



OUR BUMBLE

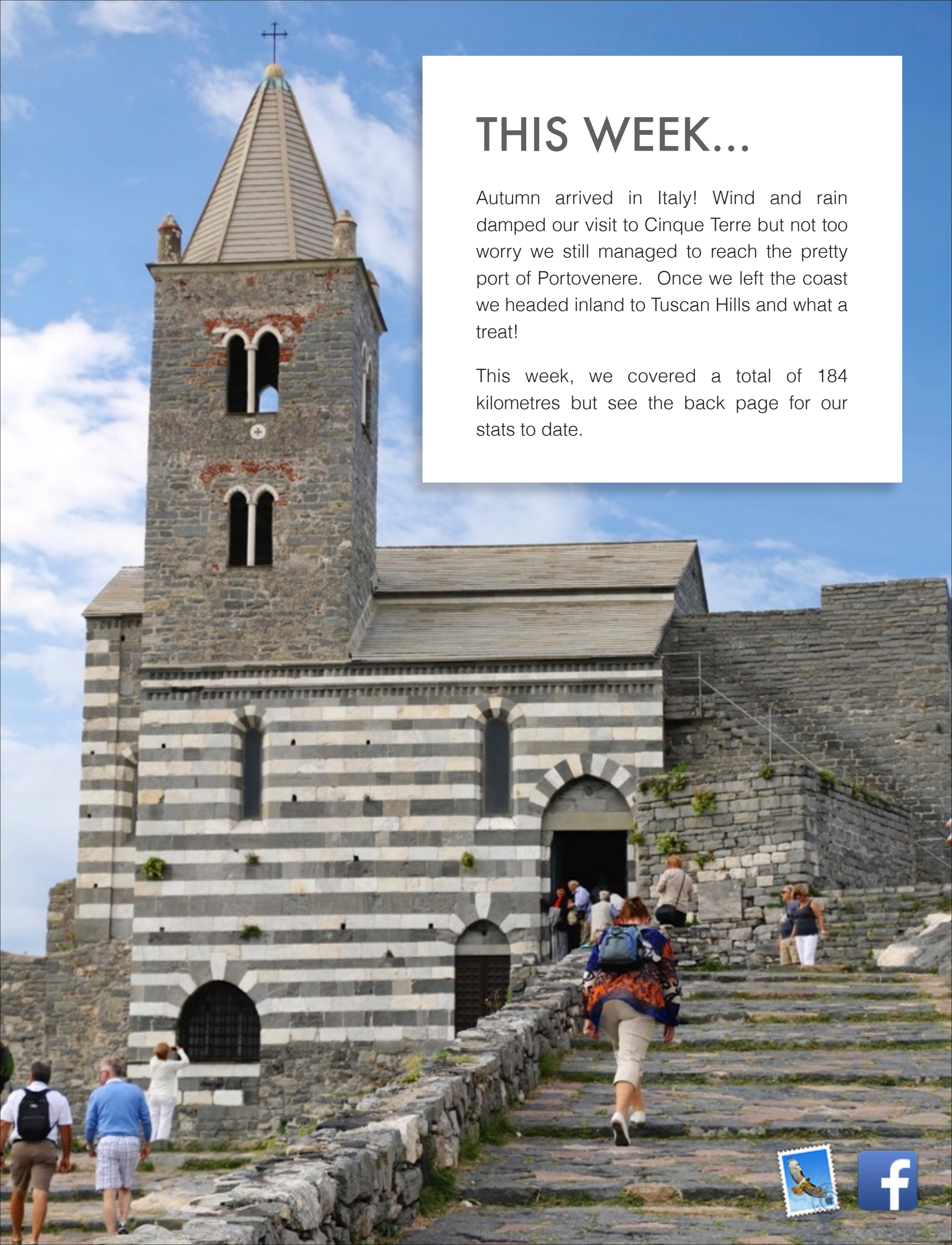
EXPLORING EUROPE IN OUR MOTORHOME.

BY JOANNE & CRAIG.

THIS WEEK...

Autumn arrived in Italy! Wind and rain damped our visit to Cinque Terre but not too worry we still managed to reach the pretty port of Portovenere. Once we left the coast we headed inland to Tuscan Hills and what a treat!

