

# JANDALS IN THE HEEL: EXPLORING THE BOOT OF ITALY

## PART 3 OF BROOK SABIN'S BLOG SERIES OF HIS FOUR MONTH ROAD TRIP WITH CITROËN EUROPASS.

**Read part 1 [here](#)**

**Read part 2 [here](#)**

"Have you ever slept next to a live bomb?", our bed and breakfast host asked nonchalantly, with the hint of a smile.

"No!" we replied - a little alarmed we may not have read the fine print in our booking: *were we at a military museum?*

"Well, tonight's the night" she said bursting into laughter, and pointing to the towering volcano next to us. We were on 'Vulcano', a small island off the coast of Sicily; although we were meant to be more than a thousand kilometres away deep in the Balkans. That's the beauty of having a car, our plans changed at a whim and instead of being in Serbia, we were now climbing an Italian volcano.



Vulcano Island, from the crater

So, what changed? In my last blog, we were on the Croatian island of Korcula, soaking up the sun and enjoying the last of the European summer; planning to head to Serbia, Macedonia and eventually Greece. The initial part of the plan was going well; we headed south to Dubrovnik along a beautiful cliff-top drive. As soon as we started exploring the marble paved fortress, steeped in history, we had to extend our stay. We spent the mornings roaming the narrow streets connecting the elaborate maze of palaces and churches, and the afternoon enjoying the glistening Mediterranean which surrounds the city.



Dubrovnik and our DS4



Dubrovnik

From there, we headed south to Montenegro, continuing along the picturesque coastal road, lined with craggy mountains.

We drove up the biggest fjord in the Mediterranean to find Kotor, a village from the middle-ages surrounded by a gravity-defying fort that disappears into the clouds. The walk was steep, but revealed a stunning panorama on the maze-like town below.



The drive to Montenegro



In the fort, overlooking Kotor

Further south, we stayed in the 2,500 year old castle town of Ulcinj. It proudly rejects the pressures of modernisation; instead the town feels like stepping back in time, with old crumbling brick facades and a torch needed at night, because the village doesn't have any outdoor lighting.

Our next stop was meant to be Serbia, but the weather had started to turn cold and wet, so we decided to change course. We discovered southern Italy was still 27c with clear skies, despite being mid-October! So we booked an overnight car ferry across the Adriatic and landed in the Italian city of Bari.

Our decision was immediately justified, with warmer weather and calm skies. Everything about Italy is grandiose, the first town we visited off the ferry Polignano A Mare even has restaurants built into the rocks, halfway between the water and the houses perched above.



Polignano A Mare



Bottom left, a restaurant built into the rock

On the way to Sicily, we decided to drive the so called 'heel' of Italy, famed for its beautiful coastal towns dotted along the route. We came across the enormous rock pool, Grotta de le Poesia, and we were the only ones there!





Grotta de le Poesia

One of the best things about having a car is being able to take the backroads, and stumbling across surprises, like the windswept village of Rocca - a mountaintop fortress. We parked the car at the bottom, and walked up the winding village streets to the castle overlooking the lush olive groves. We had no idea Rocca existed until it appeared on the horizon!

From Rocca, we based ourselves in Tropea for a week. The seaside resort town is perched dramatically on a cliff edge overlooking a golden beach, and in the high season it is a tourist magnet. One hotel offered us 70% off because of the low season, which we accepted with glee!



Rocca



Tropea

After a week of swimming and indulgence, we headed across to Sicily and were immediately struck by the beautiful landscape; the focal point being Mount Etna towering above all else. The island is an incredible fusion of culture, cuisine and climate, and ideal to explore by car - there's simply so much to see. We spent one day swimming at a canyon of crystal clear volcanic water, the next visiting the ancient city of Modica - the so called 'chocolate capital of Sicily', where we indulged in delicacies perfected over generations.



Modica



We stumbled across one of the biggest markets in Italy, the Ottobrata festival, held on the slopes of Etna. It featured a countless array of cheeses, fresh produce, bakeries and every other calorie busting treat imaginable.

As we drove the ring-road of Sicily, we made a quick diversion to a huge volcanic cave, fashioned into a village 10,000 years ago and lived in until the 1950's.



Ottobrata Festival



Village in a large cave

We drove the car up the mighty Eryx, a 750 metre mountain that towers into the sky like a pillar, with an incredible town, Erice, perched precariously on the peak (usually in the clouds!).

Every second day, we'd punctuate our travels by finding a beach to spend the afternoon swimming, and in Sicily we were spoilt for choice.



Swimming in Sicily

Just before leaving Sicily, we decided to take a last-minute ferry to 'Vulcano' sitting off the coast of Sicily, overdue for a big eruption. The island is alive with volcanic activity, the first thing you notice when arriving by boat is the sea bubbling near the shore. That's from the volcano's vents feeding into the ocean, and you can swim through them like heated jets in a spa pool. The island also has a huge mud pool, famed for its healing power.



Vulcano's vents releasing warm water into the ocean



Mud pools on Vulcano

The highlight of our stay was climbing the crater to watch the sunset. It's an easy walk zigzagging up the side of the cone, until you reach the crater rim, where you can enjoy the stunning panoramic views back towards Sicily.



Walking the crater rim

Thankfully, the bomb didn't go off, although the locals don't seem concerned at all (one night was enough for us though!). It's now back on the road to discover what else Italy has to offer, before heading to one of the smallest countries in the world, San Marino.

We're 10-thousand kilometres in to our road trip, roughly the distance from Sydney to Delhi and already I know it will go down as the trip of a lifetime.

**BROOK SABIN DROVE A DS4, ON A FOUR MONTH TRIP AROUND EUROPE**