

SMILING SICILY



Craig, Joanne & Peanut

Italians don't really smile unless they know you but if you smile or wave then they often return the gesture. It is funny but in Sicily I have found smiling really rewarding and I love smiling at people. Mainly because when you smile at an Italian, it shocks them.

They are completely stunned by your friendliness and as a result, you get the most surprised but lovely smile in the world. Its like you've made their day by showing a little bit of attention and you know what, it gives you a wonderful feeling. Making someone's day is the best feeling ever.

Today, we passed a really old gentleman. We were driving Homer at the time. The guy (90+) stopped, looked up and frowned at us in a suspicious kind of way. We waved with beaming grins and you know what, his face lit up. The old chap was soon beaming too and it was like you'd given him an injection of energy. The crouched little chap was all of a sudden bolt upright looking proud with a spring in his step. It costs nothing to smile but the rewards are priceless.

Simple but exquisite sign for a tat shop. Just reminds me of Blackpool.

Wednesday 4th June: Modica to Ragusa

Homer was damn dirty and we couldn't believe how everything was covered in a fine dust. Its like we've gone through an African sand storm. I know it was windy the other day but this place must be a magnet for sand even thought we're inland. It just keeps on coming. Craig washed the windows, so we could see out of them and the solar panels. Believe it or not but the solar panels were reduced by over 50% due to the think layer of sand.



The strawberries in Sicily are so sweet and juicy, I could eat them by the barrow full especially in a morning with fresh yogurt. Good job we're parked in the middle of the market.

Yesterday, we'd noticed a cheap fuel station, so seemed logical to fill up Homer whilst we could. Craig pulled in and forgot about the self serve price (€1.55) being significantly cheaper than service price (€1.72). When

we realised we asked the chap to stop at €25.

Heading out of Modica you could clearly see the town built within the gorge of 4 mountains. It really is pretty impressive when you look down and even more impressive when you cross the bridge which feels like it is just plonked in between two of the mountains. It doesn't look stable at all and I would hate to be mid way across the bridge during an earthquake.

As we headed towards Ragusa the countryside was pretty baron except for a few farms with fields of hay bales and the odd roaming cow. That is something we really haven't seen in all of Italy - livestock. They either keep it hidden or import their meat because they certainly don't have herds in the fields like in UK. As we approached Ragusa we spotted a Conad supermarket

**"Wonder if
these guys
do a mean
YMCA?"**

-ANON

and pulled over, after we filled up Homer (properly this time) with diesel at €1.54 and topped up the GPL. When we walked inside we realised it was a shopping centre and I got all excited. I hadn't been shopping for over 2 months. Craig sighed and I jumped with joy. I dragged him around a few clothes shops and managed to convince him I needed another pair of sandals, the 6 pairs in Homer are just not enough! I wanted to buy some Italian gear but realised I had too many clothes to start of with, so better not push my luck.

We hoped Conad would stock some lamb chops but no such luck. We did however find a bone for Peanut and a Rosemary plant to keep Basil company. We also purchased an Italian coffee maker at one of the discount stores. The good thing about Conad is you can buy a piece of steak or chicken and hand it to the chef to cook it for you. Imagine the deli counter of Selfridges with a chef in the middle cooking all the produce. Its bloody brilliant.



Back in Homer and it was like Christmas, treats all round. I put on my sandals and did a little jig with a parade up and down Homer's runway. Craig dismantled the espresso maker to inspected how it worked before putting it all together and making us an espresso. I am not normally in to espresso but I really like the Italian coffee made the old fashioned way, it tastes so smooth. I've never tasted anything so good. Peanut on the other hand went outside

and after 10 minutes of sniffing the bone and looking at us like we'd gone mad, he carefully picked up the bone and slowly walked under the van. We didn't see Peanut for another hour as he munched his way through the tasty



