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## **Vicenza Voyage and Florence & Rome Update** **Wheelchair Accessible Travel In Vicenza, Florence and** **Rome - 2005**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**



**Howard Chabner and Michele DeSha**  
**at Palazzo Farnese in Rome.**

This article is the fruit of our 2005 trip to **Vicenza**, **Florence** and **Rome**.

Subjective, selective and impressionistic, not comprehensive or systematic, it's intended as an introduction, a starting point for your research and a way to convey realistic expectations. We hope it will help you plan an access strategy based on your interests, budget and mobility capabilities and limitations. We try to describe

in nuts and bolts terms access conditions you may encounter that other sources of information take for granted and, therefore, omit.

We focus mostly on **Vicenza** but include some information about Florence and Rome. We also include a bit of information on **Venice** and **Verona**, where we took day trips. For more information about Rome and general observations on wheelchair access in Italy, see "[Rolling in Rome](#)," which is based on our 2003 trip and contains far more comprehensive information. It's available on the websites where this article is published.

In planning our trip we used the Internet and other information sources but not a travel agent. We traveled on our own, not with a tour group.

We have tried to be as accurate as possible, but of course accuracy is not guaranteed. You should confirm all information, especially access details, directly with hotels, museums, transportation providers and other facilities. As in all research, primary sources are much better than secondary ones. We encountered gaps, errors and inconsistencies in access information, especially regarding transportation. Quite often the facts on the ground are better than the information about them. Also, things change. It is essential to re-confirm information shortly before acting on it.

Not all phone numbers in Italy have the same number of digits, making it especially important to double check phone numbers. The country code for international calls to Italy is +39.

Because one's physical capabilities, limitations and equipment affect the access achievable and one's point of reference colors his perception of access, we'll tell you about ourselves. We are fortunate to live in San Francisco, where wheelchair access is generally excellent. Howard has muscular dystrophy and

uses an electric wheelchair. Michele is able-bodied. On this trip Howard used a Quickie P110 folding electric wheelchair that is 25" (63.5 cm) wide, weighs approximately 100 pounds (including the batteries, which are removable) and has gel cell batteries. Howard is six feet (1.83 meters) tall and, when seated, 57 inches (1.45 meters) high. He cannot walk and can transfer to an inaccessible car only with great difficulty.

We recognize that, because we travel together and Michele helps Howard, some access barriers that are at worst minor inconveniences for us would be major obstacles for a person in a wheelchair traveling alone. These include threshold steps at building entrances and inaccessible closets and light switches in hotel rooms. We've tried to indicate these as best we can, but because they aren't major obstacles for us, undoubtedly we missed some. In most cases these barriers are not insurmountable for a solo traveler, but unavoidably he or she will have to ask for more assistance than at home.

A hotel access questionnaire is [Appendix A](#). You are welcome to adapt it for your own use. A metric conversion guide is [Appendix B](#). A dictionary of key access terms in Italian and a pronunciation guide, both by Cornelia Danielson of Barrier Free Travel, are [Appendix C](#). This article and the appendices may not be reproduced or used for profit without our written permission, but readers are welcome to reproduce or use them for any other purpose.

**[A Call for Advocacy](#)**. Researching your trip, the trip itself and the time after your return are great opportunities to educate and advocate for access. If we learn in our research that a hotel, transportation provider or museum isn't accessible and providing access appears feasible, or that something is accessible but could be improved, Howard often sends an immediate email with detailed recommendations. On our trip we provide feedback in real time. After we return we write detailed letters advocating better access, including appeals to government officials. We aren't only critical - we try to acknowledge and appreciate good access, and we also recognize the logistical and architectural difficulties and limitations in making old buildings and ancient sites accessible. Our communications have usually been well received and our efforts have helped spur access improvements.

Howard has written letters to the mayors of Rome and Paris about access issues, including the need for more curb ramps, and to the Rome and Paris airports. When writing to government officials, we send copies to local disability organizations if appropriate. We've sometimes found that a request or recommendation from us, as foreign tourists, can lend additional credibility to similar advocacy by local individuals and disability organizations. Sometimes our efforts add to the cumulative weight of those made by locals. Ironically, it may be easier for officials to ignore or delay action on a complaint by a local than one by a foreigner.

We urge you to use your trip as an opportunity to help move the ball forward on wheelchair access - you will already have the information and the impressions will be fresh in your mind, so writing an effective letter or email won't take much extra time.

## II. GENERAL ACCESS IN ITALY

Although there are still many barriers in Italy, we were heartened to

discover a growing awareness of access and the needs and rights of disabled people. People sincerely want to help, although they may not always know exactly how. In Rome and Florence we saw locals and tourists in both manual and electric wheelchairs every day. Good access planning is evident in new construction and major renovations. Generally, access to buildings is far better than to local transportation, which is often difficult.

### [Good News About Smoking](#)

A welcome improvement was the complete lack of smoking in restaurants and cafes. In early 2005 a national law became effective that bans smoking inside restaurants, bars and cafes, except in specially ventilated smoking rooms. The penalties for patrons are strict, and those for proprietors even more strict. From our experience the law is taken quite seriously. We recall only one time where someone tried to light up inside - Chinese tourists in a Rome restaurant lit up and were immediately asked to smoke outside. We saw no restaurants or cafes with smoking rooms. Smoking is permitted at outdoor tables, but this was rarely a problem: it seems that smokers have become more considerate even when smoking outdoors. Also, if you eat outside in a crowded, bustling city such as Rome, vehicle exhaust is unavoidable, so you can't expect perfectly clear air anyway. A collateral benefit of the smoking ban we noticed is that fewer people use cell phones in restaurants – many go outside to have a cigarette and use their cell phones.

### [Museums, Monuments, Churches, Antiquities](#)

We urge you to try to tour all major museums, monuments, palazzos, churches, parks and antiquities sites that interest you - they are likely to be at least partially accessible and you will probably see something interesting and beautiful on the way.

### [Restaurants and Stores](#)

Many restaurants and stores have a threshold step of anywhere from two to eight inches. The proprietors are very willing to lift your wheelchair, although they often require instructions on how to do it. Many trattorias have outdoor tables, especially in Rome. Enjoy your meals outdoors, as the Romans do, and you will avoid barriers.

### [ATM's/Banks](#)

Michele used ATM's at a variety of banks in various locations in Vicenza, Florence and Rome. All were too high for a wheelchair. We had no occasion to enter banks, but on casual observation the entrances to many banks seemed to be up a difficult threshold step and through an inaccessible security booth.

### [Pay Phones](#)

Most pay phones we saw are inaccessible, because either they are on a high platform or the phone is too high. Some newer phones are accessible, but with difficulty.

## **III. PUBLIC BATHROOMS**

Italian bathrooms typically are large, clean and have high quality

plumbing, often including handheld hoses in addition to the regular sink and faucet. Many accessible and regular bathrooms are staffed by an attendant who cleans them frequently. It is not always easy to find an accessible bathroom, but when you do, it is likely to be well designed and spacious. Also, some bathrooms that are not fully accessible are large enough for a wheelchair.

We generally didn't seek accessible bathrooms in restaurants or churches. Many La Rinascente department stores have accessible bathrooms. Almost every museum we visited that is accessible has an accessible bathroom. Because museums are generally free for disabled people, if you need to use the bathroom and are near a museum, you can do so even if you don't want to tour the museum at the time. Proprietors, guards, government workers and salespeople are generally quite willing to let a person in a wheelchair use bathrooms in their establishment even if she isn't a customer.

Most wheelchair accessible bathrooms have large toilets that are higher than the typical accessible high toilet in the U.S. They typically have flip-up grab bars mounted on one side on the wall behind the toilet, and also an emergency alarm with a pull cord within easy reach. The sinks are large.

#### IV. LODGING - GENERAL

For hotels and apartments, as for real estate, the three most important factors are location, location and location (assuming good wheelchair access). Strolling through a vibrant, beautiful, interesting neighborhood is one of the most enjoyable things about traveling. It's exciting to stay in the heart of the *centro storico* (historic city center), where one can roll by the same building or piazza ten times and discover something new and enriching each time. Strolling at night is romantic and exhilarating; staying at a central location makes it easier to remain out late. A central location is also more conducive to an afternoon nap because it's easy to go out again afterwards.

Because accessible public transportation is sometimes scarce, unreliable, difficult to find, and subject to change, staying in a central location is critical unless you are able to transfer easily to an ordinary taxi. Being within rolling distance of museums, antiquities, monuments, churches, restaurants and shopping saves time, energy, uncertainty, frustration and expense. Up to a point, we would forego a large room, stylish atmosphere and contemporary amenities for a great location.

