



OUR BUMBLE

EXPLORING EUROPE IN OUR MOTORHOME.

BY JOANNE & CRAIG.



THIS WEEK...

This week, someone pinched the sun! Its been pretty chilly in the evenings and quite grey and wet most days. Time to dig out the thermals.

We started in the Alpi Apuane peaks and then wound our way down to two great Tuscan cities. A blinking good week seeing stuff.

Travelled a total of 228km with average cost of £17.54 per day.





BARGA

Above: Craig takes in the view from the top of Barga.

SATURDAY 19 SEPTEMBER

Tap, tap, tap

Craig there is someone at the door

Bloodiel who's knocking at this godly hour?

We jumped out of bed and dashed to the door like two buffoons. Hair everywhere and sleep dribble on cheeks. I turned off the alarm and Craig opened the door. It was the police. Oh heck, what must they think with us two like this! Then as we looked around we saw hundreds of kids, some in fear of their lives and others just wetting them selves with laughter. We had only parked on a bloody school car park. Well it was late when we arrived last night...or at least thats our excuse!

The policeman who reminded us of Cyril from On the Buses, was ever so polite. He directed us to a camper stop just the other side of town. By now, the traffic was building up and the car park was getting busier with impatience and utterly disgusted parents. We hurried up and set off. Embarrassed or what!



Above: Craig walking in the Duomo grounds.

Right: The Duomo di San Cristoforo at the top of the town built from white marble.



We arrived at the aire and it was brilliant. Free electricity as well as all the usual service facilities and right in the middle of the village. We shuffled around until we found a level spot and plugged Vin in to the mains for the first time this year. Give the batteries a super charge! Then finally had a brew and woke up.

As we were setting off to visit the village the motorhome alarm started to play up. It would switch on and then beep repeatedly to indicate a fault. We tried a number of things to sort it but in

the end we had to go get out the manual. An hour later we finally located the problem. The garage door sensor needed realigning! Two hours later, we finally set off to the village.

Barga is an elegant little up market village in the centre of the valley. The new part is predominately made up of large mansions and liberty style villas. The old part is full of historical buildings, gardens and roman bridges. The main street is home to half a dozen shops with a large open air market running behind the town and

down towards the gardens. The walk to the tawny stone duomo was hell of a climb through the steep lanes but the views from the top were fantastic. All around mountain peaks in of the Alpi Apuane. The Duomo di San Cristoforo was quite bland considering the location with a cardboard cut out of Jesus on the crucifix, which didn't really look right. To the side, a small museum with various artefacts and emblems.

I am not sure what Craig's did when he tinkered with the alarm but think he got zapped. It is like he's been wired up this morning to run on full speed. Either that or he has dropped a tablet but by Christ, my little legs are shattered. He is running around like jack rabbit, wish he would slow down.

On the way back to Vin, a lady approached us and spoke very slowly.

Heeeeeellllloooo, doooo yooooooou speeeeeeaaak Ennnnglishhhh?

It was that slow. We couldn't understand her. Sorry, please can you repeat that.

Oh you speak English, good, can you tell me if there are any other car parks nearby.

We directed her to another car park but we did have a chuckle. Everyone does the same, why do we all speak so slowly? If they don't understand your language there is a good chance speaking slowly will not make them understand any more lol.

We wound our way back down to Vin and snuggled for the evening with a feast fit for a king!

Below: Looking over the car park toward the Alpi Apuane peaks and beyond





BARGA

Above: Views from the
Duomo di San Cristoforo

Below: Stop two in Barga N.
044.07228 E.010.48158



SUNDAY 20 SEPTEMBER

Last night, the temperature dropped to 11 degrees. In the last 3 days we have gone from a low of 21 to 11 and we certainly can tell the difference. Think autumn has arrived.

Today, we did our home chores and gave Vin his weekly scrub. Everything out the van, scrub and then everything back in the van. Craig did the outside..no surprises there then and I did this inside...another no surprise! Craig gave the solar panels a good scrub too, as we've had a lot of dirty rain lately. Clean solar panels doesn't half make a big difference to the amount of solar you capture.

