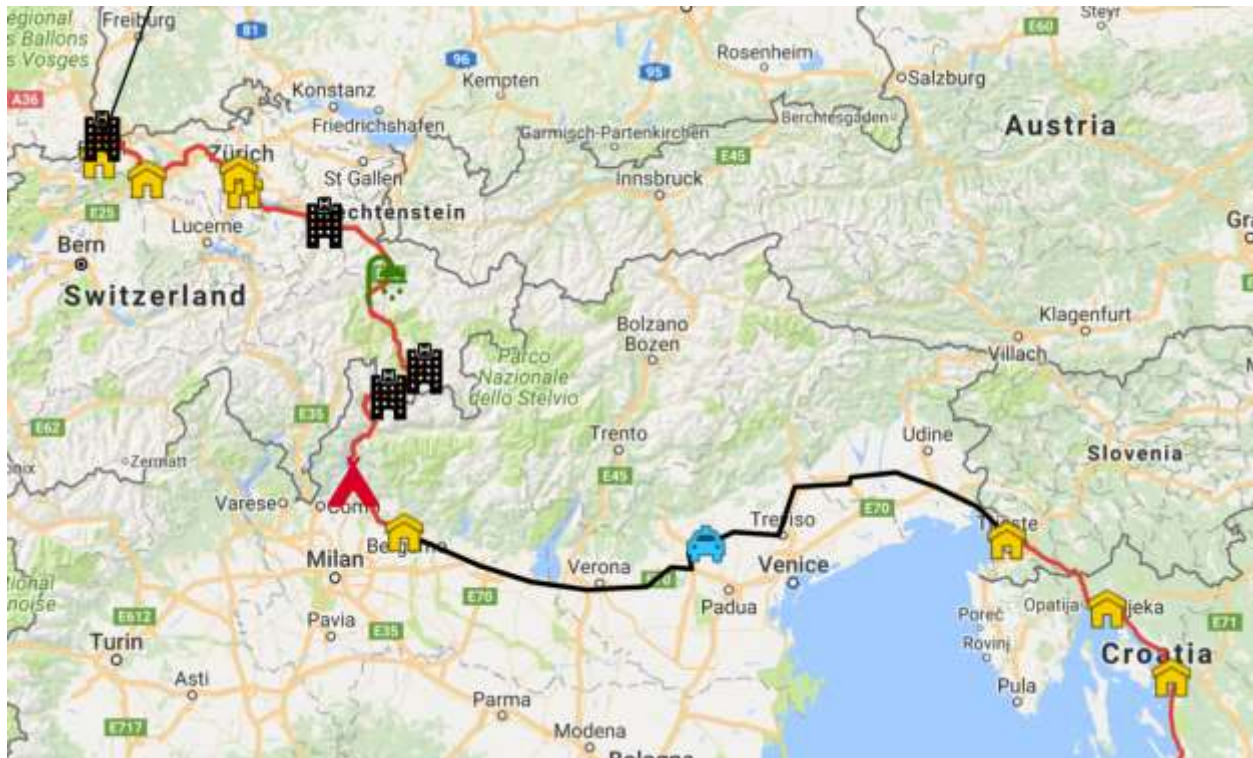


## Season 15 – Part 3. Through Italy and into Switzerland



Mo 12.12.2016, day 519. (Rijeka - Trieste, 85 km)

We were expecting a tough ride from Rijeka to Trieste, as there was quite a hill to cross between the two cities. The ride out of Rijeka was the expected nuisance, getting caught in one-way systems and big roads with lots of traffic. But we made good progress and soon we were approaching the border to Slovenia. We spent all our remaining Croatian Lira for some bread and cheese in a Lidel and then crossed the border into Slovenia. The road reached the highest point just after the border. Before descending down towards Italy, we stopped to have lunch in the grass by the roadside, basking in the glorious sunshine. The ride into Trieste was far less hassle than expected and we also arrived far sooner than expected. And so, the sun was still shining as we took a small tour of the town quickly ending up at a WiFi & coffee place. Siria's research revealed that the prices in Italy were significantly higher than in Croatia. The best deal we found was 60 Eur for a room in what seemed to be a converted office. The location was great and we could take our bikes up onto the balcony.

After some gourmet Piadine we had a bit of stroll around town enjoying the majestic architecture of Trieste.









Tu 13.12.2016, day 520. (Trieste – Bergamo, rental car, 0 km)

As we wouldn't have enough time to bike all the way to Switzerland, we were planning to pick up a rental car in Trieste and give it back in Bergamo, thereby covering about 300 km through busy and densely populated northern Italy. I headed out to the ferry terminal to check what the rental companies had to offer. I first stopped at Herz and got an offer for 170 Eur for one day rental. The only car they could offer me was a saloon. A quick look at the car was enough. We would never get all our stuff into it. The other office was Avis. They offered 90Eur for a 24h period. What a price difference! The only car they had was a VW Golf. I had a look at the boot and wondered if everything would fit. It definitely didn't look very spacious.

