



# *Italy*

## *Part 4*

### *Florence & Pisa*

*June 13 - 15, 2015*

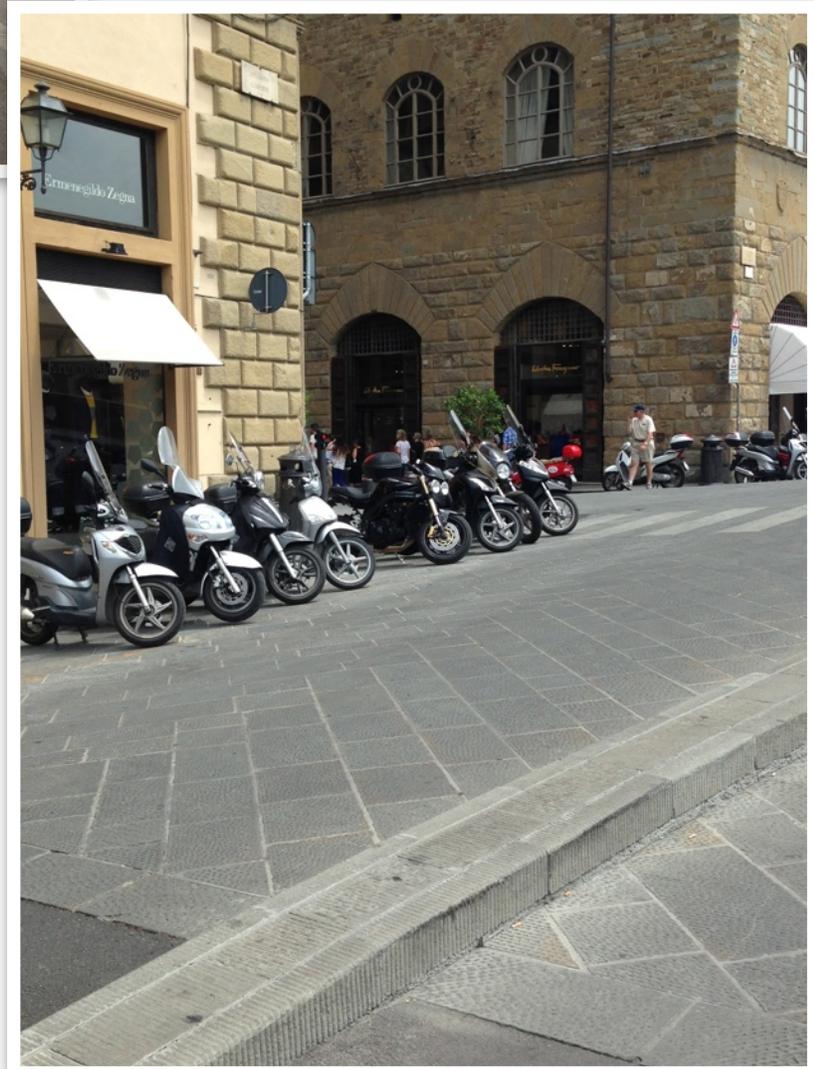


June 13, 2015 - Anna and I boarded the Italo bullet train from Venezia (Venice) to Firenze (Florence). As the train picked up speed, Anna Googled the kilometers to miles conversion. In case you're wondering about the sign above, that was in the train car over the door registering the speed of the train. We could watch as it slowed down or picked up speed. Anna discovered that 300 km converted to 186 miles per hour!! Our ears were popping and we were giggling in amazement at the speed we were traveling. Anna tried to post on Facebook about our ears popping, but it came out "our ears are pooping", which led us into such laughing out loud that people were turning around looking at us crazy old ladies laughing like teenagers. What really made Anna laugh was a gesture with my hands of poop coming out our ears....but it's one of those moments of hilarity that we always say....I guess you had to be there!!



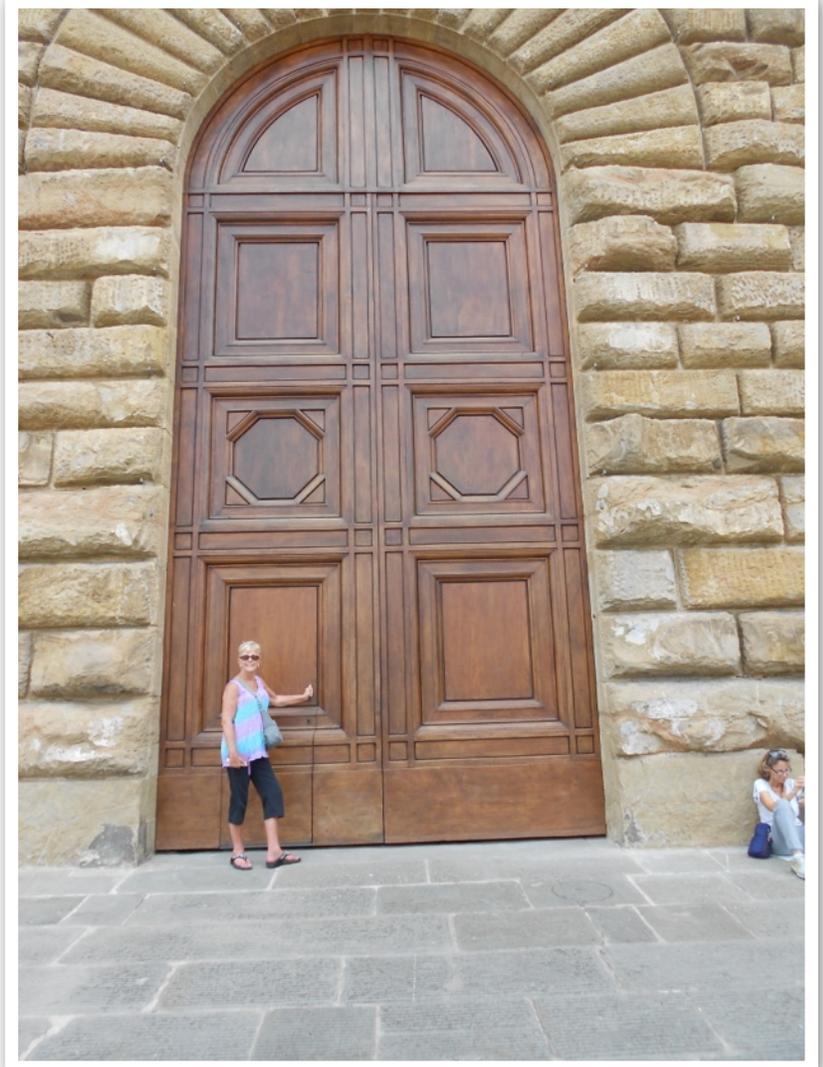
So much for high speed trains getting us to Florence in record time, but, of course, we arrived too early to check into our hotel room at the Grand Hotel Minerva right near the train station. They let us stash our luggage in the lobby, and Anna and I headed out to start walking and exploring.

Motorbikes are the practical way to travel through small European streets.



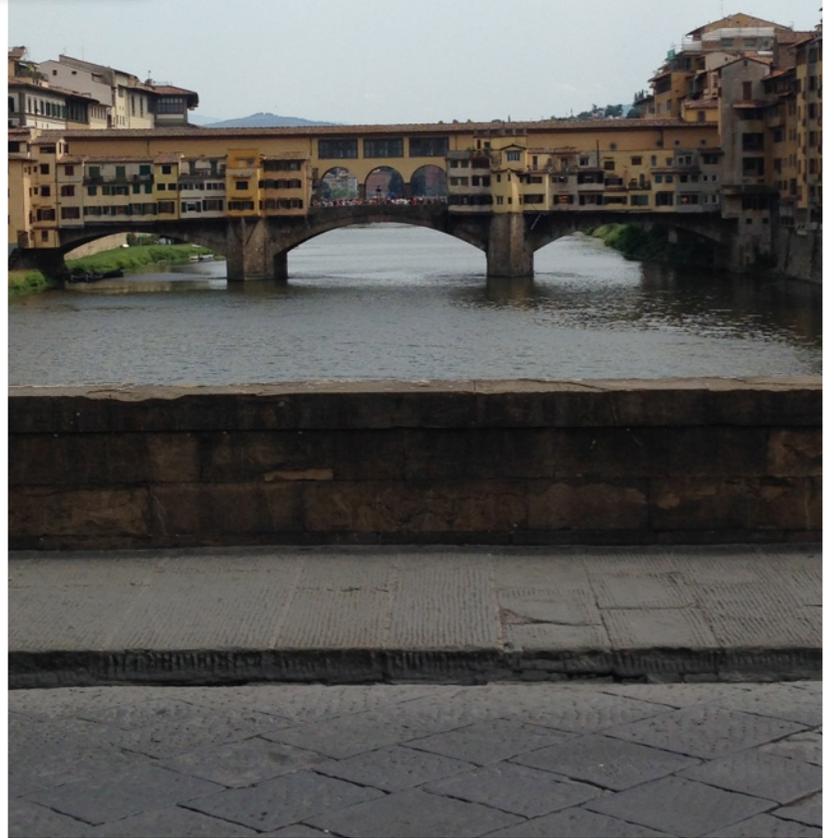


That's one big door Anna is standing in front of at the Pitti Palace. I do remember that they were having a lapis lazuli gem exhibit that we checked about, but decided to pass on it.





Narrow streets and sidewalks and below Anna referred to that as "the gold bridge." It's filled with jewelry shops along each side of the bridge that sell mostly gold jewelry and some silver.





That's me as we go on the  
gold bridge by a statue  
of....somebody??





We headed back to the Grand Hotel Minerva and were finally able to check into our room. It was lovely. Longfellow and Mark Twain stayed at this hotel in their era.





We went up to the rooftop terrace to check out the pool and our view of Florence.

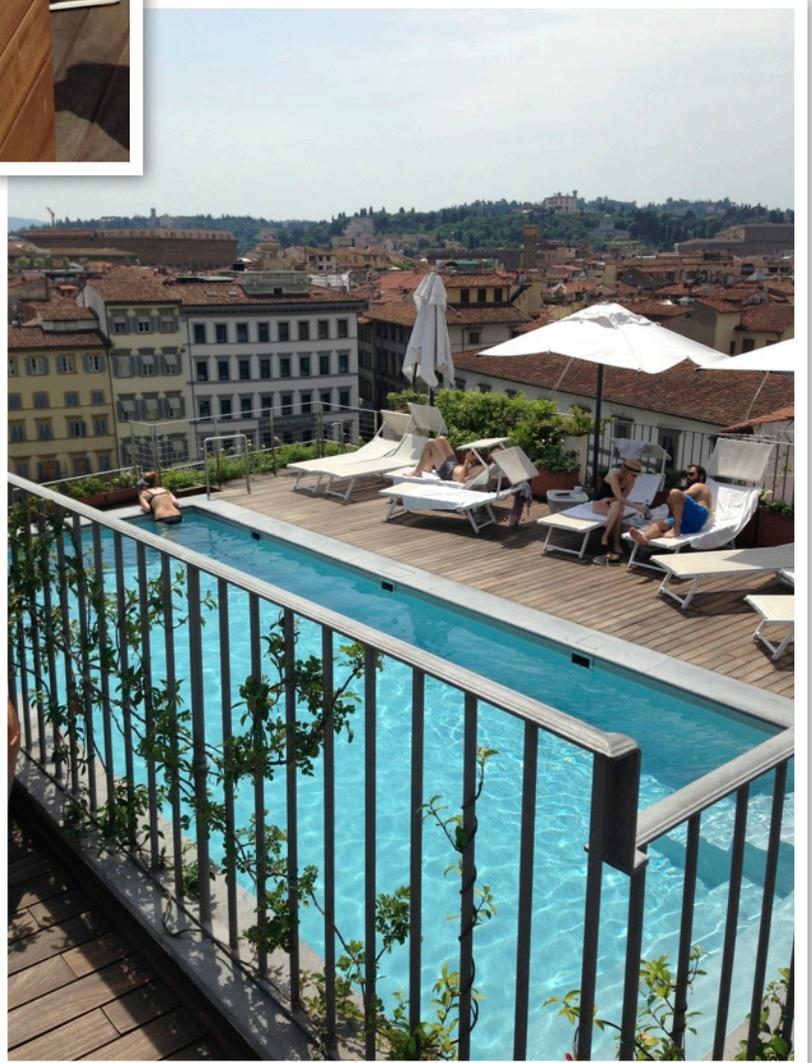








Beautiful pool area and stunning 360 degree views. We even had a marching band enter the piazza below for some sort of festival going on that day. I joked to Anna that it was our welcoming committee!





This bell tower chimed  
a few times for us.





Snacks and drinks on the rooftop terrace...and to rest our feet from walking





A pesky pigeon wanting some free snacks! And then he brought a friend!





We headed out to wander around and to also look for the place to meet our tour group in the late afternoon. Florence had some interesting street art, and Anna wandered into a vinyl record store called Twisted Jazz Shop.