This week, we covered a total of 184 kilometres but see the back page for our stats to date.





CHIAVARI TO LA SPEZIA

Above: Hulls reflect in port.

Below: Water stop and parking area in Sestri Levante
GPS position:
N44.271277 - E9.408540



SATURDAY 12 SEPTEMBER

Woke to the sound of water and wood smoke. As we peered out the window we could see the couple on the end having a home made cold shower (eek) behind a bush and making a cuppa on an open fire. Got to hand it to them.

We set off along coast and weaved our way down in to Lavagna. A rather large coastal town with a pretty good marina. We didn't stop as we toured the town to death, last year but we did pull in towards the end of the town and fill up with water. That's the best thing with Italy, fresh water everywhere. Before we set off, we put our bedding and towels in the wash box with water and soap powder.

Within an hour of leaving the busy coastline we found ourselves in the lush, lost world of orchards and fields, woodlands, knackered farmhouses. High in the hills with inviting views towards the mountains of Tuscany. It is hard to believe this part of the world manages to survive, it feels so remote and almost lost to time. You would not imagine the coast to only be half an hour away. We passed farmers cutting and gathering their crops by

hand, with scythes and wooden pitchforks, and poor little donkey and cart obediently waiting for the load. With such beauty we pulled up in a small lay by and had a bite to each. After lunch, I finished the washing and hung it in the window to dry whilst Craig had a stroll in the countryside. He bumped in to a couple with a miniature dachshund and enquired about Italian breeders. We have decided we miss having a dog around the home and going to look at buying another but not sure if best to buy in Europe (especially Germany) or at home in UK. The UK will suit us best then we can toilet train as it could be a bit hard going in the motorhome...but we will see. You never know we might find a rescue dachshund which would be just perfect.

We were all parked up for the night and talking about our plans for the next couple of days when it dawned on us. It is Saturday and the shops are closed tomorrow. Do we stay here or do we go to the supermarket. When you are travelling you never know what day of the week it is, which can sometimes catch you out because most places completely shut down on a Sunday. Well, we have no milk or water! Blinking ek what shall we do? We umm'd and arrr'd and decided to go to the supermarket. With that we packed up and shot toward La Spezia. It was 6pm and we had two hours to get down the mountain. Craig fired up Vin and took off at a speed that had the back of Vin fish-tailing. Leaving me holding the armrest with both hands and praying for our life. It was like being in one of those top gear mountain scenes where they drop in to second and floor it. In a Ferrari great, a motorhome...not to sure! He sent a flock of elderly pedestrians spinning like Tasmanian devils at a zebra crossing. By the time we arrived in La Spezia at 7.30pm I felt rather worse for wear. I stepped out

of Vin and took a deep breath, thank god we are here. With just half an hour to spare we did a mad dash around Lidl (good job we know our way around Lidl store plan) arriving at the counter with just minutes to spare. We caught our breath, packed the bags and then the dreaded moment happened. D d deer. The bill was €42 and we only had €40. We hadn't picked up any extra money from our safe. My heart sank and I just wanted the floor to open up. Between us we managed to copper up and find €2 which gave the checkout girl plenty of time to look at us like something on the bottom of her shoe. I so wanted to snort or scratch my arse and really give her something to look at but resisted for fear of losing our shopping and the big bar of extra creamy milk chocolate.

We drove around to the ambulance aire but unfortunately it closed at 8pm, so we parked up just around the corner next to a scuba diving outlet. Wonder if they will take us for a dive tomorrow? Its been a while since we went diving and it got us talking about the old days and our dive boat. We had some brilliant times diving the cold waters of the UK from our little rib. Our dive buddy Vinny (who our motorhome Vin is named after) who sadly died at a young age would be loving our adventure. Fell asleep chatting about the good old days and our great diving friends.



Joanne looks out on La Spezia.



LA SPEZIA

Above: La Spezia's industrial port.

Below: The ambulance service camper spot in La Spezia.

