

# Mohammad Akhlaghi Diary of Florence,

**9<sup>th</sup> of August 2005**

The train from Venice to Florence left on time at 16:00; it was a TrenItalia, Eurostar train. It was a good train, but I should say I thought Eurostar was much better than this! In the way I read about Florence in my Lonely Planet-Italy guidebook so I can have a view on the city. I also read about its historical sights and how I should get to them. The way wasn't too long and after around two hours and a half we got to the "Stazione di Santa Maria Novella" (the main Florence train station).



The Lonely Planet books are really good in giving excellent information on the place you want to go, but I should say its main trouble is that it doesn't tell you which one of the sights is more famous than the others (or a list of the "must see"s) it just gives you a ton of information you really get mixed up in, there is no proper order between the list of sights it gives and in its map, finding a place for the first time is hard! These things really made me angry while I was reading the book on the train, especially that I had no body in Florence to tell me where to go or what order to see things. But I was able to fix this trouble by the end of the journey by reading over the sights around two or three times and finding an order for the places I must go!

As soon as we got off in the SMN train station I went and bought tickets for the 11<sup>th</sup> from Florence to Pisa in the morning and from Pisa to Rome in the afternoon, together they got around 20 euros. On internet and also in my guide book it had written about how to get to the hostel I had reserved; I had reserved "Ostello Villa Camerata", I went to the south west side of the station and as the guide book had said, I was going to wait for a line 17, but as soon as I got there one was leaving so without thinking too much I got on. I knew the ticket was 1 euro but the driver didn't accept! (You had to have bought a ticket before!)

In the bus I saw there were two guys and a girl who looked non-Italian and had bags just like me, something inside told me they want to go to the same place, so I went to them and asked them: "Are you going to the hostel villa something!!!" and they smiled and said yes! It seemed they had trouble with the name as well! One of them seemed to know more, he was German and this was his 4<sup>th</sup> day in Florence (actually I should say in Tuscany, since in the last three days he had gone to different cities of this province) he explained to me the situation of Florence a little. Then I talked to the other two and found out they are British and were coming from Cambridge! They were both students of archeology and they had come for a summer visit to Italy. They were new to this hostel is well and so all three of us were following the German boy!



The hostel was actually on the boundary of the city and in a quiet and nice place. You can see its sign on the left and the way to the hostel (after the sign) on the right! Let me just say that this picture was just around one fifth of the way to



the hostel after passing the sign! You had to walk a long distance in the middle of a forest like place! (This was real trouble for me the afternoon of the 10<sup>th</sup>). Together we walked in this long road and I mainly talked with the girl who had

been to the Stonehenge, south England, since I really wanted to visit it but I didn't get the chance while we were in London.

After going along this long road some thing around 10 minutes! We got to the hostel, which was after a camping site with the same name. The hostel was actually in a building of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and as my guide book says it is one of the most beautiful hostels in Europe. You could tell this building is old right after entering, on the roof there was a nice painting and all around there were nice works on the walls. Luckily the staff of the hostel were really nice is well and I can say I really enjoyed my stay there in the hostel.

The German boy just went to his room and we stayed to get keys to our rooms, Since the British pair had not reserved a room, they only gave them room for one night and for the next they said we can't promise! But they wanted to stay for two nights (just like me) so they got a little upset. We were supposed to eat dinner together but they got so upset they forgot everything!!! Any way I got my room really fast (as I had already paid the money) and went in the room, as soon as I got there I put my things in my cupboard, put my valuable things (the passport bag with money, tickets and passport and my camera) in the safe of the hostel and went to bath.

When I checked in the receptionist told me that the man in the bar is also an Iranian. So I went to him and began the talk in Persian, but it seemed he wasn't too interested in continuing the talk so I finished fast.

This hostel wasn't as good as the Alba d'oro in Venice, since the room was for 8 people and baths and toilets were for everybody (you had to leave your room to get to the bath and toilets). But it was a friendly hostel. After bath I bought the coupons for dinner and ate a good dinner. Then I saw a Chinese boy who slept on the near side of the room to me. I was tired a little and wanted to go to sleep after the bath and food, but he was surprised that how I can sleep so early (it was around 21:00), so we talked until around midnight. His English wasn't too good, he was from Hong Kong and was coming on a trip to Italy, Britain, France, Switzerland, Germany and altogether wanted to see all Europe at once! He was going to Rome from Florence and had come from Milan; he had stayed in Milan for four days! As I had read before, Milan doesn't have too many sights! It is mainly for shopping, so he had got bored! Any way he slept before me!!!

I put my alarm clock for around 7:00 so I can be in front of the Galleria dell'Accademia to see the famous statue of David. One of the people was snoring a little, but luckily I was able to ignore it!

