

Cruise on the MSC Sinfonia 19-26 October 2019

Venice 17-18 October.

We stayed at the very convenient hotel, the Casa Sant-Andrea where we met up with Roar and Marit Berg who will be cruising with us on the MSC Sinfonia. Marit is Kathy's cousin. Unfortunately their bags had been lost on their flight from Norway (but they turned up next day). On the day before the cruise we all took the Venice hop-on hop-off ferry and had a lovely day seeing some of the main sights of Venice: the cruise terminal (just 4 cruise ships in!); St Mark's square with its imposing church and massive numbers of tourists; the Rialto bridge; Lido; and Murano where watched a glass blowing demonstration. The city is built on an archipelago of 118 Islands, and is intersected by over 150 canals and 400 bridges. Venice sure is an incredible city!



Saturday 19 October. Venice, Italy.

We checked out of our hotel and had a lovely walk along Venice's Grand Canal: a seething flow of people, boats of all kinds (including water taxis and gondolas), magnificent old churches and colourful buildings. Wonderful! In the early afternoon we caught the people mover to the cruise terminal and boarded the MSC Sinfonia smoothly. We are in Cabin 8179 and Marit and Roar are next door in 8175. These cabins are Fantastica ocean view, situated mid-ship on Deck 8. The ship is bigger than expected (2679 guests), and is in beautiful condition. The cabin doesn't have a couch, but is spacious and comfortable. After dinner with Marit and Roar in the Il Galeone restaurant at 6.30pm the show at 9.30pm was "Back to the musicals".



Sunday 20 October. Split, Croatia.

Split was founded as a Greek colony in the 3rd century BC. and has been ruled by the Romans, the Byzantines, Venice, the Ottomans, Hungary, Italy, Austria and Yugoslavia. In World War II the city was annexed by Italy, then liberated by the Partisans after the Italian capitulation in 1943. It was then re-occupied by Germany, which granted it to its puppet Independent State of Croatia. The city was liberated again by the Partisans in 1944, and was included in the post-war Socialist Yugoslavia, as part of its republic of Croatia. In 1991, Croatia seceded from Yugoslavia amid the Croatian War of Independence. Split is the second-largest city in Croatia and the main city of Dalmatia. It has a population of about 300,000.

We took Apodos' Blue Line tour to visit Salona, Klis, and Trogir. Salona is very close to Split, and has extensive Roman ruins with well-preserved walls; a forum; temples; a large amphitheatre and a number of cemeteries. It was the capital of Dalmatia in Roman times, and was the birthplace of the Emperor Diocletian in 244AD.



Next stop was the picturesque seaside town of Trogir. What a lovely town!

We enjoyed visiting the town square with its church, town clock, markets, judiciary and Dalmatian music.



Next was Klis, a village with a big castle built for Croatian kings back in the 8th century. It was taken over by the Knights Templar during the Crusades in the 11th century. Following many sieges it was turned into a fortress during the Ottoman wars (14th,15th century). Notable was a battle between a small number of Christians and thousands of Turkish muslims. The Christians prevailed and this prevented the spread of Islam into Europe. Back in Split we saw Diocletian's palace which was built for the Roman emperor in AD 305. It is now a major tourist attraction. After dinner we saw the show "Bella Italia".



Monday 21 October. At sea.

The weather was perfect and the sea calm so we had a nice quiet day at sea. We went to the gym in the afternoon, enjoyed the formal night dinner and the excellent show "A night in Paris". The shows on this cruise highlight a different country each time and the quality of the acts is outstanding.

Tuesday 22 October. Santorini, Greece.

We took a tender in to the famous Greek island and were then transferred to Oia by speedboat. Santorini was formed in a massive volcanic eruption and was known as Strongili (the Round One). Thousands of years ago the centre of the island sank leaving a caldera that has been partly filled in by the sea. It now has a croissant shape. Oia is a scenic village on the north-west edge of the caldera. Its picturesque blue and white houses and churches are built into the side of the caldera, 150 metres up from the port. The streets are crowded and narrow but the views are incredible, especially the sunsets. (Oia is known as "the eagle's nest"). After exploring Oia we took a bus to Fira, the capital of Santorini, 11 km away. Fira sits on the top of the caldera, 600 steps above Ormos, the Old Port. You can get up and down between the port and Fira by walking, taking a cable car or by hiring a donkey. The walk down was memorable - lots of cobblestones and steps, with plenty of interactions with the patient donkeys.