GPS position:

N44.103642 - E9.860147



SUNDAY 13 SEPTEMBER

We are right near the docks and little did we know we were parked right on the cargo truck passage. All night, we could hear the low hum of passing container trucks as they drove 5mph back and forth between the yard and ship dropping off more and more containers. When ever I see shipping containers stacked high, I always think of the word shit. Originally derived from Stack High In Transit. In times gone by they would stack products that produced methane gas on higher decks then the gas could escape. If not using a lantern at night could prove pretty lethal....boom!

We drove round the corner to the ambulance aire. The entrance is staffed with volunteers 8 -12 and 3 -8. There is no charge for parking on the aire but they recommended donations of €5 per day. At the entrance to the site is the ambulance repair centre and all the ambulances. Its quite a set up. Behind that, the aire which holds around 50 vans but as we are in Italy, probably around 70 vans as they do like to cuddle up. Right at the back, they usual service area of fresh, grey and black water.

We parked up on gravel and grass just in time before the heavens opened. The rest of the day we dossed around in Vin waiting for the storm to pass but it didn't. Thunder, lightening and rain all day folks, so nothing else to tell ya! Bored out of our tree.

MONDAY 14 SEPTEMBER

By lunchtime the rain had stopped, so we grabbed the bikes and set off in to town. Over two bridges, along the port, passed the cruise terminal and right in to the centre of La Spezia. Most of the buildings were destroyed in world war II, so not much in terms of historic attractions. However, its grid like streets with reasonable shopping outlets, chic boutiques and quiet a few cafes did offer a pleasant atmosphere. To the east of the town, a large market where we managed to get a bit of fruit. In and out and up and down the streets before heading over to the shore. To our surprise there weren't many people around and once we reached the ferry terminal we could see why. All ferries to Cinque Terre cancelled until further notice. What a shame, I was hoping to find out some information for tomorrow. With that we head off down the pier and over the bridge to toot as some of the millionaire yachts. Dream on baby.

In 19 century, Napoleon set up a large naval and military complex, which is still in operation. We could see a number of huge grey steely looking battle boats standing side by side in the far side of the harbour. Today, they looked even more steely, as the dark rain clouds started to slowly build...here comes the rain again!!



Naval ships in port stems from Napoleon.

We cycled like the clappers back to Vin and managed to escape a drowned rat moment. Our luck must be changing!

Despite the weather, we still had our BBQ under the awning. Craig cooked a full chicken, which he'd marinated in garlic and herbs. Once the chicken was cooked he plonked on the rosemary potatoes, corn on the cob and pan of green beans. I have to say, it was one of the best meals in ages and the chicken was just so succulent and tasty. The only downside was the mosquitos. They were out in force tonight and we were a treat or as Craig pointed out...we were meals on



Rigging on a yacht.

wheels with juicy bits. The little buggers had a right old go at us despite using the mosquito coil, citronella and deet spray. Later that night, Craig had a read up on the little buggers because he thought they looked different. He was right, they are known as the forest mosquito or tiger mosquito and came over from Asia several years ago. They are only tiny but have a white strip on their head and nibble like hell. Look like the bad gremlin on a good day! Our mosquito techniques have worked a treat up until now but nothing on the market will shift these things except a good old slap.

Our Bumble verdict La Spezia: Nothing special but nice enough if you are passing through.



Pottering around the port on the bikes.



The other side of La Spezia Port, lots of yachts and boat trips to the Cinque Terre.



LA SPEZIA & PORTOVENERE (BOAT)

Above: The view as you pull into Portovenere harbour.

Below: Church door detail.



TUESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER

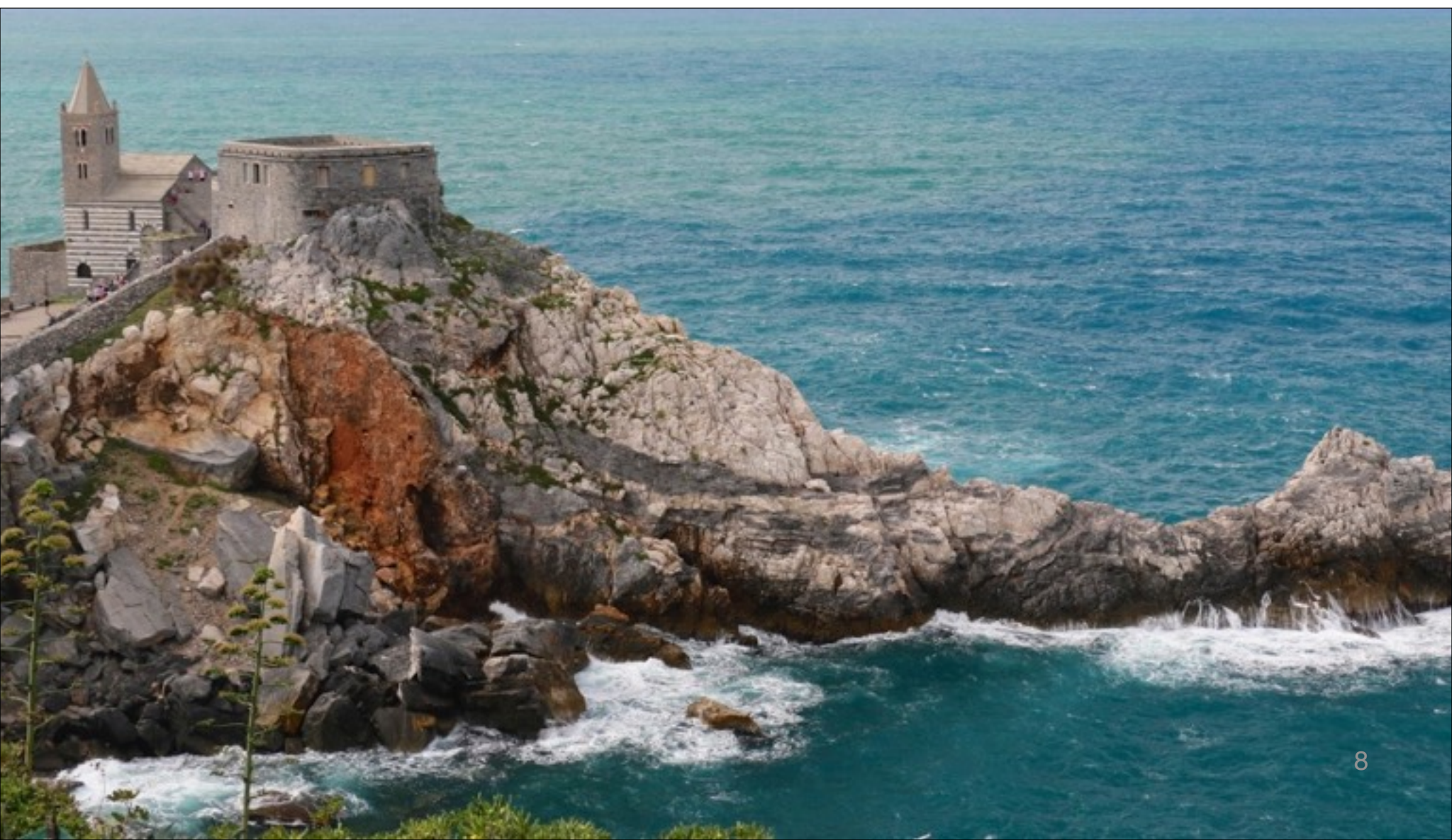
The 1st ferry to Cinque Terre leaves at 9.15, so we set off nice and early. We caught the bus to the ferry terminal, which only took 15 minutes. It was only when we got on the bus that we were informed that we should have purchased a prepaid ticket. We hadn't got a clue, so we had a free ride in to town. Felt so guilty.

With a rucksack full of chicken butties, fruit, water and yogurts, we headed towards the ferry. A handful of people were already queuing and I got all excited but it was soon shattered. All boats to Cinque Terre were cancelled due to rough seas but we could head to Portovenere for €8. We debated going to the train station when we heard someone say the trains were cancelled. Ah what the hell lets go to Portovenere on the boat. Its been a long time since we had a boat trip. We purchased our tickets and clambered on to the ferry. I got all giddy whilst Craig did his macho thing and entered in to stern mode. Men and emotions, why can't they show they are happy? Wish he would fart, that would make him grin!