#### V. TRAIN TRAVEL IN ITALY

Wheelchair passengers are required to register for intercity trains, by phone or in person, with the "Centro di Accoglienza" or "Hospitality Center" (marked with the blue wheelchair logo) at the station of origin at least 24 hours in advance. In addition, check-in at the Hospitality Center is required at least 45 minutes before departure. At small stations the employees aren't strict about the time required and may not even be available that early. But regardless, always check in before proceeding to the platform; don't just wait at the platform and assume someone will be there to help. Wheelchair passengers embark and disembark from the platform to the train by a portable, attendant-operated mechanical lift. The lift is quite narrow; Howard's wheelchair fit but without much room to spare. Advance registration and arrival are required so the train company can ensure availability of the lift and employees to operate it. In large

cities where the station is a terminus, getting on and off the train isn't terribly rushed, but in small cities the train stops for only two or three minutes and the process is quite hurried. Be sure to organize your luggage.

Not all cars have wheelchair spaces, and some local trains have no cars with wheelchair spaces. When purchasing tickets on the Trenitalia website it is essential to make sure that the train has wheelchair spaces and, in Italy, to call or visit the Hospitality Center as described above. Just because there is a wheelchair symbol on the website for the train you want does not mean that the train employees will be ready for you; you must inform Trenitalia in advance. Similarly, if you buy tickets at the station, go to the Hospitality Center first because the general ticket sellers are not necessarily knowledgeable about which trains are accessible or the availability of employees to assist. In some stations the Hospitality Center may be able to sell you tickets. It's also important to understand that, for able-bodied and disabled passengers alike, purchasing a ticket isn't the same as reserving a space on a particular train.

Although we had heard that passengers in electric wheelchairs are required to transfer to a train seat or manual wheelchair, Howard was never asked to do this and always remained in his wheelchair. First class was very spacious; second class, while not quite as large, had ample room for his wheelchair. The rides generally were pleasant, fast and smooth. On trains where the only accessible car is a first class car, wheelchair passengers are usually charged second class fare. Each car that has a wheelchair seating space has a medium size accessible bathroom nearby.

Procedures vary a bit from one station to another and even from one employee to another. Also, we have the impression that the procedures are in flux, so it is essential to check everything carefully. Be patient and allow plenty of time.

For general information, start with [www.Trenitalia.com](http://www.Trenitalia.com) and, for Rome, [www.RomaTermini.it](http://www.RomaTermini.it).

## **VI. LIFTS; ELECTRICITY; WHEELCHAIR REPAIR; MEDICAL NEEDS**

### **Stair Lifts**

The stair lifts at many museums, monuments and churches in Italy (even lifts that appear fairly new) are typically narrower, shorter and have a lower weight capacity than in the U.S., often 330 pounds (150 kilograms). (The typical capacity in the U.S. for lifts in public accommodations is 750 pounds or, less commonly, 500.) Howard's wheelchair barely fit many of them - perhaps by 2" in width. Howard's Quickie power wheelchair is standard size; people with wider chairs would have difficulty fitting on some of the stair lifts. Our strong impression is that in planning for wheelchair access, the norm, the default is a manual wheelchair, and a power wheelchair is still considered atypical.

Generally, and unlike the typical lift in the U.S., the Italian lifts are able to operate with the moveable safety edges at the front and back in the lowered, open position (approximately parallel to the main platform and the floor), as distinguished from the raised position (at perhaps a 45 degree angle to the main platform and the floor). Howard's wheelchair footrests often protruded past the

front edge and the rear tires often rested on the lowered rear edge. This is less safe because raised edges help prevent the wheelchair from moving forward or backward, so it is crucial to have one's brakes on. But it mitigates somewhat the small platform size.

### [Electricity and Charging your Wheelchair](#)

Italy uses 220-volt AC power. The standard plug has three prongs in a straight line (one is the ground) and is different from the plug used in most other European countries. Plug adapters are available at any travel store; we recommend buying several before your trip.

If you use an electric wheelchair, we recommend obtaining a wheelchair battery charger with settings for 110 and 220 volts. It eliminates the need for a separate converter. A surprisingly small, lightweight and inexpensive charger with dual settings is available from MK Battery. [www.MKBattery.com](http://www.MKBattery.com). Also try Lester Electrical. [www.LesterElectrical.com](http://www.LesterElectrical.com).

We highly recommend gel cell batteries, which are non-spillable, safer and more acceptable to airlines than wet batteries.

We experienced no problems charging Howard's wheelchair on this trip. (See "[Rolling in Rome](#)" for a description of some problems we had in 2003.)

### [Wheelchair Repair](#)

Howard's backpack was stolen at the Rome train station; the lost items included his battery charger, so he had to order a new one. We called Sunrise Medical's main office in Italy, which promptly sent a new charger by overnight delivery to a medical equipment dealer in Rome. The only charger available was expensive, heavy and of very high quality. It had only a 220-volt setting, not dual settings, so we donated it to an Italian medical organization on our last day in Italy.

[Sunrise Medical – Italy](#). Main phone +39-052-357-3111. Fax +39-052-357-0060. Address: via Riva, 20, Montale, Piacenza. Jonathan Pezzali, the manager, is very helpful and speaks English well; his direct phone is +39-0523-573-146. [Jonathan.Pezzali@SunriseMedical.it](mailto:Jonathan.Pezzali@SunriseMedical.it). Roberto Mandelli, technician; direct phone +39-0523-573-130. Open Monday to Friday 8:30 AM - 12:30 PM and 1:30 PM - 5:30 PM.

Medical equipment dealer in Rome. [Ortopedia Mancini](#). Phone +39-06-321-3148. Fax +39-06-321-3208. Address: via Tacito, 94 (in Prati neighborhood). Open Monday to Friday 8:00 AM - noon and 2:30 PM - 6:30 PM. They don't speak English.

Wheelchair repair in Florence. [Ortopedia Giotto](#). Stefano Puccetti. Phone +39-055-463-3154. Cell +39-329-263-4444. Fax +39-055-463-2397. Address: via del Romito, 57-C. Mr. Puccetti was very helpful when Howard had wheelchair problems in 2003; he even made a house call.

### [Medical Needs](#)

The [United States Embassy in Rome](#) provides referrals to English speaking doctors and dentists. [www.USEmbassy.it](http://www.USEmbassy.it). Phone +39-06-467-41.

Fax +39-06-488-2672.

[Foundation Santa Lucia – Santa Lucia Rehabilitation Hospital](#), several miles outside central Rome, offers physical therapy and an accessible swimming pool. We didn't go there, so this information is based on correspondence. A doctor's letter is required in advance. [www.HsantaLucia.it](http://www.HsantaLucia.it). [degenze@hsantalucia.it](mailto:degenze@hsantalucia.it) or [dirsan@hsantalucia.it](mailto:dirsan@hsantalucia.it). Phone +39-06-515-011/014/022/023/024. Fax +39-06-503-2097. Address, via Ardeatina, 306; 00179 Rome.

## VII. VICENZA

### [Vicenza - General and Terrain](#)

Vicenza is a small, ancient, affluent city in the Veneto region west of Venice. It's proud of its Roman past like many Italian cities, though not many antiquities remain. It became a territory of the republic of Venice in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, when Venice was expanding its influence westward to the "*terra firma*."

Why Vicenza? Vicenza is for architecture buffs. Although the Civic Museum in Palazzo Chiericati does boast some fine paintings by Tiepolo, Veronese and other Northern Italian masters, Vicenza's art museums and churches are not spectacular in comparison with many others in Italy. But its architecture is spectacular! Vicenza is the city most closely associated with the architect Andrea Palladio (1508-1580). The well-preserved city center features many of his palazzos and civic buildings, while his villas and those of other master architects dot the surrounding countryside. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the patrician families of Venice, Verona, Padua and Vicenza became interested in agriculture and the benefits of country living, and built villas in the countryside.

Compact, well preserved, clean, flat and quiet, Vicenza is pedestrian- and wheelchair-friendly. The historic center, most of which is closed to automobiles, can easily be toured in wheelchair and by foot. The Retrone River runs near it and some of the bridges are inaccessible, but it's easy to find accessible alternate routes. It's a joy to stroll without worrying about cars. The sidewalks are low, probably two to three inches above street level in many places. There are some curb cuts. Most of the sidewalks and some of the streets are stone; they are a bit bumpy at places, which wasn't a problem for Howard but might be a moderate obstacle for some manual wheelchair users.

Vicenza is a good base for day trips to Venice (a 45-minute train ride), Verona and Padua (less than 30 minutes each). It's not as romantic or colorful as Venice or Verona, but to us it feels more real.

Vicenza is proud, dignified and sophisticated, with delicious regional cuisine (see "Vicenza - Restaurants" below). It has unique clothing boutiques and bookstores, and much of the gold jewelry sold throughout Italy is made in Vicenzan workshops. Vicenza is off the main tourist path, so prices for lodging and restaurants are unexpectedly reasonable. In great contrast to Venice and Verona, where we took day trips, we encountered almost no tourists in Vicenza and felt much closer to ordinary Italian life. Locals in places that are very oriented toward tourists can sometimes be either jaded or fawning. Vicenzans, in contrast, are pleased that you are interested in their city and proud to host

you, but their lives are complete without tourists.

