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Part Two – Ports of Call by Deb Jennings

The day after we set sail on the Freedom we embarked on our first port of call: Naples, Italy. My husband and I, along with our friends, had signed up for an invigorating hike up Mt.



Vesuvius and then a tour of the ancient city of Pompeii. For me it was a dream come true; the stories of a place completely covered in volcanic ash had haunted me since I was a child. As it turns out, Pompeii was as ethereal as I had imagined it would be, and much more beautiful. It was also much larger than I expected, which just added to the mystery that such a place could be lost without a

trace for centuries.

Pompeii was a treasure, but certainly not the last we treat we were in for on this cruise. Over the next week and a half, we visited the impressive ruins of Ephesus near Izmir, Turkey; the esteemed Acropolis in Athens, Greece; and Ancient Olympia, the original site of the Olympic games. Of all these, I was most surprised by Olympia, near the charismatic town of Katakolon, Greece. Although there's not much left of the physical temples, training areas, or even the stadium, the historical presence is palpable. And the flowering springtime trees



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made a spectacular contribution to the site’s venerable beauty.

Other ports of call included Rhodes, Greece, where we had no trouble indulging our proclivity for wandering the narrow, cobble stoned streets. We also spent an adventurous day in Istanbul, Turkey where we greatly enjoyed a boat ride on the Bosphorus, the straight that



divides Istambul between two continents (Europe and Asia). The tour also featured a delicious and hearty lunch of traditional Turkish food, a trip to a private antiquities museum, and a Turkish rug demonstration before wrapping up with shopping in the bazaar.

Our final shore excursion took us to the scenic and peaceful towns of Livorno and Portovenere in Italy, where we enjoyed a short boat ride on the dark blue waters, and had lunch on top of a castle. (Our friends had opted for a more ambitious tour of Pisa and Florence.) As we sat in a tiny square in Livorno, eating gelato and watching the world go by, we realized that we could have our cake and eat it too – we could immerse ourselves, if only for a day, in the culture of a place, enjoy the local cuisine, explore the side streets, and have a fantastic time – even on a cruise.

Published Friday, August 15, 2008 12:49 PM by [Stephanie](#)
Filed under: [Naples](#), [Rhodes](#), [Livorno](#), [Pompeii](#), [Italy](#), [Olympia](#), [Greece](#)

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