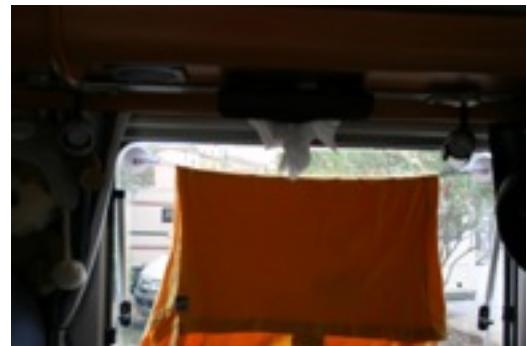
marrow. That's something you don't really see in the UK anymore, marrow bones for dogs. Anyway when he surfaced he was licking his lips and clinging on to the bone for dear life. This was his first 'marrow' bone and he was not letting it go. He was one happy pooch. We didn't fancy a smelly van, so we popped in to a bag for later.



We clambered back in to Homer and set off down the road to Ragusa. This place is meant to be pretty steep but as we arrived we didn't think it was that bad. However, we moved forward with caution making sure we didn't take a bum turn down an alley to find Homer wishing he'd taken a cliff hanging course. We passed Piazza Del Populo and carried on down to the terraces. As we turned the corner it was a Jesus Christ that is steep. Now we know what they mean. We were on a ridge looking down on what was the old town Ragusa Ibla and it looked pretty awesome. We found a nice parking spot at the top of the old down / bottom of the new town. The location seemed ideal but more than anything Homer was level, which we recon would be a rare find in this hill joint.

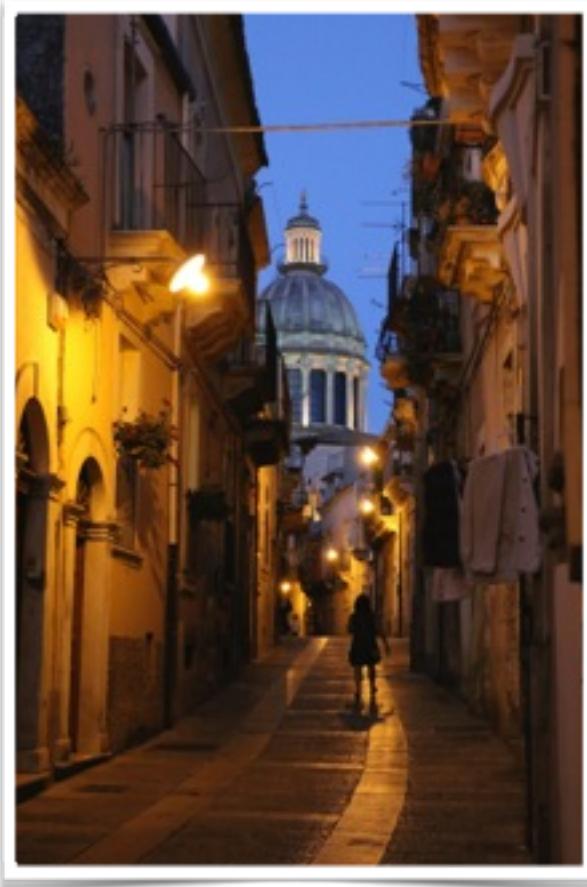
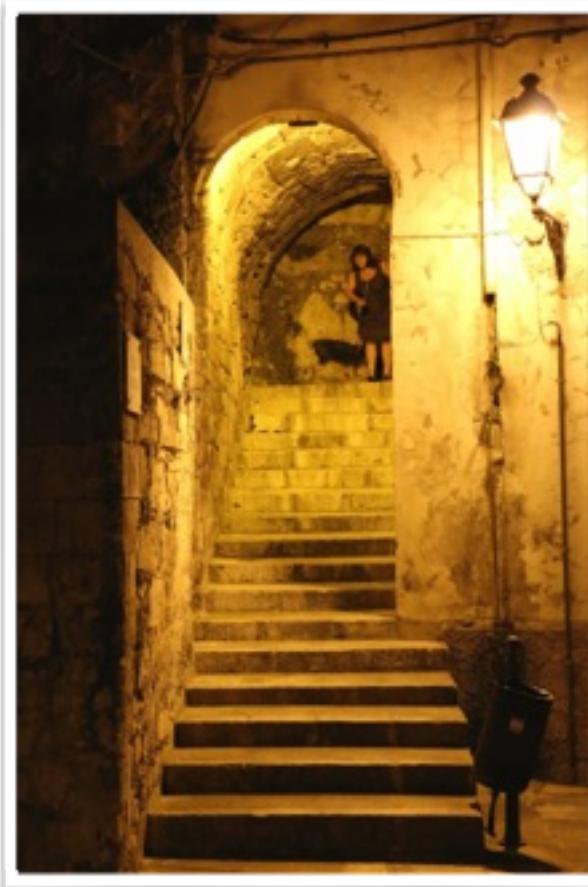