### [Vicenza - Hotel](#)

[Hotel Due Mori](#). Contra Do Rode, 24/26. Phone +39-044-432-1886. Fax +39 044-432-6127. [www.HotelDueMori.com](http://www.HotelDueMori.com); [hotelduemori@inwind.it](mailto:hotelduemori@inwind.it).

In the heart of the historic center, the Due Mori was an unexpected gem and, at 77 Euros per night, a bargain. The location is ideal - on a quiet street just off Corso Palladio, the main street in the pedestrian zone, a two-minute stroll to the main square Piazza dei Signori, and an easy 15-minute walk from the train station. There is a free disabled parking space in front of the hotel reserved for hotel guests (reserve it when booking a room).

Designated a two-star hotel, most likely because there are no televisions, no concierge, no newspapers and a limited breakfast, the Due Mori features a lobby, guest room size and furniture of at least three-star quality. The front desk staff was always friendly, helpful and informal. The lobby is spacious and inviting, with good furniture and carpets. The hotel breakfast was unexciting and there are several delicious cafes nearby, so we recommend not having breakfast at the hotel.

The accessible entrance is adjacent to the main one and has a moderately sloped well-designed metal ramp. Large (perhaps 14 or 15 feet by 18 or 19 feet, not including the bathroom), cheerful and full of restored Italian art deco wood furniture, the accessible room is on the ground floor. It was easy for Howard to maneuver his wheelchair and there is plenty of storage space. The room is well lit, though there is no view because it overlooks the street.

The spacious bathroom has a roll-in shower with a small wall hung bench, a large toilet with plenty of adjacent space for a side transfer, a fold-down grab bar on one side of the toilet, a large deep sink with a long-handled faucet, a well-placed mirror and a bidet. The only drawback is the small size of the shower bench.

The obstacles for a solo wheelchair traveler are the closet, dresser and window shade; assistance would be needed to access them. For someone traveling with an able-bodied companion, there are no significant obstacles. We enthusiastically recommend Hotel Due Mori!

### [Vicenza - Transportation](#)

We walked/rolled around Vicenza and took a day trip to the countryside by taxi to visit Palladian villas. The train station is less than half a mile from the beginning of the centro storico and its main street, Corso Palladio. The local buses are not wheelchair accessible.

For our day trip we hired a taxi. There is only one truly accessible taxi in Vicenza, so be sure to reserve it in advance. It's a brand new Fiat minivan with capacity for one wheelchair passenger and several able-bodied ones. A manual ramp attaches to the rear; the angle is fairly steep, so driver assistance is necessary. There was no shoulder belt, so Howard had to hold on tight to the adjacent seat, but the driver drove smoothly.



We agreed on a fixed price in advance based on the number of hours and distance of the destinations. The price was reasonable and there is some leeway for bargaining. The driver told us that the government subsidizes the accessible taxi service.

The driver was friendly and helpful; he even took the initiative and enlisted workmen at one of the villas to help carry Howard's wheelchair up the stairs into the villa.

The taxi company also has an older accessible vehicle with an electric lift, but the ceiling is low and the accessible seating area small. Not realizing how close our hotel was to the train station, we had reserved a ride from the train station. A driver met us with this vehicle upon our arrival, but Howard didn't fit so we just strolled to the hotel.

[Vicenza Taxi](#). CO.TA.VI. Phone +39 04-44-920-600. Fax +39 04-44 927-799.

Via Lago d'Iseo, 56. [VicenzaTaxi@virgilio.it](mailto:VicenzaTaxi@virgilio.it). We reserved our rides by email. The taxi company was prompt at replying to our emails and sufficiently fluent in English.

### [Vicenza - Palladio, Museums, Monuments, Church, Park](#)

Palladio designed city palazzos and civic buildings, country villas and a handful of churches, including the masterpieces Il Redentore and San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice. His works are graceful, with great harmony between individual elements and the whole, and among elements. Palladio was a serious student of ancient Roman architecture, and his buildings are often described as classical or neoclassical. This is true in that he used arches, domes, the classical order of columns, and colonnades to create works of supreme harmony, balance and proportion, and he generally eschewed elaborate ornamentation. But his work also is varied, changes over time, and is concerned with mass, rhythm, light and shadow, and unexpected patterns; these attributes anticipate later architectural styles. Palladio's influence continues through today in Europe and the U.S. by virtue both of his own realized buildings and his [Four Books on Architecture](#), considered perhaps the most important book on architecture in the western world since the writings of Vitruvius in republican Rome. Jefferson's Monticello and his buildings at the University of Virginia, for example, were heavily influenced by Palladian ideas.

Besides the places described below, Vicenza has many beautiful and architecturally significant buildings designed by Palladio and others that are privately owned and in commercial use. Some, housing stores and banks, are open to the public, while the exteriors of others can be admired but the interiors are closed.

[Basilica Palladiana \(Pallazo della Ragione\)](#). One of Palladio's masterpieces, this spectacular town hall dominates Vicenza's main piazza, the Piazza dei Signori. To all four sides of the existing town hall, Palladio added a two-story arched loggia with double columns, creating a balanced, rhythmic, harmonious interplay of open and closed; light and shadow; vertical and horizontal; and linear and curved. This is a secular building; "basilica" is used in its ancient Roman sense meaning a large rectangular space used for important civic and communal functions. A permanent concrete ramp at the far left, near the Tower of Torment, allows access to the loggia gallery that encloses many

fine stores. Beware, however - the gallery floor is composed of extremely uneven stones that make for a very bumpy ride. Bustling open-air markets are set up in the piazza on the far side of the building.

**Civic Museum.** Housed in Palladio's Palazzo Chiericati, the city's museum has paintings by Tiepolo, Montagna, Maffei and other Northern Italian masters, some Flemish paintings, modern paintings and historical artifacts such as Napoleonic medals. The main picture gallery in the center of the building is a great example of Palladio's masterfully proportioned rooms - the relationship between length, width and height is ideal, as are the size and placement of the windows.

The parking lot in front abuts a busy street, so be careful when crossing in front of the building. The main entrance is inaccessible; for wheelchair access you must ring a bell on the left side of the front of the building. A guard will open a door; from there proceed up a small concrete ramp to the rear of the building. A small, though not tiny, elevator serves the gallery floors; assistance from the guard is required. Howard's wheelchair fit without difficulty but without much room to spare. The bathroom is not accessible.  
[http://www.vicenzae.org/pages\\_241.html](http://www.vicenzae.org/pages_241.html)

**Duomo.** This cathedral was extensively damaged during World War II, has been rebuilt, and the rebuilding shows. It is not especially beautiful but is worth a quick visit. It is easily accessible via a ramp at a side entrance.

**Olympic Theater (Teatro Olimpico).** This intimate, dazzlingly beautiful theater, the first permanent indoor theater of the Renaissance and perhaps the oldest indoor theater still in operation today in the western world, was officially begun by Palladio in 1580, the year of his death, but he had begun planning it several years earlier. The interior is the work of his protégé Vincenzo Scamozzi and several others over many years.

It is semi-elliptical in shape, with a gorgeous painted ceiling of blue sky and white clouds, a stately colonnade at the top with full and half columns, neoclassical full body statues (that appear to be marble but are made of stucco) in niches between the half columns and on top of the balustrade that surmounts the colonnade, and a large proscenium stage, permanent stage wall (*scanae frons*) and stage set. The *scanae frons* is in the form of a triumphal arch with columns, pilasters, friezes and neoclassical statues. The stage set inside the openings of the arch and doorways is an imagined recreation of the streets of ancient Thebes. The perspectival effect of the streets is masterful - the streets appear to go on indefinitely but are actually quite short. Made of wood, stucco and other ordinary materials, the stage set was intended to be removed after the first series of performances, but its beauty and extraordinary trompe l'oeil effects were lauded immediately and it has remained in place to this day.

We took a self-guided tour and heard a concert; both were among the highlights of our trip. The thorough, well-researched audioguide is available in English; we highly recommend it. If you have only a short time in Vicenza, see the Teatro Olimpico and the Basilica Palladiana!

If you are with an able-bodied person, have her go through the garden and up the stairs and ask for assistance. If you are alone, look for a bell for wheelchair access on the wall outside the garden, to the left of the main gate.

Press it several times and proceed left along the wall, all the way around the corner. There is an almost-level wheelchair accessible entrance leading to a small museum, lobby, bookstore, concert ticket office and the entrance passageway to the theater seats, at the level of the bottom row of benches. All seating is on wooden benches with portable pads. Only the entrance row is accessible. This row is a bit narrow, so be careful.

For the concert, Howard was seated at the very end of the accessible row (at the level of the entrance passageway), with his wheelchair partially blocking the entrance passageway. There is an equivalent wheelchair space 180 degrees opposite. Though Howard was, in effect, partially behind the orchestra, the sound was surprisingly warm, clear and balanced, due probably to the benches and floors being made entirely of wood and the intimate size of the theater. The *scenae frons*, stage set and statues, with their extraordinary perspectival effects and rich detail, looked magnificent from Howard's spot; it was difficult to take his eyes off the stage. Unfortunately, however, Michele wasn't seated in the bench seat closest to Howard. When reserving tickets, be sure to emphasize repeatedly that the able-bodied person and the person in the wheelchair want to sit as close together as possible. Also, for someone who can transfer fairly easily, it might be possible to transfer from a wheelchair to the bottom row of benches (the row at the level of the entrance passageway). We didn't measure but the bench height appeared to be within an inch or two of the height of Howard's wheelchair (which is higher than most manual wheelchairs).