Within 15 minutes the ferry was full and we set off. Two little peas in a pod of package holiday tourist, we felt the odd one's out. We had no headset or colour coded sticker, and with the amount of looks we might as well as been stark bullock naked. You could hear the American's "Do you think they are OK? I wonder if they lost their sticker?"

It was nice to look back on La Spezia and see the city nestled nicely between two hills leading gently to the palm fringed promenade and the harbour. And as long as you keep looking forward, it looks great. Ignore the working docklands to the right and the naval fleet to the left. The 45 minute boat trip to Portovenere was disappointing uneventful with no drama. With rough seas we were expecting a few waves to rock the boat, cause a few screams and send a babbling tourist overboard. But instead we arrived calm and chilled.

As we pulled in Portovenere the sea condition changed quite quickly. We were now entering the open waters and coming out of the secluded bay of La Spezia. It was pretty damn rough and probably round a force 8, a tad windy and cold but we had blue skies. The first thing we noticed about Portovenere were the pastel coloured terraced houses. So thin and tall but very pretty. Apparently they were once the defensive wall. We tootled off away from the hoards of tourists and headed along the sea front towards the headland. Lined with cafes and bars offering mid morning snacks. We carried on to the end and perched on the end of rock, the small black and white church of San Pietro. It wasn't much inside but in and around the church was wonderful with fantastic views out to see and the island of Palmaria. The church was built on the ruins of the Roman temple to Venus, which is where Portovenere gets its name. The copper door to





Photos Clockwise:

- ❖ Joanne ascends to San Lorenzo church.
- ❖ Joanne looks out to sea.
- ❖ The old church on the headland.
- ❖ Graphic statue inside.
- ❖ Small boats in the harbour.



the church was so nice and contained small figurines of the 12 apostles, which no one seemed to see except us! Maybe our attention to detail is a little ocd!

Our bellies were starting to grumble, so we sat down on the wall and had our pots of yogurt. After breakfast, a stroll along the castle wall before we wound our way up through the narrow alleys to the church of San Lorenzo. Over the doorway, a carving of the saint that was roasted alive on the spit...charming way to treat your saint. We carried on up the hill to the castle with even better views of the coastline and sneak previews of Cinque Terre...you know that place we want to go to but can't get there! We slowly wandered back down to the seafront via the shops, alleyways and cafes. Three hours later and we were back on the ferry to La Spezia.

We enjoyed our picnic lunch on the harbour wall along with the entire population of La Spezia pigeons. They coed, pecked at crumbs and strutted their stuff until we'd finished our butties. When they left we felt quite lucky, at least they didn't deposit a wet fart on us like they normally do.

A leisurely gander around the boats before we slowly walked it back to Vin. Arriving just in time before the heavens opened. Not quite the day we'd hoped for but a truly wonderful time non the less.

Our Bumble verdict: Great fun on the ferry and Portovenere is very pretty.





LA SPEZIA TO MINUCCIANO

Above: Codponte village.

Below: Stone carving at the car park in Gazzano.



WEDNESDAY 16 SEPTEMBER

No change on the weather front, so we decided to set off and give Cinque Terre a miss until next time.

Before heading off in to the mountains we called at Lidl and brimmed all the cupboards with food, beverages and cleaning stuff. Vin was stuffed and spilling over at the seems like a little muffin top.

After a short drive we pulled over and tucked in to steak and onion baguettes for lunch. With full tums we bumbled off in seek of our next village. Narrow roads, sticky out rocks and mad Italians made for a knuckle clenching drive. Poor Vin was rather shaken, just like me and my steak and onion booty belly!

The little village of Gazzano looked nice from the car park but thats where it finished. Tiny cobbled alleys and traditional houses were average but the fact it had loads of dog poo everywhere didn't do it any favours. With only a handful of villagers you would think they would clean it up. The little village church was basic but it had the best echo. I bet it sounds lovely when they all sing

hymns just hope the dogs don't come here to howl. Within 15 minutes we were back in Vin and on the road.

Our bumble verdict: skip it.

The drive through the Lucido Valley was just fab. If you have an image of Tuscany of rolling hills, vineyards, olive trees, hilltops village and remote stone villas then here it is, all wrapped up perfectly in the valley. A feet on the dash and dream moment! Life right now feels good and being in the middle of this wonderful idyllic landscape just made it feel even better.

