

South Jersey Ski Club – Madonna di Campiglio/London – 2019

The perfect European trip report could run on for many, many pages, however with limited space, I will try to be brief! When a group of 38 friendly, diverse, active, curious and hardy souls take on the wonders of Alpine/Dolomite skiing and exploring and then add a trip to the magnificent city of London into the mix, there are stories aplenty. Here you will find a few of them, and please ask the trip participants for more when you see them. Don't be surprised if they talk on for hours!

We set out from Philadelphia this year with a group ranging in age from 24 to 83! There were 2 mother/daughter pairs, several sibling and cousin groups and lots of great friends, both old and new. Everyone was very excited about our adventures to come.

After a long night and day of travel via London Heathrow to Milano Linate and a long bus ride up and up and up, all were delighted when we finally pulled into the car park of the Hotel Ideal in Madonna di Campiglio on Saturday evening. After a quick and efficient check-in, we were treated to a lovely welcome reception and delicious welcome dinner featuring a whole suckling pig! The food that evening set the standard for the week to come, and we can assure you that no one lost any weight on this trip! Despite all the lengthy travel, there were a few hardy folks who hit up the hotel bar, among them Terri C, John B., Pat and Tara C., Don B., Lisa S., Jim and Ronni R., Dale and Bianca M., Mark R., Janet D., and Samantha S.

Sunday morning dawned clear and bright, and a fun day of very spring-like skiing awaited. As per usual, the trip leaders set out with a large group to pick up rental skis and purchase ski passes. The rental process was a bit disorganized, which resulted in some slightly frayed nerves, however all were eventually on the 5 Laghi Gondola by 11:30 AM. The gorgeous views up above and the beautiful warm sunshine immediately melted away any lingering angst. Our group of Mark R., Janet D., Lisa M., Yan W., Dale and Bianca M., Renee M., Jean P., Bobbie S., Ed and Leslie P. enjoyed several long and pleasant runs before hunger set in. A leisurely mountain lunch on the deck at Refugio Viviani helped restore everyone's energy. Suzanne D., Caitlin C., Nic and Peter D'A. decided that lounging on sling chairs with Bombardinos in hand was a necessity, especially for sore knees, and smiles prevailed. Kelly W. led a small group off to Pinzolo despite it being her first time in Madonna, having no map and no clue where she was going! She proved to be a very intrepid guide, and all returned with a fun story to tell. Michael Y., Lisa S. and Pat and Tara C. were set up with lessons thanks to Dale M's intervention, and they set off to learn to master the blues under the tutelage of Timmi!

Our sunny Sunday ended with a hilarious and delicious introduction to Bombardinos outside at Bar 1947. Ava B. and Lisa M. were particularly smitten with Ava loudly exclaiming, "OMG!" after her first sip. Both had 2! After dinner, a large group headed to La Champagneria, the new and beautiful champagne bar next door to our hotel. Mary S., Renee M., Don P., Terri C., Lisa M., Thomas A., Joe H., Cheryl R. and John B. among others turned a place that did not know it was a dance club into a dance club that night!!

Monday at breakfast there were a few red eyes in the crowd, but all were up and ready to go. Mary S., Jim and Ronni P. set out for a hiking excursion organized by Rachele, our hostess. It was another beautiful day in Madonna although colder temperatures fortunately were in order. The trip leader group headed up the Spinale Gondola for Groste'. The weather proved to be anything but normal with sun, wind, more wind, hardpack windblown snow, a raging blizzard, scudding clouds revealing spectacular views and lifts that ultimately closed due to the wind. The group skied down to town and shuttled back

for lunch at Antica Folcolare Pizzeria/Ristorante. Ed and Leslie P., Bobbie S., Jean P., Terri C., Don B., Lisa M., Renee M., Yan W., Mark R., Janet D. and Jay B. joined us in devouring some amazing pizzas. Shopping expeditions followed for many, and Dale M. was able to find a perfect new jacket and one that is truly befitting of a trip leader.

Tuesday was a PERFECT day, a real 10 out of 10. The wind was gone, the sun was out, and the temps were cold enough to keep the snow in perfect condition. Our group of Ava B., Larry M., Jean P., Bobbie S., Lisa M., Yan W., Jay B., Ed and Leslie P. set out for the long but beautiful gondola trek to Pinzolo. There we met Terri C., Don B., Joe H., Cheryl R., Thomas A., John B. and Fran C. on the slopes. SJSC was well represented in that newly connected area. Highlights of the day were Fran C.'s encounter with a net fence where he ended up caught like a spider in a web and Lisa M.'s conquering of the red steeps with Bianca M. as her kind and proficient guide. Lisa proclaimed it her finest ski day ever!

