

Europe 2018

Along the Adriatic Sea

Janet and Robert Connery - Sheri and Kirk Tiner

Madrid, Spain

Everyone was to meet on Wednesday in Venice. Sheri and Kirk left home on Monday to make it in time. This involved a 12 hour layover in Madrid so we decided to make the most of our time and go into the city to look around. The plan hadn't included cold and rainy weather. After a 40 minute metro ride into the city we walked around Puerta del Sol then a couple of streets over to the 124 year old San Gines Chocolateria for the most excellent Spanish hot chocolate and churros. Kirk couldn't quite finish his chocolate, Sheri all but licked the cup.

After getting warmed up, we headed over to Plaza Mayor to walk the covered arcade around the square and the rain just got harder. Luckily the next stop was less than a block away, the Mercado San Miguel. Sheri introduced Kirk to the variety of food that is Spanish tapas. Olives, ham, sausages, seafood, paella and much more. Then there is the sangria. Sheri selected one typical sangria and a special glass of excellent berry sangria that is probably so good because they add Cava, a Spanish sparkling wine.



After snacking at the market we wandered around a little more until Kirk finally got too cold to enjoy it and we headed back to the airport for a long wait on the flight to Venice. While we were waiting at the airport we made the mistake of reading the news and discovered that Venice had a major flood, more than one meter of water over much of the city at high tide. There was no telling what we would arrived to.

A couple of hours into our wait at the airport, Janet and Rob began their journey from Philadelphia.







Venice, Italy

Sheri and Kirk arrived in Venice just before midnight on Tuesday to a fortunately nicely dry city. Sheri had been researching like crazy to figure out how to get into the city from the airport that late at night. The water bus was the cheapest option but it stopped running not long after midnight so if the plane was late, that option would be gone. Finally after pricing every other option, she went with a private car service which had the advantage of someone meeting them in the terminal and taking them right to the Piazza Roma in Venice to the Vaporetto (water bus) stop where we could catch a bus on the night route.



Researching transportation in Venice is a must, especially when arriving late. Sheri knew she needed the Rialto stop but it turns out there were three, two serviced on the night line but on opposite sides of the Grand Canal. When it's late there's nobody around to ask for directions so knowing as much in advance is critical. Fortunately because it was late, there wasn't a line of impatient people at the ticket machine so Sheri had the leisure to figure out the process while Kirk snapped some photos. Another challenge in Venice is that it's a labyrinth of narrow streets and alleys that are notorious places for getting lost. Ordinarily





this would be interesting in an old and amazing city but arriving after midnight after a day and a night of travel with suitcases in tow made it sound like torture. Sheri studied Google Street Views for months to make sure they did not take one unnecessary step from the Vaporetto to the hotel.

Regardless of all of the challenges, Venice late at night with empty streets and quiet is amazing. The walk to the hotel turned out to be easy, we went right to it. After we arrived at the hotel is when Kirk told Sheri he had thought they would be





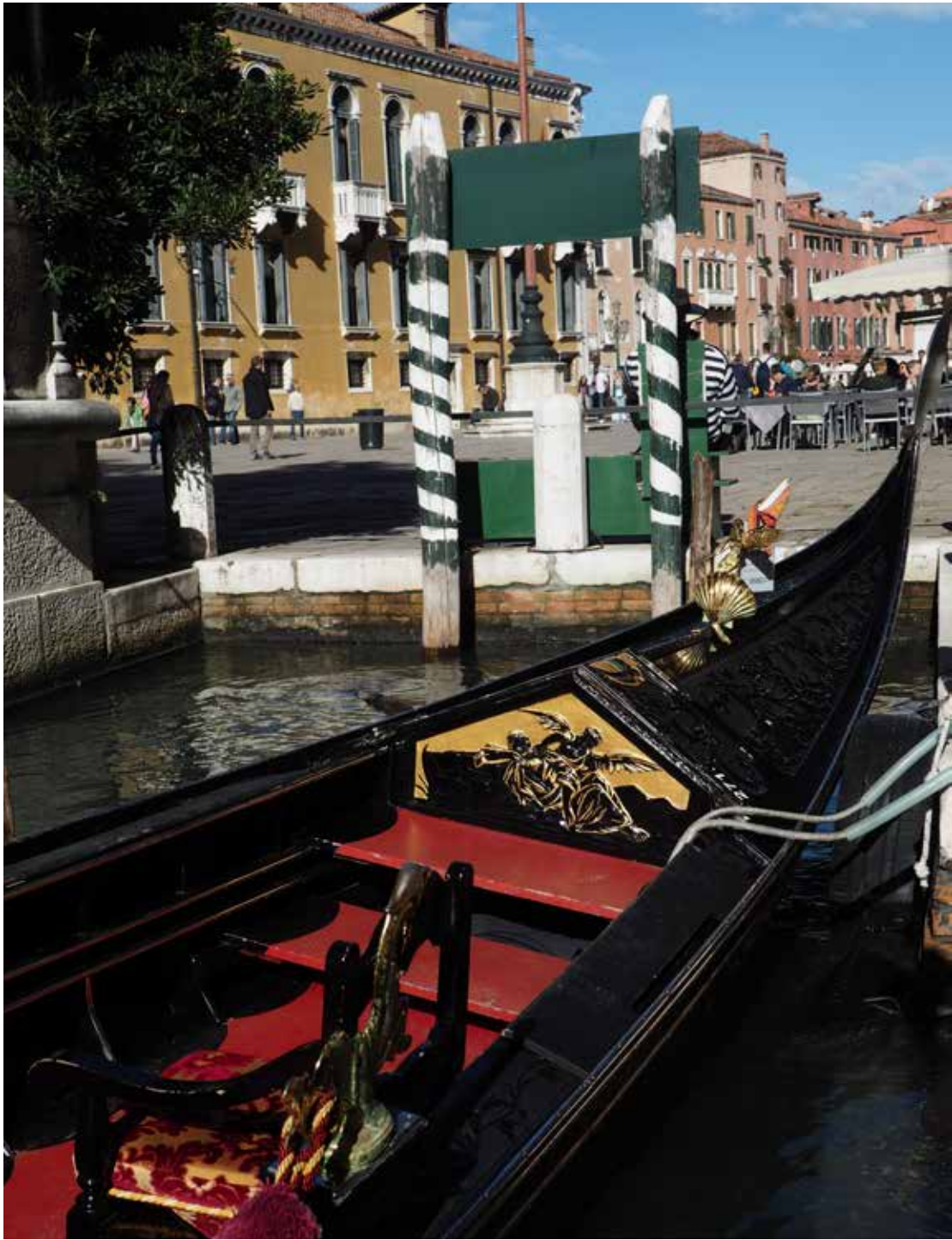
wandering for hours looking for it. Talk about no faith! He should know better by now.