As we turned a corner, we spotted an enchanting little hilltop village that just shouted...stop. So we did. We pulled over into a car park. Craig climbed out...

Hey chuck, look at this gadget

What is it?

Its cool just give me 5 cents and an empty bottle

Eh, what for?

Water, what else

Craig placed his money in the machine and selected his preferred water choice...iced. Out poured 1 litre of ice cold water. He was well impressed and have to say what a great idea. Much cheaper than supermarket bottle water. Unfortunately we didn't have any more change, so Craig didn't get to play with the water gadget. Not as cheap as spring water but twice the fun!

The village of Codponte was really very pleasant. Not much to do here but it was a lovely place to walk around. Old church and bell tower, river, roman bridge and quaint village with stone



Winding little streets in the Codponte.

houses all squashed and mingled together. It was difficult to work out when one house started and one finished. I suppose it was a bit like a stone logo land where if it slots together then great. Over the river (Aulella torrent) the ruins of a 11 century castle and some roman ruins, which date back to 7 BC.

Our Bumble verdict: Well worth a wander.

We toyed with staying but Craig wanted to find a great spot, he could feel that hidden gem just around the corner. Within half an hour we were parked up and gawking at a view to die for. We really didn't expect Tuscany to be as beautiful as the hype but you know what, it is better than the hype, it is natural beauty at its best.

We had found a perfect spot. Small car park with no one around and a couple of stone benches to sit and chill. The landscape took a dip in to a small valley before it swept up high in to a stunning, dense tree mountain. A moment to remember. We cracked open a bottle of red wine and put on the BBQ. Grilled steak, squashed sausage, rosemary potatoes, corn on the cob and garden peas. And if that's not good enough, we got a blood red sunset that totally transformed and lit up the landscape. For the first time in years, I got a little tipsy, went a little ditzy, made Craig smile but you know what, we had a belting night.

Our Bumble verdict: Views to die for.



Above: Craig find another great little spot.

MINUCCIANO TO VERRUCOLE

THURSDAY 17 SEPTEMBER

We flipped up the blind and stuck our head out the bedroom window to admire our view.

Someone pinched our view

Where did it go?

I dunno but think the rain clouds want to spoil our fun

Within half an hour it was raining and we were surrounded in cloud. We couldn't even see the end of the road. We lullied about, had breakfast, a shower and more lulling about. We hoped the

rain would clear but nope. Do we stay or do we go? We got bored and decided to head off.

The roads through the Tuscan hills were perilous beyond words, much too narrow for a motorhome, full of impossible bends, crazy Italian drivers and sheer falls from unimaginable heights. My toes curled on several occasions.

We arrived at Verrucole and found another perfect parking spot. Cloud and drizzle hindered the view but as we had lunch we watched the cloud lift and reveal a beautiful valley.

Image below: Verrucole Fortress





Photos Clockwise:

- ❖ Military clothing and weapons in the fortress.
- ❖ All the food on display was real. Even the pigs trotter in the foreground.
- ❖ The fortresses stone insignia.



We took a steep walk up into the hills, through a pretty hamlet and picturesque jumble along roughly cobbled streets that were sometimes all but vertical. It was a strenuous climb even locals could be seen pausing for breath, a hand against a wall but the views from the higher points were memorable.

At the top the fortress of Verrucole, an impressive defence structure erected by House of Este on the crest of the hill that dominates the entire Serchio valley. Entrance fee of €5 per person but well worth it for the 360 panoramic views. Inside, a medieval village full of items and activities to demonstrate life in 10 century. Traditional weaving, huge catapult, medicine cabinet and herb garden to name but a few. A truly good visit.

The walk down the hill was equally challenging with little stones just like marbles waiting to flip you straight on your derrière. We had a toot around the hamlet and said hello to a few locals. A little girl playing with her new puppy and two boys bashing the hell out of their skateboards. No matter where you go, kids playing always fills the air with fun. Four old chaps sat outside the church catching up on the days gossip.



