

Travel Strategies

Amy Bright Unfried



The formula that my husband and I have developed for our travels during the past seven years was initially dictated by a long, slow recovery I had from some medical adventures in 2008. It became clear that I couldn't do the kind of fast-paced touring that had been our main pattern before, but we did realize that it was possible to settle down in one place and live a quiet life for a month or two, and that that place needn't be our home. We began with a two-month stay in a [VRBO.com](https://www.vrbo.com) apartment in Florence, Italy. An essential ingredient was the study of language, since I had long regretted that our sole overseas posting, to London, had not enabled me to achieve a long-held goal of becoming fluent in another language. We therefore attended an Italian language school three hours a day for seven weeks that first time. To the extent that my energy level permitted (and during the succeeding years it has permitted an increasing amount of activity), we engaged in cultural excursions to museums, churches, galleries, concerts, and short trips outside the city.

This immersion in the daily life of a city, facilitated by improving language skills, was such a success that before we had even left, Steve was making plans for the next trip along the same lines.

Subsequent stays have been in Rome (three times), Florence (two additional times), Milan and

Venice and Bologna, and each time when we've returned to the same city we've rented an apartment in a different area, the better to get to know the city. In some places we have made friends we keep in touch with. Two years ago my husband decided he'd like to improve his high school French, so we've spent two Aprils in Paris and will be returning there this coming fall, attending l'Alliance Française. We spend a smaller proportion of our time in school nowadays, but Steve, who has less aptitude for languages than I do, likes to have a two-week refresher every time, and last fall in Florence I had individual lessons instead, which worked better for me for several reasons—there could be a greater focus on topics I was interested in (the majority, though by no means all, of our fellow students are under forty), I could be listening and speaking all of the time instead of my proportionate share, and one-on-one lessons

eliminated the problems I sometimes had of being unable to hear in a larger class due to my hearing issues.

Starting with our first trip in the spring of 2010, I wrote a blog with my personal observations about our experiences on these trips, illustrated by pictures I took. It was not intended to achieve a wide following, merely to inform friends and family of what we were up to so that I wouldn't need to write a long emails to a long list of individuals, but it is not password-protected or anything like that. The occasional posted comment or separate emails from readers (and many of my most loyal readers are Wellesley friends) let me know that I was not writing into a vacuum. I can't make sculpture while I'm traveling (though all the museums we visit, and all life experience, do inform my work in various ways), so photography and writing are the best creative outlets for me while we're away from home for extended periods of time. The research required to make some of the pieces more complete and accurate was fun too. I have continued to write my blog on all subsequent trips of this kind, and by now the archives hold 276 postings. The address of the blog is blog.unfriedsculpture.com. I'll be starting to write for it again in late September when we return to Paris.