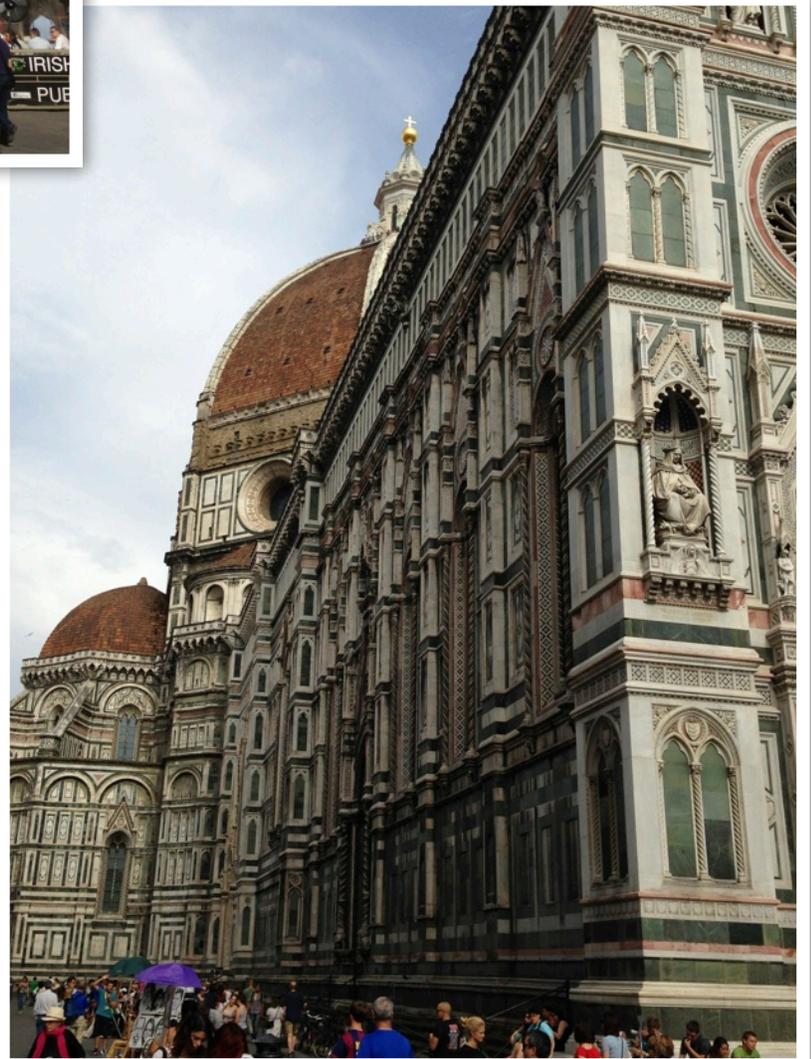


Anna and I walked in circles again looking for a church named after her dog, Santo. We finally found it and it was closed. On the left one of the places we stopped to get a refreshing drink and some respite from the heat and to sit and soothe my aching feet. It had cool artsy lampshades.





We met up with the tour director who walked us over to the gallery where the Michelangelo statue of David was housed. Along the way we saw the one huge main church that is a big tourist attraction in Florence.

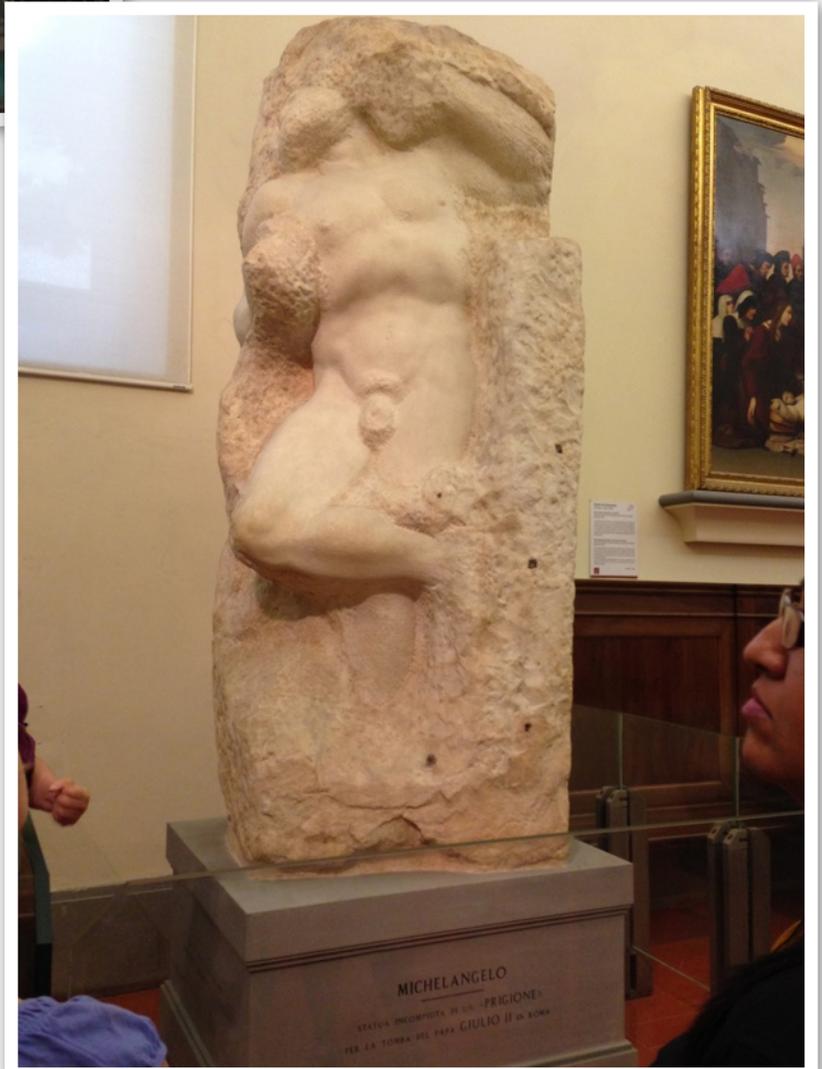


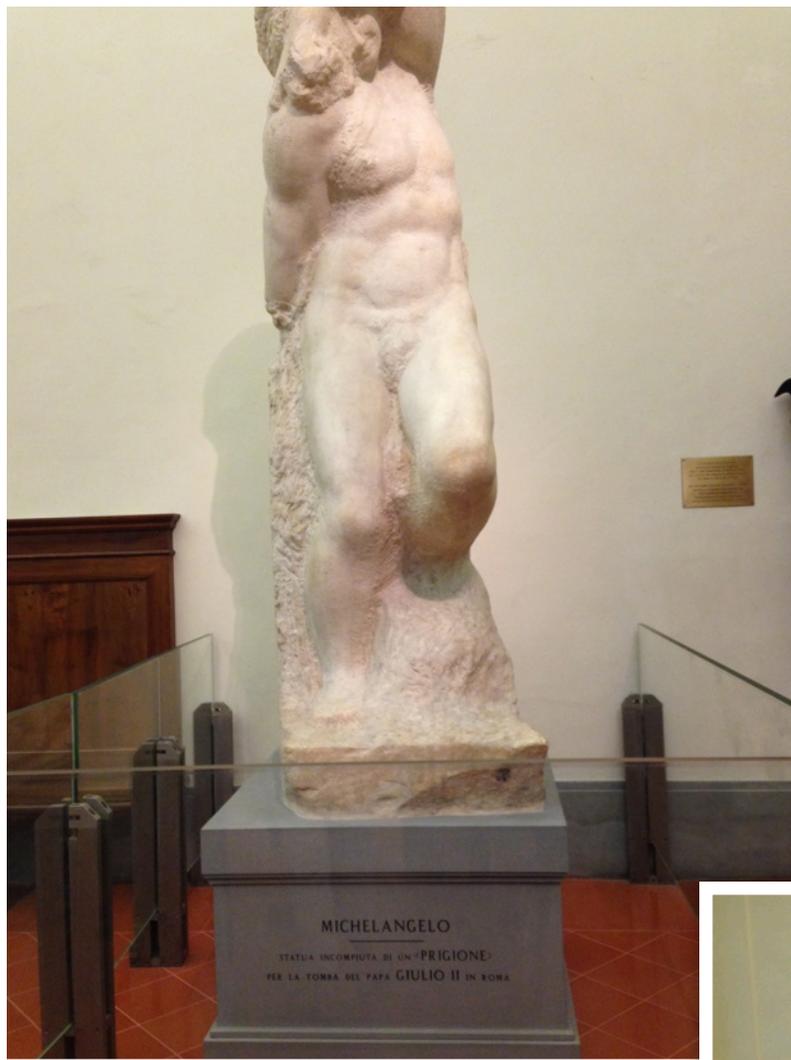






After entering the museum, we saw a few unfinished statues by Michelangelo.





And other sculptures by Michelangelo.





Then I caught a glimpse of the David statue and walked over to take the first photos. It is very definitely impressive to see in person.



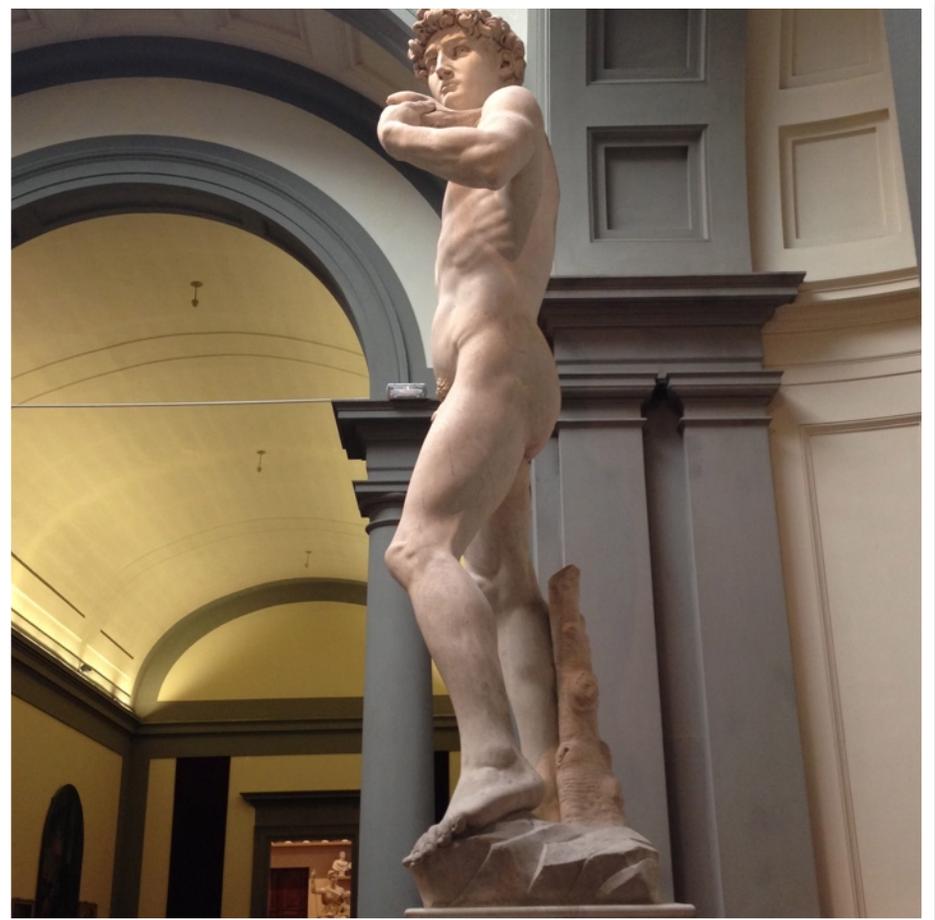


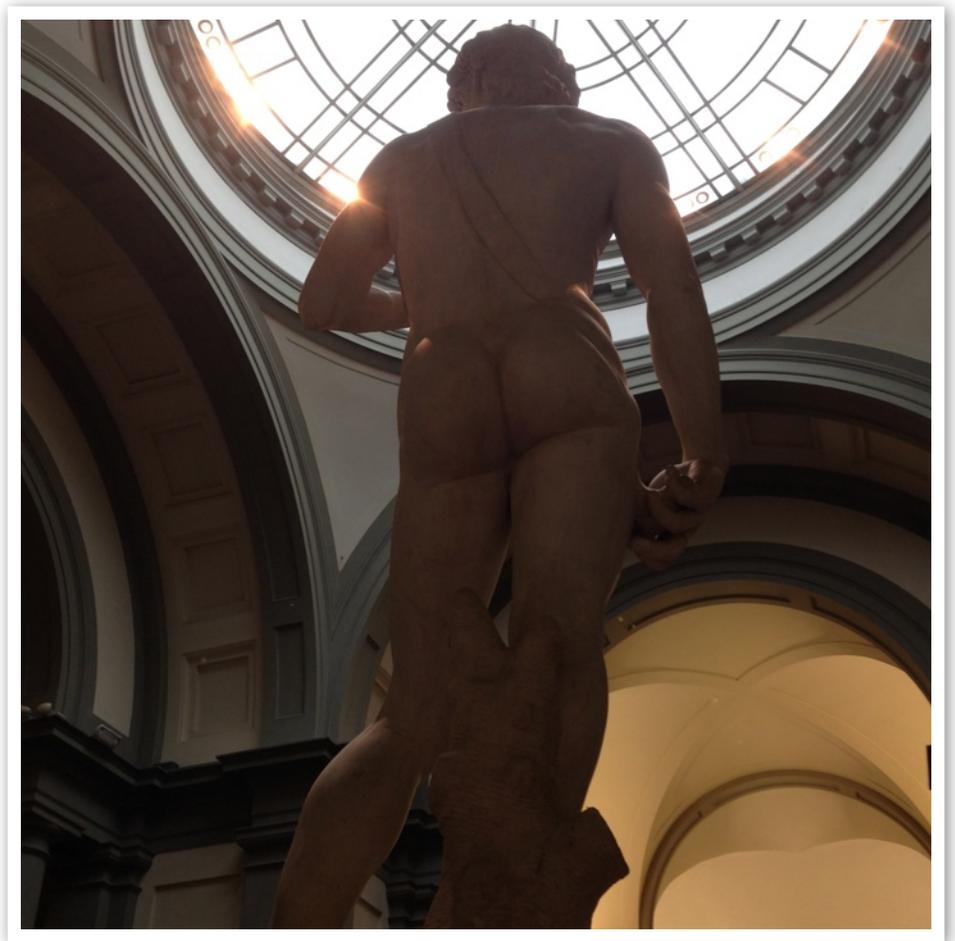
It's really just stunning to see it  
in the specific lighting and  
position in the gallery that they  
have it placed in.