We truly enjoyed hearing the [Orchestra del Teatro Olimpico](#) perform a Tchaikovsky Serenade and Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue. This small local orchestra was quite good, and the piano soloist who played Rhapsody in Blue was outstanding. The audience was spirited and engaged.

[Teatro Olimpico.](#) [Orchestra del Teatro Olimpico.](#) Phone +39-0444-222-800. Fax +39-0444-321-192. [oto@goldnet.it](mailto:oto@goldnet.it). Ticket agency Carta: Phone +39-0424-600-458. Not all concerts are handled by the same ticket agency, so check individually. It took some persistence to order tickets from the U.S. Our fax and emails weren't answered, but once we found the phone number of the ticket agency, things went smoothly. The ticket agency person spoke English. The tourist offices listed below may be able to point you in the right direction.

[Palladio Center and Museum.](#) Located in Palladio's elegant Palazzo Barbaran da Porto, this informative museum is both scholarly and accessible to the non-specialist. During our visit it had a fascinating special exhibit of the villas of the Veneto, from Palladio to the modernist architect Carlo Scarpa. Models, photographs, manuscripts, drawings, paintings and artifacts illuminated individual villas and the ideals underlying all Veneto villas. A large, well-organized bookstore on the ground floor has an extensive, broad collection of architecture books, almost all in Italian. The website has a well-organized section in English with comprehensive information useful in learning about Palladio's work and planning your trip.

Access is very good. There is a short cobblestone path at the main entrance, from which gradual ramps lead to the ground floor. A fairly large elevator serves the ground floor and the exhibit floors. A large accessible bathroom is on the ground floor. The sink and toilet are large, but a fixed grab bar completely blocks side transfer to the toilet.

### [Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio.](#)

Phone +39-0444-32-30-14. Fax + 39-0444-32-28-69. Contra' Porti, 11.  
[www.CISAPalladio.org](http://www.CISAPalladio.org).

[Querini Park.](#) Featuring manicured lawns, paths lined with statues, and a tiny island with a round neoclassical temple, this park is serene and stately. The terrain is flat. The paths are easy to roll on; they're made of tightly packed gravel over hard surfaces.

### [Near Vicenza - Canova Museum](#)

The town of **Possagno**, near Bassano del Grappa (yes, where grappa is made!), was the birthplace of the great neoclassical sculptor Antonio Canova (1757-1822) and is home to the [Canova Museum](#). The museum includes Canova's plaster casts, some marble sculptures (though not his greatest, which are scattered throughout Europe), paintings, and Canova's house. We did not make it there. The only accessible way to get to Possagno from Vicenza is by car or taxi. We were informed that the gallery and Canova's house are partially accessible and the other buildings are not accessible. Access is uncertain, therefore, but if you have a car and admire Canova, the museum may be worth a visit. [Lascito Fondazione Canova](#). Via Canova, 84. Phone +39-0423-544-323. Fax +39-0423-922-007.  
[www.MuseoCanova.it](http://www.MuseoCanova.it). [gipsoteca@libero.it](mailto:gipsoteca@libero.it). [info@MuseoCanova.it](mailto:info@MuseoCanova.it).

### [Vicenza - Villas](#)

Patricians from Venice, Verona, Vicenza and Padua, seeking income sources besides trading, firmly convinced of the moral, health, intellectual, and social benefits of country living, and eager to establish country lives to balance and complement their city ones, built dozens of villas, if not hundreds, in the Veneto countryside during the 16<sup>th</sup> century and, to a lesser extent, the 17<sup>th</sup>. Designed by Palladio, his protege Vincenzo Scamozzi and others, these range from rustic but sophisticated working farmhouses to elegant manors where, one suspects, farming was discussed more than practiced.

Almost all the villas have stairs. After much inquiry, we were unable to find any with wheelchair accessible interiors, so be prepared to see only the exteriors. If you have a choice, don't visit soon after a major rain because many of the paths are likely to be muddy. But even with these limitations, a trip is not to be missed!

The lack of access appears justified. Typically, there are too many stairs for a portable ramp, and stair lifts would ruin the villas' symmetry, beauty and architectural integrity. It doesn't appear feasible to install full elevators on the side. Also, many of the villas have limited resources.

On a long afternoon we visited the three Palladian villas described below. La Rotonda is the closest to Vicenza; though walkable from the city center, it's up a steep hill and the streets leading to it probably have wheelchair access barriers. The others are much too far to walk. The buses are inaccessible. So the only way to tour these and other villas in the Veneto is by car or accessible taxi. Careful advance planning is essential: the degree of wheelchair access varies (while none are fully accessible, some villas have completely inaccessible terrain); some villas are closed for restoration and in

winter; and each has different, and limited, days and hours of operation. Even the interior of the famous La Rotonda is open only on Wednesdays (the exterior is open most days).



**Villa Pojana, near  
Vicenza, with ramp taxi.**

Serlio (1475-1554), this double arch/double column or pillar arrangement was further developed by Palladio in his Basilica in Vicenza (see above). The oculi afford natural light as well as being decorative.

The ground is flat, with hard paths that have gravel in some areas. Wheeling around is easy because the gravel is compacted. With 10-12 stairs, the entrance ordinarily is inaccessible. Serendipitously, several workmen were there; our taxi driver enlisted them and together they carried Howard upstairs in his wheelchair. The stairway is wide, so this was not difficult. The floor plan is open and symmetrical, with rooms aligned to maximize natural light and countryside views. The rooms are perfectly scaled and have well-preserved frescoes with scenes from Roman mythology and history. Seeing the graceful interior was an unexpected treat for Howard. Major restoration is underway on the grounds and outbuildings, so future visitors are likely to be rewarded with even more to see.

Phone/fax            +39-0444-898-554.            [Cpojana@tin.it](mailto:Cpojana@tin.it)            or  
[biblioteca.pojana@libero.it](mailto:biblioteca.pojana@libero.it).

**La Rotonda.** Considered Palladio's finest villa, this beautifully proportioned neoclassical masterpiece has inspired buildings in Europe and America for centuries. La Rotonda is on a lush hilltop with a gorgeous 360-degree view of the surrounding countryside. It appears to grow organically out of the hilltop but, paradoxically, is rigorously geometric, perfectly symmetrical and precisely, mathematically proportioned. It is grand and stately but not showy or overpowering. Michele enjoyed the panoramic view from the central-plan interior but, like many people, found the frescoes, friezes and other decoration (added long after the building's completion and not designed by Palladio) too ornate and not in keeping with the architecture. Howard remained outside and looked at the building from all sides and every angle. We both enjoyed our visit very much.

The grounds are up a steep hill with a rocky path; the top is mostly level but has gravel paths that are soft in some places. Michele assisted Howard in a few areas; a manual wheelchair user would require more assistance. The entrance stairways at each of the four sides have approximately 19 stairs. They

are wide, so there is enough space for someone in a wheelchair to be carried by several people if she were determined to see the interior.

**[Villa Saraceno](#)**. Located in the village of Finale di Agugliano. One of Palladio's earliest commissions and the simplest of the three villas we visited, this was Michele's favorite because of its informality, small scale and clean lines. It was bought and restored by a British nonprofit organization and is available to rent as a vacation home for up to 16 people.

As at **[Villa Pojana](#)**, the ground is flat, with hard paths that have gravel in some areas. The gravel is compacted, so wheeling around the front of the building is easy. To see the rear Howard rolled across uneven grass; this would be difficult for someone in a manual wheelchair. The entrance has around 10 stairs, so Howard didn't go inside. The stairway is quite wide.

**[The Landmark Trust](#)** is the nonprofit that owns and operates vacation rentals at Villa Saraceno and other historic buildings, primarily in the UK but also in Italy and the US. Its representative in Italy, who resides at Villa Saraceno, is Lorella Graham. Phone/fax +39-0444-891-371; **[lgraham@libero.it](mailto:lgraham@libero.it)**. The Landmark Trust USA, 707 Kipling Road, Dummerston, Vermont 05301. Phone 802-254-6868. **[www.LandmarkTrust.co.uk](http://www.LandmarkTrust.co.uk)**.

### **[Vicenza - Restaurants](#)**

Vicenza's delicious regional cuisine is varied, fresh, sophisticated, flavorful, balanced and, with a few exceptions, relatively light. Polenta is a staple and there is also a large variety of wonderful pasta. We enjoyed calf's liver Venetian style with onions and polenta (*fegato alla Veneziana*) and roast duck and veal. Salt cod Vicenza style (*baccala alla Vicentina*), cooked in milk and spices, was well prepared but an acquired taste we did not acquire. We ate breakfast at several cafes; each had mouth-watering pastries - delicate and not too sweet - and smooth, rich espresso. Service everywhere was friendly, attentive and knowledgeable, and prices were reasonable. Howard didn't look for accessible bathrooms at any cafes or restaurants, and Michele didn't notice any. The city center is small and our hotel was central; all of the restaurants were less than ten minutes from the hotel.