### **10<sup>th</sup> of August 2005**

I got up at 7:00 and was able to eat my breakfast and get ready by 7:30, and then I got on the same bus and got off in the San Marco Square. From there I found the Galleria dell'Accademia by map, the museum would open at 9:00 and it was 8:00 when I got there, but I was sure I found it when I saw the line of people! The street had a turn and as I passed the door of the museum I said to my self that this is a long line (it was around 50 meters until the turn) but I will last it to see one of the famous works of Michelangelo, I got to the turn and to my horror I saw the line continued to another turn! As I walked past the people I was just wishing that the line finishes on the other corner (which was another 60 meters away from the first corner) and thank God it finished around 15 meters past that corner!

I think you can tell how shocked I was. In fact in my guide book it had written that there are long lines in Florence but



after seeing this I understood what it means by the word queue! Any way I said to my self that one of the main reasons I came to Florence was to see David, so I stood in the line. But as the guide book had written there is a place you can go and pay an extra 6euros to jump the queue and go in as soon as you get there. So most of the time they were letting those kinds of people in and every 15 minutes they let around 20 people in. As I said I was in the line at 8:00a.m and I went in at 10:00a.m. After all this time waiting I should say getting inside was like reaching heaven!!!

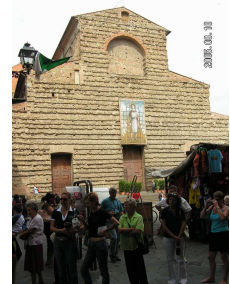
As you know, the statue of David was made by Michelangelo completely naked, so one of the souvenirs of Florence was bathers (for men of course!) with exactly that part of David's body that should be under the bathers drawn on it!!! It was so stupid and funny when I saw it the first time!!! There were even post cards of that part!!!! Any way, after going in you would have to pay 8 euros as the entrance fee and you could enter the museum. The first thing you saw was a few paintings and then a saloon that in the end you could see David. It was a big statue, in the end of a saloon with a special part made only for David. On the walk way to David you could see some uncompleted statues of Michelangelo and finally you got to David, it was a little populated around the statue and beside it they had made a nice 3D computer animation that you could control to see all the details of the David. It really was big and nice, but well, after seeing the museum had nearly nothing else, I got hopeless of waiting in the line so much! To the left of David there was a nice saloon with the works and plaster works of some of the statues of someone named Lorenzo, these statues were nice, in that saloon you saw statues of people every where! All you could do was to walk in between them. It was nice, but I wouldn't say it's worth 2 hours waiting and 8euros giving!

I was so surprised when I saw the museum nearly finished after I saw David and that saloon of Lorenzo! I could see most everybody else was also surprised, as an example on the way out I saw two girls sitting on the stairs and talking, the moment I passed I heard them say "We came in here only to see a naked boy!" (They were more depressed than me!) The souvenirs part was another proof that the only thing in this museum worth seeing was David! 90% of the things in the shop were related to David!

I was in the museum for around 20 minutes!!! I should say it wasn't only me who left like this I saw a lot of the people who came in with me, left with me also! When I came out and saw how everybody was waiting in the line (that had got nearly double what I stood in) I just laughed inside! Of course for a person who has studied the history or philosophy of art this statue is so special that this line is nothing, but for most of the people I saw waiting, the fake statue in Piazza della Signoria was exactly the same as its real copy!

From there I walked to the Piazza San Lorenzo, I had heard of the famous Basilica di San Lorenzo, in this square (Piazza, which is pronounced Piatza, means Square). But After I saw it I should say it really discouraged me again! It had no outside colors of decoration, you only saw bricks. I thought that since I have enough time I will just wander freely in the places around then have a look inside. There was a temporary market place to the right of the Basilica as you see it in this picture, so I thought of having a look. Since I had heard and seen that Florence is famous for its leather work, and there were lots of leather things in there.

There were also a lot of clothes shops in between the shops, I saw a nice tie I really wanted to buy for my self (with the famous sign of Florence on it) for 5euros but when I came back to buy it I didn't find it no matter how much I



searched for it! I did want to buy a few souvenirs but as I always have so much doubt it buying things that I don't usually buy them; the same thing happened here!

After seeing the market and feeling bad that I didn't buy any thing I went inside the Basilica of San Lorenzo but I didn't see any thing special inside and also there was a really high security out side the door that didn't let any body in after I came out. After I came out I was just getting ready to go to the Duomo Cathedral, when



I suddenly heard drums and people dressed in clothes of

the middle ages coming close. At first I thought it is some kind of a circus or something for fun that is put for tourists, but then I saw there are police around some of the people dressed like that and also I saw they all looked serious.



Then I saw all the soldiers lined up perpendicular to the door of the

Basilica and actually opened a way for those with more formal middle ages clothes to pass in between the population. I then saw it is not something stupid because all those people with the formal clothes went in the basilica and closed the door behind them. Then I asked a police women what the story is, but she didn't know English! Then I asked some one else who was a tourist but found out he wasn't much better then me, but luckily I found someone after that who knew English and what is going on; He told me that today it is Memorial Day of Saint Lorenzo; he added that every year on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August there is such a program!



