

Travels with Anzie – Lecco and Fussen – New Discoveries

May 2018

Lecco? Fussen? Never heard of them!

After three wonderful months exploring southwestern France and northern Spain, we left our base in Narbonne and launched our six-week journey through central Europe. Eight and a half hours driving time brought us to Lecco in northern Italy. Why Lecco? It was a convenient stopover. We knew nothing about the town except that it lay on Lake Como. The lake is shaped like an inverted “Y”. The town of Como sits on the base of the western leg; whereas, the town of Lecco anchors the eastern leg.

I had visited Como with sister Kate and brother Kevin in 1962. I'll never forget the sight of this pristine lake surrounded by the Italian Alps. I remember diving off a dock into the crystal water, and surfacing with toilet paper on my head. So much for pristine Lake Como! I also recall that my parents stayed at a famous resort on the lake, Villa d'Este. Hoping to retrace their steps, I contacted the resort for a reservation. The price brought me back to reality: \$600./night! So, we settled for an AirBnB in Lecco at \$80/night.

As we approached Lecco, we knew we were in for a treat. The Alps surrounding the lake are, how can words describe them, “Majestic”? “Awe-inspiring”? Here we were on May 1 and ample snow still covered many of the 4,000 ft.+ peaks. And yet, those peaks seemed so near. It looks like you could climb them in twenty minutes. Not!!

After settling into our comfortable, conveniently located digs at **Monsignor Polvara 31**-- known only by the address -- with the help of owner Frederico and his mother, we decided to explore. We ended up at the busy waterfront. No cruise ships here! Only water taxis and tour boats maxing out at about 40 passengers. One tour boat, shaped like a 40 ft. long green dragon, is named “Loch Ness”. We had a drink at a sidewalk café while we absorbed the charming atmosphere. The sidewalk opposite the lakefront was lined with classy hotels, bars and restaurants. One block back we discovered a plaza and pedestrian-only street lined with more of the same.

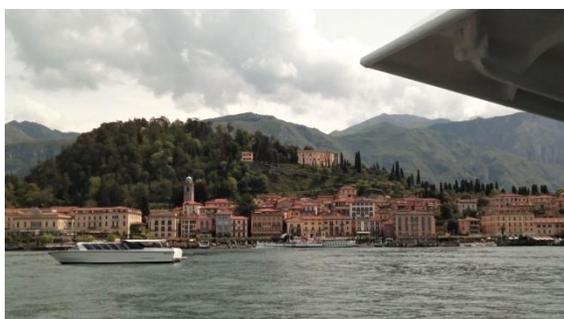
We decided to find a restaurant at another lakefront area that Frederico had recommended. We found **Barcaiolo** resting right on the lake. As local as you can get. Wonderful food. Superb ambiance. I had cheese risotto with grilled perch filets. Anzie had a garlic oil and cheese pizza with the most delicate of crusts.

The next morning we returned to the lakefront to take a boat tour. Frederico gave us coupons good for a 20% discount. We had coffee at a café right next to the boat launch entrance, so we were the first on the boat. We hurried to the stern so we could grab seats out of the wind but with great views of either side. The boat was a ferry – no commentary – just stops all along the lake, which was fine with us. We had a map. We just enjoyed the fantastic scenery on a blessedly clear, sunny day. Crystal blue sky – we could see every bit of those mountains. Here were these colorful villages climbing up these steep mountainsides. Some of the houses seemed to be located in places impossible to reach, with no sign of a road. We discussed our next trip, which would be a week long. We would stay with Frederico one night; then, taking one small overnite

bag, we would ferry up and down both sides of the “Y”, stopping overnight at pre-selected ports.



Our destination this day was **Bellagio**, undoubtedly the inspiration for the famous Las Vegas hotel/casino. The village sits on the point between the two legs of the “Y”. Definitely a spot whose only income source is tourism. Yet, few signs of tackiness. It sits on the side of a mountain. Around the port are countless cafés, restaurants, high and middle-end vendors of art, clothing, jewelry, etc. If you climb a series of steps, you arrive at other walking streets parallel to the port, with more of the same.



We selected a restaurant that bordered the second rank of steps we had climbed, and we weren't disappointed. **Antichi Saporo** offered us great pasta with a “demi” carafe of excellent wine.

