

# Europe Through the Front Door

By Nancy Fowler, Willamette International Travel

July, 2009

**HOW:** aboard Oceania's m/s Insignia

**WHEN:** July 14 – 26, 2009

**WHERE:** Rome, Portofino, La Spezia, Livorno, Amalfi, Sorrento, Taormina, Venice, Italy; Monte Carlo, Monaco; Corfu, Greece; Kotor, Montenegro; Dubrovnik, Croatia.

**WHO:** Nancy and her mother-in-law, Dolores Langwell

It was with much sadness that we left the Insignia on July 26. We had a great cruise, and I'd sail with Oceania again in a heartbeat. With only 700 passengers, we became one big family within a few days. Our entertainment was meeting our fellow travelers. What a wonderful mix of nationalities, ages, and interests. Where else could we have:

1. met an 89 year old woman who is sheriff's posse for the 14th year straight?
2. chat with an 80 yr old monsignor in the laundry room, while he ironed his underclothes?
3. met an 86 year old man who flew B17s in WWII out of Italy? and his 72 year old "soul mate", who lived for the casino?

The staff is definitely Oceania's secret weapon. Truly everyone we encountered was friendly, professional, and helpful. We were greeted by name, preferences were noted and actioned, etc. To me the food and beverage dept. is doing everything right. The food choices were great (thank you, Jacques Pepin), and the servers made each dining experience more festive. They were watchful without hovering, which I liked. My filet mignon in the Polo Grill was my favorite dinner, until we experienced Toscana. It was superb! The balsamic vinegar and olive oil tasting menu was a really cool touch; we could have made a meal of that alone. Everyone we spoke with had high compliments for each restaurant on the ship.

Our ocean view cabin on Deck 4 was most convenient. Just a few doors away from reception and shore excursions desk, and about 10 doors from the stairwell to the disembarkation point. Our cabin steward and her assistant were so nice. The twice daily service was so well timed; usually we'd return from breakfast to an already made-up cabin. Loads of storage space nicely sucked up all the stuff from our suitcases.

Truly, the harbors we arrived in are the front doors to these regions. These communities predated roads, and there is rich and colorful maritime history in each place. Certainly the high point was sailing into Venice, the unrivaled mistress of trade between Europe and the Orient for centuries. Leaving the Adriatic, cruising through the mudflats that appear to be unchanged since Attila the Hun caused refugees to hide in them, and then sailing past Piazza San Marco a few hundred feet to our right will forever be in my memories. Note: we have special rates on the July 24, 2010, sailing of this same itinerary.