Waking up surprisingly early the next morning in Venice, Sheri left Kirk sleeping and went down to breakfast then out for a walk. Partly in search of a cold Coke and partly to snap a few photos before the rest of the tourists were out. When she got back to the hotel she woke Kirk with a Coke and a ham and cheese sandwich snatched from the breakfast buffet. Once he was awake we took off walking. We had about 4 hours to kill until Janet and Rob arrived in Venice.

Kirk followed Sheri and her camera around for a while and eventually we arrived at the Grand Canal and the Ponte dell'Accademia, one of four bridges across the Grand Canal and the only one made of wood. It's also about the best bridge for awesome shots down the canal toward Piazza San Marco.

By this time it was close to noon and we were getting hungry.









As we were walking away from the bridge we noticed a bunch of guys in city worker coveralls, we followed them into a local restaurant figuring it would be reasonably priced and good. Both were true. We sat at a table in the middle of all the workmen. It's pretty cool to realize that in Venice the workers take time for a nice lunch with a glass of wine and a coffee after.

Kirk had a reasonably healthy chicken dish and Sheri had her favorite carbonarra. As we finished lunch we got a message that Janet and Rob had arrived at the hotel so we headed back that way. The gang would soon be together again!



Janet and Rob arrived at the Venice airport a bit after 11 in the morning as scheduled. Once we collected our bags we found the dock, bought vaporetto tickets and were on the next boat. Arriving in Venice from the water is exhilarating, and very welcome after a long travel day. We craned our necks to see the buildings on both sides of the Grand Canal and soak up the Venice atmosphere. We were rewarded with an great view of the Rialto Bridge against a clear blue sky as we passed underneath. The four of us reunited at the hotel and set out to explore.



The tide was low and the weather was perfect for exploring. We wandered at a relaxed pace as we got ourselves oriented but covered a lot of ground. Sites seen included; Campo Sant'Anzolo, Chiesa di Santa Maria del Giglio, Chiesa di San Moisè, St Mark's Campanile, Saint Mark's Basilica, the Columns of San Marco and San Todaro, St Mark's Clocktower, the Bridge of Sighs, Church of San Giorgio Maggiore, the Doge's Palace, Basilica di Santa Maria della Salute, and the Rialto Bridge.

When we arrived at Piazza San Marco we first saw the raised sidewalks in use. The central part of the piazza had several inches of water, especially right in front of the church. Masses of people slowly traversed the walkways while others in their smart plastic boots escaped the crowds and just waded through the water.





Window shopping reached a new level as we gawked at Murano glasswork, drooled over sweets and were awed by the intricate, colorful masks. We stopped for a delicious dinner a few blocks away from the main sites at a restaurant that had authentic Venetian fare. After dinner we went back to Piazza San Marco for some night shots and then took a walk down the Grand Canal where we admired rows of gondolas bobbing in the water. As we headed back toward our hotel we paused on a bridge as singing gondoliers with passengers passed by, serenading into the evening.







We continued walking for a couple of hours, past our hotel and followed the crowds to the Rialto bridge and beyond. At one point a passage through a building led to a low and dark pier jutting out into the Grand Canal. Sheri insisted she needed photos, Kirk insisted it was too dark with multiple warnings of be careful!! It really was dark, Sheri had to use the light of her cell phone to see where to walk.

When we finally made our way back to the hotel everyone was very ready to settle in for the night. We still had to pack up our bags to check out of the hotel and be ready to head to our shipboard home for the next seven days.











As we prepared to set out for the day we noticed that the tide was high, the first step out of the hotel would be into ankle deep water! The hotel did not have boots to lend but happily supplied trash bags to put over our shoes and tie around our knees, which got us out of the door. It didn't take long to see that the trash bags were not going to work long term so we found a kiosk selling plastic boots in fashionable black and canary yellow.

Venetians have plenty of experience living with the encroaching ocean. Storefronts slide metal inserts into place to dam up doorways and run pumps to suck out the water that does get in. Elevated platforms are moved into place to form walkways in high traffic areas, in other areas we relied on the boots to get us through the ankle deep water. We were thankful that we arrived after the epic flooding of the prior week subsided.

This day's exploration included Ponte dell'Accademia, Sant'Agnese, Chiesa di San Pantalon, Campo Manin, pretty much the opposite side of the Grand Canal. We explored for close to seven hours with a few rest breaks. One break was to have a sandwich near the rail station. We figured out that the beggars were asking people headed into the station for their plastic boots. They were collecting them for re-sale. I suppose it's a way to make a few bucks. The darn boots weren't cheap.

After our snack we collected our bags from the hotel and headed to the ship. We were once again on the Vaporetto with our luggage. It's much nicer in the middle of the night, those water busses are crowded. Next we had to take the People Mover, an elevated tram, to the port. When we got there several men started waving us over to busses saying "Oceana here." Well, we weren't going on Oceana, we were going on Viking so we ignored them. They kept it up wanting us to go get on the busses. Sheri was skeptical,









the busses had all kinds of shopping ads on the side. They looked like they would go straight to shopping hell. Rob told them we were going to Viking and finally the men made it clear they were the shuttle to all of the cruise ships. Well, why didn't they say so in the first place?