**[antico ristorante Agli Schioppi](#)**. Everything was delicious at this restaurant that blends Vicenzan tradition with thoughtful innovation. The *fegato alla Veneziana* was especially good. There is one four-inch step at the entrance. Phone/fax +39-0444-543-701. Contra piazza del Castello, 26. **[www.RistoranteAgliSchioppi.com](http://www.RistoranteAgliSchioppi.com)**; **[info@RistoranteAgliSchioppi.com](mailto:info@RistoranteAgliSchioppi.com)**.

**[al Pestello](#)**. Each of the three meals we ate here was memorable. The light, deeply flavorful pastas - gnocchi with bright green nettle sauce, chestnut gnocchi, thick spaghetti with seafood, and the Vicenzan specialty thick spaghetti with a light duck sauce (*bigoli con l'anatra*) - were among the best pastas we've ever tasted anywhere! *Fegato alla Veneziana* and steak were also superb. The menu is in Vicenzan dialect and the proprietor was proud to translate. The knowledgeable proprietor was eager to introduce us to the excellent, fairly priced regional wines. The atmosphere was warm, with shelves of art books everywhere and classical music playing in the background. For us, the food, service and atmosphere at this place epitomized the unpretentious, easy sophistication of Vicenza. There is one three-inch step at the entrance.

Phone/fax +39-0444-323-721. Contra S. Stefano, 3 (near the Palladio Center and Museum). [Al-Pestello@libero.it](mailto:Al-Pestello@libero.it).

[Righetti](#). This lively "self-service" restaurant is always packed with Vicenzans having a good time, and for good reason. Fish, chicken and steaks, grilled over wood, are tasty, fresh and unbelievably cheap. Try the delicious polenta cake for dessert. Although technically a self-service restaurant, attentive high-energy staff members are always on hand to help. There is one four-inch step at the entrance. Closed weekends. Phone +39-0444-543-135. Piazza Duomo, 3.

[ristorante Tre Visi](#). Delicious roast duck and other poultry, fish and meat. *Bigoli con l'anatra* was simple and flavorful. Excellent desserts. More expensive than the other places, but still a fair value. There is a ramped entrance adjacent to the main entrance. The inviting outdoor seating area is level. Phone/fax +39-0444-324-868. Corso Palladio, 25.

### [Vicenza - Information](#)

Vicenza has informative tourism websites with extensive English language sections. Some offices and websites are operated by the city (the Comune di Vicenza) and others are regional. They responded to our emails promptly with useful information, and also sent excellent written brochures including a list of villas and their locations, hours, etc. The employees were knowledgeable about wheelchair access.

The regional IAT Vicenza was especially helpful. [www.Provincia.Vicenza.it](http://www.Provincia.Vicenza.it); [iat.vicenza2@provincia.vicenza.it](mailto:iat.vicenza2@provincia.vicenza.it). Phone +39-0444-544-122. Fax +39-0444-325-001.

Official town tourist information: [www.Comune.Vicenza.it](http://www.Comune.Vicenza.it). Phone +39+0444-222-169. Fax +39-0444-221-378. Contrà delle Morette, 17 - 36100 Vicenza.

[Centro Informazioni Handicap](#). Phone +39-0444-320-777. Via della Rotonda, 58.

[www.Vicenzae.org](http://www.Vicenzae.org) has a wealth of general tourist information and extensive information about Palladian buildings.

[Northeast Italy](#) is a well-written, insightful and thorough travel guide to Vicenza, the Veneto, Venice and the Dolomites. By Dana Facaros and Michael Pauls; 2004; published by [Cadogan Guides](#); [www.CadoganGuides.com](http://www.CadoganGuides.com); ISBN 1-86011-150-5.

[Palladio - Architect Between the Renaissance and Baroque - The Complete Buildings](#), available in softcover, has beautiful photographs, comprehensive plans and insightful analyses of all of Palladio's works. By Paolo Marton, Manfred Wundram and Thomas Pape; 2004; published by [Taschen](#); [www.Taschen.com](http://www.Taschen.com); ISBN 3-8228-3200-6.

[The Palladian Ideal](#) is a hardcover coffee table book with lush photographs of selected Palladian villas and of their progeny in England, France, Germany and the U.S. By Joseph Rykwert and Roberto Schezen;

1999; published by Rizzoli International Publications; ISBN 0-8478-2158-7.

## VIII. VERONA AND VENICE - DAY TRIPS

We spent only one day each in Venice and Verona, so our information is limited. Venice and Verona are fascinating, historically important, gorgeous, colorful, dazzling and charming; we admire them greatly and would like very much to spend more time there in a future trip. It is almost impossible to describe Venice!

In addition to our interest in Palladian architecture, we chose Vicenza as our base in the region because of its centrality, very good wheelchair access in general, and reasonable prices. We found an ideally located hotel in Vicenza that appeared to, and in fact does, have excellent wheelchair access. Finally, because we would be staying in bustling Florence and Rome later in our trip, Vicenza's serenity and compactness were very appealing.

### [Venice Access](#)

Comprising landfill and islands, and surrounded by canals, Venice poses unique challenges to people in wheelchairs and to civic and private efforts to provide access. Given this fact, we were impressed by those efforts. However, in choosing Venice and planning a trip there, you must be realistic and realize that access in Venice is more difficult than in other major Italian cities. We didn't spend much planning for Venice because we were only there for a day and came with the attitude that we'd be happy to see whatever we could. If you are going to stay there, careful planning, realistic expectations and steadfast patience are essential.

The tourist office at the train station has a map of accessible routes, including bridges with lifts. They gave us a key to operate the bridges and a survey to fill out about our experience. But we spent most of our time around [St. Mark's Square \(Piazza San Marco\)](#) and didn't find any bridges with lifts, so we can't report on them.

The entrance to [St. Mark's Basilica](#) is easily accessible, as are most of the interior areas. [The Doge's Palace \(Palazzo Ducale\)](#) is easily accessible, with ramps on the ground floor and a large elevator. St. Mark's Basilica and the Doge's Palace are extraordinary, magnificent, unique and not to be missed!

The public bathrooms we found that were designated accessible were smaller than those in other major Italian cities; Howard fit into one but not several others.

The waterbuses serving most areas of Venice are accessible, but navigating them in a wheelchair requires careful attention and intrepid timing. The waterbuses are boarded via floating bridges, and the ramp from land to the bridge typically is moderately steep, depending on how many people are on the floating bridge. Howard was able to negotiate the ramps unassisted but most manual wheelchair users would require moderate assistance. The employees tie the boats close to the floating bridge, so there is no horizontal gap. The difficulty for wheelchair users lies in the potential vertical gap: fellow passengers rush on and off the boats and if there are too many or too few people on the boat at the moment you enter or exit, the boat will be lower or



higher than the bridge. We tried to get the employees to stop the flow of passengers when the boat was exactly level with the bridge; this was sometimes successful but often not, in which case Howard was the last one on or off and the employees had to lift his wheelchair over the vertical gap.

**[Venice Information.](#)** The Comune (city government) of Venice has an informative tourism website with a detailed access information section in English that was recently expanded and improved significantly.

**[Informahandicap](http://www.comune.venezia.it/handicap/turismo_eng.asp)** **[http://www.comune.venezia.it/handicap/turismo\\_eng.asp](http://www.comune.venezia.it/handicap/turismo_eng.asp)**. **[informahandicap@comune.venezia.it](mailto:informahandicap@comune.venezia.it)**. Phones +39-041-274-6144 or +39-041-534-1700. Fax +39-041-534-2257. They will send maps, guides and other access information in hard copy upon request.

General Venice website: **[www.Comune.Venezia.it](http://www.comune.venezia.it)**.

### **[Verona Access](#)**

The colorful, charming and lively historic center is around a mile and a half from the main train station, and getting there requires crossing some busy streets that lack curb cuts. All the sights are in the historic center, so if you stay in Verona, we recommend staying there. The area outside the center is drab.

We visited three of the major churches. Each has distinctive architecture and beautiful paintings and was well worth seeing. Each one has very good access and is without significant barriers.

A steep cobblestone perimeter surrounds the well-preserved **[Roman Arena](#)**; accessing the Arena entrance requires going down the cobblestones. Manual wheelchair users will require significant assistance. The bottom level of the internal walkway in the Arena is accessible, but the performance space in the center and the seating area (cavea) are not.

We couldn't find an accessible public bathroom in Verona, but a gelateria/restaurant near the Roman Arena had a large, clean, well designed one and the employees cheerfully allowed Howard to use it more than once.

