advertisement of an airport shuttle and write down the phone number. As I arrive in camp, I check out and make them reserve a seat on the airport shuttle for tomorrow at 04:40 o'clock.

31.10.2009 Rome to Thal

At 04:30 I am at the gate of the Camping, but no airport shuttle. The guard tells me to wait. Two Frenchman arrive, who have booked the camp's own airport shuttle, although this doesn't run anymore this time of the year which even I knew. At 05:00 the airport shuttle arrives and takes me within a quarter of an hour to the airport, where I am even one of the first ones to check in. The flight to Zurich is marvellous, everything covered by a sea of clouds which shine in the morning light, with the Alps sticking out of them. We arrive on time in Zurich, where I, as I have no checked-in luggage, head straight for the railway station and head for St. Gallen. There I quickly purchase a monthly card for Monday and manage still to catch the train to Rheineck. I meet by chance Nigel, whom I have not seen for months. Arriving in Thal, I dig the bicycle out and quickly go shopping in Lustenau, as there are neither fruit nor vegetables around. I hate fruit with a passion! But as everyone tells me I

HAVE to eat them, I do, reluctantly, trying to ignore the stomach cramps fruit causes me to have. Cakes, cookies and chocolates NEVER give me stomach aches!



St. Peter's Square, Vatican City



Castel Sant'Angelo, Vatican



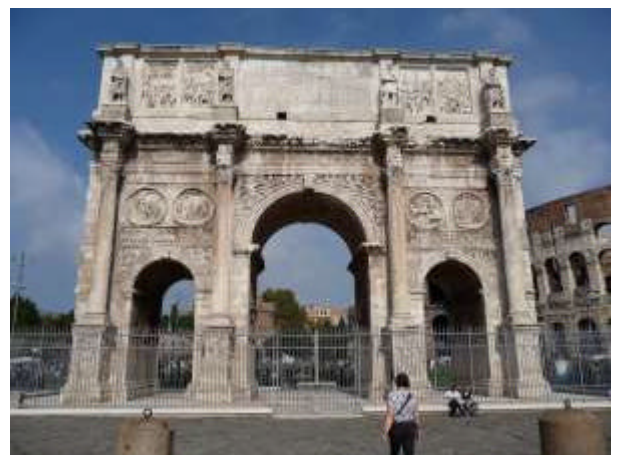
Romulus and Remus, Capitolio



Colosseum



Ostia Antica



Arch of Constantine