Once we were on the ship we all breathed a sigh of relief helped along by a glass of champagne. We ditched our bags in our room and headed up down to dinner. Luckily we had a short wait so we got a couple more glasses of champagne. Dinner was lovely and quite relaxed.

After dinner we headed up on deck to find the smoking area and discovered nice loungers where Janet decided to relax. Sheri left for just a minute to go to the ladies room and came back to find Janet snoozing and the boys giggling like four year olds. When Sheri asked what the heck they were doing, they said they were playing puking cat videos in Janet's ear to see if she would wake up because she always said "I instantly wake up at the sound of a cat puking up a hairball." Kirk added, "In our defense, we were left unsupervised."

Waking up on our last morning in Venice to breakfast from room

service was a treat. We all had room service breakfast for the entire cruise. After breakfast we gathered up our Viking quiet boxes and headed to the dock to start touring.

The Viking walking tour started at Palazzo Cornoldi and took us through an area we had not visited before and filled us in on some history. The tour ended at Piazza San Marco with a little over an hour of free time, since we had explored this area before we had no agenda. Kirk was cold and of course it was raining so we were happy to relax at Café Florian that just happened to be expensive as hell, probably because of the location and possibly a little because Hemmingway had sipped coffee there 70 years ago.

Kirk was too ready to get back to the ship, he was completely done with being wet and cold in Venice. Not long after we got back, the ship sailed away from port giving us a fantastic view of Venice from the top deck as we cruised out of the lagoon and across the Adriatic toward our next port. We took some time in the afternoon to explore our first Viking ocean cruise ship.







Split, Croatia

Sheri had wanted to visit Croatia for about 15 years. She finally made it and did not have nearly enough time there. Our two stops were Split and Dubrovnik, both cities have very early origins and wonderful old towns to visit.

The first stop was Split. We had purchased an optional excursion for Kirk and Rob to visit the Krka National Park to see the beautiful waterfalls. Janet and Sheri were going to do the included city walking tour. It didn't quite work out that way. When Sheri woke up she discovered that Kirk had been up and down sick all night, the ugly bathroom kind of sick. She quickly confirmed that she could go on the paid excursion with Rob and that Janet wouldn't mind doing the walking tour on her own and then cleared out of the room.

Split is the second largest city in Croatia and is dominated by the Diocletian's Palace in the center, which was the main focus of the walking tour. The Palace, a fortress really, was built for the Roman Emperor around 300 AD as both a residence and a military base. The rest of the city was constructed tightly around the palace's outer walls. The tour started at the Brass Gate and took us down into the well-preserved cellars before moving up to the ground level. The palace contains many granite sphynxes that the Emperor took from Egypt. Most of the sphynxes were decapitated or fully destroyed when Christians took control of the palace but the best preserved still guard the Temple of Jupiter. The Palace's Vestibule is known for its amazing acoustics, when this was mentioned a member of our tour group launched into an impromptu and impressive rendition of 'Nessun Dorma'. Then an acapella quartet known as the Diocletian Singers came out to sing several songs for us, and then peddle their





CDs. The tour took us past the 28 foot tall Statue of Gregory of Nin, a medieval Croatian bishop, and included time to explore the Ethnographic Museum, and ended by the Venetian Tower in Fruit Square.

While Janet was touring the city, Sheri and Rob headed to Krka National Park. The park was created in 1985 to preserve the Krka River as a natural area. The park is quite large with an area of about 42 square miles. The main attraction of the park is the Skradinski buk falls, considered to be one of the most beautiful calcium carbonate waterfalls in Europe. The area appears untouched even though the Krka River not far from the falls was first used for hydro-electric power generation as early as 1895 and the electric-





ity lit the streets of nearby Šibenik, the first city in the world to have electric street lights. The park is about a 45 minute bus ride from the city of Split. Rob needed to pee for 35 of those minutes. Here’s the story from Rob.

7:45am - Before heading down to the bus used the restroom

7:48am - Down at the meeting point for the bus, stopped and used the restroom.

8:01am - Met Sheri, went one more time. Got on the bus

8:15am - Sitting on bus. Have to go! Will wait.

8:20am - I Ask tour guide if there will be a bathroom break on the way to the waterfall park. Told they could stop. Ask if I could use the bathroom on the bus. Told, “it’s not allowed”. I want to pee in his shoe. I go back and sit down.

8:25am - Hit a bump in the road. HAVE TO GO. I think my kidney is sprained...

8:35am - STILL HAVE TO GO.

8:40am - Tour guide says “we could stop if you really have to”. Challenge issued. “I should be ok” I say with false bravado. I want to pee in his pocket so bad. I brace myself...

8:50am-9:15am - STILL HAVE TO GO.

9:16am - Arrive at the waterfall park. The sound of waterfalls fill the air. My very being is filled with the sound of water falling all around me! I inform the bus driver that his existence is inconsequential to me as I seek out a place in which to relieve myself. “It’s right down the road” he lies to me, right to my face- oblivious to the bus driver now I am filled with the spirits of Greek marathoners, my purpose is clear- I MUST RUN! I MUST FLY!



Cue the Chariots of Fire soundtrack. The music inspires me, I reach down deep to inner reserves I never knew I had. I MUST PEE!

I am encouraged by the faces of friends and family, cheering me on- “You can do it!” they say to me- “I can do it right here!” I yell back, eagerly looking for a tree, a wall- anything to relieve myself behind. Onward I run...

I suddenly happen upon a group of surprised women, sitting around a table. They see the look of panic on my face, my hands desperately clutching my crotch to contain myself.

“The water closet is that way!” they shout, standing up and helpfully pointing to a place that was close and yet still so very far away. With a dejected sigh I thanked them, steeled myself and made one last dash to relief. Running down a path, past a few buildings there at last was the sign I was waiting for- WC. A water closet! I didn’t have to pay anyone to get in, and no one else was there- At last, relief!

The closing notes of Chariots of Fire echo off of the walls of my mind as I curse my tiny bladder...

We wandered in our free time taking photos and admiring the scenery. We also made several preventative visits to the WC before boarding the bus for the ride back to Split.