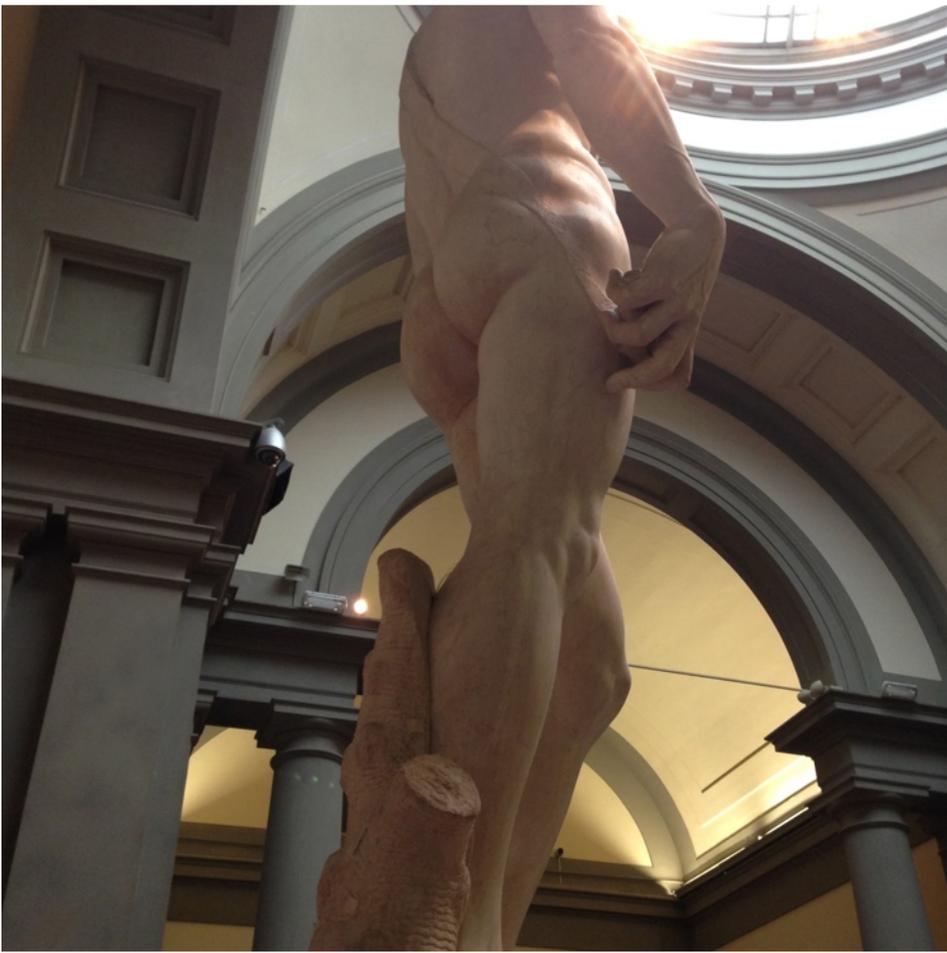


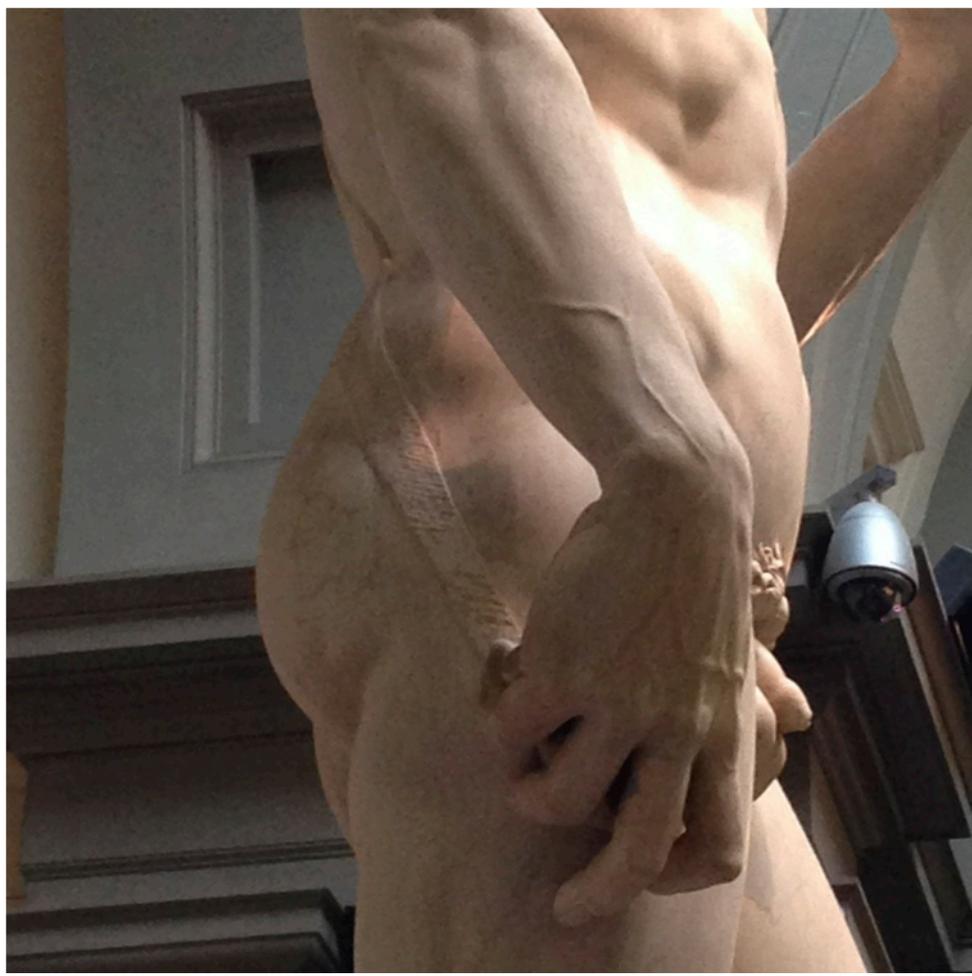


Our tour guide was a marvel at understanding the artistic nuances of every aspect of the statue. As she talked, I found myself walking around it and taking photos of all sorts of angles and features.

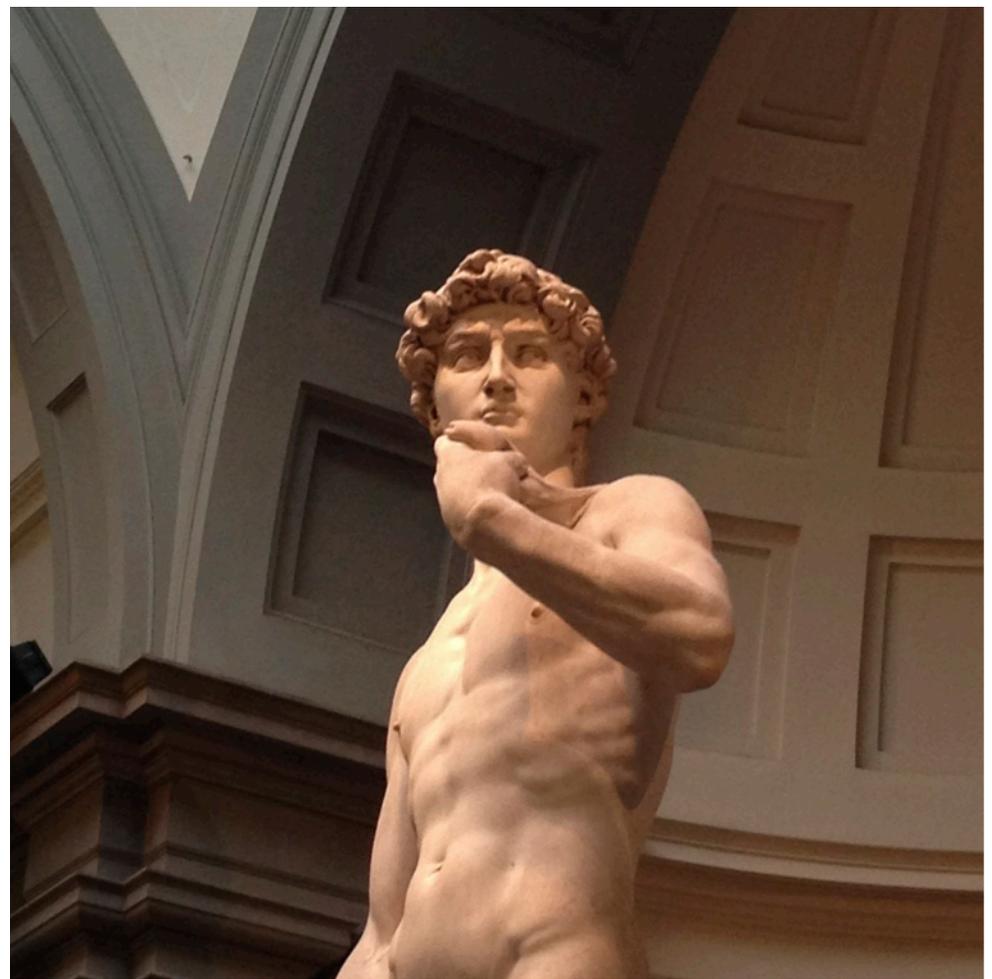


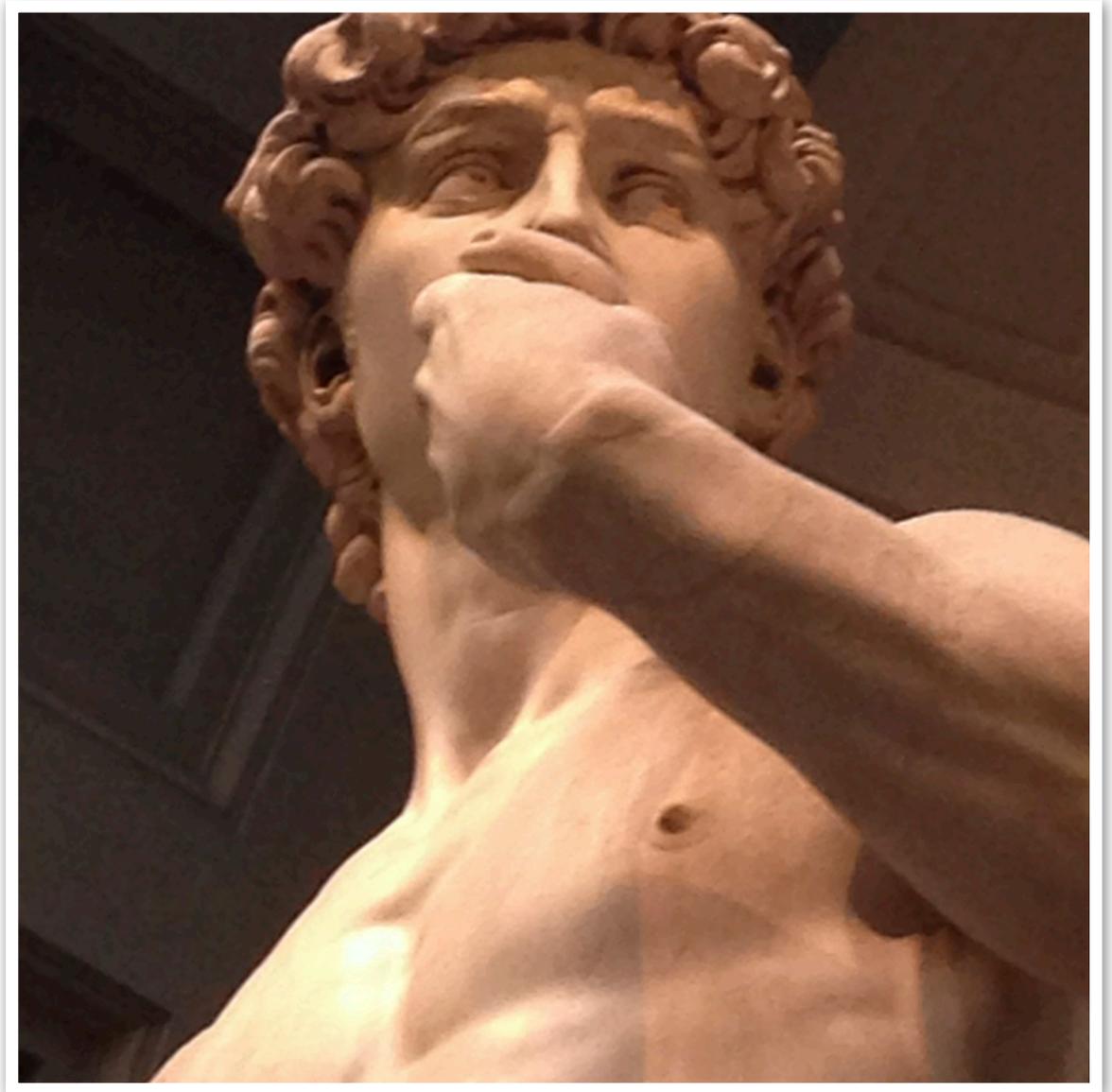
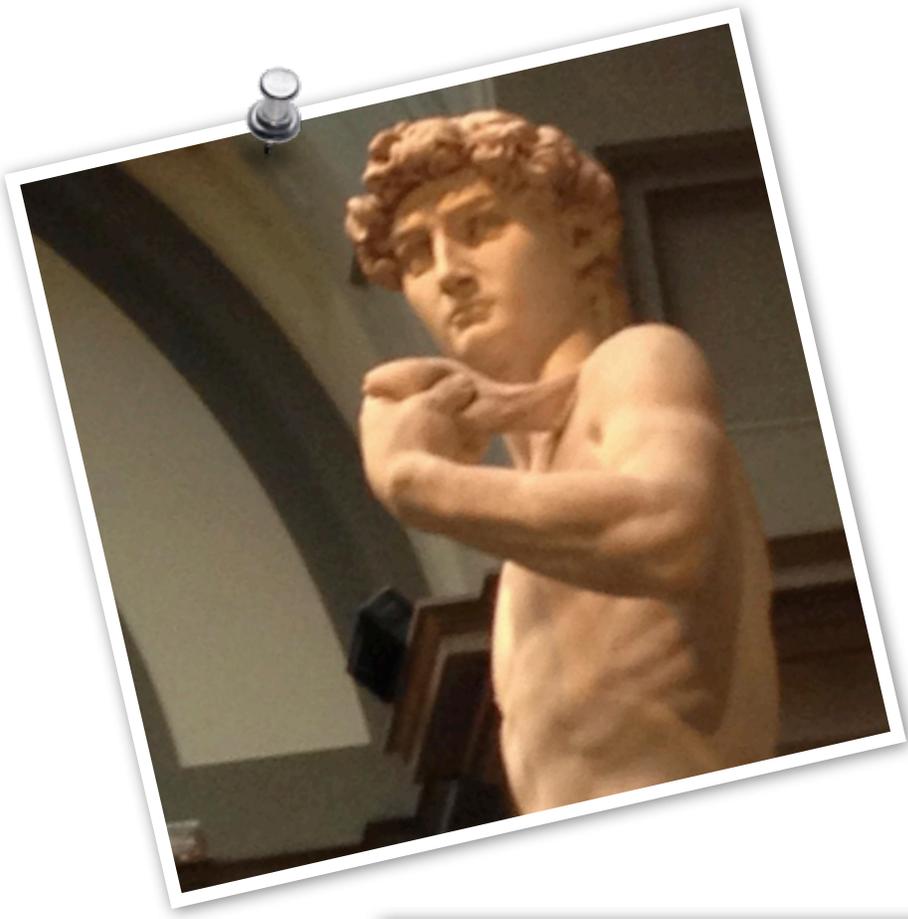