**[Verona Hotels.](#)** In planning our trip we had difficulty finding accessible hotels in Verona.

**[Hotel Firenze](#)**, a Best Western hotel, told us it has an accessible room with a roll-in shower and grab bars near the toilet and shower. Room size is 140 square feet, and the bathroom is 43 square feet. The elevator door is 31¼" (78 cm) wide, and the elevator is 32" (80 cm) by 48" (120 cm). **[Hotel Firenze](#)**. Corso Porta Nuova, 88. Phone +39-045-801-11510. Fax +39-045-803-0374. **[firenze.vr@BestWestern.it](mailto:firenze.vr@BestWestern.it)**.

While in Verona we strolled by **[Hotel Firenze](#)**. It's in a drab 1960's or 1970's building on a drab busy street that connects the train station to the historic center. Although a bit less than a mile from the beginning of the historic center, it wouldn't have been fun (though probably not dangerous either) to stroll back there from the historic center at night. And the prices were surprisingly high for the location and room size. We were glad we had decided not to stay there.

[Hotel Victoria](#) told us it has two accessible rooms with roll-in showers and grab bars near the toilet and shower. We were told the room size is 269 square feet and the bathroom is 75 square feet. The toilet is 19¾" (50 cm) high and the shower is 31½" (79 cm) square. There is an elevator from the garage with a door 32" (80 cm) wide, and another elevator from the lobby with a door only 26¼" (67 cm) wide. [Hotel Victoria](#). Via Adua, 8. Phone +39-045-590-566. Fax +39-045-590-155. [www.HotelVictoria.it](http://www.HotelVictoria.it). [Victoria@HotelVictoria.it](mailto:Victoria@HotelVictoria.it).

[Hotel Victoria](#) is well located in the heart of the historic center near the Roman Arena. We didn't look at it when we were in Verona but from the website photographs it appears luxurious. It's expensive: we were quoted a price of 290 Euros, and the hotel would come down only to 270 Euros.

[Verona Information](#). The Province of Verona has an informative tourism website with an English section, but it doesn't contain access information. They will send maps, guides and wheelchair access information in hard copy upon request. [www.Tourism.Verona.it](http://www.Tourism.Verona.it). [info@tourism.verona.it](mailto:info@tourism.verona.it).

## IX. FLORENCE

### [Florence - General](#)

Almost everything you need to know about access in Florence, and many things you will be delighted to learn about Florentine history, culture, art and architecture, are found in [The Accessible Guide to Florence](#) by Cornelia Danielson. Ms. Danielson, an American who's lived in Florence for many years, has a Ph.D. in architectural history and is the founder of [Barrier Free Travel](#), a nonprofit organization dedicated to access and accessible tourism in Florence. She promotes access in Florence and throughout Tuscany tirelessly and effectively. Written with the familiarity and pride of an almost native and the authority of a scholar, the guide is extraordinarily thorough, detailed and well researched.

[The Accessible Guide to Florence](#). By Cornelia Danielson; 2004; ISBN 1-4134-5730-4; published by Xlibris; [www.Xlibris.com](http://www.Xlibris.com); 1-888-795-4274.

Ms. Danielson also provides accessible travel services for a reasonable fee on an individual basis for travelers with disabilities, ranging from designing itineraries to tours to equipment rental.

[Barrier Free Travel Services](#). Phone/Fax +39-055-23-36-128. Via Benedetto da Foiano, 19; 50125 - Firenze - Italia. [www.BFTServices.it](http://www.BFTServices.it); [info@bftservices.it](mailto:info@bftservices.it)

### [Florence - Lodging](#)

[Palazzo Belfiore](#). Via dei Velluti, 8. Phone +39-055-611-115. Fax +39-055-605-603. [www.PalazzoBelfiore.it](http://www.PalazzoBelfiore.it) or [www.ResidenceBelfiore.it](http://www.ResidenceBelfiore.it); [belfiore@dada.it](mailto:belfiore@dada.it).

We've stayed twice at [Palazzo Belfiore](#), a charming Renaissance palazzo located in the Oltrarno, the area across the Arno River from the main part of Florence. The location is perfect, near elegant antique stores and

palaces; traditional Florentine artisans such as a violinmaker, a gilded picture frame maker and a print maker; superb trattorias; and Santo Spirito church. It's in a quiet side street with ancient neighborhood character yet only a five-minute walk from the busy Ponte Vecchio and Pitti Palace. Rental is by the week and the reasonable rate is significantly less than a hotel with comparable features. The building is elegant but simple, with thick stone walls, huge windows and vaulted ceilings.

The manager is gracious, kind, helpful and charming, and has excellent recommendations for sightseeing, restaurants and stores. She's hosted many people in wheelchairs and knows how to welcome them. She speaks English well and is at Belfiore during weekdays.

Belfiore has been our only experience staying in an apartment when traveling, instead of a hotel, and it truly added an extra dimension to our trips. We've searched in vain for accessible apartment rentals in other cities and seen the results as one more frustrating example of the limited choices available to disabled people, so we feel lucky to have discovered Belfiore. We felt more connected to our surroundings than in a hotel. We made small connections with some of the neighbors. When we returned after a day of sightseeing we felt at home. With so many delicious Florentine restaurants to try and so little time, we (Michele) didn't cook much, but the small kitchen and dining room table were handy for breakfast and wine, cheese and fruit.

Apartment 2, Francesco de' Medici, is on the ground floor and very accessible for a wheelchair traveler with a companion. At nearly 600 square feet and with 16 foot vaulted ceilings, it's very spacious and open. The bed, kitchen, dining area and sofa are in a single open room; the bathroom is separate. There are two single beds that can be combined to form a king size bed and a large sofa bed that sleeps two, so four people can share this apartment comfortably. The heat and air conditioning controls are accessible, as is the refrigerator. The stove and kitchen sink are not accessible, and there is no oven. There is a good size bathroom with high toilet, adjacent transfer space, a fold-down grab bar adjacent to the toilet, a large sink and a roll-in shower. However, the fold-down shower bench is small and the shower controls are difficult to reach.

The building entrance is around a foot above street level (there is no sidewalk) and a portable wooden ramp is required to access the building. This is unavoidable because of architectural constraints, the narrowness of the street that makes it impossible to leave the ramp out and the infeasibility of having a manager available 24x7 to assist with the ramp. (Belfiore has only seven apartments.) When the manager is on duty she is eager to set and remove the ramp, but she is not there nights or weekends, so the able-bodied traveler must do it then.

Unfortunately, therefore, there doesn't seem to be a way to make Belfiore accessible to a solo wheelchair traveler. The access barriers within the apartment that would be obstacles for a solo traveler are unimportant for someone traveling with an able-bodied companion. We enthusiastically recommend Belfiore!

**[Hotel Il Guelfo Bianco](#)**. Via Cavour, 29. Phone +39-055-288-330. Fax +39-055-295-203. [www.ilguelfobianco.it](http://www.ilguelfobianco.it). [info@ilguelfobianco.it](mailto:info@ilguelfobianco.it).

We haven't stayed at Il Guelfo Bianco but heard it was accessible and checked it. It is a bright, pleasant three-star hotel centrally located on a busy street. The entrance is level with the sidewalk. An accessible double room and an accessible single room are on the ground floor. The double room is tiny. It would be possible, but very difficult, to maneuver a power wheelchair or large manual wheelchair in it, and only if some furniture were removed and the wheelchair footplates were removed. We didn't look at the single room.

### [Florence - Update on Sights](#)

The [Pazzi Chapel](#), Brunelleschi's masterpiece of proportion, harmony, contrast and austerity, located in the cloister adjacent to [Santa Croce Church](#), has two high stairs. A moderately sloped wooden ramp has been placed on the stairs, so it is now accessible with moderate assistance. This beautiful space is not to be missed!

[San Lorenzo Church](#) includes Brunelleschi's magnificent [Old Sacristy](#) and the [Medici Chapels](#), which contain beautiful tombs of Medici family members by Michelangelo. All are up stairs. The church employees were kind, proud and strong; they enthusiastically offered to carry Howard in his wheelchair, and he accepted. The employees were among the most welcoming, resourceful, strong and good-natured we've ever met anywhere.

The [Old Sacristy](#) is up approximately three wide, high stairs from the area to the left of the altar, with level landing spaces between the stairs. The employees were able to get Howard into the Old Sacristy with moderate difficulty.

The [Medici Chapels](#) are more difficult to access. They usually are entered through a museum with an entrance around the block from the church, and are up a long flight of stairs. The museum has a handheld device for carrying people in wheelchairs up stairs, but Howard's wheelchair didn't fit and the device looked precarious anyway; it appeared to be an emergency evacuation device. The museum employees expressed their regret and said nothing further could be done.

Later at the church, the church employees seized the initiative and carried Howard in his wheelchair up several high stairs to the lower chapel, Michelangelo's [New Sacristy](#). This was difficult, as the doorway was narrow and there was no landing on which to pause, but the employees were determined and cheerful. One of them spoke English rather well and was impressively learned about Michelangelo and the Medicis; he gave us a fascinating lesson about the tombs and the chapel. The church is higher than the museum, which is why there are fewer stairs to the chapels from the church than from the museum. The upper chapel, the [Capella dei Principi](#), is up a narrow flight of stairs from the lower chapel; it appears impossible to carry someone in a wheelchair up them.