Poor Kirk stayed in the room the entire day. He finally felt good enough to try some soup from room service. Sheri stayed far away just in case whatever he had was contagious. Fortunately he was much better the next day.









Dubrovnik, Croatia

Dubrovnik is a striking, walled city on the Adriatic Sea with a long history of ever-changing rule dating back to the 7th century. The walls as they are now are mainly from the 12th-17th centuries. We had to dock a few miles from the old city so Viking ran shuttle busses back and forth throughout the day.

Janet and Rob decided that the best way to see this city is from above so had booked a ride on the cable car. This involved a bus ride past the walls of the city and partially up the mountain to the lower station then a 4 minute cable car ride ascending 778 meters to





the upper station at the Imperial Fort. Three terraces provided amazing views of the city and the sea on one side and the Dinaric Alps of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the other. The group then rode the cable car back down for the first walking tour of the day before returning to the boat for lunch.

Kirk and Sheri had nothing booked for the morning so Sheri decided to visit the spa and have a massage. Kirk was feeling much better and was ready to do some laundry.

The Viking spa was amazing. There's a warm pool with a built-in lounge at one end where bubbles come out of the wall and laying there it's hard not to fall asleep. There is also a hot tub, a steam sauna, a snow grotto, a multi-directional shower and a cold plunge where you stand in the cubicle and pull a cord to dump a bucket of cold water on your head. Sheri skipped the steam and the cold water but really enjoyed the rest of the spa. After an hour of relaxing she enjoyed an amazing massage.

Kirk took care of the laundry and didn't mind much when he figured out that the laundry room had a sofa and TV. He was just finishing up when Sheri got back from the Spa. Next was meeting up with Janet and Rob for lunch then a walking tour of Dubrovnik. We took the bus back to the city for the afternoon walking tour, which covered much of the same sites that Janet and Rob had seen that morning but were well worth a second, or third look.

The first stop on the afternoon tour was up the





mountain a little outside the city for a great view of the old walled city and up the coast. After a brief photo stop we headed back down to the old city and started our walking tour. Our tour guide was very pleasant and informative. Very informative. We spent a lot more time than necessary in some places but it was a good tour. Throughout the tour Janet and Rob recognized many locations that had been used in the HBO series Game of Thrones. Quite a bit of the show was filmed in Croatia, especially the old cities of Split and Dubrovnik and our guides were happy to point out each location.

We all enjoyed our free time wandering the old city buying snacks and souvenirs. We were ready to get







back to the ship for our special gourmet dinner in the Chef's Table restaurant, one of two specialty restaurants on the ship. They have a different menu every two days serving fancy food with lots of courses and frou-frou things like lemon vodka foam. The other restaurant is Manfredi's that serves Italian food.







Kotor, Montenegro

Montenegro was a country we knew pretty much nothing about. Once we visited, we were all impressed with the country and it's history. The coastlines have beautiful beaches on the Adriatic Sea and the interior of the country is farms and mountains and really quite wonderful.

The ship docked at Kotor, a walled city built in by the Venetians between the 15th and 17th centuries. We had booked a tour that took us out of town to see more of the country. We first traveled up a scenic road that had 25 hairpin curves and amazing views of Kotor bay. The road was so narrow that in a couple of places our bus had to back up to a wider area to let oncoming traffic pass. We stopped at a turn-out overlooking the town of Kotor and our ship to take a few pictures then got back on the road.

Our next stop at a restaurant in the small town Eraković of for a snack of Njeguški pršut (smoked black ham), a specialty of the nearby village of Njeguški, some cheese and a glass of black wine made from Vranac grapes. The ham was excellent, Sheri thought it was even better than Spanish ham. The wine wasn't actually black, just very dark red and quite good. We were told by our tour guide that we could order any drink so Sheri asked for a Coke and got a very strange look but eventually got the Coke. After the snack we had about a half hour to walk around and snap some photos. There really wasn't anything to the town but the restaurant, some scenic cows and some houses but it was in a small valley surrounded by mountains. We were in an area of farms not far from the ski resorts so a lot of the houses were actually second homes used mainly in the winter.

The much larger town of Cetinje, known as the royal capitol of Montenegro, was our next destination. We took a short walk





along a park to the King Nicholas Museum, the former home of the royal family of Montenegro. The home is large and not particularly impressive from the outside but the inside is beautiful. Unfortunately we weren't allowed to take pictures inside but Kirk couldn't resist snapping a sneaky photo in the billiard room.

The furnishings are all original due to the political connections made by King Nicholas through the marriages of his daughters to the ruling families of Russia and Europe. The home and contents were not looted during WWI when King Nicholas fled







to Italy when Montenegro was conquered by Austria-Hungary.

During our free time after the museum we wandered a bit taking photos of the old monastery and Janet found several pairs of colorful, cheap earrings.

Driving back to Kotor we passed along the coastal mountains overlooking the resort town of Budva which is quite modern. Fortunately we didn't have to go back down the windy road and instead passed under the mountain through a tunnel.

Once back at the ship we began a walking tour of the walled town of Kotor. It didn't start off too well though, right after the tour guide said something about watching our step Janet tripped up the curb and face planted on the sidewalk. Sunglasses and camera went flying and we found out later, she landed on a souvenir bottle of the local specialty



plum rajika she had bought earlier and tucked in her purse. She had a lovely bottle shaped bruise on her hip later but since the bottle didn't break, she had the liqueur to soothe the ache. The twisted ankle would last longer than that brandy.

The walking tour took about a half hour then we had free time to wander. Kirk and Sheri got ice cream, Sheri had to try the Extra Black which was truly black and dark chocolate flavor. Janet's ankle decided she wasn't going to walk on it anymore so she and Rob headed back to the ship and Kirk and Sheri wandered a bit more before heading back to get ready for dinner.





Corfu, Greece

We finally reached Greece on our sixth day on the ship, docking at the island of Corfu. In the morning everyone relaxed, except Janet who got bored and took the shuttle into town for an hour to wander the gardens. Oddly, she was the only person on that shuttle both on the trip to town and the one back to the ship, not many early risers on vacation.