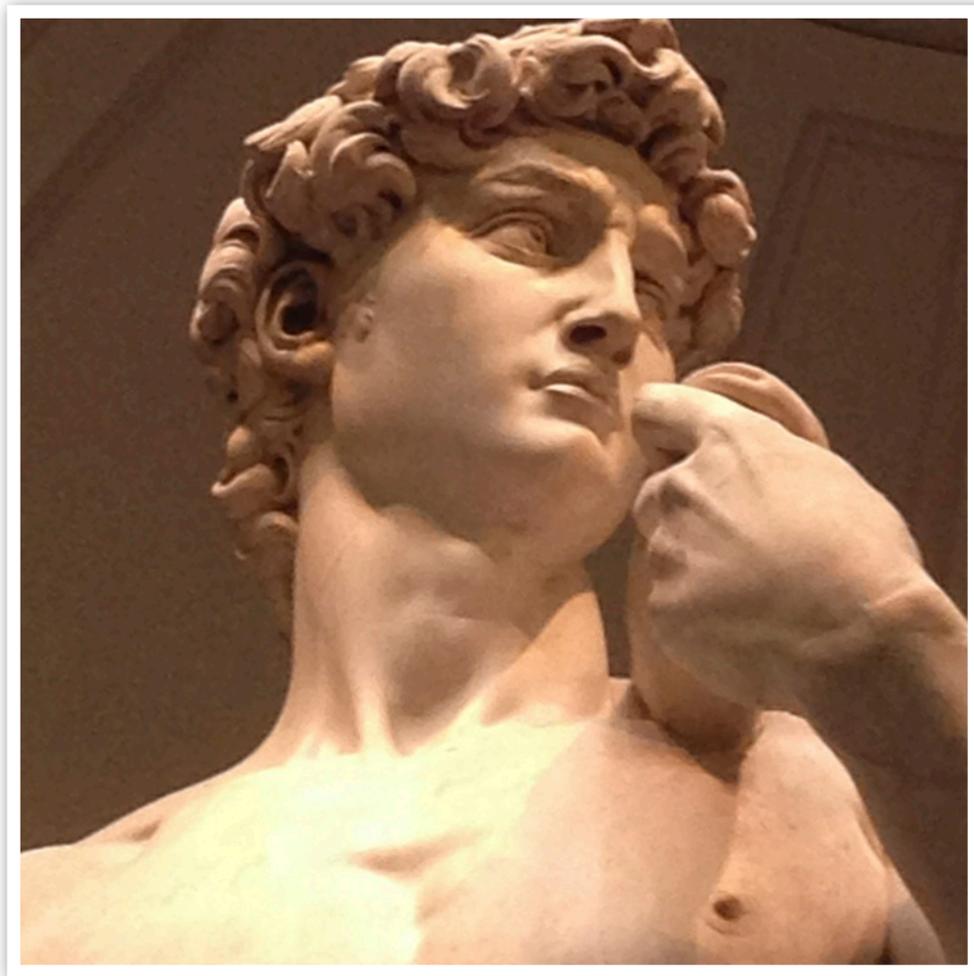




She pointed out the details of the veins in the arms and the expression on its face from different angles.









That would be me above at the gallery....I enjoyed seeing this work of art so much, that I overcame the fact that I was in so much pain from my aching feet and calve muscles from walking all through Venice over bridges and now all over Florence.



One last photo as we left the museum.



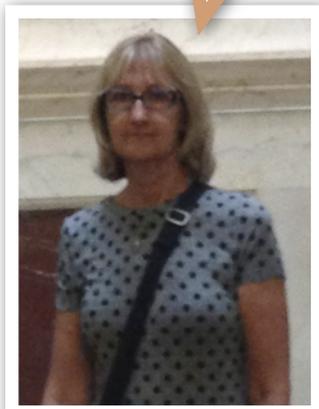
We walked back to our hotel and ate appetizers and dinner on the terrace overlooking the piazza. The hotel had free prosecco sort of happy hour in the evening. We were entertained by a street musician guitarist.

June 14, 2015 - The next morning we got up early to walk to meet our next tour guide for the walking tour of Florence. Did somebody say walking again?





We started the walking tour in the town square. There are carousels everywhere in Italy and France. I took these photos because I was thinking I wish I could put Ariya on it!!







We went on so many tours and so much history I can't remember a lot of what was taught to us. I do remember the guide saying something about the flags at the top of this statue. Florence is apparently divided into four sections. There are four flags on each direction of the statue facing the territory of Florence that they represent.

Amidst some of the more modern buildings are a few of the ancient buildings still standing through the centuries of time.





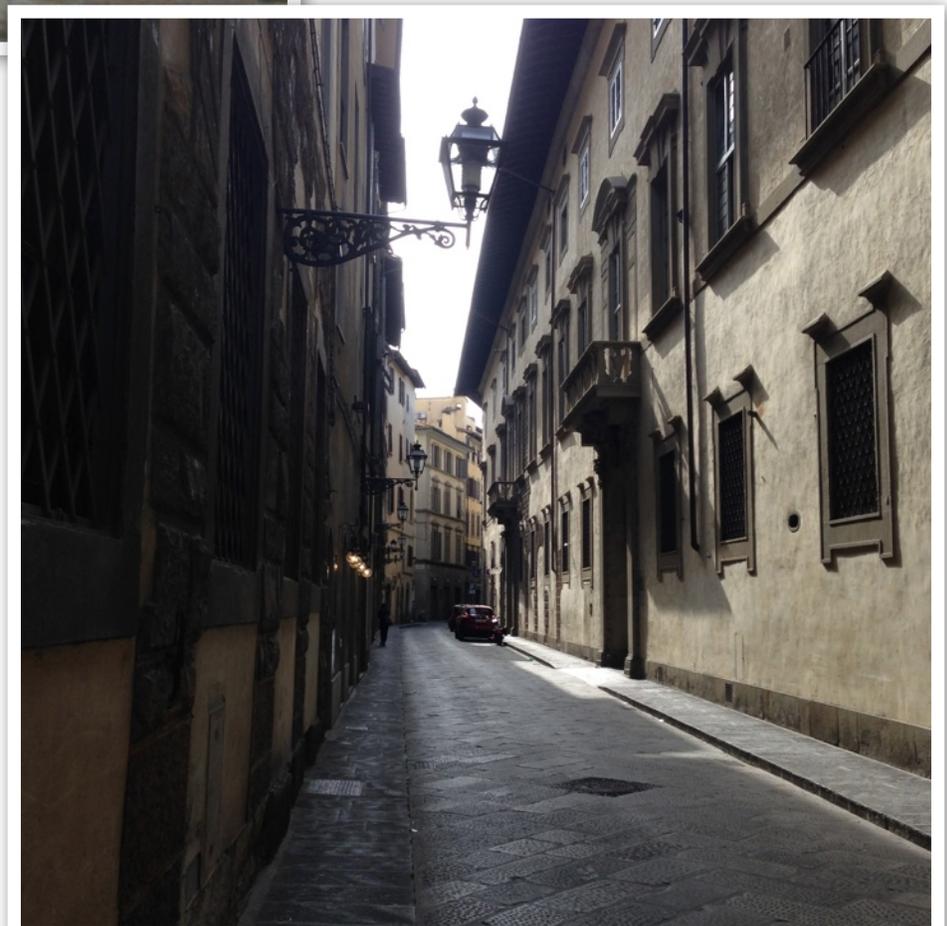
This old building looks a bit like a castle. We were told that it did once belong to people of wealth in the city of Florence.





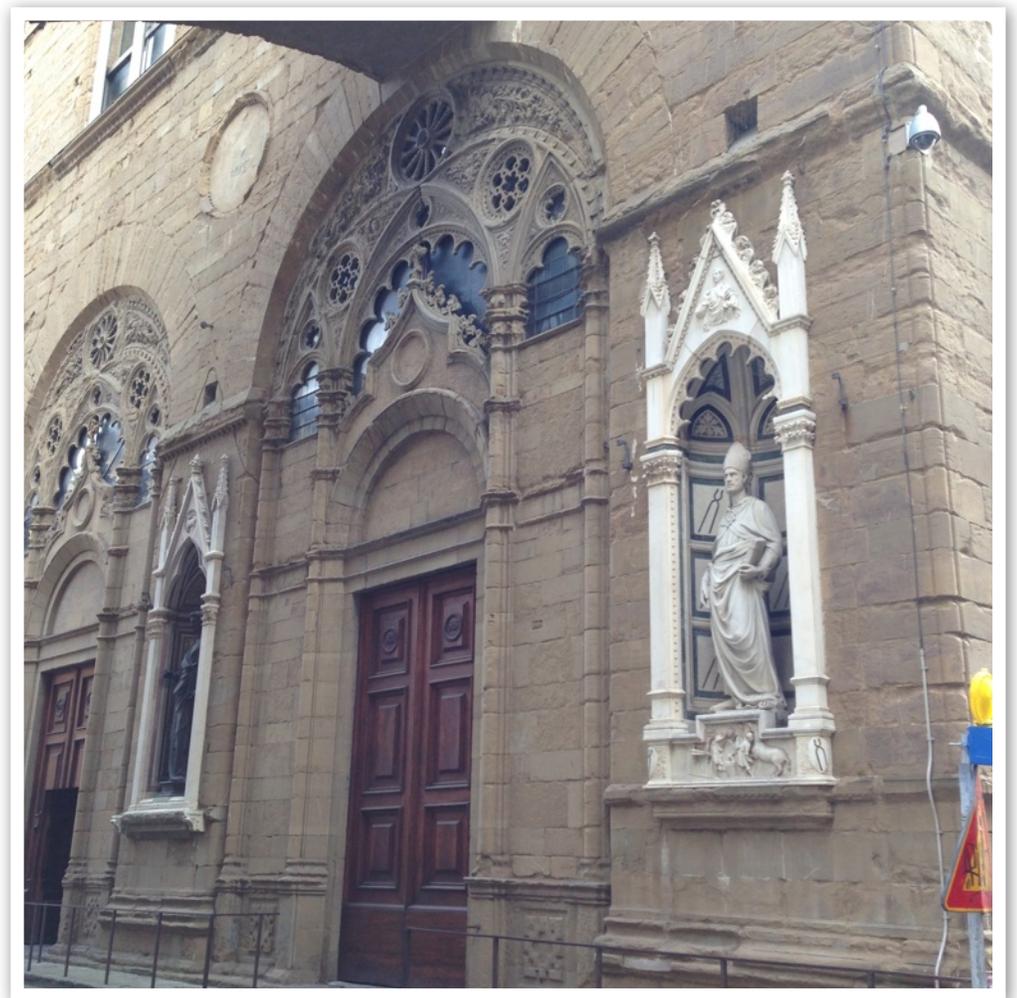
Our guide explained that if you see a statue embedded into any of the old buildings in Florence, it would depict what kind of business they were in that made them wealthy enough to have such a large house. The sheep depicted in the side of this house that looked like a castle means they were in the wool business.