Photos Clockwise:

- ❖ Medieval catapult.
- ❖ Craig finally sits down for a minute and admires the view.
- ❖ This was his view.
- ❖ The fortress interior.
- ❖ The great rat bar sign.



An old lady picking mushrooms and smiling away. Gosh this is one happy and lovely place to live.

Back in Vin, we prepared tonight's evening meal, a homemade beef curry (can't buy jars or tins in Italy) and rice. All cooked on the BBQ stove, so Vin doesn't stink like an Indian takeaway. As we prepared the curry we watched the setting sun provide a warm glow over the Serchio valley and crown a skyline of church towers as the bells echoing over the rooftops. Another fine evening in Tuscany.

Now what will tomorrow hold for us?

Our Bumble verdict: Gem of a find and not on the big tourist trail.

Below: Our view for the evening.



Above: Stained glass panel in the fortresses church.





VERRUCOLE TO BARGA

Above: Mountains and hilltop villages around Verrucole:

Below: Town music hall.



FRIDAY 18 SEPTEMBER

Once again, the rain cloud covered the view and whilst we toyed with stopping the thought of finding another hidden gem drove us on.

The road snaked up the lush green hills in a series of long, lazy S-bends, and only a few miles along we found a well presented castle. We parked up on the sloping car park and made our way to the village. Castiglione di Gorfagnana is entirely surrounded by medieval walls and towers. We entered through the stone gate and took a left. The village still use the original street layout, houses and plans with only necessary restoration work undertaken. The village square was compact and the music hall situated in the near corner displayed hand written posters of their concert nights. Further down the street, a garden dedicated to soldiers from both World War I and II. From here the walled balcony offered fabulous views of the limestone hills. We meandered around the village and noticed a little old lady and her son tending to their crops. We peered our heads through the gate and she welcomed us inside. Wow, what a great terraced allotment and garden with stunning views over the church.

They chatted away in Italian despite us explaining we do not speak Italian. Whilst we didn't understand everything they said we got the gist, this was a piece of land handed down through many generations. She was so proud of her grapes and wine. She snipped a couple of bunches of grapes for us, so sweet and juicy. Craig noticed her cutting tools, a hand made copper pouch for holding the grape cutters. How neat and ornate. Unfortunately she didn't fancy a photo in her piney and slippers but we did manage one of her allotment.

On the way to the medieval bridge we bumped in to two Australian ladies and had a good chat about our different adventures. Then we continued down the narrow grass track to the bridge. To one side an overgrown stone wall with lots of holes and missing stones. It was full of bugs and creepy crawly creatures. Craig shot off as usual leaving me to navigate the horrid path. I let out one almighty scream

For fuxxs sake what the hell

Joanne, are you ok?

No I am not bloody OK.

What is the matter?

A friggin snake has just crawled out of that hole in the wall and slithered across my path in to that undergrowth.

Oh. How big?

I dunno. Big enough to scare the shit out of me. About as thick as down spout and at least a meter in length.

So big?

Yeah, so big and its name was Sid Vicious.

Craig carefully rustled the grass to make sure it had gone and then we set off. This time I kept him close to my side and didn't let him wander off.





Photos Clockwise:

- ❖ A local lady gives Joannes a tasty gift.
- ❖ The towns castle remains.
- ❖ Craig eyeing up a photo on the medieval wall.
- ❖ Verrecule cemetery.
- ❖ Photo on a gravestone dated 1804.





Photo above: This was the old lady's back garden view over the town below.

We reached the medieval bridge. It was only small but pretty and located at the side of a waterfall. Covered in ivy and wild flowers but then all of a sudden, I got severe stomach ache. We set off back to the motorhome, which seemed to take an eternity. I danced all the way back taking three steps forward and one back. That afternoon, we stayed in Vin until the stomach cramps and pains passed.

Our Bumble verdict: Superb place and wonderful views.

The car park was on a slope and not suitable for staying in, so we had to move. We drove a few kilometres out of town but nothing level enough to park on. Then the GPS had a dicky fit and got all confused. Poor thing could decide which road it was on until Craig gave it a big clunk. A slap from Craig and all sorted.