Our neighbours, Peter and Carola are a lovely couple from the Black Forest in Germany. We spent several hours chatting away to them and sharing stories. We exchanged contact details and will definitely give them a bell if we are in their neck of woods, as we got on so well. They did mention that you can no longer get GPL in Italy? They had tried at several fuel stations but each one refused to fill , as now they are only permitted to fill cars. This is a new one on us.



Photos Clockwise:

- ❖ The Duomo di San Cristoforo from the Piazza below.
- ❖ Religious frescos.
- ❖ Door archway details.
- ❖ The duomo pulpit.
- ❖ Joanne strolls in the grounds towards museum.





We explained we filled up with GPL only a few days ago near to Portofino. We are not sure if the Italian law has changed but we will keep an eye out because we definitely need GPL for cooking, heating and the fridge.

With the solar clean and batteries on full charge, Craig decided to disconnect the engine battery from the solar panel charge. It is something he has been pondering about for a while, so today

he unplugged and will monitor over the coming weeks.

Our Bumble verdict: up market village worth a stop.

Above: Marble door lintel.

Below: Another view point from the Duomo





BARGA TO LUCCA

Above: The Calomini hermitage sits partly inside a rock face.

Below: Hermitage fresco.



MONDAY 21 SEPTEMBER

We unplugged Vin from the free electricity, filled him up with fresh water and set off. Thank you Barga for letting us stay, most enjoyable.

After about 10km we turned off the main road on to a slither of a road. We twisted and turned through little villages until we turned right up a damn steep road. The single track path was more like a footpath than a road but Craig was confident we would fit. Water oozing out of the rock face and trickling down the path making is pretty slippery in places. Vin went vertical and I went green. As we climbed up the zig zag (note not S shaped) road Craig had to do three point turns at each corner. Reversing on cliffs is not my idea of fun especially when you can see the sheer cliff drop on the reversing camera screen. I eek'd several times.

Only half a dozen parking spots at the top and it was quite a tight fit. We parked and entered the Calomini hermitage. The usual sanctuary is built in to and under a huge rock. Outside a small court yard with a few statues, natural water fountain and pleasant views of the surrounding area. First the monk quarters and then a



Photos Clockwise:

- ❖ The rock provide the sanctuary with some shelter.
- ❖ Curly pillars support the chapel ceiling.
- ❖ Confession room. Note the ceiling is solid rock..



small chapel. Inside the chapel not much to see but it was rather unusually situated. More like a bare cave chapel with a couple of benches. Next door, the main church. Quite small and inside it was neatly decorated in pastel colours with flecks of gold leaf. To the side another cave type room with the most beautiful wood furniture. Unfortunately, the rest of the monastery was inaccessible due to restoration.

Our Bumble verdict: worth a visit (if you have a good ticker) but check its open.

The journey down the hill was equally as hair raising but this time with only a few minor heart attacks. At the bottom we drove through a valley which was more like an impressive canyon. The bumpy road clung to the rock face and the only thing that prevented you from going over the ledge, a small 2 foot stone wall. At times, it was a challenge for Craig manoeuvring Vin between the small wall on one side and the rock over hang on the other. The angle of the rock overhang wanted to take chunks out of our awning.

At Bagni di Lucca we popped in to a local Simply mini market for some bits before trying to park in the village. The village has numerous natural hot springs which the Romans took advantage of and created plenty nature spas. With only a handful of parking spaces fit for a matchbox toy we had no choice but to move on....but the stone bridge was rather nice.

As we drove towards Lucca the landscape started to change. Still lush but hills were much smaller and the limestone cliffs were no more. We spotted a GPL station, so we topped up just in case the Italian law has changed. But once again, no issue in filling up.

Eventually, we arrived at Lucca and the traffic was horrid. We crawled our way passed a

massive open air market, a circus and a small fun fair. We arrived at the municipal car park located at the side of the city wall and next to the park. Parking €0.20 for first hour with €1 for every hour there after with a max €6 for the day. I had some admin to do so Craig had a quick scoot around the area.

Lucca is a walled city. The 16th century ramparts are not only solid, and intact but pretty big. They completely surround the city and are so wide on top they have become quite an attraction for people to stroll round and what an enchanting way to view the city. We had a cycle around having a good toot from above. As you looked in to the city, you could see row upon row of terracotta roof tiles, the odd brick tower and crowds of people. The ramparts help keep the



traffic out of the city unless of course you are one of the top gear presenters. We spotted a beautiful formal garden with white Baroque god and goddess statues, Palazzo Pfanner.