One of the many narrow streets of Florence.



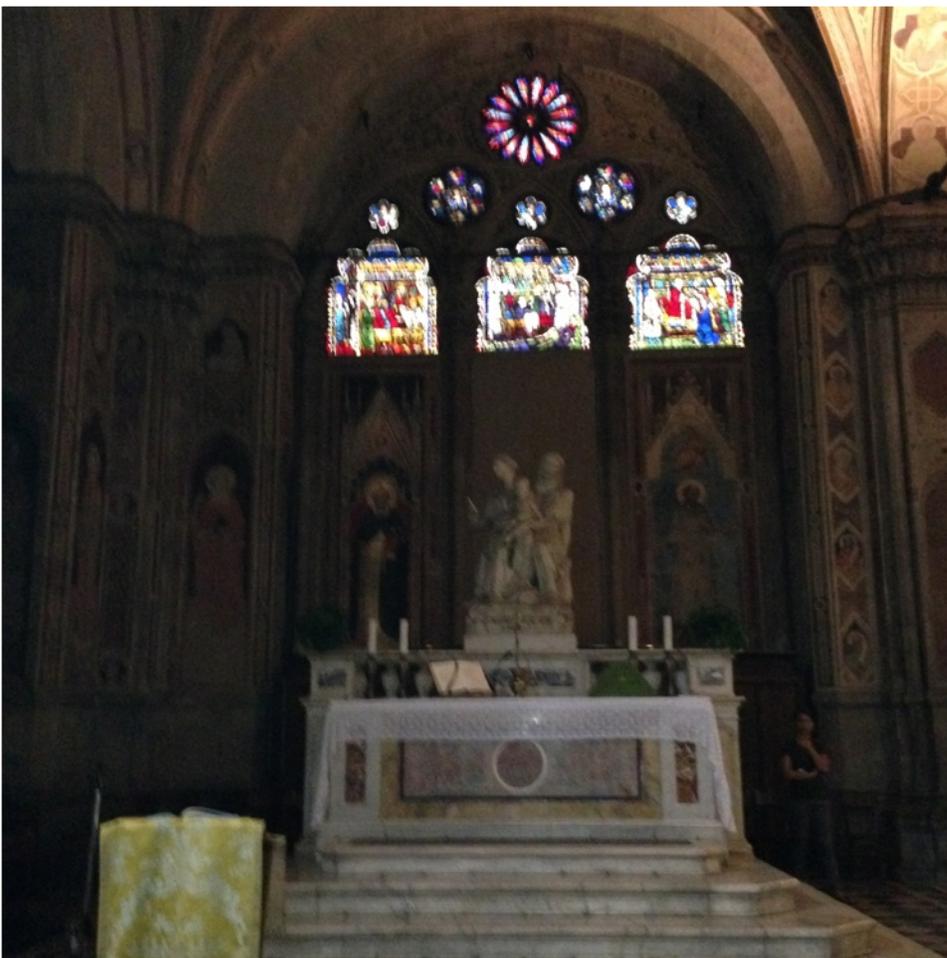


This building was once an open grain market and then was made into a church.



A statue of St. Mark.







These three photos on the previous page and on the left are of the inside of the church that was once the grain market. We could still see the chutes where the grain was poured down from the top floor into the bags of the customers. When they turned the market into a church, people would still come in to get their grain from the same chutes pouring grain into their sacks from the second floor. As our guide explained, the people of Florence are very practical people.





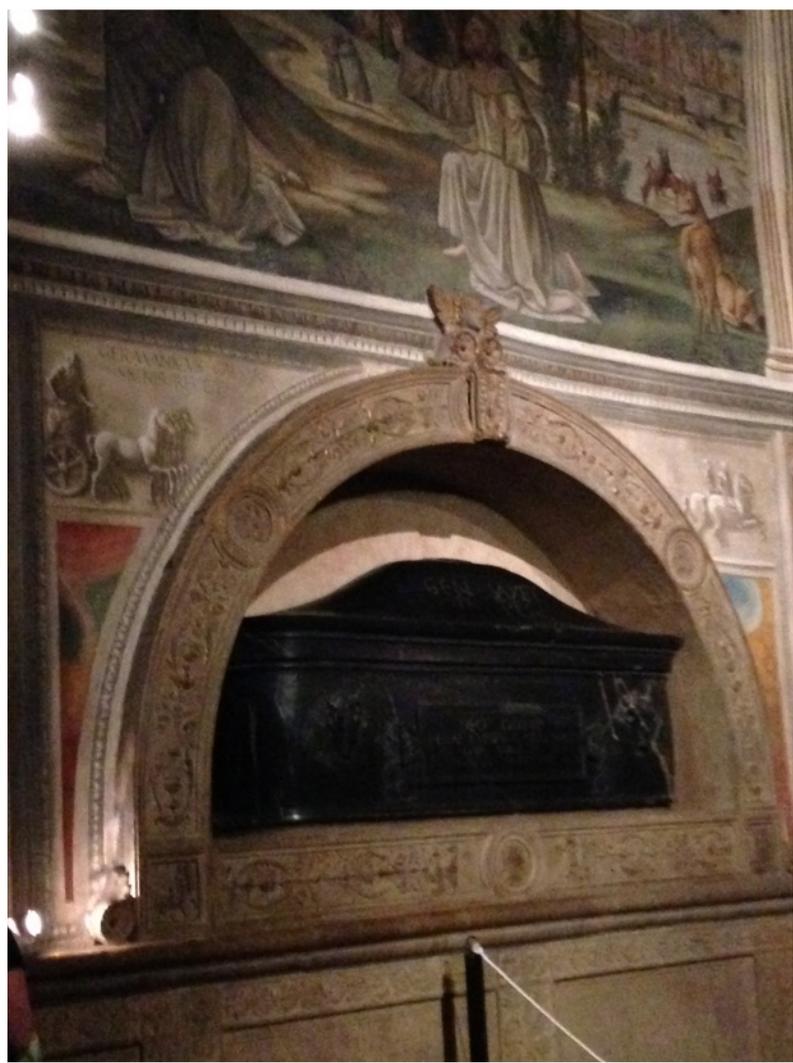
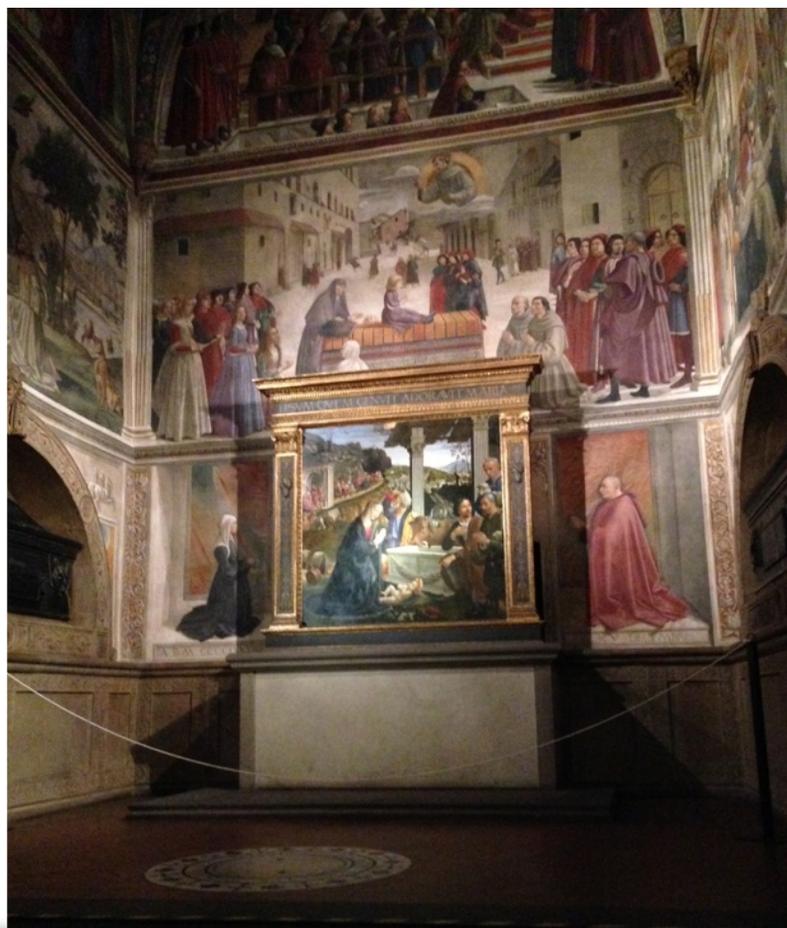
Continuing on our walking tour through the streets of Florence. Did I mention my legs were aching and my feet were pulsing and pounding with pain? I never walked so much in my life, as I did on this trip to Italy, Greece and France.





An amazing street artist doing the Mona Lisa in chalk. On this street there were three designated places for street artists to draw. Although they were outlined and marked off for the artists to create, cars and trucks would still drive over them. Eventually the rains would come and wash away such fine works of art.





Stopped into another church to see the beautiful art work. The priest was nervous about a handful of us tourists and came over to make sure the rope was in the right place for us to keep our distance. The tour guide joked saying, "Let's leave before he locks us in the church dungeon."

Some sort of art exhibit having to do with "spoons."



# Spoon - I eat earth

**GALLERY Hotel Art**

**GALLERY HOTEL ART PRESENTANO SPOON - I EAT EARTH, FAME DI VITA E UN ORIGINALE OMAGGIO A EXPO2015**

Artista, designer e, dal 2012, Art Director di Lungarno Collection, inaugura, in Vicolo dell'Oro a Firenze, Spoon - I eat earth, nuova iniziativa dal Gallery Hotel Art, in omaggio a Expo2015 e al tema Nutrire il pianeta. Energia per la vita.

tra quest'anno sul rapporto dell'individuo con il mondo, considerando il tema della fame - fame di vita, di pensiero, di libertà, di certezza verso gli altri: il centro del progetto è un grande cucchiaio posto in Vicolo dell'Oro, realizzato in plastiche riciclate e alto e poggiato su un cumulo di terra umida e spaccata di luce. La parete del Gallery Hotel Art diventa invece la base su cui collocare le panchine inferiori, un metro e mezzo di altezza, sempre in plastica rigenerata e rigenerabile. Lo schema con cui sono organizzati gli spazi: una serie di cucchiaini bianchi attornia un centro di cucchiaini rossi.

il progetto è costituito da un cucchiaio-panchina, che ha il pregio di riproporre il tema in una chiave più divertente e di maggiore interesse pubblico. Nelle intenzioni dell'artista, la panchina è una sorta di culla dei pensieri che, con la sua forma avvolgente, aiuta lo spettatore in contatto con la propria interiorità permettendogli di liberare energie positive utili a se stesso e al rapporto con il mondo.

Gallery Hotel Art sono stati realizzati insieme a Carlo Rizzetti, che nel 1993 è stato fra i firmatari del manifesto della Cracking Art, al progetto ponendo la propria tecnologia al servizio di un'idea in cui crede: da Spoon - I eat earth nasce quindi anche una serie di sedili identici a quelli esposti, in vendita dal 1° maggio, accattivanti, divertenti e facili da trasportare. Al cucchiaio è stato dato un omaggio a Bruno Munari e al suo lavoro, cui D'Auria si ispira, per l'attenzione alle cose semplici e per la vocazione universale del suo progetto. "Noi non vogliamo far capire che finché l'arte resta estranea ai problemi della vita, interessa solo a poche persone" (Bruno Munari, Arte come impegno). L'arte di Simone D'Auria fa parlare di sé con il sorriso, con la meraviglia, con uno wow! che erompe all'improvviso: wowart, il movimento che l'artista sta organizzando per diffondere e testimoniare una visione del mondo e della vita più solare, solidale, entusiasta.

**SIMONE D'AURIA AND GALLERY HOTEL ART FEATURE SPOON - I EAT EARTH, A HYMN TO THE HUNGER FOR LIFE AND AN ORIGINAL TRIBUTE TO EXPO2015**

Simone D'Auria, artist, designer and, since 2012, Art Director of the Lungarno Collection, inaugurated, in Vicolo dell'Oro in Florence, Spoon - I eat earth, new work commissioned by the Gallery Hotel Art, in tribute to Expo2015 and the theme Feeding the Planet. Energy for life.

D'Auria focuses this year on the individual's relationship with the world, considering the themes of hunger - hunger for life, of thought, of freedom, of experiences, of openness to others: the heart of the project is a large spoon placed in the Vicolo dell'Oro, made from recycled plastics and more than 5 meters high, stuck in the damp earth, cracked by the light. The wall of the Gallery Hotel Art instead becomes the basis on which to place 63 teapoons, each one a meter and a half high in size, also made from regenerated plastic. They were organized to reproduce the design of a target: a series of white spoons surrounds a circle made with red ones.

The third focal point of the project is a spoon-shaped bench: which presents the theme to the public in a more fun and interactive way. The artist invites you to sit and be soothed by your own thoughts: with its wraparound shape helps the viewer to get in touch with his inner, allowing him to release positive energy useful to themselves and to the relationship with the world.