After lunch the gang took a tour of the island, which include a drive to Kanoni for photos of tiny Pontikonisi (Mouse Island) and the Vlacherna Monastery. We also drove past the archaeological site of Paleopolis and along Garitsa Bay before reaching Corfu's Old Town.

At every stop along our cruise we had been hearing about Roman and Venetian influence and Corfu was no different. The Romans occupied the island and used it as a naval base for over 500 years ending in about 300 AD. From then until the 1300's the island was occupied by various powers then the Venetians took control and held it until 1797. Of course the British took their turn after Napoleon fell and held it until Corfu became a part of Greece in 1864.

The stroll around the town was quite relaxing as we took in the Esplanade, stopping at a cafe for a drink and a potty stop. We found out that in Corfu, you can just go in to any open business and use the restroom, they can't reserve just for customers. The theory being once the business is open, the restroom becomes public.

We moved on making stops at the Old Fortress and the Durrell Gardens, named for the British family who moved to Corfu for several years. Two of the sons eventually wrote popular books about their





time on the island. The most impressive building in the old town is the Palace of St. Michael and St. George. The Palace was built by the British Lord High Commissioner as his residence and to house the administrative headquarters. The building is now the Museum of Asian Art.

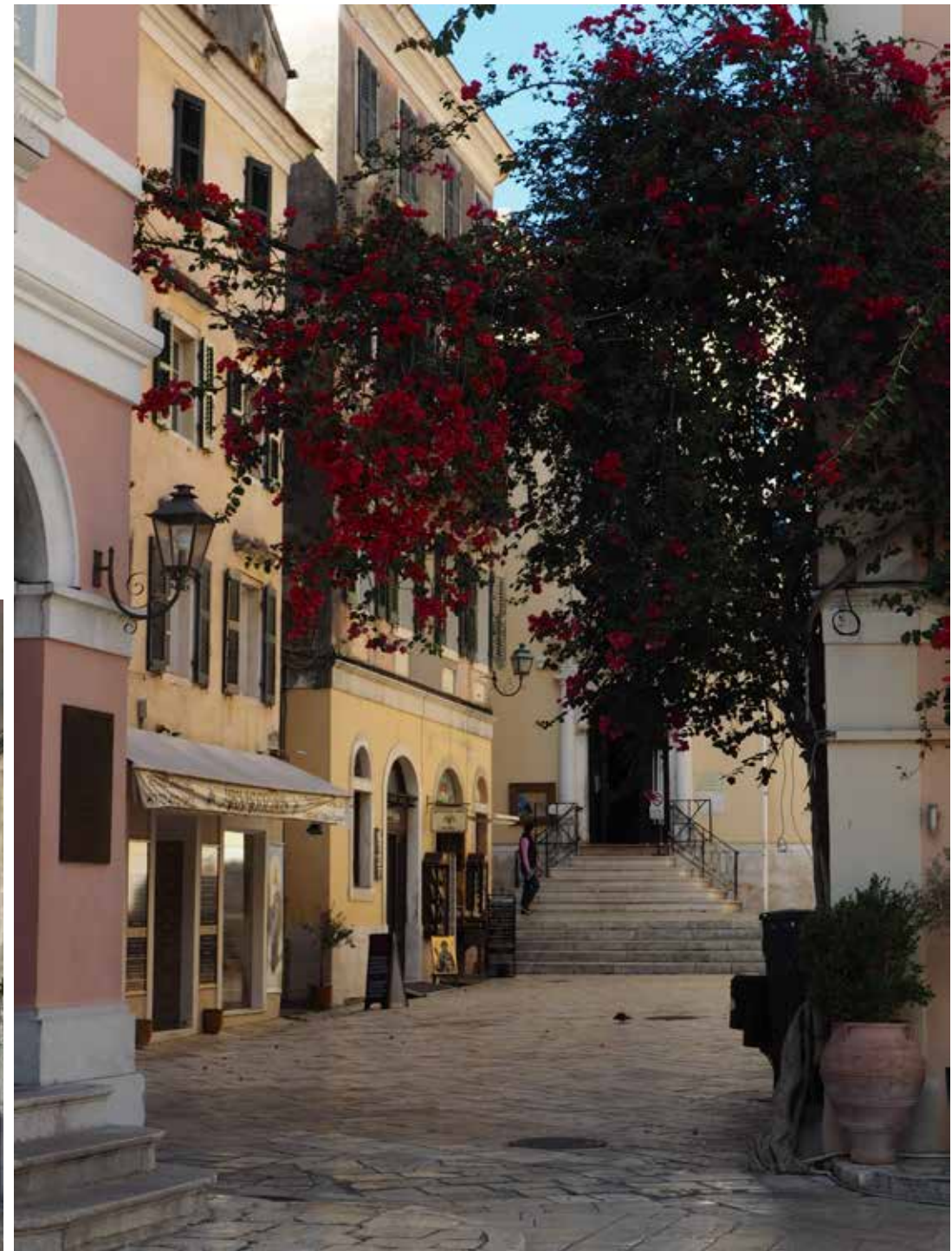
When we returned to the ship we were welcomed by crew members lined up along a red carpet dancing and handing out glasses of champagne. Once on board we were just in time for tea in the Winter Garden. We sat politely chatting