At the cathedral, hundreds of priests, cardinals, nuns and people. We weren't too sure what was going until we noticed the funeral car. By the hoards of religious people, we guess it was a person of the church who passed away.

Lucca is home to Puccini and what better place to hear one of his concert and recitals, I just love classical music. Held everyday at 7pm at Chiesa San Giovanni for an entrance fee of €20. One for me whilst Craig opted for a bottle of wine.

Previous: Joanne stops in the main Piazza.

Below: Clock face and surround.

Right: Fine archways lit by the evening sun.





LUCCA TO PESCIA

Above: San Michele in Foro. Notice the different colours and shapes on the columns. The faces are different famous people that mean something to Lucca.

TUESDAY 21 SEPTEMBER

The city streets of Lucca originate back to 180 bc with all the streets running in parallel pattern. Large stone floor slabs line the dark and narrow streets. Lucca feels very different to other cities in terms of architecture. It feels so industrial like a reclaimed warehouse district. The buildings are a mixture of stone, red brick and render. A real odd mix but somehow it works. The shops range from basic bakery to top end designer shops but one thing they all seemed to have in common, their traditional shop signs. First place, San Michele in Foro and the main square.



Photos Clockwise:

- ❖ San Michele in Foro interior.
- ❖ Detail on the front on San Michele in Foro
- ❖ Statue of Puccini.
- ❖ San Michele in Foro





San Martin Cathedral Photos Clockwise:

- ❖ Main Entrance.
- ❖ Exterior wall details.
- ❖ Interior door arch.
- ❖ Wall reliefs.
- ❖ Dome details.
- ❖ Next page the ceiling and painting.





Cafes and bistro dotted all around for people to chill and relax whilst admiring the outside detail of the 11th century church. Built on the site of the roman forum its twisted columns and marble insets are beautiful. If you look closely you can see different famous people on each layer above the columns. Inside, was very boring compared to outside, Then the house of Puccini and his bold statue but I was keen to the get the cathedral via Fillungo shopping district. Just as you thought you'd come to the end of a street, you turned a corner a wow another plaza, church or clock tower. It was a maze of hidden surprises. Finally, we arrived at San Martin Cathedral. Outside, Roman Pisan style with a 60 meter high bell tower. Originally founded in 6th century and then expanded in 11th century, so there are several aspects to the inside.





All photos from inside San Martin Cathedral, The detailing was superb.





The large marble pillars lined the entrance guiding you towards the altar. The base of the cathedral was a steel grey marble with beautiful colourful leaded windows. The side walls lined with massive paintings and the altar with white marble sculptures. In the middle, a small octagonal temple containing the Volto Santo of Lucca. To the right, a room containing the monument to Ilaria del Carretto. The amount of detail was just beautiful. A quick wander through Anfiteatro Romano, a circular plaza surrounded

by once slum housing before stumbling on San Fediano with its shiny facade. We wandering round and round just soaking up the atmosphere and nibbling on focaccia bread.

Our bumble verdict: excellent walled city with unusual but pretty architecture.

Above: Ilaria del Carretto.

Below: Detail on Ilaria del Carretto.





As we left Lucca we filled up with diesel. The cheapest in Italy so far at €1.27 per litre. With Vin full on go go juice we set off back in to the Tuscan villages with pastel and terracotta coloured houses. We turned off the main route and stopped at the village of Pisia. It seemed to be rather nice. A river, albeit rather dry at the moment, with a grassed bank and a couple of twisted foot bridges. Quite a pleasant shopping plaza with lots of traditional trade shops like shoe maker and tailors. We had a look in a few churches as well as paper Marche museum. One thing this place isn't short of is hairdressers, we've never seen so many.

Our Bumble verdict: OK if you are passing but don't go out your way.

After a nice our evening meal settled down and watched Prime Suspect...again.





PESCIA TO PISTOIA

Above: Joanne admires the
museums ceiling.

WEDNESDAY 23 SEPTEMBER

What a wet, grey day. We sat in Vin all morning just waiting for the weather to pass. By 12 noon we hadn't budged and we looked like two dropouts in need of a shower and clean clothes. Scruffy sods or what!