The 63 teapoons of Gallery Hotel Art were made with Carlo Rizzetti, who in 1993, was one of the signatories of the manifesto of the Cracking Art. Rizzetti participates in the project as producer, putting his technology at the service of an idea in which he believes: from Spoon - I eat earth, is born a limited set of spoons identical to those exposed, on sale from May 1st, catchy, fun and easy to carry. The spoon was named Bruno, in homage to Bruno Munari and his work, which inspired D'Auria, for the attention to the simple things and the universal vocation of his work: "We need to understand that, as long as the art is still foreign to problems of life, affects only a few people" (Bruno Munari, Art as a profession). As always, the art of Simone D'Auria makes itself heard with a smile, with the wonder, with a "wow!" that erupts suddenly and wowart.it, is the movement that the artist is organizing for bearing and testify to a world and life view more cheerful, supportive, Eco-enthusiastic.

#brun Spoon #galleryhotelart @lungarnocollection

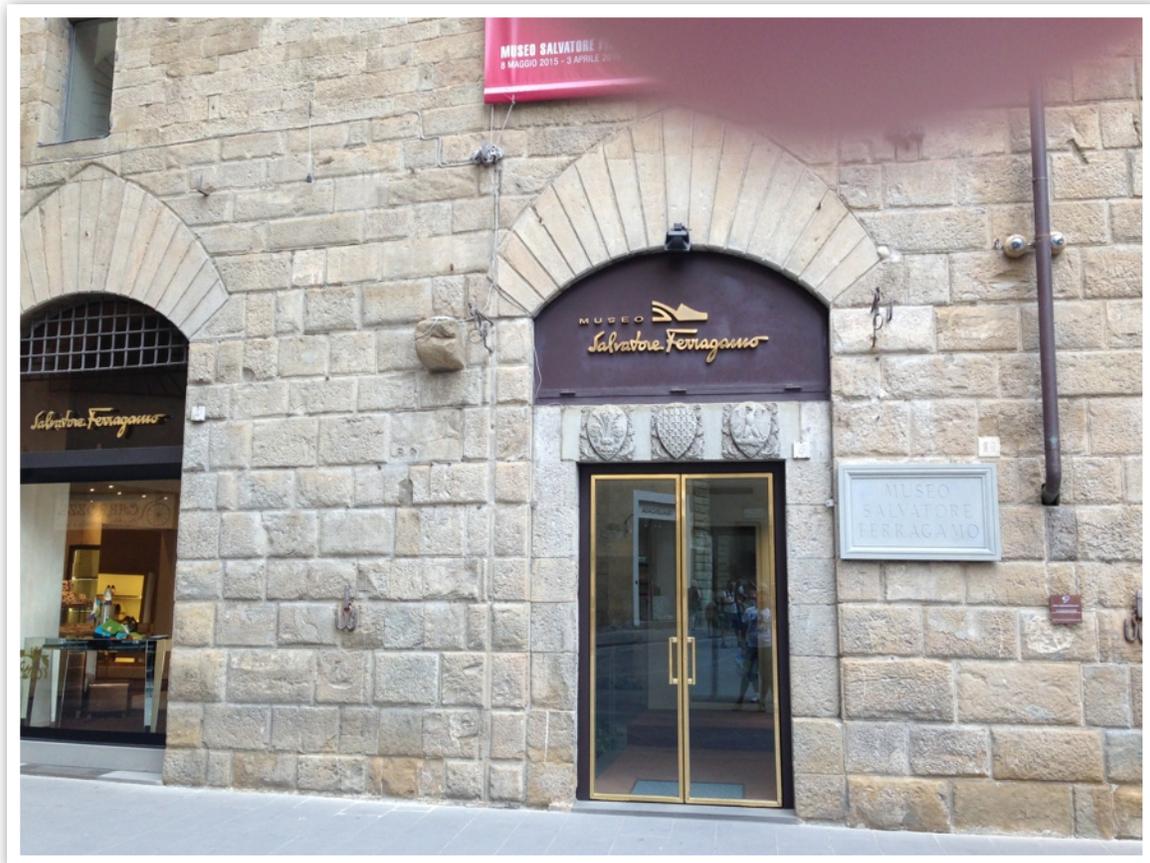
#brun Spoon #galleryhotelart @lungarnotweet

Anna and I had fun with the large spoon display.





Florence is also known to be a fashion capital with all the high end brand names. We passed by the original Salvatore Ferragamo shoe store and museum.





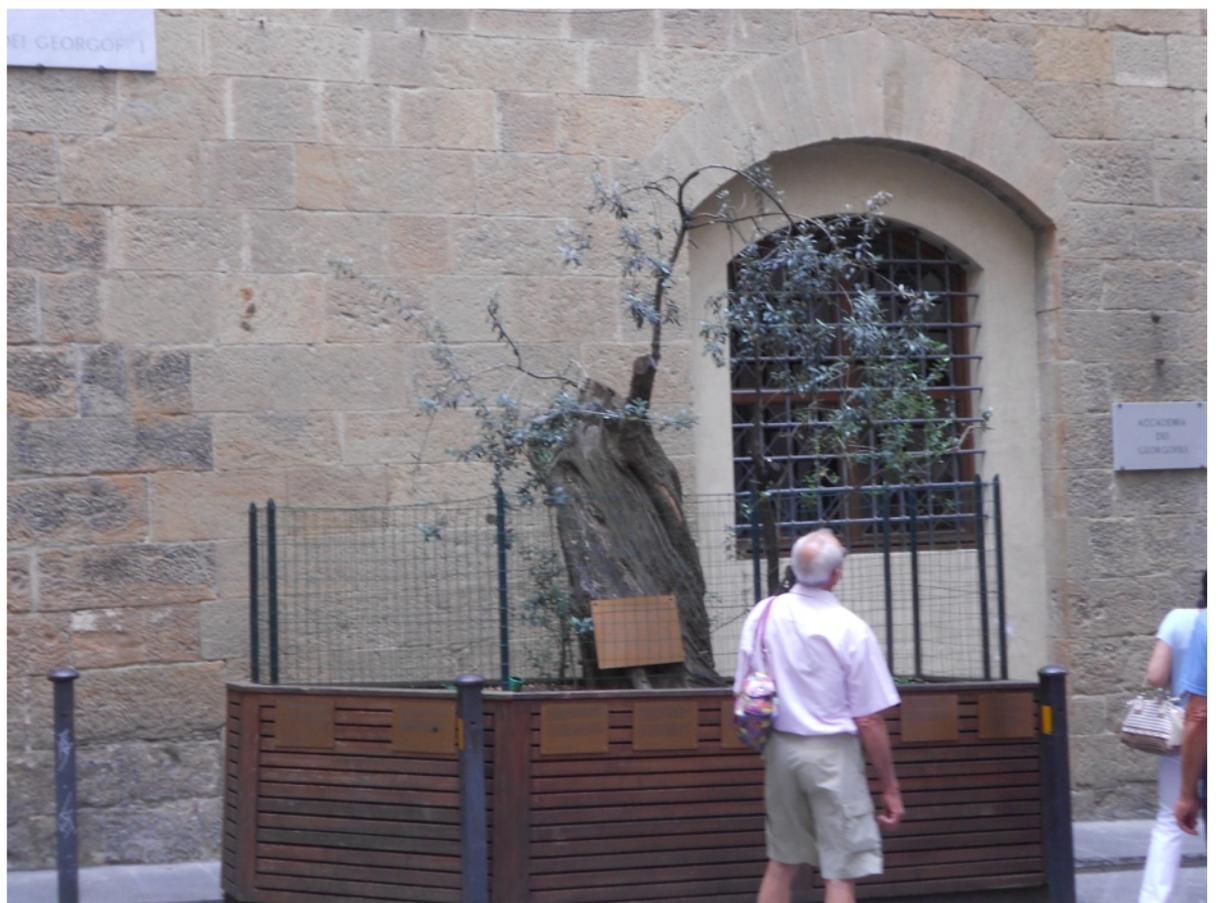
And Dolce & Gabbana for kids.

Saw this interesting silverware in a store window.





The first Mafia story we heard from our tour guide was in regards to the photo below. The tree was planted in memory of the people who died from a car bomb placed in that spot by the Mafia back in 1993 who were trying to destabilize the Italian government.





More interesting buildings  
and a convent on the right  
and top of next page.





Our tour guide led us back to the gold bridge.





During our walking tour we saw a number of street signs that a street artists used very cleverly to express their creativity. The city of Florence sued the artist over defacing public property.



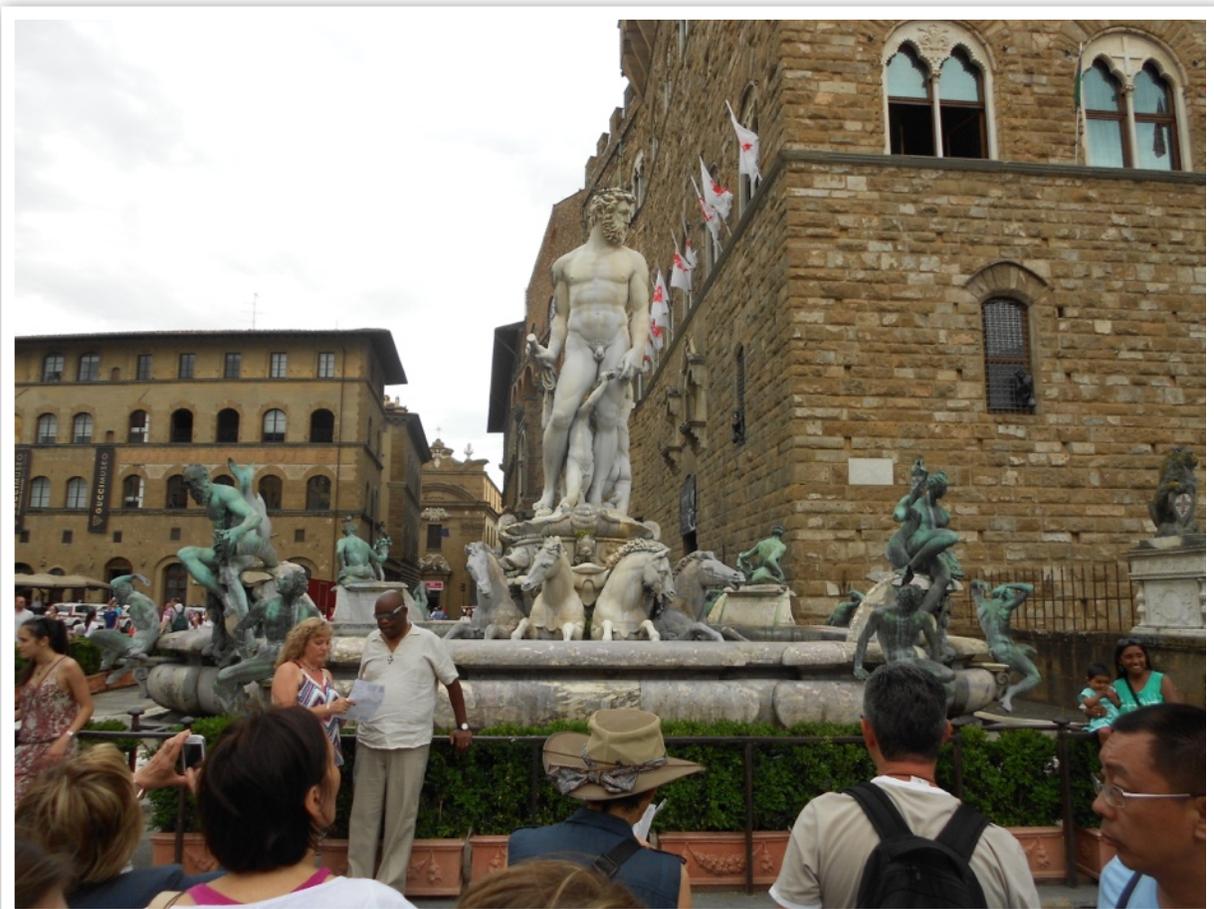


When we got to this Piazza della Signoria it started to rain. You might be able to see a replica of the statue of David near the door of this city hall building called Palazzo Vecchio.





Statues, columns and fountains. Below is the fountain of Neptune.





Our tour guide gave us a 15 minute break in the piazza, and Anna got a gelato, while I sat on the curb to rest my feet.