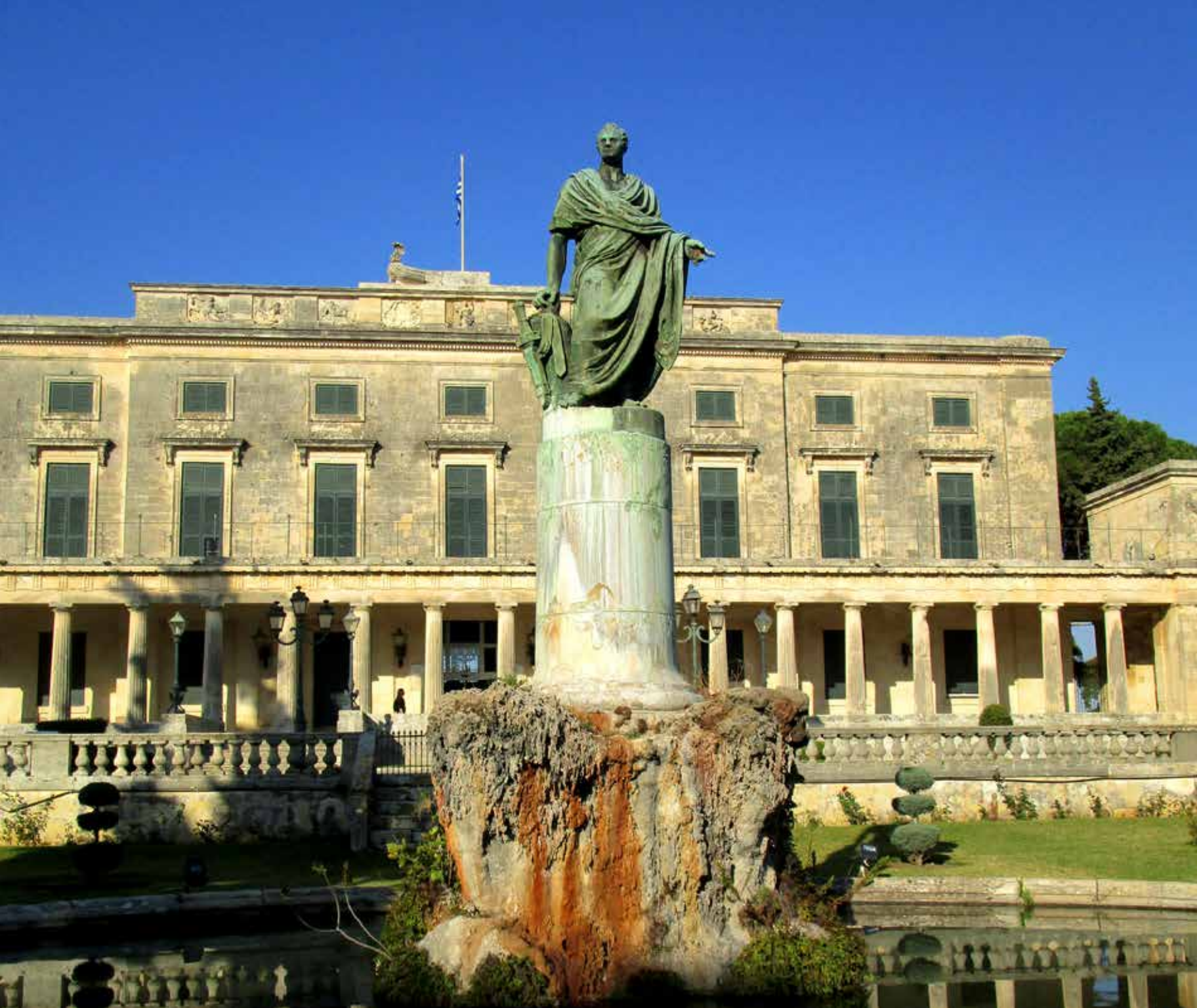




over our choice of tea and enjoying the plates of finger sandwiches and decadent deserts. So good! So good in fact that we asked for more, and more, and could you bring a plate of just those yummy cucumber and watercress sandwiches this time? Excellent.

The morning in Corfu included a beautiful sunrise over the Greek mainland that was totally surpassed by a spectacular sunset. A sunset that seemed to go on forever as the ship sailed south past the rocky coastline while the sun fell below the horizon, then rose again minutes later, then set again as we passed the next peak, then rose again in the valley, then set again...











Olympia, Greece

On the last day of our cruise we visited the archeological site of the first Olympic games which are said to have taken place in 776 BC. Not only did we get an education on the Olympic games and the site but also on the Greek pantheon. Ancient Olympia was first a sanctuary site which by the tenth and ninth centuries BC, was devoted to Zeus. In about 776 BC the games were organized to honor Zeus and not long after became a national festival drawing competitors and spectators from all over what is now modern Greece.