We eventually found a lovely spot just a short stroll out of Barga centre. It was getting quite late and the light was fading but seemed like a nice area. Tree lined avenue with plenty nice houses and lots on parking spots and bays. This will do nicely and it is level. We pulled up made some soup and had an early evening for once. Tomorrow we will be up nice and early to explore Barga.

Below: The waterfall and bridge below the town.





CIAO AND CHOW.

Yes OK so I had a week or two off. Not much to report so i've kept quiet.

As Joanne mentioned last week we had a little accident reversing, I bust the rear light on the van and scratched up the bumper a bit, I was not a happy bunny. The light needed glueing back together in places so the old super glue came to the rescue. It will hold fine until we reach Bad Walsee in southern Germany to get a replacement.

The flamin chopping board i mentioned a bit back decided to delaminate again so i have applied an even thicker layer of mastic to hold the two sides together and allow both sides to

flex more. The mastic i have used though isn't the best and I may just make a nice solid wood one instead when we get back to the UK.

I made us some hams and fresh bread the other night and Joanne posted a piccy on Facebook, well apparently quite a few people want to know the method of making the bread so here goes.

Fluffy flat bread whilst on the go!

Ingredients needed.

- 500g bread flour.
- Half tea spoon of salt.
- 1-2 teaspoons of yeast.
- Warm water

- Extra virgin olive oil.

Procedure

- Mix the flour and salt in a big pan.
- Add some warm water to the yeast in a cup and leave for 5 mins to reactivate.
- Mix the flour and yeast/water together.
- Add enough extra water until the dough is very pliable, it will be very sticky at first.
- Mix and knead like billy'o for 5 minutes or so.
- Put a couple of tablespoons of olive oil in the pan or a bit more if you prefer.
- Plonk the dough in the pan and cover with lid.
- Leave to rise for an hour.
- After an hour knock it back (knead it again for a minute) and mix in the olive oil left in the pan.
- Put a little flour on the table and put a small ball of dough in it and press out into a circle with your finger tips and put on one side of the table once flattened.
- Repeat until all the dough is used.
- Heat a dry frying pan and place the first flattened circle of dough in and dry fry on a medium heat for a couple of minutes.

- It will start getting big bubbles on the surface but leave it until the bottom is slightly brown, turn it over and leave for a couple more minutes.
- Put the hot breads on a cooling rack or grill tray to cool.

Notes. The amounts don't have to be exact but you must leave it to rise in the first pan until the dough roughly doubles in size.

The same dough can be used for pizza, nan style breads, pittas, make it a little thicker and cook in the first pan with the lid on for focaccia style bread just cook it on the lowest heat on both sides.

You can make it with white flour and roll it in another flour for different textures and tastes, try wholemeal flour or semolina.

The dough can be kept in the fridge once made so you can use it over a couple of days.

It's miles better than the crap in supermarkets and even most bakers. Plus it's very cheap to make, Serve with what ever you want.

Enjoy and Ciao for now.



OUR JOURNEY SO FAR!

We set off on 11 April 14 and bar a couple of months back in the UK to change motorhomes we are still travelling and enjoying the adventure. So far, we have covered a total of 20,552 kilometres or 12,770 miles over 415 days. Travelling an average of 50 km per day with the longest journey being 468 km.

We have travelled to and visited 12 countries and consumed 2,699 litres of diesel from 53 fuel stations with an average of 21 mpg.

We've filled our LPG bottles 34 times and used 504 litres of gas to heat our home, run the fridge and freezer, hot water, oven, grill, hob and last but not least our BBQ at an average cost of €0.91 per day.

We have paid 25 tolls, tunnels and mountain passes, 3 ferries and 6 flights. We've had 1 break in 1 bump and 1 oops when the garage door flew off at 2,425 m above sea level.

Overnight, we have stayed on 62 campsites or aires but we have grown to love wild camping and spent 353 nights where ever the road takes us.

201 supermarket sweeps and 32 evenings of fine dining.

A total of 268 days with nothing but sunshine, 61 overcast days, 49 mixed and only 37 days of rain.

So how much has it cost...€11,942.69 excluding insurance, service and road tax but includes any European repair bills. Oh and we forgot to mention, killed each other 8 times, spent 5 days in silence and 402 days loving each other to bits.