At lunch time we set off to Pistoia. The drive was average but with grey cloud and drizzle things don't look quite the same. As we arrived, we hit a traffic jam. The college students were breaking up for lunch and so pandemonium everywhere. For an hour we crawled through the village until we popped out at the other side and parked near a newspaper kiosk. We had a little look around and spotted a large open space with motorhomes parked up, so we clambered back in Vin and headed over. The open space was actually the sports complex with running track, ice skating, shot put, long jump etc. It had the works in terms of a sporting ground. We parked up along with around 20 other motorhomes.

As we cycled in to Pistoia we chatted about its bloody past. The Pistoia people are renown for violence as the gangs of Bianchi



Photos Clockwise:

- ❖ San Zemo.
- ❖ San Zemo interior.
- ❖ Museum ceiling.
- ❖ Marble work inside San Zemo.
- ❖ Door lintel carvings.





Basilica Madonna Dell Umilta Photos Clockwise:

- ❖ Relief at prayer.
- ❖ Wall relief.
- ❖ Cherub.



and Neri often clash. Their weapon of choice, a pistola dagger (wonder if linked to the town name?). The main square, Piazza del Duomo is pretty big. One side a cafe and restaurant with a couple of people sipping coffee . The other side a town hall and museum with brilliant artefacts from the town. Then the San Zemo a 12 century church and clock tower. Inside was quite plain but it did house some interest tombs and a small chapel with a silver alter. Opposite a building dedicated to the history of Pistoia and whilst not a lot inside, the walls and ceilings were beautifully decorated with paintings. We cycled around and found the most ornate and tranquil Basilica Madonna Dell Umilta, a perfect place to say a few prays for our Nigel and his family and hope the chemo has zapped the cancer. We continued to wander the streets and venture in to open doorways in the hope we would find some hidden delight. The Duomo Piazza offers a wow but unfortunately the town doesn't offer much else.

Back to Vin, something to eat and more Prime Suspect.

Our Bumble verdict: nice Piazza but that's it.



PISTOIA TO PRATO

Above: Craig outside the towns Castello dell'Imperatore

THURSDAY 24 SEPTEMBER

Today, the last of the three “P” towns..Piscia, Pistoia and Prato.

We are now out of the hills and the pretty Tuscan landscape is no more. Instead we have over populated towns with sprawling communities and industrial zones. On a positive, we did pass miles upon miles of garden centres with wonderful shaped trees and hedges.

As we arrived at Prato we pulled in to the Lidl for a few bits. It was the best stocked and busiest Lidl in Italy just a shame they



Photos Clockwise:

- ❖ Duomo Fountain
- ❖ Duomo
- ❖ Duomo exterior corner detail.



were under staffed. The poor check out girl was pulling her hair out and by the time she served us, she was well fed up.

We parked on a brilliant spot just 5km out of the city. We didn't fancy parking in the city as the place looked quite run down and full of people who made us feel uneasy. We cycled in and out within an hour. Prato did not float our boat at all. The Duomo (no photos permitted) housed an interesting pulpit of the Holy Girdle designed by Donatello but that was it.. We found the sort of streets that you automatically associate with dropout places - dark, dingy, semi-paved alleyways, with plaster peeling off walls and washing hung like banners between balconies that never sees sunlight. The streets were full of unclean women and scatty, unattended children, naked from the waist down, in filthy T-shirts. Today must be one of those grey days where nothing feels or looks quite right.

Our Bumble verdict: Keep the foot on the accelerator.

The rest of the day we wondered what to do and by 4pm we talked ourselves in to moving on to Florence. Not long after we set off we hit peak hour traffic. In a bazaar way, it was nice. At

least it gave us something to think about and something to watch. Sad but that's our highlight of the day!

We had a few GPS positions from fellow travellers, so as we approached Florence we kept a look out. The first couple looked more like lock ups or compounds with barred wire on top of the 20ft fencing. Not quite what we'd hoped for, so we carried on. The next few aires were full. We eventually pulled in to one place with a few spaces but after a walk around we decided to move on. It looked more like a gypsy camp with unscrupulous people. It was the sort of place with 'eyes'. You know the sort of place I mean? Everywhere you walk you can feel people watching your every move, hiding behind curtains, waiting for you to walk on the wrong piece of grass, so they can kill you. This place really didn't feel safe at all.