### [Florence - Terrace Cafe at La Rinascente Department Store](#)

This cafe has an exhilarating view of Florence, and the bright, open atmosphere is welcome after spending time in the crowded Florentine streets. Serving gelato, dessert and a few sandwiches, its tables turn quickly, so eat slowly if you want to linger. Take the main elevator to the fourth floor. Go toward the stairway leading to the terrace cafe. Near the stairway is an

enclosed lift going from the fourth floor to the cafe. To call the lift, and to use it, hold the button down continuously. Be careful exiting the lift because the exit is close to the top of the stairwell. The fourth floor has a medium size accessible bathroom.

### [Florence Airport - Beware](#)

This tiny airport close to Florence can accommodate only small aircraft and has intra-European flights but not direct flights to the U.S. We flew out of this airport once and would never do it again. There are no boarding gates; boarding is by stairs or a movable lift. The ground crew is poorly trained and inexperienced in dealing with people who use wheelchairs. They insisted that Howard transfer to an aisle chair long before boarding; the aisle chair was unpadded, didn't have enough seat and shoulder belts, and almost tipped over with Howard in it. The plane was so small that Howard barely made it through the door. If you use a wheelchair, don't jeopardize your health, safety or sanity by using the Florence airport.

## X. ROME



**Roman Forum**

since 2003.

### [Rome - General](#)

See "[Rolling in Rome](#)," based on our 2003 trip, for information about Rome's terrain, wheeling around, transportation, monuments, museums, churches, the synagogue, antiquities, Ostia Antica and Hadrian's Villa. It's available on the websites where this article is published. We didn't notice significant improvements in paths of travel or other major items

### [Rome - Hotels](#)

[Albergo Santa Chiara](#). Via Santa Chiara, 21.  
[www.AlbergoSantaChiara.com](http://www.AlbergoSantaChiara.com). [stchiara@tin.it](mailto:stchiara@tin.it) Phone +39-066-872-979.  
Fax +39-066-873-144.

We highly recommend the three-star **Santa Chiara** for its ideal location, spacious guest room with two large bathrooms, excellent wheelchair access and reasonable rates. We stayed here again in 2005, and again had a great experience. See "[Rolling in Rome](#)" for a complete description of the Santa Chiara. Solo wheelchair travelers will encounter some obstacles.

We've looked at the following hotels but have not stayed there. They are worth considering.

[Hotel Cosmopolita](#). Via Santa Eufemia, 5.  
[www.HotelCosmopolita.com](http://www.HotelCosmopolita.com). [info@hotelcosmopolita.com](mailto:info@hotelcosmopolita.com). Phone  
+39-06-699-413-49. Fax +39-06-699-413-60.

This four-star hotel near Trajan's Markets, renovated in 2002, has a

steep slope at the entrance. The immediate terrain is somewhat hilly. There is a large wheelchair accessible bathroom on the ground floor. The desk clerk was friendly and helpful when Howard asked to use the bathroom. He told us the hotel has accessible guest rooms. We didn't inspect them but this hotel is worth considering for someone who wants to stay very close to the Forum and Capitoline Hill.

**[Hotel Pomezia](#)**. Via dei Chiavari, 12 and 13. Phone/fax +39-06-686-1371. **[hotelpomezia@openaccess.it](mailto:hotelpomezia@openaccess.it)** or **[hotelpomezia@libero.it](mailto:hotelpomezia@libero.it)**.

The two-star **Pomezia**, in a great location between Largo Argentina and Campo di Fiori in the heart of the historic center, has an accessible guest room with a large, well-designed accessible bathroom including a roll-in shower. The accessible room is on the ground floor; the bedroom is not large but is adequate size. The hotel and guest room are clean, basic and spartan. The people at the Pomezia were very gracious and the rate seemed inexpensive for Rome. There is one medium height step at the entrance, so assistance is required.

**[Hotel Ponte Sisto](#)**. Via dei Pettinari, 64. Phone +39-06-686-310. Fax: +39-06-683-017-12. **[www.HotelPonteSisto.com](http://www.HotelPonteSisto.com)**.

This elegant four-star hotel has a sunny, gorgeous garden and courtyard. It's centrally located near via Giulia, Campo di Fiori and the Jewish Ghetto. It has two or three accessible rooms; we saw one. It has a large, well-designed accessible bathroom including a roll-in shower. The bedroom is smaller than the one at the Santa Chiara, but is adequate size and quite charming. The elevators are large by Rome standards. There is one medium height step at the hotel entrance, so assistance is required.

### **[Rome -Transportation](#)**

**[Trambus](#)**. Trambus, operated or at least subsidized by the Comune (city government) of Rome, has wheelchair accessible vans with lifts. We took a ride from our hotel to the airport. The driver was courteous and on time. Trambus also provides transportation within Rome but availability is limited. Reservations are essential for both airport and in-city transportation. Prices are more than a regular taxi but less than a private accessible transportation service. Phone +39-06-4695-4001; Fax +39-06-4695-4457. Marco Pedroni speaks English. **[www.Trambus.com](http://www.Trambus.com)**. (The website is only in Italian.) **<http://www.romeguide.it/disabili/trambusdisabiliing.htm>** has an explanation of Trambus's accessible transportation services in English.

**[ATAC - Rome public transit agency](#)**. **[www.ATAC.roma.it](http://www.ATAC.roma.it)**

See the "Transportation" section of **["Rolling in Rome"](#)** for information about buses and private transportation services.

### **[Rome - Vatican Gardens](#)**

Unfortunately, due to natural and architectural barriers, the Vatican Gardens are not wheelchair accessible. Tours are given on a limited basis; it's necessary to make reservations far in advance. Fax +39-06-6988-5100. **[http://mv.vatican.va/3\\_EN/pages/MV\\_Home.html](http://mv.vatican.va/3_EN/pages/MV_Home.html)**.

## [Rome - Walking Tours](#)

**[Context Rome](#)**. **[www.ContextRome.com](http://www.ContextRome.com)**. A knowledgeable guide can enrich travel anywhere, but this is especially true of Rome because of its complexity, physical and historical layers, vast temporal scale, extraordinary richness and sometimes overwhelming density. The two walking tours we took with Context Rome were among the highlights of our trip. Context operates in-depth small group (six people maximum) walking tours (Context prefers the term "itineraries") of three to four hours led by English-speaking docents who live in Rome and typically have advanced degrees in art, architecture, history or urban planning. The docents aren't conventional tour guides, but specialists sharing their expertise and passion for their subjects. Context also operates in Florence, Naples and Paris. Context is dedicated to mitigating the corrosive effects of mass tourism on cities and on the tourists who visit them. Context offers a large variety of itineraries with varying degrees of wheelchair access. When signing up, provide as much information as possible about your mobility limitations and capabilities.

We took "Classical Rome" with Tom Rankin and "Roma Antica" with Sarah Yeomans. Fascinating, in-depth and interactive, these walks added a rich new dimension to our knowledge and appreciation of Rome. The route for Classical Rome was hilly but Tom mitigated the obstacles as much as possible. Part of Roma Antica involves the Palatine Hill, which is up many stairs, so Howard said goodbye at that point. (Sarah had thoughtfully rearranged the itinerary to make the Palatine Hill the last destination.) The docents' knowledge and insights were deep and broad, their passion for their subjects energizing and the pacing perfect. They were historically imaginative in evoking the times. They welcomed questions, and our fellow travelers asked well-informed ones. Context staff viewed wheelchair access as a challenge and a learning opportunity, not a burden. Context also has a well written, informative website. The customer praise on Context's website is entirely justified!

**[Context Rome](#)**. Phone +39- 06-482-0911. Fax +39-06-4543-9055.  
**[www.ContextRome.com](http://www.ContextRome.com)**. **[info@ContextRome.com](mailto:info@ContextRome.com)**.

## [Rome - Information](#)

**[www.HandyTurismo.it](http://www.HandyTurismo.it)** is the official accessible tourism website of the Comune of Rome. It's only in Italian and a bit clunky, but a useful starting point. The tourism office answers inquiries about access in Rome from Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM and by email. Their information isn't always up to date, so it's advisable to double check with the source to which they refer you. Phone +39-06-3507-5707 or +39-06-5833-2730; Fax +39-06-3507-3152. **[infohandicap@handyturismo.it](mailto:infohandicap@handyturismo.it)**.

**[Comune of Rome - Disability Services \(Ufficio Mobilita Disabili del V Dipartimento\)](#)**. Phone +39-06-6710-5387 or +39-06-6710-5393 or, only when calling from Italy, 800-015-510. Address: viale Manzoni, 16.

**[www.ContextRome.com](http://www.ContextRome.com)** has useful and interesting insights about urban trends and issues in Rome, archaeological and historical information, lesser-known places of interest, events and restaurant recommendations.