I really felt good that moment, but let me just say that just by being in the city I felt completely content! I had read a lot about Michelangelo in this city and just being in the city satisfied me! This was actually one of the main reasons I didn't get hopeless when I saw Galleria dell'Accademia and the San Lorenzo Basilica! Any way after this I continued my trip for discovering Florence. Using my map I went right down to the Duomo.

The first part of the church that came to my sight down the road from San Lorenzo was a long tower kind of thing, but all the churches and religious places I had seen so far were dark or if they were white they were only white, this tower had a white back ground and colors of green and red mixed in it, so I thought it is just something in the way, but as I got closer I saw this was actually part of the cathedral and the whole cathedral was like this!!! It was strange for me! I had never seen such a color full cathedral with such colors and all these statues around the outside of the walls.

I entered Piazza di San Giovanni from Borgo San Lorenzo and saw the octagonal baptistery in front of me and the cathedral to my left. It was really populated and I saw a line wanting to enter the Cathedral that completely changed my old program of seeing inside this cathedral, the line was even longer then that of Galleria dell'Accademia and so I said to my self that if I wait in this, the next place I will get to see would be the hostel! So I just stayed out



side and looked at the outside decoration with statues of the cathedral:

The high amount of the use of statues around this building was really interesting for me, but the population was crazy, really crazy! There was a long queue waiting for entering the Baptistery as well so I just decided to see around the place! I sat down a little on a chair and after looking around I started going around the cathedral from it's northern side (along the population) and just looked at these poor people who where just standing in their place feeling how free I am to just walk by!



I walked around and on the southern side of the Cathedral I saw a set of painters who drew faces, the place reminded me a lot of the Montmartre district of Paris, where there were a lot of drawers drawing faces.

This when I passed one of the drawers who drew caricatures of people it suddenly attracted me and I got curious on seeing how much the price of such a painting is, after I



asked the man he said it is 20euros but for you I will take 10. I thought it is worth it to have a cool memory of my trip so I told him to draw me as a tourist with my camera and tripod and put the Duomo of Florence in the drawing so I always remember I drew it in Florence. Before he draws me he asked where I am from, when I said I am from Iran he said he has a Tehrani friend and that he likes the Iranians. Then he began drawing. As he was drawing five or six people came and stood behind him comparing his drawing with my face! I felt so stupid that moment!!! All those people could see my caricature but I couldn't! Finally since I wanted to have a picture of this moment I gave the camera to one of those standing, and asked him to take a picture of me before the picture gets complete!



The Duomo was nice and so I had one more spin around it and took a few pictures with it. Then I walked down Via de Calzaiuoli which was a relatively wide road with no cars inside it (actually I should say I didn't see too many cars in this city!!!) as my guide book had written this road is the chicest road in Florence and it really was, on both sides you could see all kinds of Luxury brand shops with big windows and really nice insides! Just in the beginning of the road I saw a pizza shop which sold pizzas for 3euros for every slice and I was hungry. I saw a strange kind of pizza I hadn't seen before that had pieces of brown things on it that I thought they are meat. I got the pizza and went on the second floor to eat it, while I was eating I thought that

it doesn't taste like meat and it tastes bad in a way! After eating around half of the slice I found out it is actually eggplant! I wanted to kill my self!!! I hate eggplant! So I separated all those pieces of eggplant left on the pizza and ate the pizza with a ton of trouble then I went down and got a big slice of water melon (for two euros) to eat so it fixes my thirst and takes this bad taste from my mouth!



After this road I reached the Piazza Della Signoria. When I entered the square at first I didn't notice it is Piazza Della Signoria since I had read a lot about it in my guide book, but as I checked the map I saw I had come to the right place, I could see the fake statue of David and some other fake statues placed around this square. It was a really nice and relatively populated square.

All around this square where statues, it was a nice square and I did like it! I took a few pictures with this fake David that is

made very much like the original, let me just say that if you haven't got a degree in Art or related topics, this statue has no difference with the original for you and so waiting two full hours in the line of its museum is kind of like crazy!



To the left of the farther statue in the picture on the left, there was a walk way that the entrance to the Uffizi Gallery was there. In the beginning of the way there were different interesting programs, like people who had dressed and colored them selves like statues and stood completely still like a statue and only when a person dropped them a coin they would move really slowly like a robot! It was interesting! Also right in the entrance of this way there was a man who had dressed like a clown and bothered the people passing by, which made everybody laugh!