With not much light left we were struggling as to where to park. In cities we prefer to park on aires or sites for safety then we are left to explore the city without worry. What shall we do? Then Craig had one of his great ideas...San Domingo. We headed out of Florence and up to the hillside retreat of Fiesole. We found a brilliant parking spot right on the hillside overlooking Florence. What a spot and more importantly, it felt safe. Night Night Folks.

Right: Statue in the main Piazza in Prato.





FLORENCE

Above: The breath taking Duomo.

FRIDAY 25 SEPTEMBER

We stepped out Vin and had a good old toot around to see exactly where we are parked. If you are in Florence and look north, you see a rather large hill...that is where we are. We are about 3/4 the way up at near the church of San Domingo. It really is very pleasant with great views over Florence against a back drop of large villas stretching up to the top of Fiesole. The area is quite well to do and plenty people around, so we are going to cycle 8km or so in to the city.

The cycle to Florence was great....down the hill all the way and within 5 minutes we were slamming on the breaks. We arrived

smack bang in the middle of Piazza del Duomo. Wow, what a sight. It was better than anything we expected, it was big and so beautiful. We pushed the bikes round and admired all the detail. It truly is amazing. The cathedral, the baptistry doors, the campanile, it was all wonderful and so detailed. There is only one problem, the people. There are far too many tourists and the crowds and queues of people are endless. I don't think I have seen so many tourists in such a long time. Japanese both young and old all in designer clothing and their fingers permanently on the camera button. It was only early and the queues to enter the cathedral were massive. Rather than queue, we peaked our heads round the mass entrance and had a good gawk maybe the queues will die down later?

We cycled around the tiny alleys admiring all the renaissance architecture and as well as Casa di Dante. Then over to Bargello, the city's oldest Prison before pausing for 10 in the church of Orsanmichele. Then over to Santa Croce to Michelangelo tomb and 14th century frescos by Giotto. At Ponte Vecchio, the oldest bridge in Florence there were many a painter trying to capture the scene amongst the thousands of tourists. At Piazza del Signoria, it was very...manly! Lots of male statues around strutting their stuff. The Palazzo Vecchio, which is now the town hall with an imposing bell tower. Then to San Marco with hundreds of students mingling around the streets. We didn't know this was home to the worlds oldest art school. The whole day just in and around Florence, I loved it but not sure it was Craig's cup of tea.

The cycle ride back to Vin wasn't so quick but we got home in time for supper!



Above: Della Citta Archway

Below Duomo, the Neo-Gothic marble facade.





Photos Clockwise:

- ❖ 276ft The Campanile. It is clad in white, green and pink Tuscan marble.
- ❖ Duomo reliefs by Andrea Pisano.
- ❖ Water fountain.
- ❖ Neri museum, San Forenzi.
- ❖ Orsanmichele columns.





Photos Clockwise:

- ❖ Is that an iPad statue?
- ❖ Bronze relief Piazza della Signoria.
- ❖ Two ladies painting Ponte Vecchio.
- ❖ Cheeky statue.
- ❖ Santa Maria Novella.





FLORENCE TO MARRADI

Above: A local fishes on the river that flows through Marradi.

SATURDAY 26 SEPTEMBER

The drive from Florence to San Lorenzo over the small country lanes was very scenic. Back in to countryside admiring the Etruscan walls and tall slender cypress trees. The hills dotted with old stone houses and goats roaming freely. This side of Florence was completely different to the side we drove through a few days ago.

We stopped at Borgo San Lorenzo for some water and to stretch our legs. It is a busy little town with small market and plenty small shops. We had a walk around the pond, fed the ducks and

attracted loads of Italians wondering why the hell we were feeding bread to ducks. Craig gave a small piece of bread to a mother and child...the child ate the bread! Poor ducks didn't get a look in.

Our Bumble verdict: Nice pond but that's it

Another 20km drive but this time it was over a mountain pass. The slow drive, popular with bikers and not motorhomes was extremely pretty. We bumbled pleasantly through a landscape of small farms and steep wooded hills, along shallow rivers, little waterfalls, stopping occasionally at isolated villages where half a dozen people would look bewildered at our motorhome. Their jaw dropping gawk said it all "what the hell is a motorhome doing up here".