Alan Epstein, tour guide and author of the engaging **[As the Romans Do](#)**, and his wife Diane Epstein maintain an informative website with restaurant

recommendations and descriptions of museums, galleries and other places of interest. We especially liked the restaurant recommendations. This site doesn't contain access information. [www.AsTheRomansDo.com](http://www.AsTheRomansDo.com).  
[astheromansdo@mclink.it](mailto:astheromansdo@mclink.it).

Also see the information sources listed in "[Rolling in Rome.](#)"

## XI. GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT ACCESSIBLE TRAVEL

[Access-Able Travel Source](#) has an excellent database of articles and links about accessible travel to a variety of destinations. [www.Access-Able.com](http://www.Access-Able.com).

[Global Access News - Disabled Travel Network](#) has useful general information about traveling in a wheelchair, and articles and links about travel to a variety of destinations. It also publishes a superb monthly e-zine with informative and interesting tidbits and links about accessible hotels, apartments, transportation and museums. To sign up, go to the website or send an email to [clearpath@cox.net](mailto:clearpath@cox.net). (Note the new website address.)  
[www.GlobalAccessNews.com](http://www.GlobalAccessNews.com).

[Emerging Horizons](#) has links to several sources of access information about Rome and other Italian cities. Emerging Horizons publishes a print magazine with articles about accessible travel to a variety of destinations, some of which are also on the website, and also publishes a book of practical advice about accessible travel in general. [www.EmergingHorizons.com](http://www.EmergingHorizons.com).

## APPENDIX A [Hotel Wheelchair Access Questionnaire](#)

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am sorry this letter is not in Italian, but I don't understand Italian. My wife and I will arrive in [ ] on [ ] and depart on [ ]. We will stay for [ ] nights.

I use an electric wheelchair that is [[ ] centimeters ([ ] inches)] wide. [I am unable to walk at all.](#) My wife is not disabled. We would like a non-smoking room with one large bed. We have the following questions about your hotel:

1. Do you have any specially equipped (adapted) wheelchair accessible guest rooms? If not, please disregard the other questions. Thank you and we would appreciate a recommendation of hotel in the area that does have specially equipped (adapted) wheelchair accessible guest rooms.

If you do have specially equipped (adapted) wheelchair accessible guest rooms, we have the following questions. Please answer even if you are fully booked for the requested time, because we are interested in your hotel for the future.

1. Is it necessary to go up or down any stairs in order to get from the street entrance to the guest room? Does the building have an elevator?



If so, how wide is the elevator door and what are the interior dimensions of the elevator?

2. In the bathroom, is there space for a [ ] cm wide wheelchair on one side of the toilet? What is the width of the doorway into the bathroom? What is the height of the toilet? What is the size of the shower? Can a wheelchair roll into the shower? Are there grab bars near the toilet and shower?
3. Are all the doorways in the room at least 75 cm wide?
4. What is the size of the room? Does this include the bathroom?
5. Was the building renovated recently?

If you do have specially equipped (adapted) wheelchair accessible guest rooms, is the room available on the nights mentioned above? If yes, please quote a price.

Thank you very much. We can be reached at [ ]. We really appreciate any help you can provide.

Very Truly Yours

## **APPENDIX B**

### Metric Conversion Guide

One inch = 2.54 centimeters.

One centimeter = 0.3937 inches

One meter = 39.4 inches

One square meter = 10.76 square feet

One kilometer = 0.62 miles

One mile = 1.61 kilometers

One kilogram = 2.2 pounds

One hundred grams = just under ¼ pound

One pound = 0.454 kilograms (454 grams)

One liter = 0.264 gallons = 1.056 quarts

One gallon = 3.785 liters

## **APPENDIX C**

### English-To-Italian Dictionary Of Disability Access Words And Phrases

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### Vocabulary

“disabled” - DISABILE or HANDICAPPATO

“I am disabled” – SONO UNA PERSONA DISABILE

“wheelchair” - CARROZZINA or CARROZZELLA or SEDIA A ROTELLE

“I use a wheelchair” – SONO IN CARROZZINA

“I use an electric wheelchair” - USO UNA CARROZZINA ELETTRICA

“wheel” - RUOTA  
 “battery” – BATTERIA  
 “tire” – GOMMA  
 “tire tube” – CAMERA D’ARIA  
 “my wheelchair needs to be repaired” – LA MIA CARROZZINA HA BISOGNO DI ESSERE RIPARATA  
 “transfer board” - TAVOLETTA DI TRASFERIMENTO  
 “I am unable to walk” – NON CAMMINO  
 “ramp” –RAMPA or SCIVOLO or PEDANA  
 “is there a ramp?” - C’E’ UNA RAMPA?  
 “stairs” –SCALE  
 “are there stairs?” CI SONO DELLE SCALE?  
 “how many steps are there?” - QUANTI GRADINI SONO?  
 “elevator” - ASCENSORE  
 “is there an elevator?” – C’E’ UN ASCENSORE?  
 “is it necessary to climb any steps to get to the elevator?” – CI SONO DEI GRADINI PER ARRIVARE ALL’ASCENSORE?  
 “what are the elevator’s dimensions?”- QUALI SONO LE DIMENSIONI DELL’ASCENSORE ?  
 “what is the width of the doorway?” – QUAL’ E’ LA LARGEZZA DELLA PORTA?  
 “what is the height of the bed?” - QUAL’E’ L’ALTEZZA DEL LETTO?  
 “up” - SU  
 “down” - GIU'  
 “roll-in shower” - DOCCIA A PAVIMENTO  
 “accessible bathroom” - BAGNO ACCESSIBILE or SERVIZIO IGENICO ACCESSIBILE  
 “grab bars” – MANIGLIONI or CORRIMANI (hand rails)  
 “is the bathroom wheelchair accessible?” – IL BAGNO E’ ACCESSIBILE ALLE CARROZZINE?  
 “does the bathroom have a roll-in shower?” – IL BAGNO E’ CON DOCCIA A PAVIMENTO?  
 “are there grab bars in the bathroom?” – CI SONO DEI MANIGLIONI NEL BAGNO?  
 “is the bus wheelchair accessible?” – L’AUTOBUS E’ ACCESSIBILE ALLE CARROZZINE?  
 “is the train wheelchair accessible?” – IL TRENO E’ ACCESSIBILE ALLE CARROZZINE?  
 “is the van/minivan wheelchair accessible?” – IL PULMINO E’ ACCESSIBILE ALLE CARROZZINE?  
 “does the van/minivan have a ramp?” – IL PULMINO HA UNA RAMPA?  
 “does the van/minivan have a lift?” – IL PULMINO HA UN SOLLEVATORE ?  
 “the elevator/ramp/lift is broken” – L’ASCENSORE/ LA RAMPA/ IL SOLLEVATORE E’ ROTTO (or “ROTTA” depending on the gender of the noun)  
 “how far is it from [ ] to [ ]?” - QUANTO DISTA DA [ ] A [ ] ?  
 “blind” – NON VEDENTE or CIECO  
 “I am blind” – SONO CIECO or SONO UN NON VEDENTE  
 “Braille” – same word is used, pronounced “brile” (with a long “i” and silent “e” like “bile”)  
 “guide dog” –CANE GUIDA  
 “deaf” – NON UDENTE or SORDO  
 “I am deaf” – SONO SORDO or SONO UN NON UDENTE  
 “hearing impaired” – IPOUDENTE  
 “I am hearing impaired” – SONO QUASI SORDO  
 “sign language” – LINGUAGGIO DEI SORDOMUTI

“sign language interpreter” – UN INTERPRETE DEL LINGUAGGIO DEI SORDOMUTI

### [Pronunciation Guide](#)

Every letter (vowel and consonant) is pronounced in Italian. There is no silent “e” for example as there is in English  
A is always a short “a” (as in “adopt”)  
E sounds like a long “a” (as in “ate”)  
I sounds like a long “e” (as in “eat”)  
O sounds like a long “o” (as in “oats”)  
U sounds like “ou” (as in “you”)  
C has a hard sound like “k” before “o” and “a” (carrozzina) BUT BEFORE OTHER VOWELS it sounds like the “ch” in “chair” (doccia)

**Editor's note: Don't miss the following access reports by Howard & Michele Chabner. Just click on the title.**

[Paris 2003-2007 and Burgundy, Perigord \(Dordogne\) 2007](#)

[Paris Passerelles - Wheelchair Accessible Travel In Paris 2003](#)

[Paris Appendices: Hotel Wheelchair Access Questionnaire, Metric Conversion & Hotel Wheelchair Access Survey Results\)](#)

[Paris Passerelles Supplement 2005](#)

[Burgundy, Perigord \(Dordogne\) and Paris 2007](#)

**[Rome, Florence, Vicenza & Naples, Italy 2003-2006](#)**

[Rolling in Rome 2003](#)

[Vicenza, Florence & Rome 2005](#)

[2006 Navigating Naples 2006](#)

**[Spain 2004](#)**

[Barcelona](#)

[Granada](#)

[Cordoba & Seville](#)

[Toledo, Madrid, Segovia](#)

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