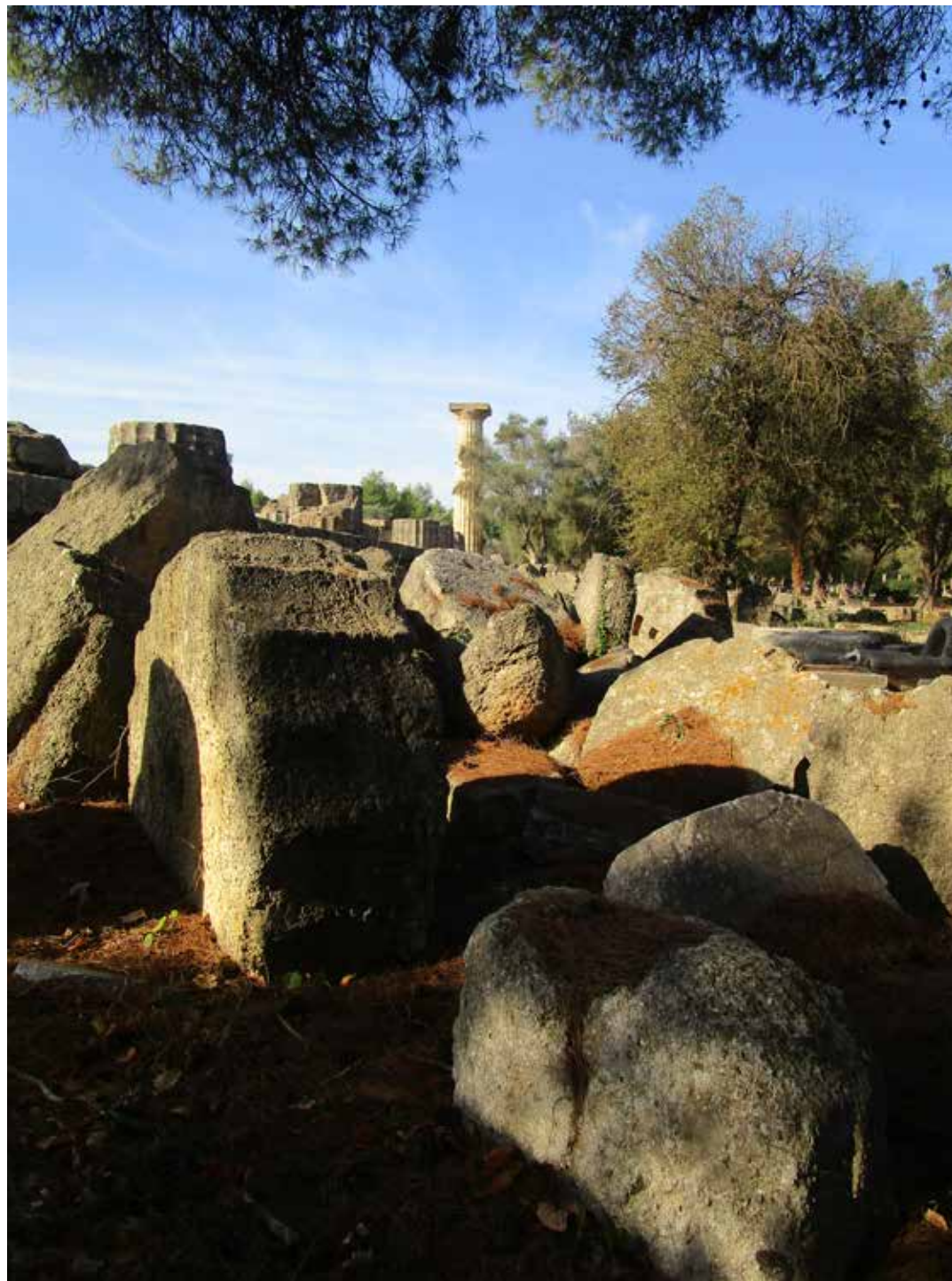
We toured the ruins in the morning seeing the remains of the Temple of Zeus, which used to contain a statue of Zeus that is one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The largest ruin is the gymnasium, an indoor area where athletes practiced track and field and the pentathlon. There were also the ruins of barracks, the Temple of Hera, Philippeion temple, and the outdoor stadium where the athletes competed.

Our guide for the tour was so enthusiastic we couldn't help but be fascinated. She obviously loved her job. She walked around the site touching the stones of the ruins almost reverently. It's not easy for most people to appreciate ruins, our guide brought them to life for us.

After walking the archaeological site, we visited the Olympia Archaeological Museum which has a large collection of items and statues found while excavating the site. Most remarkable are the statues of Hermes and the Infant Dionysus and Nike, the winged Victory that used to tower 12 meters high over the Olympic site from her pedestal.







We set sail for Athens soon after returning to our ship. Our last night on the Viking Sun Rob, Sheri and Kirk enjoyed the spa instead of dinner, planning on room service later. Somehow each couple ended up eating in the Italian restaurant. Funny, we tried over and over to get reservations but walking up two at a time got us a table.



Athens, Greece

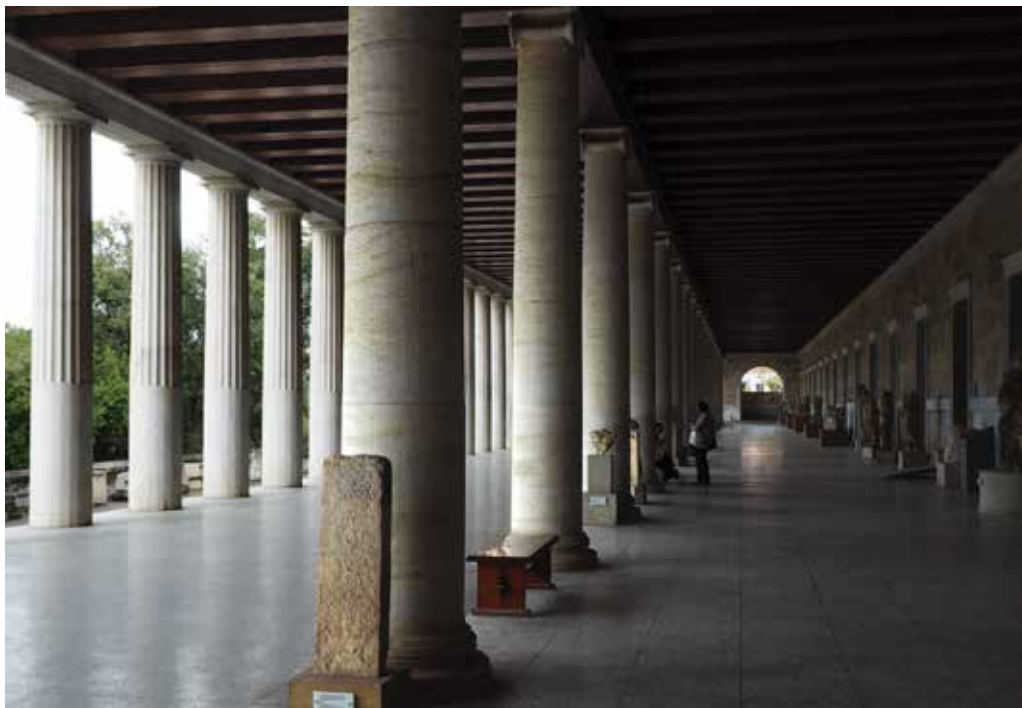
We regretfully left the ship on Thursday morning and grabbed a taxi to the hotel. We arrived with a rough plan of seeing just a few of the main sites, but quickly changed our minds when our taxi driver, Theodore, offered us a good deal on being our tour guide and driver for a few hours. This was very helpful since most sites were not in walking distance from the hotel and the public transportation did not look promising. Touring with Theodore allowed us to see more items on our list and offered some surprises we certainly wouldn't have seen without him.