At the bottom of the pass we noticed a camper service sign, so we followed it. Tucked at the back of the village of Marradi in the middle of the countryside, a free terraced aire. It was so clean and tidy and not a soul around. We parked up Vin, got out the BBQ and admired our little find. And this evenings entertainment...you got it Prime Suspect No 3!

Below: Our parking spot for the next couple of days.





Above: The towns church above the roof tops.



Above: Joanne feeds the neighbours.

SUNDAY 27 SEPTEMBER

I woke to the sound of the birds tweeting, the goat bells tinkering and Craig bashing the door frame to bits. It's been squeaking for a while and today, it will squeak no more or if it does, so help its little plastic bits.

With such a fine view and all the facilities to hand what better place to do our weekly clean. Scrub, scrub and scrub some more. This time though we got out the other quilt. In the last two weeks we've gone from cotton sheet to double duvet and fluffy blankets. The days are still nice but the nights are damn cold. After 9 months or relatively mild weather it feels awfully cold.

Our neighbours are excellent. We have several goats, half a dozen cats and a friendly dog. They all live together on a patch on land just to the side of Vin. In the evening, they all snuggle up

together in a old stone derelict building. We have named the dog Oxtail because...you guessed it, he loves oxtail soup. I have fell for the dog, she is so adorable and friendly. I would happily adopt her but it would be a shame to take her away from her surroundings, she clearly loves it.

The village is really nice with a river, bridge, small centre and oodles of countryside to explore. Nothing special or outstanding but it has everything you need in a little village from a butchers to a bakers. It even has a conker museum and a kiddies park.

After updating bumble, feeding the dog, cat and goats out came the BBQ...tonight folks we are having chicken fajitas with Craig's flat breads followed by an evening of...Prime Suspect No 6.

Our Bumble verdict: Nice place for countryside walks

Ciao!



BATTERIES, SQUEAKS & NO. 2'S

Yes i've been on the roof cleaning again, I noticed a drop in the batteries a few days back so a clean was in order, I also decided to take the engine connection off too so now they just charge the leisure batteries for the time being. The batteries took a battering though, the computer was on for hours, all the washing/spinning was done etc so we'll see how we go on. On the last van the Electroblok (the thing that controls all the electricity in the van) was different, it always charged the leisure batteries first then anything left went to the engines battery. This one seems to charge them equally which is anything but ideal with one engine battery and 3 leisure batteries so i think i'll fit an

inline switch when we get home so I can easily top up the engine battery when needed just by flicking it on, then turn it off again for the rest of the time. The only slight problem is the stereo in the van consumes 10 amps (energy hog) so it doesn't take long to have an impact on the engine battery. Any experts out there, please shout.

A couple of weeks ago we started getting a squeak noise whilst travelling. The culprit was the dam mosquito screen that fits to the vans habitation door (the main door). They have a foam surround on the edge of the frame and it's started to break down a little and is now chaffing on the doors rubber seal. Phillips screwdriver out

and 10 minutes later so was the dam frame. I have just cleaned it up a little and retightened the fittings so hopefully it works until we get back at which point i'll change the foam section for something else. I have now quite a growing list of things to correct, fix or change when we get home.

What else, oh yes the lovely job of cleaning the toilet cassette (the box where all the number 1'n'2's go) Every couple of months I clean the inside thoroughly to keep any nasty niffs at bay, You get a build up of limescale inside which seems to act like a sponge for... well take a guess. The top of the cassette comes off very easily so it's easy to access the inside. The top mechanism is particularly prone to limescale build up so with the aid of some limescale remover, a scouring pad, an old disused toothbrush and a bit of elbow grease it looks as good as new inside now so that too will be ready for another clean when we get back home.

We have noticed that if you add a little fabric softener to the toilet cassette after cleaning it, it reduces the limescale build up (acts as water softener) and has a pleasant odour to boot. I usually use the stuff from after washing our clothes as it only gets wasted otherwise. All goes to keeping the pennies in our pockets.

Well that's it for this week, time to move on towards Venice and hope that door doesn't squeak on route, I may even treat Joanne to a Cornetto when we get there.

Ciao!