Mark R. and Janet D. led a group to all the runs at Pradalago and Groste'. Suzanne D., with Caitlin C. as her encourager, had her best day of the season. She was excited to get a red under her belt! Many Bombardino toasts were shared at Suisse Bar in the main Piazza where SJSC literally took over most of the outside tables!

Wednesday was a day of challenge and a few injuries were the result. Most of us headed toward Marilleva and Folgarida, where there are many lengthy and tough red runs. The greater degree of difficulty brought a few falls, and several suffered some bruised ribs, among them Don P., Fran C. and Dale M. Lisa M. took a tumble that resulted in a very sore knee, and many thanks to Mel F. who escorted her back to Madonna di C. The dreaded No. 10 slope, with its VW size mounds divided by ice tracks, was almost a deal breaker for all upon our return trek back to Madonna, and Ed P. proclaimed that he would NEVER ski that slope again! Who can blame him?! Tara C. and Lisa S. also suffered tumbles in their class with Timmi. Lisa was hobbled by her knee and Tara's ribs were sore. However, it was amazing how effective Bombardinos, Aperol Spritz and that unlimited red and white wine at dinner proved to be at easing the pain.

Yan W. and Bianca M. took Ava B. shopping and convinced her to buy the beautiful floral ski jacket she had seen the previous day. She will make a true fashion statement wherever she goes from now on!! Ava, the jacket looks like it was made especially for you!

Our dear Italian friend and honorary relative, Stefano M., appeared just in time for dinner, and he brought an extra measure of fun to all the SJSC European trip participants who have come to know him on previous trips. He is an extremely expert skier, and many of the group, among them Fred S., Kelly W., Michael J., Jay B. and Ava B. really enjoyed their runs with him on Thursday and Friday.

Thursday was a day to take it easier and enjoy the spectacular nature surrounding us in all directions! A group of sightseers led by Lisa M., Mel F., Peter and Nic D'A., Suzanne D., Caitlin C., Mary S., Jim and Ronni P. set out for Pinzolo via the local bus. They had a lovely day of touring historic churches, shopping, tasting grappa and enjoying long and leisurely Italian lunches. A big group of skiers, led by Dale and Bianca M., headed up to Monte Spinale/Groste' where we were able to enjoy all of the scenic trails in the otherworldly beauty to be found in that area. Dale M.'s bruised ribs took him off the slopes after the morning runs, but Bianca M., Mark R., Janet D., Larry M., Ed and Leslie P., Bobbie S., Jean P. and Yan W. loved the day. Stefano M. led Ava B., Michael J. and Kelly W. down the Spinale Direttissima with its 70 % pitch! Wow!

During the day, a group consisting of Jay B., Fred S., Samantha S., Thomas A. and Fran C. found themselves on a black pitch where a "snow snake" took Fran to the ground. In the process, he lost one ski and fell on the other resulting in a large cut on his knee. Leaving a trail of blood, Fran made it to the lift base where fortunately 2 Carabinieri were waiting*. A sled ride down to town and a trip to the Trauma Clinic was to be Fran's next run. 7 stitches later he was on his feet, but his bloody socks, pants and boots were a bit the worse for wear. Thomas A. took excellent care of him by making all the necessary calls concerning insurance claims, etc. Good friends are a real treasure at such times!

The group of Dale and Bianca M., Yan W. and Michael Y., Mark R. and Janet D. enjoyed a delicious après at La Champagneria where we were visited by Thomas A., Fran C., Fred S., Lisa S., Tara C. and Don B. Tara C. told us that the lesson group had split into two parts with Michael Y. and Pat C. together and Lisa S. and Tara C. together. This division was for the betterment of all, and Tara reported that it made everything "more fun". Fun is what it all should be about!

The hotel treated us to a festive candlelit dinner of local Trentino specialties, and there was a crowd in the bar all evening. By this time in the week, everyone was a friend, and the sharing of stories made for lively conversation and many laughs! Several of the hardy partiers headed out for the Piano Bar that is anything but, however by 10:30 almost everyone else was ready for bed!

The warm weather returned with a vengeance on Friday, our last day at Madonna. It was full on Spring with all the sun, soft snow, soft breezes and afternoon slush that brings. A huge group of us headed up to Spinale/Groste' for final fun on those slopes. Michael Y. and Pat C. had progressed so well in ski school that they were able to join us. Jim P. also ventured out for his first runs of the week. Jim had been doing so much hiking all week that he felt that his hip would allow him to ski just fine, and he was right. We had a lovely morning on the lower slopes, but unfortunately the beautiful wide-open upper slopes were closed due to a particularly fierce wind. We were all so proud of Michael Y. and Pat C. as they took the long, long blues down to the valley with great control and confidence. Thanks to Timmi for all he taught them!