After dropping our bags off at the hotel our first stop was the Ancient Agora, which was once the heart of Athens where political, commercial and social activity took place. It was also the birthplace of democracy. The highlight of the Ancient Agora was Temple of Hephaestus that dates back to the 5th century BC and consists of 34 Doric columns still supporting a partially intact roof.

We walked on down the pedestrian street to stop at the remains of Hadrian's Library, built in AD 132 and then on to the Roman Agora to see the octagonal Tower of the Winds that served as world's first meteorological station with sundials, a water clock and a wind vane. The Roman Agora was quite small, especially in comparison to the original Greek one. We rejoined Theodore and took off for the next site.

After a short ride we arrived at the Temple of Olympian Zeus, which took a few hundred years to construct starting in 515 BC. Only 15 of the original 104 massive columns remain, but that was enough to give us a good idea what it was like to live in that era. Hadrian's Arch was at







the end of the Temple of Zeus toward the Acropolis.

We made a quick stop by the Panathenaic Stadium, the only stadium in the world constructed entirely of white marble. The current stadium is built on the site of the first stadium which was used for the first time in 330 BC when games in which nude male athletes were held. The Romans added on to the stadium and installed the marble seating but it fell out of use during the early Christian era. The revival of the stadium came about when the Olympic games were revived in 1896 and extensive restoration was done so that the games could be held there.

Something we never would have known to see the Presidential Guard. These are soldiers in an infantry unit who train specifically for this duty. Their uniforms are representative of those worn by the Evzones in the Hellenic Army from about 1868 to 1914. The shoes alone weigh about 3.5 pounds each. They march in a very stiff legged









manner, pausing to stomp and scrape at the ground before turning and going in the other direction. They guard both the Presidential Mansion and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier along with other ceremonial events.

Each time we got in the car with Theodore to go to the next site, we would get a talk about what we would see. It was great to have our own guide, we could ask all the questions we wanted or even to go to spe-



cific places. We were pretty happy with Theodore's suggestions. Mount Lycabettus is another place we knew nothing about but was a great place to view the city of Athens and all the way to the coast. We stopped for some photos then all agreed it was time to eat.

Theodore took us to a very nice, well decorated restaurant located about 10 minutes outside the tourist district called Calypso. It had a neat roof that retracted to let in the sunlight, and the flowers throughout the place were live orchids in planters. The menu items were traditional Greek, and we ordered the Greek lamb chops and decided to also order the Greek meat plate. Theodore assisted us and acted as liaison with the waiter. Ordering went something like this: Rob: I'd like the Greek lamb chop dinner, please. Janet: Meat! Me: Meat! Kirk: Meat! Sheri: Meat! Me: I'd also like the Greek meat platter Janet: Meat! Kirk: Meat! Sheri: Meat! Waiter: (something in Greek) Theodore: He says "that's a lot of meat..." It's a really good thing there were refrigerators in our hotel rooms, we had leftover meat.

After we were all stuffed it was time to finally see our rooms in the hotel. That morning we had just checked in and quickly ditched our bags. The rooms turned out to be great, each had a balcony and the rooftop had an excellent view of the Acropolis just a short walking distance away. We were worn out with full bellies so the rest of the afternoon and evening were spent lounging around the hotel planning for the next day.

On the last morning of our vacation Janet was up early and at breakfast when Sheri went downstairs. The hotel's breakfast was typi-





cal of Europe with sliced meats and cheeses, cereal and breads. The one thing that really stood out was the wonderful Greek yogurt. When Sheri went back upstairs she told Kirk he really should try it but he didn't seem convinced. Sheri sent Janet a message to remind Kirk when he got to the breakfast area. After so much pressure he finally gave in and found his new favorite food. Yeah, it was that good.

When Rob finally crawled out of bed we all assembled in the lobby to plan our attack on the Acropolis. Janet's ankle had finally rebelled and she borrowed Rob's cane to make sure she could make it to the top of the mountain. Fortunately she and Sheri had studied all of the possible locations and picked the perfect hotel, it was only a five minute walk to the entrance to the Acropolis.



We spent a couple of hours exploring starting with the Odeon of Herodes Atticus, an open air theater near the bottom of the hill. We snapped a few photos and continued our climb. We were there pretty early but there was still a crowd. We all were glad we weren't visiting at the height of the tourist season.

The climb wasn't as bad as it could have been and the views from the top were great. We could see each of the sites we had visited the day before as we walked the perimeter of the hill. There are three significant temples on the site. The largest temple is the Parthenon, dedicated to Athena Parthenos, the patron of the city. Next is the Erechtheion which is half dedicated to Athena Polias and the other half to Poseidon-Erechtheus. The smallest temple is dedicated to Athena Nike and supposedly once held a statue of a wingless Nike or wingless victory, no wings so that she could never leave Athens.

By the time Janet and Sheri were finished exploring and taking photos, Kirk and Rob were well past being ready to leave. We all headed back to the hotel for some rest and relaxation and Janet to put her foot up to rest her ankle. Sheri headed up to the roof for a great place to read with a view.

That evening, our last in Athens, we took a short walk to the Acropolis Museum. Much of the original art recovered from the site is now in the museum and replicas are being used to reconstruct the temples on the hill.







Five of the original Karyatides from the Erechtheion temple, the young women from Karyes of Lakonia who danced in honour of the goddess Artemis, are in the Acropolis Museum and another in the British Museum. They are remarkably well preserved and very impressive.

After our very educational visit we headed over to the edge of the touristy area of the Plaka for some dinner. Our hotel suggested Arcadia and we found it quite easily. Janet, Sheri and Kirk all had moussaka. Janet's was the vegetarian ver-





sion, Kirk had the antique style, and Sheri had the traditional. of course had lots more meat, this time the lamb gyros he swore he would not leave Greece without trying.

It was finally time to go back to the hotel and get ready for a 4:00 am taxi ride with Theodore to the airport the next morning. We packed up our clothes and souvenirs, sad to see our adventure end. Also dreading having to roll out of bed before the crack of dawn to start the long trip home.