Craig did a bit of DIY (no surprises there then) and fitted Homer with 2 internal washing lines. This way we can dry the odd garment without looking like we're camping and causing distress to local residents. When you are travelling around, drying washing is probably one of the hardest things to do. Washing is easy but drying is challenge even through you have ideal weather most of the time. If you are on campsites its OK but when you try and wild camp, you struggle especially if you are on a street or public place. The good thing with the bungie line that Craig has put up means we can still close the blinds with the washing in place. That way we can hang stuff to dry, close the blinds, go out for the day and then when we return they are dry!



After dinner we strolled in to the old town. Up and down the charming little streets. Ragusa certainly has a good feel factor about it and one of those places you would definitely return to. I'd even think about retiring here but maybe as an old fart, I would struggle climb up and down the streets unless of course they installed a few stenna chair lifts.

We twisted and turned around the streets, each one presenting an interesting little something - unusual door handles, back alley church, tiny archway, gargoyle fountain, it went on and on. Every turn kept you intrigued and we just kept on going. Eventually we reached Piazza Del Duomo and its





cathedral, beautifully lit by the odd spot light. The piazza was extremely quiet apart from two sets of newly weds having their photographs taken on the cathedral steps (also moon in background). One of the brides had clearly had enough of smiling and the groom, well he was about to slit his wrist but for the fact he was holding his wife's bouquet. We watched the couples for a short while before heading back to Homer. It was around 10pm when we returned, which is late for us two.

Thursday 5th June: Ragusa

The town of Ragusa was destroyed by the 1693 earthquake.

Unlike other settlements in the area they not only built a

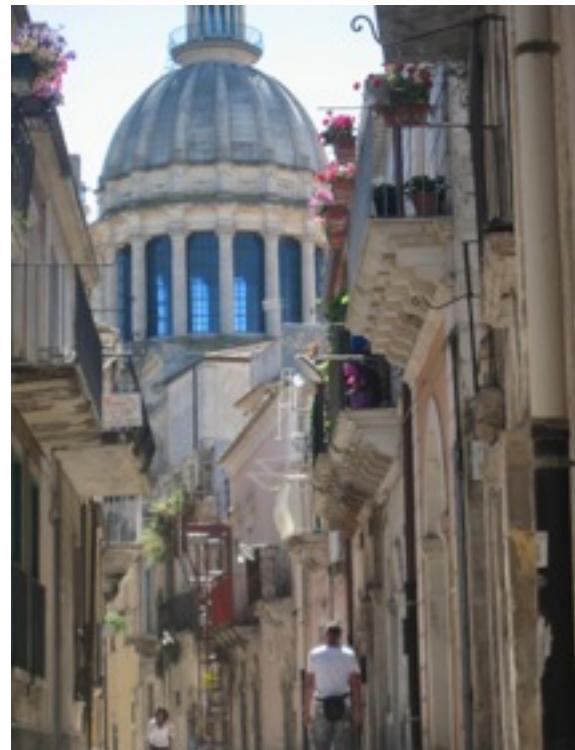
new town but they rebuilt the old town hence upper (new) and lower (old). Apparently this caused some shit for a few hundred years but eventually the old and new kissed and made up and now live in harmony. The new bit doesn't really have the appeal of the old but a good place to go shopping. The old town is just wonderful.