Stefano M. took Ava B., Larry M., Kelly W., Jay B., Don B. and Samantha S. over to Pinzolo where they found the slopes in better condition, at least for most of the day. Lisa S. and Tara C. took the Gondola up to Rifugio Boch at Groste' where they were spotted sipping Mimosas as we zipped past them. Shortly after noon, it was clear that the slush was making for some dangerous skiing. Yan W., Michael Y., Terri C., Mark R., Janet D., Peter and Nic D'A and Bianca M. decided to hit the Après Bar Tulot terrace for lunch and chatter. We ended up sitting there for almost two hours which resulted in some very sunshiny faces and chapped lips! Just about everyone once again ended the day over drinks outside in the Piazza at either Suisse Bar or Café Campiglio. That spring sunshine just felt so good! Some ventured into the food and grappa specialty shops for some last-minute purchases, and Peter D'A. was delighted to find his favorite Amaro del Capo from Calabria.

Things were a bit quieter Friday night as most headed upstairs after dinner to pack for our departure the next morning. The hotel bar did see an increase in traffic around 10 once those bags were packed and last-minute drinks could be enjoyed as accounts were settled. There were lots of toasts to an excellent ski week, but many questions about London were being asked as all turned their attention to the UK adventure ahead.

Saturday all were up early and enjoying a full breakfast spread provided by our wonderful innkeepers, Giorgio and Rachele. “Arriverderci” and “Grazie Mille” were shared all around as we thanked the waitstaff who had provided us with such great service all week. At exactly 7:15 AM we took off down and down and down to Milano Linate on a glorious spring morning. All were entranced by the scenery, the blooming shrubs, flowers and greening trees as we descended to sea level through glorious mountains.

Our flight to London was right on time, but our landing there a bit rough due to very high winds. We then had to wait in an interminable passport control line at Heathrow that had everyone feeling “hangry”!! It took over 2 ½ hours before we finally made it out to our bus into Central London. Our driver, Paul, was lovely, but his bus was too small for all our luggage. Much had to be put in the aisles. Then upon arrival at the hotel K+K George, we found a huge snafu with the rooms we had been assigned. The trip leaders had to make a few sacrifices and smooth some ruffled feathers, but in the end, everyone had a reasonably acceptable place to sleep for our three nights there.

Fortunately, the weather in London was lovely, and after yummy dinners out, drinks in the bars and a good night’s sleep, good moods once again prevailed. Everyone made the most of our two full and one-half days in London. Large groups took the Hop-On/Hop-Off busses or availed themselves of walking tours to see as many sights as possible. Lots visited the Tower of London, and others visited Kensington Palace, Hampton Court, Borough Market, Old Spitalfields Market, Brick Lane, the British Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Natural History Museum and Churchill’s Cabinet War Rooms. Jay B. and Melanie F. were lucky enough to score tickets to “Hamilton”! Several people visited the Mews at Buckingham Palace and saw the Horse Guards parade while others gasped at the prices in Harrod’s. One lucky group even spotted the Queen’s Bentley!

Everyone was entranced with the beauty of London’s parks and the birds and blooming flowers and trees to be found in those. Fish and Chips, Pints and Pies in Pubs, Indian Food, French Food, Sunday Roasts and High Tea were among the culinary treats enjoyed by the group. Many took the Tube everywhere and learning to navigate that using the Oyster Card for payment was a fun exercise for the brain. Our hotel featured a lovely little bar where many in our group could be found each evening sharing their stories of the day. There were no more complaints of any sort, and everyone thoroughly loved London and praised it as a great add-on city. Many are already planning return trips so they can see more.

Tuesday at noon we departed the hotel for Heathrow. Check-in went very smoothly for most of us, and there was plenty of time for those duty-free alcohol purchases prior to boarding. Sipsmith Gin seems to have found more than a few new fans! Abundant seatback entertainment options and films kept everyone occupied on the flight home, and before we knew it, we were on the ground in Philadelphia.

The 2019 European Trip is history now, but it was a lovely one. All had fun and many new friendships were made while older ones strengthened. We look forward to future adventures with a wonderful group of fellow snow sport and mountain lovers, travelers and most of all, friends. Great people make for a great trip! - Submitted by Bianca Mandel

*In Italy, slope rescue is done by the Carabinieri Police, who are part of the Italian Army. A 2.5 Euro charge per day that is paid when ski passes are purchased pays for this excellent service.