

SISTINE CHAPEL

Today was our last full day at the apartment. And our last chance to see the highlight of our Rome trip, the Vatican Museum and the Sistine Chapel. We got up early, and loaded ourselves in the van, and wended our way to the Vatican. Fortunately, 2-3 days before, I had more or less cased the joint and seen at least 2 underground parking lots in the area, and I had no problem finding and maneuvering to the first through a narrow side street, just two blocks away from St Peter's Square. The parking for the whole day was a very reasonable Eu19, at least when compared to NYC, but not to LA where parking is mostly free everywhere. However, the entrance to the museum was at the other side of the Vatican, about 6 blocks away, so we started walking, and after 2 blocks, found that the queue of people to enter already was right there. It took more than half an hour to get to the ticket booth. Along the way, there were vendors, and beggars, and performers, etc. There were a number of Pinoys in the queue, two, in fact, right in front of us. They were visiting from Manila. Halfway down, a Pinoy couple walking the other way stopped and started chatting, then brazenly asked if they could make "singit" into the line. Lisa promptly said "huwag naman, nakakahiya".

The part of the building where the ticket booths are located is very modern, reminds me of the Getty Museum in Sta Monica. But once past the section after paying Eu15, the character changes altogether, and we found ourselves being herded along a corridor filled with grandeur. Below are photos that juxtapose the two types.



We had rented those telephone-like gadgets that contain commentaries about the hundreds of exhibits. One just has to punch in the number on the keypad corresponding to the number listed on the exhibit. There were hordes of people, and fortunately, the arrangement of the exhibits was such that one just had to follow the flow, just like a river. We stopped here and there, to listen to the commentary from the headphones as we looked at some particularly interesting exhibit. But we were all eager to get to the piece de resistance, the Sistine Chapel.

Finally, after almost an hour, we were there. It was grandiose, and filled with people, craning their heads to see the magnificent work of Michelangelo on the ceiling. I could just imagine him way up on his back supported by wooden plants on rickety scaffolding, painting away for so many years. This also must have been the method of the artisans who did the Basilica's dome.

The signs said: no picture taking, maintain silence in this holy atmosphere, no sitting on the floor. However, the walls had a ledge, used as a bench to sit on, and we managed to grab some space to sit, and just meditate. What I found fascinating was some sort of cyclical event: all of a sudden the intercom would come on and in a couple of languages, remind the people to keep silent and not to take pictures. There would be a palpable effect of silence, but after a few seconds, the murmuring would rise and get louder and louder as people started talking, and cameras would click and flashes pop. Then, the intercom would come on again.

As the saying goes, when in Rome do what the Romans do, so I did just that: I talked, and I took one or two shots with my digital, but with the flash off.



My chin wasn't supposed to be there. I put the camera on floor to keep it steady as the self timer tripped the shutter for perhaps one second.

No need to describe what the Sistine Chapel is all about. Googling it would bring much more info. Highlights would be that the ceiling is over 5000 sqft covered by at least 3000 figures, taking 4 years of work. Here's a good link:

<http://www.twingroves.district96.k12.il.us/Renaissance/SistineChapel/Michelangelo/Ceiling.html>

By that time our group of 8 had lost each other. We couldn't find Jimmy and Lillian. So we carried on through the rest of the exhibits until we were back at the exit area adjacent to where we started. But we had to return the headphones; it was Stella's drivers license that was surrendered, and we couldn't find Jimmy and Lillian who had the last two sets. After milling around, and peering outside through the exit, we finally got reunited.



The exit spiral from the Museum

It was time for a late lunch. We walked to the Chinese restaurant 6 blocks away where we had taken dinner 3 days ago. Then it was time for more souvenir shopping, as we wended our way back to the garage to retrieve the van.

Since Paul and Nena hadn't seen many of the sights we had earlier seen on foot, we decided to drive by as many of them as we could. In looking for the Trevi Fountain, we got lost and found ourselves at the Spanish Steps, at the upper end, and there was parking. But before that, we managed to go to another popular tourist site, St Maria Maggiore church where there was a relic of her. I parked on the cobble-stoned square, but I wasn't too sure if that was legal so I just hovered around the van while the rest of them went into the church. Here's a good link: <http://www.panoramas.dk/fullscreen/fullscreen46.html>

Off we went to other places, and got hopelessly lost, as it was getting dark. We pulled into a gas station, diesel up, and asked the operator to point out where we were on the map. In 20 minutes, we were home. Time for the last home cooked dinner, then time to pack and get ready for an early start tomorrow for Florence.