

Cruising the Med

By Anne Reeves

The Mediterranean, long enjoyed by the rich and famous but only recently discovered by Dick and me, was for us a seminal experience which we would whole-heartedly recommend to anyone. The Med has been a destination for many nationalities and cultures for centuries. And it is no accident that celebrities gravitate there to enjoy the diversity of the many surrounding countries, each with its special blend of scenery and history from Neolithic times through the Greeks, Romans, Arabs and Christians.

Ephesus, on the Turkish Isle of Kusadasi,



Author & daughter at Bernini's Fontana de Trevi in Rome.

with its ancient Greek Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, and its still-used 25,000-seat amphitheater was our first awesome port of call. Another of the Seven Wonders, the Colossus of Rhodes (the statue of Helios) 100 feet tall, once straddling the port entry and long vanished, is still memorialized by two very large bronze deer on pillars which now define the entrance to the harbor. The city itself boasts the Palace of the Grand Masters and the hospital of the Knights of St. John, now the archeological museum. The Knights were forced out of Rhodes by the Ottomans in

1522 to relocate in Malta, with permission of the Spanish Emperor, Charles V, where they paid an annual tax of one live falcon, made famous by Dashiell Hammet in "The Maltese Falcon". The Ottomans then tried to oust the knights but were defeated, thus saving Europe from Ottoman rule. Walking these 500-year-old streets gave us a real sense of history and, perhaps, a better understanding of today's crusades. Malta's entrance into the harbor of Valetta is incredibly dramatic with its cliffs and 16th century battlements all around and the entire city an open-air museum. For its more recent and decisive role in World War II, while it was a British Crown Colony, King George VI awarded the George Cross to the entire population in recognition of their bravery in fighting the Italians and Germans.

Barcelona is noted for the works of its most famous architect, Antonio Gaudi, especially his "Sagrada Familia" Cathedral, begun in 1882 and still under busy daily construction. It is generally believed that it may be completed in another one or two hundred years. Its intricacy and detail defy description. The Picasso Museum in a restored palace is also well worth a visit, as is The Ramblas, one of the most famous promenades in Europe with the Christopher Columbus Column at the foot and its many varied shops, artists, mimes, street musicians, dancers, jugglers, artisans, cafes and, of course, tapas.

Then Rome, the eternal city. Who could possibly do it justice? Although we had been there several times we couldn't wait to show it to our daughter, Maura, who was truly Alice in Wonderland. From the Sistine Chapel and St. Peter's magnificent Basilica to the Spanish Steps and the Trevi Fountain, it was a whirlwind day. We walked, gawked and marveled at the grandeur of the city immortalized by Michelangelo, the greatest of them all. To anyone who has not been to Rome I can only say if there is one place to visit before you die make it a day, week or month with SPQR.

Naples, with its gorgeous bay and Vesuvius looming, was our substitute stop for Gibraltar (The Brits and Spanish were having a tiff). We found a wonderful cabby or rather he found us, who drove us to Sorrento, another indescribable bay with views, shops and cafes. Then a tour of Naples, both far better than a rock and plethora of monkeys (ugh), though we did get a good view of the rock through a haze.

We next traded the Med for the Straits of Gibraltar and headed north to Lisbon, cruising up the Tagus River past the gigantic statue of Christ the King high atop a hill, not unlike the one in Rio (the "Portugal" of South America). We toured Lisbon by bus and then visited Sintra, a verdant city with little crooked alleys, views, and the ubiquitous shops. Cascais, too, a resort where the city folk have their summer homes by the sea much as we do here in N.C. Vigo, in northwest Spain, appealed to me when I learned that one tour would take us to Santiago de Compostella, the premier pilgrimage site of Spain a la Lourdes, Fatima and Mecca. St. James (Santiago) had come to Spain in the early years of Christianity to convert the people. He was executed in Judea, his body carried to Spain and hidden. His remains were found in the early ninth century in Compostela. The first church built in his honor was subsequently razed by the Moors. Then a new cathedral with two spires was built in the eleventh century. It still stands and with modifications over the centuries has become a beautiful example of Spanish Baroque Architecture. July 25 of each year is the day of homage for the pilgrims. While there in this sacred town we attended Mass in the Cathe-

dral on Sept. 11 and memorial words were spoken both by the clergy and the laity in a very moving ceremony. In the courtyard on



Author, husband & daughter at the home of The Virgin Mary in Ephesus.

the main square, which had been surrounded by a 15th century convent now a hotel, we had cocktails accompanied by richly costumed dancers and musicians complete with bagpipes, flutes and singing followed by a delicious lunch. On the way to Compostella we were able to view the estuaries with many, many special rafts of mussel farms, one of the big industries of Galicia along with sardines and tuna. I couldn't help wondering if our bays and shores would support fish and shellfish farming for as many years.

Our last stop was to have been Guernsey in the Channel Islands enroute to Harwich to debark for London and home, but rough seas ruled that out so we will have to save it for another trip and couldn't fault the captain for opting for our safety and comfort. Then Harwich, Gatwick, Philadelphia, Charlotte and New Bern, where we were glad to see the ever gracious Betsy McGibbon, our airport chauffeur, and found our modest abode unscathed by hurricanes.

And that, dear teacher, is the required essay on our trip for which I hope to get at least an A.