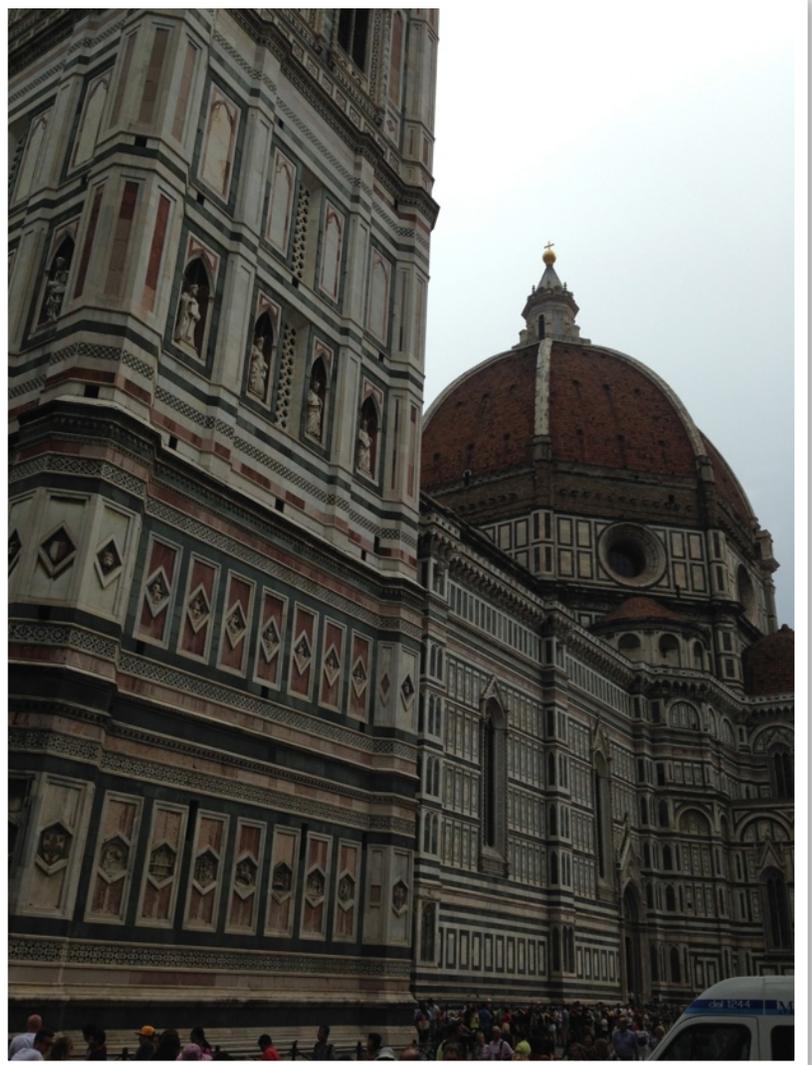
Again the fountain of Neptune and rainy skies above.





I snapped a photo of all those colorful men's shoes above, as our guide explained about the tower on the right that has been turned into a hotel was used in the latest Ron Howard movie due out in 2016 called "Inferno" starring Tom Hanks.



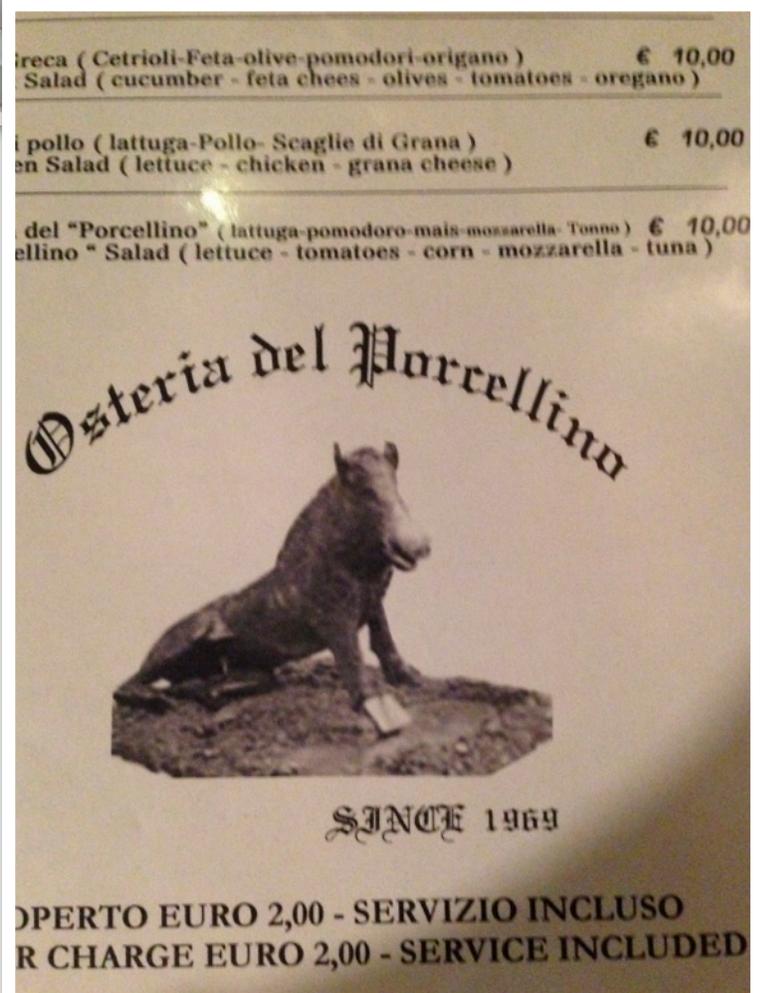


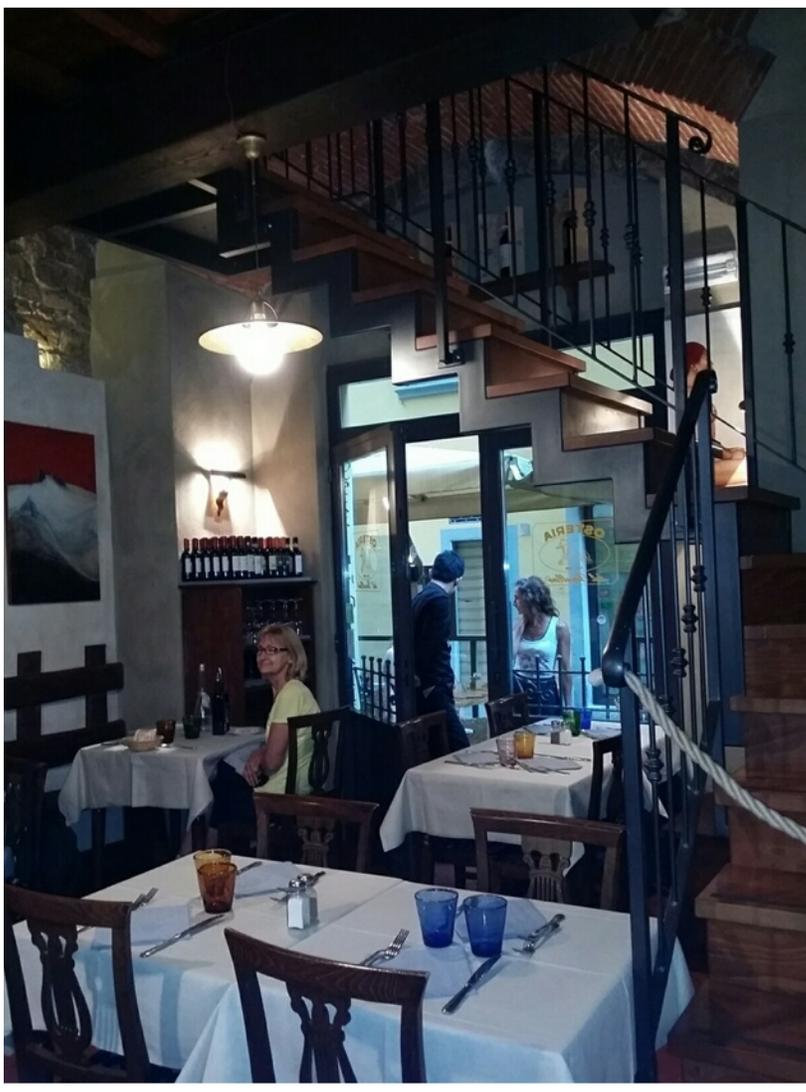
Our walking tour ended back at the ornate church.



A close-up of the church doors.

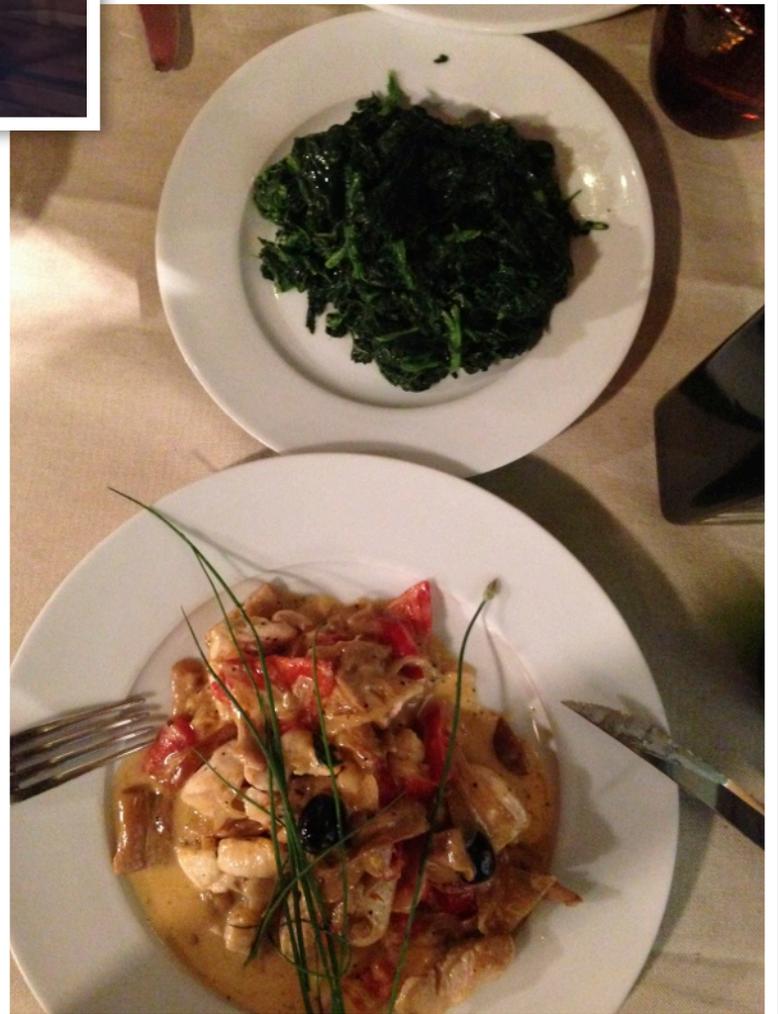
We asked our tour guide for a good place to eat dinner nearby. She gave us two options. We chose Osteria del Porcellina. Yes, that's a wild boar (porcellina) on the menu.





Anna snapped this picture of me at our table waiting for the food.

And OMG!!! This was the best chicken cacciatore I've ever had. Anna had some average ravioli, and her fork kept diving into my plate to help me devour this delicious dish. All I can say is if you're ever in Florence, go to this restaurant and order the chicken cacciatore!





Back at the hotel we went up to the rooftop terrace to see if we could catch a good sunset. Nothing spectacular but the view was pretty nonetheless.

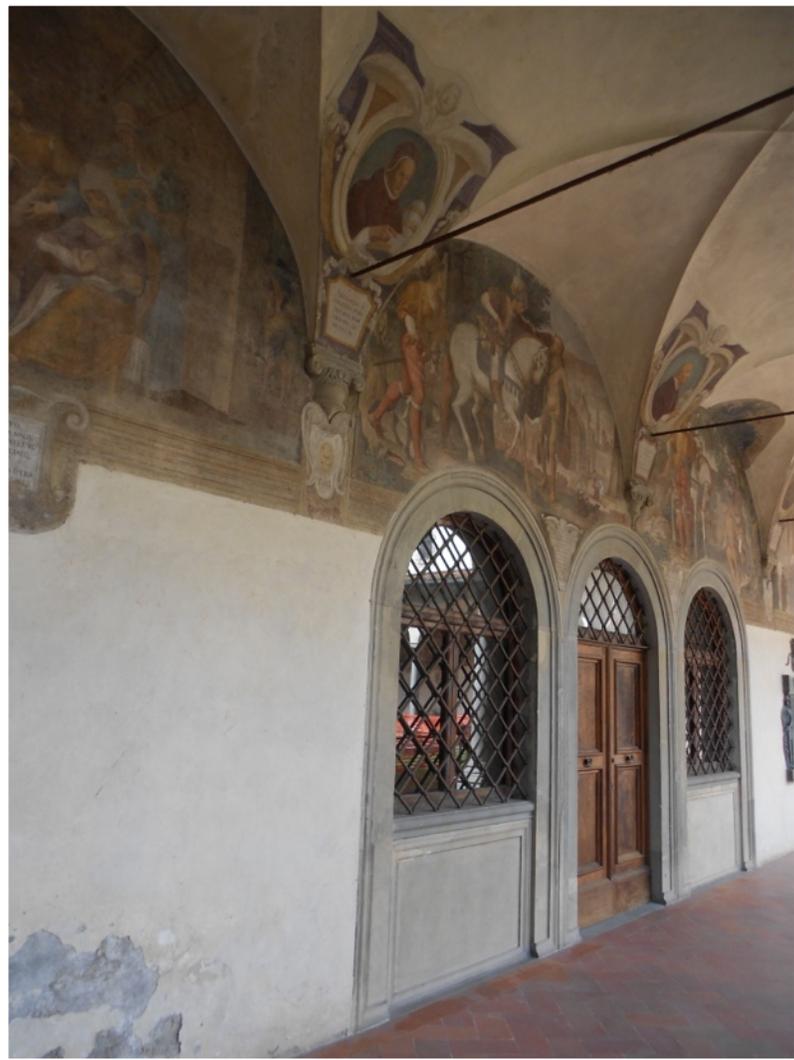




June 15, 2015 - Another great all you can eat buffet breakfast on our last morning at the Grand Hotel Minerva.



After checking out of the hotel we walked with our suitcases towards the rental car place. On the way we saw a door open to an old church courtyard, so we wandered in to look around. We saw these beautiful old frescos on the walls.