Used to be in the States of the 70's-80's one could order a carafe of wine in almost any restaurant of even moderate repute. The source was gallon bottles, usually of Gallo. For some reason this offering was eliminated and replaced by wine by the glass or bottle. Now we have some fine offerings coming out by the box. I'm sure that the box, with its ever-shrinking inner bladder is the source for the carafe wine offered by restaurants throughout western Europe. It's an excellent value. I hope it returns to the U.S. restaurant market soon.

But I digress. Next stop **Fussen, Germany**.

On our way, we stopped for lunch at a cute restaurant decorated Bavarian style – lots of ornately carved wood – very comforting. Signs all over the place announcing “SPARGEL!” What's Spargel?, we asked. Asparagus! was the answer. Mid May to mid June all German restaurants have a separate menu celebrating asparagus. The menu offered asparagus every which way except dessert. We're not talking green asparagus. This is white asparagus about the diameter of your thumb. Anzie ordered a

delicious spargel with Bernaise sauce, and smoky Black Forest ham. I, the traditionalist, ate bratwurst. Exquisite!



We arrived at **Casa Fussen**, and were greeted by Dora, the owner. Dora is Portuguese, who came to Fussen one summer to learn German. Then she met Andy, and the rest is history. Our apartment was perfect: located right in the middle of town on a quiet street, well-furnished kitchen (including great coffee). Our digs were comfortably sized with separate bedroom, kitchen/dining room and bathroom.

Fussen is Bavaria at its cutest. Building exteriors are decorated with frescoes depicting scenes anywhere from fascist to floral, depending upon the age. Many stores display Bavarian clothing for sale: dirndls and leiderhosen – expensive! An ancient castle overlooks the town. Fussen lies at the southern end of the “Romantic Road”. The town was famous for producing lutes and violins. We were surprised at the number of Asian restaurants. (See fascist mural below painted 1935.)



Speaking of which, we were amazed at the number of Asian tourists we came across at any tourist site. Although we were close to Mad Ludwig’s castle, **Neuschwanstein**, we visited it from a distance because of the crowds. This is the castle that Walt Disney used as a model for the Disneyland castle. Although it looks ancient, it was completed at about the same time as the Eiffel Tower. Ludwig wanted to outdo his father’s nearby castle, Hohenchwangau. He also built another one copying Versailles. His building spree was bankrupting the country when he was declared mentally unfit to continue as king. He died in questionable circumstances shortly after being dethroned. He lived in his dream castle a total of 172 days.



Back to Fussen: We dined at two memorable restaurants. The first was Schenke & Wirtshaus. Chuck wasn't sated with wurst yet. So he dined on bratwurst ("brat" means grilled), sauerkraut, and spaetzle. It was the best of the wurst. Anzie had a delectable pork stew.

The next night we ate at a restaurant two doors down from S&W, called Ritterstub'n. There we ordered a local specialty: perch pike. Medallions of fish are lightly breaded and served with a creamy herb sauce.



We used Fussen as a base from which we explored the area. One day we visited **Oberammergau**, famous for its Passion Play. The Play is put on every tenth year; the next one is scheduled for 2020. Rick Steves claims this town is overrun with tourists. Not so in early May. We were almost the only ones in town. Rick also describes it as "the Shirley Temple of Bavarian villages" ... wearing "too much makeup". Rick has perhaps become too jaded due to his many travels. Oberammergau is definitely worth a visit. A town of 5000, it feels smaller.

What struck us was the number of shops featuring woodcarving. The pieces, mostly of a religious theme, are of excellent quality. If you don't have a nativity scene, here's the place to start one. Here's me teeing off with "Woody".



St. Peter and Paul's Church is worth a visit. Here life-sized, gilded woodcarvings of saints surround you. The domed ceilings are covered with frescoes depicting the two saints at significant points in their lives. One poignant scene shows the two of them saying goodbye to each other on the last day of their lives. Yes, they died on the same day. Peter was crucified upside down; Paul was beheaded. Look closely below. On the left you will see a halo without a head!



We didn't visit the Passion Play theater/museum. Back in 1633 plagues broke out throughout Europe. The townspeople promised God that, if they were spared, they would put on a play every ten years depicting the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. Over 400 years the Oberammergauers are sticking to their pledge. The next one is scheduled for 2020. Next, on to the Tirol region of Austria, with a rather beery visit to Munich.

A la prochaine,

Chuck and Anzie