After a Mediterranean dinner in the restaurant we watched “Alma flamenca” - great flamenco dancers.

Wednesday 23 October. Sarande, Albania.

Albania has been inhabited by numerous civilisations including the Illyrians, Thracians, Ancient Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Venetians and Ottomans. The modern nation of Albania emerged in 1912, after the defeat of the Ottomans in the Balkan Wars. It was invaded by Italy to form Greater Albania before becoming a protectorate of Nazi Germany. Communist Albania was launched after the Second World War and which led to much oppression of its people and decades of isolation. The town was called Porto Edda for a period in the 1940s during WWII, after Mussolini’s daughter. The revolutions of 1991 included the breakup of Communist Albania and eventually the establishment of the current Republic of Albania.

Sarande is a seaside town on the southern Albanian Riviera, opposite Corfu, and not far from the border with Greece. The town’s name comes from Ayii Sarande, an early monastery dedicated to 40 saints. We walked around the town centre and saw the lovely waterfront, modern buildings facing out to sea, remains of an early basilica which became a synagogue, and occasional evidences of Sarande’s awful past. A great contrast between the modern tourist centre and the old closed communist state! After dinner we watched the show “Rock the baroque”.



Thursday 24 October. Dubrovnik.

Dubrovnik is a beautiful walled city and is a World Heritage site. Recently it has become even more well known as “Game of thrones” was filmed there. Dubrovnik has a population of around 50,000. After the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991 Dubrovnik was besieged for seven months by Serbian and Montenegrin soldiers of the Yugoslav People's Army, and suffered significant damage. After major repairs in the 1990s and early 2000s, Dubrovnik re-emerged as one of the top tourist destinations in the Mediterranean.

We took Vidokrug’s Panoramic Dubrovnik tour to see the major sights: the spring of the River Ombla, Franjo Tuđman bridge, Fort Imperial on Mt. Srđ (cable car summit), Pile Gate and the impressive city walls.



On walking through the Old Town we saw the Republica Ragusa; Onofrio's fountain which was main source of drinkable water till beginning of 20th century; the oldest functioning pharmacy in the Franciscan monastery; the Cathedral; the Old Town port, and Luza Square including the Rector's Palace, St. Blaise, Sponsa Palace and the main street Stradun. Wonderful!



In the evening we had a lovely dinner, cocktails with the Captain, and then went to the "Viva Sinfonia" show.



Friday 25 October. Ancona, Italy.

The cruise terminal is right by the centre of Ancona – a major port in the Adriatic. The greater city has a population of about 500,000, with great weather and beautiful beaches. We wandered around the old city and saw the main sights: the San Ciriaco Cathedral, the Church of Santa Maria, the Piazza del Plebiscito, and the old Roman amphitheatre. The churches here are enormous and there are lots of them. After dinner we watched the final show "The best of Sinfonia" and then packed up ready for our departure for Norway.



Saturday 26 October. Venice to Oslo

Our cruise finished back in Venice and we disembarked smoothly. We took the people mover to Piazzale Roma and caught the ATVO bus back to Marco Polo airport. We then flew Norwegian to Oslo – a 2½ hour flight.

Highlights of our cruise on the MSC Sinfonia were:

- sharing the cruise with Marit and Roar
- beautiful weather and flat sea every day
- the MSC Sinfonia: a lovely clean ship; a comfortable cabin; good food and excellent shows
- our shore excursions which enabled us to see some truly wonderful places. We didn't use any of the ship's shore excursions but still saw all of the main sights, possibly even more. The places we visited were all new to us, very historic and with interesting, sometimes difficult histories.

Overall, this was a really wonderful cruise.