I had heard that the science museum was behind the Uffizi Gallery so I went around the building (not going through this way) and found the science museum right beside in the end of the same building of the Uffizi Gallery but on the other side, it was the last thing to the river! I went inside and luckily I think this was the only place in Florence that didn't have a line! The ticket price was 7.5 euros and there was no student discount! Since I had heard a lot about it (Especially considering the telescopes of Galileo in this museum) so I paid the money and went in.

Contrary to the Paris science museum that was all with multimedia and showed all aspects of modern science, I would call this museum a museum of the history of science; as you walked on you passed all the different devices belonging to around 4 or 5 centuries ago. The telescopes of Galileo were on the second floor (a lot of stairs) but before the telescopes was a portrait kind of thing that was actually all a decoration around the lens of that telescope of Galileo that he used to see the moons of Jupiter and the phases of Venus. It was broken and had lots of cracks inside it but this cover around it and what it has done for the history of science makes it valuable. As you passed through the rooms you would pass through time, how the telescopes got more and more sophisticated and bigger and finally you could see a saloon with a huge celestial sphere in the center and lots of smaller terrestrial and celestial spheres.



Taking pictures inside the museum was forbidden but I was able to take this picture of two of Galileo's telescopes, as you know Galileo was a telescope maker and had made lots of telescopes, around 5 of his telescopes were here. After the astronomy part slowly you entered the world of biology and medicine and how its devises developed through out time. It was interesting; I didn't know they had reached such a level around 300 years ago! Finally

you would come to pharmacology and a little of chemistry. When you go to this museum be expecting a museum of the history of science not science. As you can see in the picture above its title also says this, the blue sign reads: "Museum of the story of Science".

After the museum of the story of science I walked parallel to the Arno River towards the Ponte Vecchio (meaning old bridge). I had heard it is an important bridge (as Mr. Cecotti had told me) and in the map you could see the signs of buildings continuing on the bridge as well, I didn't understand these until I saw the bridge my self.

The same architecture that was on the buildings around continued on the bridge and there were actually houses on the two sides of the bridge! When the Nazis where leaving Florence they broke all the bridges of Florence except this one! That is where its name comes from; Old Bridge. On the way to the bridge I bought two post cards from a shop and took a few pictures with this (I would say) unique bridge! It was really interesting, as you walked towards the bridge the population got more and more, since the width of the road was getting lower and lower! On the bridge it was really populated and all around you were gold and jewelry shops. I walked to the other side and walked parallel to the Arno River in the direction to the Science museum (but on the other side) and took the above picture there where the population was much lower and the scene was better.



After seeing the other side I walked back to the Cathedral and wrote the two postcards for the two Ehsans; Ehsan Khakbaz and Ehsan Moravveji. I had Ehsan Khakbaz's address so I sent it but for Ehsan Moravveji's, I couldn't find it so I stuck its stamp on it and kept it until I find his address. After sending Ehsan Khakbaz's post card, I bought a 1.5l water since I was thirsty and walked down to Ponte Vecchio and from there I walked to a bridge that was west of the Vecchio

Bridge; Ponte Santa Trinita and had been designed by Michelangelo, it had got destroyed in world war two but it was rebuilt with the same plan.

From in front of Ponte Santa Trinita I walked straight to Chiesa Santa Trinita which was a small and nice church. There I rested a little and I should say I was really getting tired! I found my way back to Piazza Della Signoria. There I walked back to the Saint Marco Square and finally I got on line 17 again to go back to the hostel. I was in the hostel around 17:30, before I go to the hostel I asked about the price of using internet in an internet point that was really close to the hostel entrance because I didn't have any money with me I walked back to the hostel (in that long road through the forest) and picked money and came back with the camera so I can send pictures.

After coming back all this way and getting to the internet point I paid for one hours use and asked if I can use my memory disk, he said yes, so I sat down and suddenly saw there is no memory disk converter, after I told him, he said we don't have any you have to use your own! I wanted to kill him!!! Since I had left my bag with the camera wire in it in the hostel! So you can guess what I did, I walked back all this way, picked the wire and walked back!!! Finally I was able to open the pictures I took and I sent a few of them in a mail to all the



family and friends, then I answered the mails I had to answer and walked back to the hostel.

In the hostel I went to bath and packed my things (since I was leaving Florence the day after), then I went for washing my clothes, I paid 5.5 euros for washing and drying, they gave me two coins; one for washing one for drying. The whole process took around 2 hours. In the mean time I talked to the Chinese boy which I had met yesterday and we talked about a lot of things while I was eating a few cakes and a coke I bought with a good price for dinner and he was also eating a sandwich. The clothes got completely clean and dry after coming out. I had never seen a dryer dry so good! The clothes were just like if they had come from under the sun! I put the clothes I didn't need in the bag and only kept the clothes I would need for tomorrow, then I put my alarm clock for 6:30 and went to sleep.

*Mohammad Akhlaghi  
21<sup>st</sup> of September 2005*