Its like a medieval hamlet with a bit of Baroque architecture thrown in. Some of the streets are extremely steep and narrow and if you hear a car, watch ya toes!. And if you see a large Italian, step in a doorway. All morning we just wandered from street to street calling in little churches, gardens etc . It was a pleasant change to walk and hold

hands rather than cycle.

We saw so much but the highlight for me was the benedettino convent. As usual we wandered in to a small church and this was one was no different to the rest but then heard singing. We tentatively walked through a small doorway to find another little alcove. It was a little museum dedicated to the Benedettino nuns. We had a toot a round (no one else in there) whilst the





Holy Bread Press. I always wondered if they made their own or bought it from bakers.

nuns sang away in the background. There is something about hymns that give me goose bumps and today, I had goose bumps all over. We couldn't really understand the Italian signs and posters but from what I can gather, it certainly brought tears to my eyes. I might have this wrong but the story went something like...2 nuns survived the earthquake. They survived on very little but everyday they slowly rebuilt the church and convent.

As years went by the convent slowly grew in numbers. Just as they'd finished the church some state officials took all the church possessions. The nuns managed to hide a few of the key sacred items in tiny tunnels. They too hid in the tunnels and survived on next to nothing. They stayed in the tunnels until it was safe to practice once again.

We also peaked our head round the door of a little house. We could hear something strange inside and as the door was ajar... Inside there was a chap restoring church items. I have no idea what he was restoring but it looked like a chest or part of a stand for a statue? He was taking the paint off and restoring the whole section by hand. What a slow but rewarding job that must be. He was only a young chap too.



We wandered in to church, which is now a museum for chairs.

There is so much to see here in Ragusa, I could waffle on for hours and bore you all silly, no doubt.

The park area is nice here. If you walk right to the end, you can see beautiful views down the valley. I bet its nice



Wonder if this nun could sew Craig's t-shirt that he's just ripped on a thorn bush.



here at sunset.



If you are ever in Sicily, Ragusa is a place to definitely visit. It also has a number of tiny boutique B&B's, which look beautiful. We didn't go in but one of the B&B's looked very inviting. We glanced through the door and it was like 3 little caves inside. Bear stone walls with cream leather furniture, plain but extremely stylish. I will be sorry to leave Ragusa, its charm and simplicity has a wonderful feeling that makes you feel right at home.

Back in Homer and Craig is tinkering in the garage. I have no idea what he is doing but it squeaks, so he is either filing, sanding or sawing. What you up to? Dunno yet. Eh? Not decided. How the heck can he not decide, I need to have a look....He's making another gas cap. We lost our original one in Switzerland and he made a temporary one. Well now its time to do a proper one. Its very disturbing when you see a leaf walk by. Eh? A leaf. What you on about? This bloody ant is carrying a full leaf on its back, you can hear it huffing and puffing, poor little bugger. Give it a lift then. Nah, it will nip me. I nearly forgot, yesterday Homer got a little



nick on his belly. A street flag lifted up and gave Homer a right hook. Not a lot of damage and a wound that I am sure Craig will fix at some point.

I could stay in this little spot for weeks. Imagine a circular crazy paved car park. Round the edge you have neatly trimmed hedges and in the middle a couple of trees and bushes. It is only small, you could probably get a dozen or so cars parked around the circumference. Not many people stay here but quite a few drive through, so its brilliant for people watching and chatty to folk. The local rag and bone guy is ace. He comes several times a day and rummages through the bins. He always has his music blasting away like some boy racer, he's well cool. We've recently been joined by a French couple and they are very friendly. The chap gave Craig a high five and offered to help him with his tinkering!

Tatty bye for now xxx

