

As soon as I saw that the ski list for this year included a Texas Ski Council trip to Cortina, Italy I knew I was going. When I read that it could also be extended for three nights in Venice, I got r-e-a-l-l-y excited. Not because these world famous locations were on my “bucket list,” but because I had been to both of them several times and already KNEW they were both wonderful places to visit....including some skiing on the side. Imagine that!

This trip was well designed: we flew into Venice’s Marco Polo airport, then only about a two-hour bus ride up into the Dolomite Mountains that surround Cortina. We got settled into the very comfortable, quaint and stylish Hotel Ancora, where the club has stayed on a previous trip or two to this town in the “Italian Alps,” and which also played host to the 1956 Winter Olympics plus numerous Hollywood productions, including the original “Pink Panther” and “The Spy Who Loved Me” (with Roger Moore as James Bond). Ask anybody who went on our trip to tell you the inside scoop about David Niven’s remedy for frostbite in where he described in his memoir as “the part of my body that should have been the warmest.” Helene Robinson started from her home in Whitefish and Ellen Matson journeyed from her home in New York City. They flew into Venice, rented a car and joined us at the Ancora Hotel.



TC Ali Practicing for last head count at Guggenheim

You will often hear Americans claim that skiing in Colorado is the best in the world, and I would have to agree with them. However, adding European ambience, beauty (read: castles, towns that have been accumulating character and historical charm for centuries), delicious inexpensive wines, and Italian food prepared by real Italian chefs, and I say that skiing is no longer the end-all and be-all of the trip. It is a fun addition to a Life Style Total Experience. The name of our club has been very appropriately expanded to the present Space City Ski & Adventure Club.



Annie Benzon, Jim and Laura Nowicki cross country skiing

The go-for-it skiers headed out to one of the half dozen ski slopes in the Dolomite Mountains surrounding Cortina d’Ampezzo, including Evan and Ginger Howell, Scott Pederson and Gail Kitowski, Nancy Sutton, Ross Baker, Ash Moza and Vic Graff. Helene Robinson and Ellen Matson declared the Cinque Torre (Five Towers) area to be their favorite.

Many of our SCSC’ers opted for a tour of the impressive Castel Brando (Marlon would definitely acknowledge the lineage of the original occupants of this spectacular and still livable mountain top castle and hotel). The stairs were steep enough that we all got some good exercise without a day of skiing.

After an impressive lunch at the Castle, we viewed the Northern Italian scenery by a very comfortable bus, arriving at the Toffoli Winery, learning about the growing and bottling of the Veneto region’s most famous wine, Prosecco. As you probably know from personal experience, Prosecco is a pleasure you can enjoy before, during or even after a meal, and we certainly did. As a result of our trip, this “Italian Champagne” now has several more Texas converts. Tom and Magdalena Huzzey liked it so much that they not only joined the later Venice extension, but further went on to Florence and Rome to ensure Italian quality control.



Laura, Jim, Myra and Annie went to the ball



SELLA RONDA--Helene Robinson, Ellen Matson, Ross Baker, Laura Nowicki & Annie Benzon

Cortina is just a few miles

south of the border with Austria. In fact it was an area of intense fighting in World War I. Ernest Hemingway notably received his wounds there (near the Piave River) and turned that experience into literary prominence in his "A Farewell to Arms." Bob and Melissa Frazier, Bob and Marilyn Davis took a tour of some of the WWI significant sites, although new snow fall impaired the full viewing of the battlefields. Both Bobs are military veterans and it was of particular significance to them.

The Fraziers and Davis's also took the opportunity to learn some new culinary skills at the artisan cheese making (and tasting) class and the our hotel's cooking demonstration.

John and Cheryl Woltemate, Vicki Faulkner and Allan Simpson travelled by local bus to another battlefield site and World War I museum on one of our "too-much-snow-to-ski" days. This became a quest through the accumulating snow to the unattended-but-doors-open museum. It was very peaceful and almost surreal to experience this location...with the explosions of war having been silenced there for a century now. I was reminded of the snowy isolation of the abandoned grand house in "Doctor Zhivago."

Austria was also the choice of many of our folks for a side trip to Innsbruck and the Swarovski Crystal Museum. Innsbruck is famous for its medieval town center and also for hosting a prior Winter Olympics. The ladies, and in fairness the men, were fascinated by the beauty and variety of artistic crystal on view, and for sale, at the Swarovski Museum. This excursion was a MUST for our esteemed TC, Ali Pethick, who made enough purchases at Swarovski to rival our Trip Shopping Queen, Leslie Taylor. Many finished off the night with a ride on the ferris wheel where we viewed the end of the night fireworks and the local scenery. We didn't want it to stop but it did and our bus was waiting.

If Cortina was the main course for our Italian adventure, Venice was certainly a very tasty dessert ("dolce" to you Italians). Most of the SCSC'ers on this Texas Ski Counsel trip ventured to the Venice extension...and to our delight it was



Who did Ginger find in Venice?  
OMG

during Carnevale (Marde Gras being our name for it at home). In Venice it is more a costume festival than an excuse to get drunk. Many of us bought some of the classic Venetian masks and just had fun walking the streets, especially Piazza San Marco, where there was live music and a big-time party atmosphere.



Donna Kidwell, Mike Gibson, Vick & Sharon Graff heading for Island of Murano

Some of our troops went in for one of the classic masquerade balls. Laura and Jim Nowicki went in country western garb (which they said is pretty normal for them). Annie Benzon and Myra Whitten wore elegant black dresses and ornate Venetian masks, while Evan and Ginger Howell dressed as Donald and Melania Trump (and got asked to pose for lots of photos at the ball).

Ali and Fred Pethick joined Sharon and Vic Graff and Donna Kidwell and Mike Gibson for a special boat ride which took them to the Murano Glass Works on Murano Island. Ali was a little concerned when two men in suits met the boat at the dock but they just wanted to show us the exquisite and opulent Murano Glass. Donna and Sharon are not revealing what they purchased but any of the chandeliers and pieces of art were clearly not for the faint of heart.

ATC Allan Simpson and Vicki Faulkner decided to pass on further wine drinking in favor of some true American cocktails at Harry's Bar (the favorite of Ernest Hemingway, Bogart and Bacall, and the A-List of 1940's and 50's celebrities. Joining them at Harry's were Louella Stellar, Marsha Lutz, Ann Rogers, the Fraziers and Davis's.

On the last evening several of us had cocktails again at the Gritti Palace Hotel bar. Scott Pederson, Gail Kitowski, John and Cheryl Woltemate, Donna Kidwell, Mike Gibson, Vic and Sharon Graff, Bob and Marilyn Davis, Melissa and Bob Frazier and a few others who could not resist the beauty of this location on Venice's Grand Canal.

Ali took the final head count at 4:00 am on the day of our departure from Venice. Survivor had nothing on this group. We hauled our luggage up a very large bridge with hundreds of steps to the train station and another hundred steps into the train station and from the train to the bus to the airport. There was not a minute of grumbling. The boxed breakfasts helped which we ate on the train. There were plenty of open seats on the plane--imagine that--and most of us were able to spread out a little and enjoy the trip home.

Arrivederci, Italia!