

Upfront

“It doesn’t matter where we go, but if going there brings us together – I’m in.” I might be slightly misquoting my friend, but the essence is accurate.

A few days ago, we returned from a third-annual late-winter trip to Italy. Although I’m not a group traveler by nature, this tradition features a collection of characters built around a core contingent of my closest college chums. Guys with whom I’ve remained close for 44 years. Our wives have become mates (as Jenna would say in her legacy London-ese), and additional friends we have cultivated throughout the decades have joined us, too. If not each of the three times, at least once when schedules aligned. At its largest – the first year – the count was 24. This time, we peaked at 12, after a few late-stage cancellations for reasons including a case of shingles and a series of cancelled flights.

As the approximated quote above suggests, it’s as much about the comradery as anything else, but the food and scenery don’t hurt. Italy is my emotional home-away-from-home. I try – with mixed results – to communicate in the native language, at least for a few rounds of back and forth. I walk endlessly with no intention beyond consuming the visual beauty that reveals itself around the next corner,

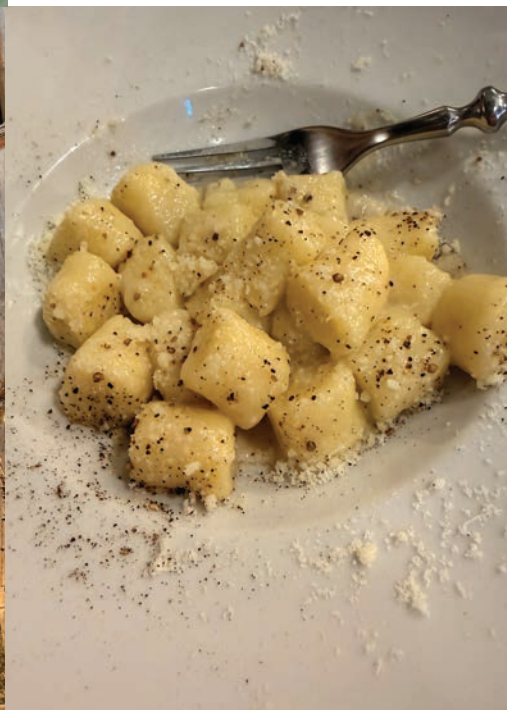
and the next corner, and the next corner after that. I overeat – an antipasto, a first course pasta, a main course, and a dessert at every meal. And I sit with my friends and talk until we are the last ones in whichever café we choose to end the night.

Two years ago, Jenna and I had a Mass to commemorate our wedding at Santa Maria in Trastevere, a 4th Century basilica in the heart of one of Rome’s liveliest neighborhoods. That was the year the group totaled 24. Each annual return to the motherland is a tribute to that very special occasion. A once-in-a-lifetime treat relived.

This year, we added Venice on the front end. My first visit 40ish years ago left me unimpressed. I returned a quarter-century hence and fell in love with the place. I’d be delighted to go once a year for the rest of my ambulatory life. Outside the core bustle, the quiet alleyways are mind-bendingly beautiful in a word-transcending way.

Typing “Italy” into my iPhone Photos app yields 2,943 results. And I’ve deleted a bunch over the years. The collection on this page is a small collection of images I managed to capture last week when I wasn’t overwhelmingly distracted by my simple, elemental joy. I hope they transport you for a moment in your mind.

Scott A. Laurer



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