We got the rental car, and Anna started to drive us out of Florence. This is when the adventure of trying to read an Italian road map and road signs began. It didn't work, so we relied heavily on GPS, which was a robot voice with a very British accent. When we weren't sure we could trust her directions, we called her Mrs. Doubtfire. When it turned out she was right and led us right to where we wanted to go, her name became Mrs. Travelworthy. Every now and then we'd lose contact with Ms. GPS, and panic ensued. That's when we drove round and round the roundabouts in circles trying to read the signs.



*Italy*

*Pisa*

*June 15, 2015*



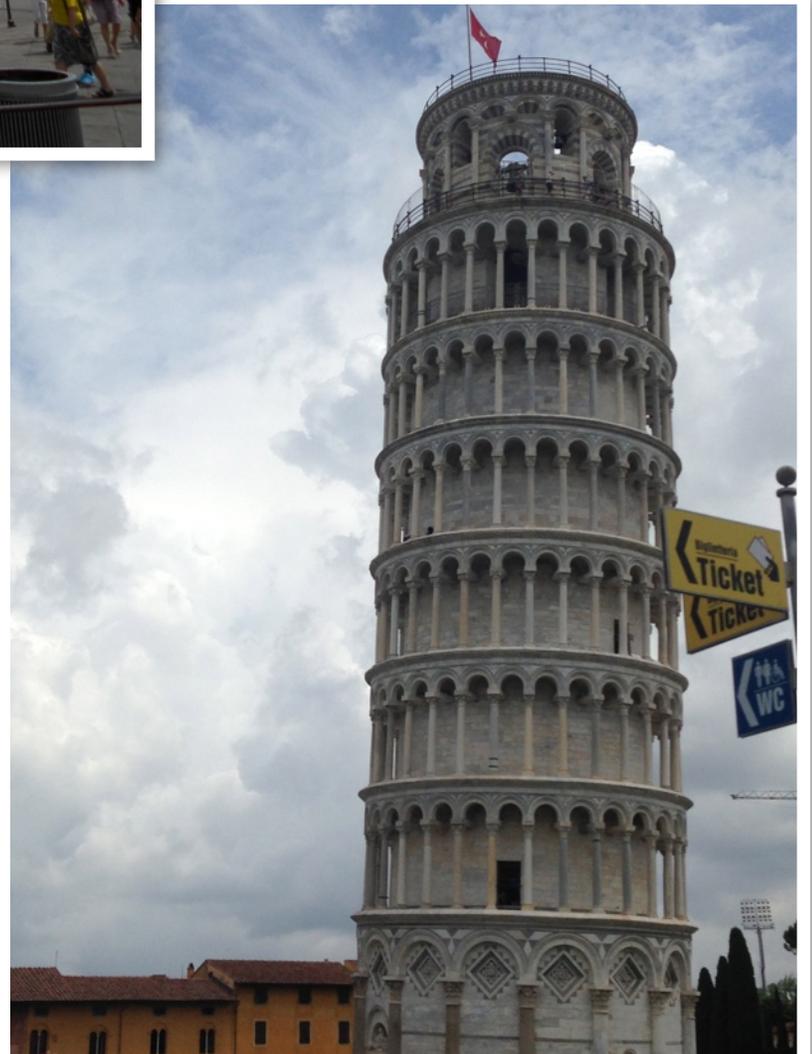
When we got on the highway out of Florence, Anna casually says, "We have a lot of hours before we can check into our room in Tuscany. Do you want to drive to Pisa?" "OK" I say. GPS was programmed and we headed to Pisa to see the famous Leaning Tower.

I learn a lot when traveling. I had no idea the Leaning Tower of Pisa was actually a bell tower that went with a very huge church. That's part of the church below.





When planning our trip, I mentioned to Anna that I didn't really care about seeing the Leaning Tower of Pisa. But I have to say when seeing it in person, it's quite impressive.



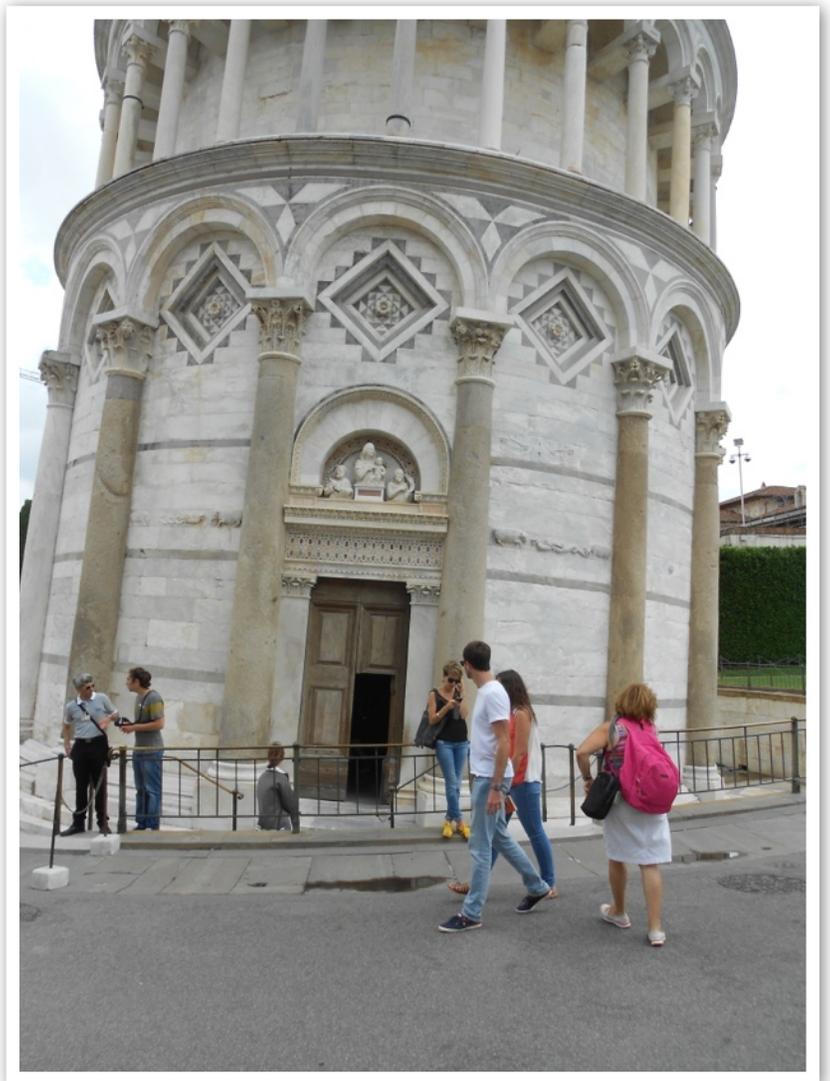


Always the rebel...I chose purposely to lean to the opposite direction as the tower when posing for my touristy photo.

Anna managed to get in perfect alignment with the lean of the tower.

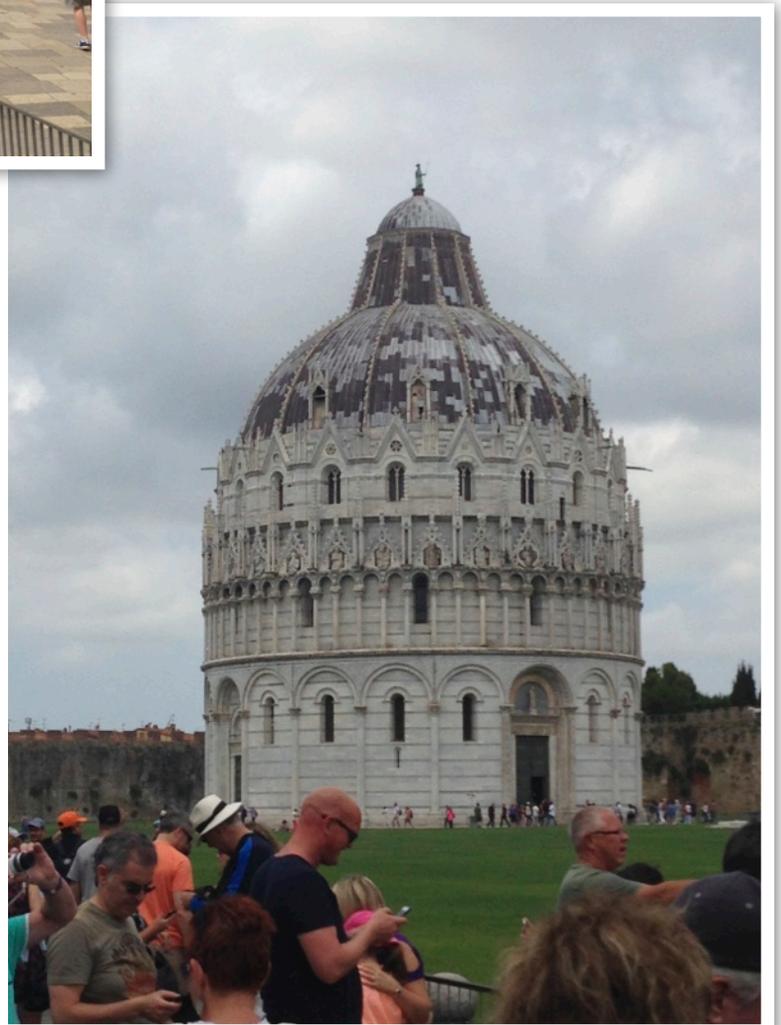








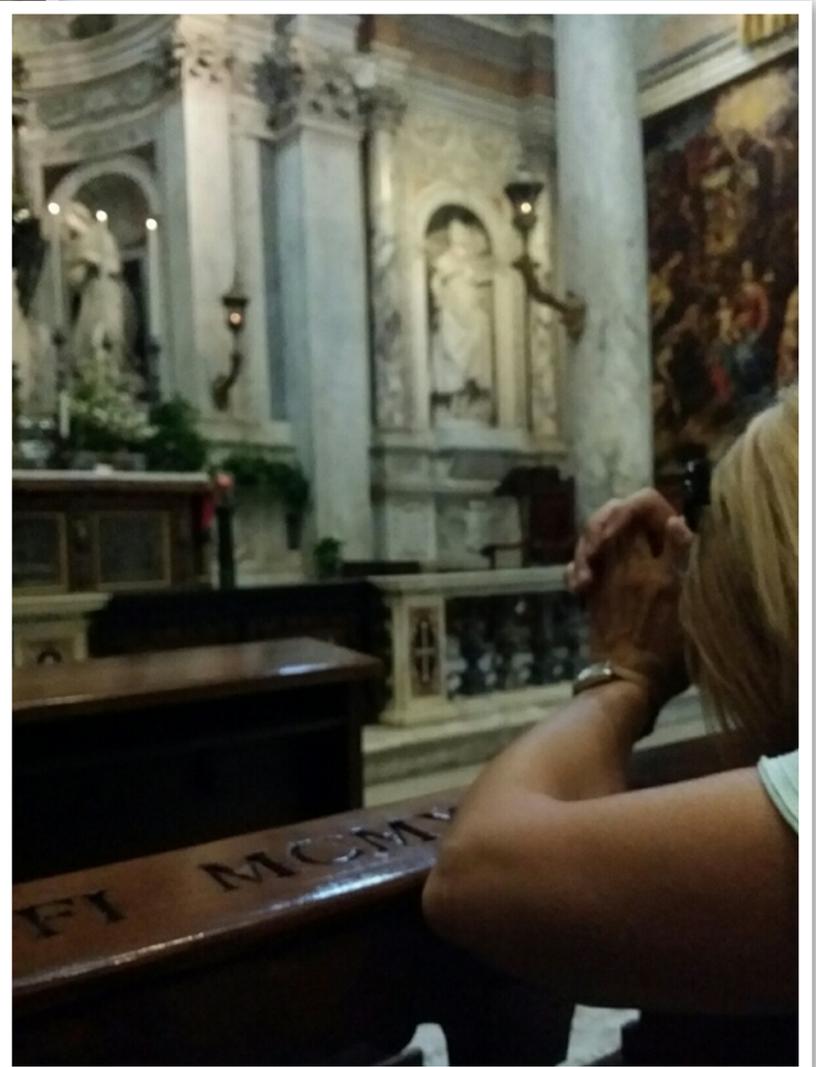
This is a smaller part of the church used for baptisms.





Notice the sign to the left that says ENTRANCE FOR PRAYER ONLY. Anna decided she wanted to see the inside of the church. However, they were selling tickets to tour the inside. We didn't want to stand in line or pay for tickets. She got the idea to go into the door that was "for prayer only." We enter and it was quite beautiful inside. We immediately sat in the pews facing the altar because the guy at the door...the door monitor was watching us closely. She told me to pretend to pray, so she could hide behind me to take some photos. As I did, she snapped a photo and the flash went off. The door monitor guy gave her a stern look and wagged his finger.

This was the picture she got of me with the beautiful background of the altar a bit out of focus. She was also trying to walk over and look at the large area of the church where the tour people were, but once again the door monitor guy made a gesture to us, so we left. What can I say? That's why Anna and I get along so well. We like to bend the rules here and there.





I took the above photo in a restaurant we stopped at to get some take-out pizza and then walked the few blocks to the car. We got there in time before the parking meter ran out. After only spending a short time there, we sat in the car eating pizza in Pisa. It was a fun spontaneous and unplanned side trip adventure.