We decided to pick the car up at about 11 am, giving us time for a small breakfast in one of the excellent cafés along the canal and allowing plenty of time the following day to return the car. I then picked up the car and it was time to see if all our stuff would fit. When Siria first saw the size of the boot of the car she simply shook her head and laughed at me. She then started to make plans to take the train. I quickly took the front wheels off the bikes, removed one pedal to make them flatter and was very relieved to see that they just fitted inside the boot laying down. I then screwed the yoke and the wheel off the trailer it then easily fitted in on top of the two bikes. All our bags easily fitted into all the gaps. I was very chuffed and also quite relieved. To my surprise, I still remembered how to drive a car and in fact I quite enjoyed it. We drove to Bergamo via Conegliano, the town Siria's grandmother is from, taking a bit of a detour. She had never been there and was interested in having a look around. It was dark when we got to Bergamo. The cheapest place we had found was called Automatic Rooms, or A-Rooms for short. It was an interesting concept. At the front door of the little detached house in the outskirts of town we



found a note with the password for WiFi. This allowed us to check our booking confirmation that included a code to open the front door. There was not a soul inside the house, but there was a web-cam staring down at us, so doubtlessly whoever was running the place was watching our every move.

We checked good old Mr. Internet and located a highly-recommended pizzeria quite close by. The place was packed when we got there and we had to wait about 30 minutes to be seated. It looked as if we had stumbled on the most popular place in all of Bergamo!

















We 14.12.2016, day 521. (Bergamo - Lecco, 85 km)

The day didn't start too well for me. The plan was that I deposit Siria with all our bags at the top of the hill in Bergamo Alta, the ancient part of town and then bring back the car and ride back up with my unpacked bike. So up we drove and I left Siria sitting on a park bench surrounded by a huge pile of bags. I then headed back down again to give back the car. But when I arrived at the address the Avis agent in Trieste had given to me, I found that the office was no longer there. After asking around a bit and wondering what I should do, finally a very friendly chap working in an office helped me out. He called up Avis for me and found out that they had moved at the beginning of December. The new office location was in the neighbouring town, about a 20 km drive away. I was really pissed off, but didn't know what else I could do but to bite the bullet and drive out there. What was particularly annoying was that the office was relatively close to the hotel we had been staying at. What a waste of time!

It was quite a long ride back up to Bergamo Alto. The whole exercise took me 1.5 h and Siria was very worried when I finally got back to her little park bench. Bergamo Alto was very much worth the visit. Lovely little streets, ancient churches and piazzas. And even at this time of the year, it was crawling with tourists. After our sight-seeing tour, we headed off direction Lake Como, but were soon drawn into a little restaurant with a sign up for a set lunch for 10 Eur. To my delight the set lunch included a huge pile of pasta for starters, meat with veggies for seconds, a dessert and coffee and even a whole bottle of wine! The Italians definitively have style! Of course, everyone in the restaurant soon learned that we were on our way home after 1.5 years circling the world and to our surprise soon the cook, a slightly shy



but very friendly guy from Bangladesh, who spoke perfect Italian, was standing at our table. It turns out that more than 20 years ago, he left Bangladesh by bike and biked all the way through India, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and eastern Europe arriving in Switzerland 11 months later. There he completed a training course in gastronomics. Unfortunately the Swiss did not permit him to stay in Switzerland (one more story of people being kicked out of Switzerland!) and so he went to northern Italy and has lived there ever since and now has two grown up kids who are going to university in Bozen. The wonderful thing about this story is that no one in the restaurant, where he had been working for several years, had known this story and they were all completely enthralled and full of admiration for him when they found out. We of course took a lot of selfies with the whole crew of the restaurant, said our good byes and biked off.

We arrived in Como at dusk and decided to head up the lake hoping to find a place to camp. For a short stretch the ride was very unpleasant indeed, as we were forced to ride on the 6-lane highway, without any hard shoulder in the dark with cars and trucks shooting past us and even had to bike through a tunnel, again with no hard shoulder. We were very relieved when we were able to exit the highway and take the old main road along the lake shore. We soon biked past a camping site and stopped to see if it was open. At least it didn't seem closed so we biked in. The guy running the place seemed to be living on the campsite and he was very surprised to see us. He gave us a discount and so we camped for 10 Eur. After a little tour of the village, some coffee and cake and a pizza, baked by a Turkish pizzaiolo we returned to the campsite. It was quite a cold night. The worst part was the high humidity that made everything in the tent wet, including our sleeping bags. But still it kept me cosy and warm and I slept wonderfully.



























Th 15.12.2016, day 522. (Lecco - Spino, 75 km)

The tent was drenched on the inside and covered in a thick layer of frost on the outside when we got up. It was bitterly cold when we headed off and we soon stopped in a pasticheria for some goodies and also to warm up a bit. The sun soon appeared over the crests of the mountains surrounding Lake Como and we enjoyed a wonderful ride along the lake shore. It soon became clear that we would make it into Switzerland. I was a bit hesitant about crossing the border, knowing that the hotel prices would easily be double the price in Switzerland. But we were so excited about crossing the border, that we decided to go for it. The actual border crossing was then a bit of an anti-climax. There was no border as such, just a sign and a couple of offices at the roadside. I didn't even have to show my Swiss passport! The village just over the border turned out to be completely deserted and both hotels that were there were well and truly closed. Luckily we bumped into an elderly Swiss guy who looked the part with a long white beard. He very kindly telephoned around checking out the surrounding hotels and we thus learned that the only place that was open was about 5 km up the road. And so, after a ride through the dark of the night we arrived at Hotel Fancione in Spino where I spent the first night on Swiss soil since almost 18 months. We celebrated with a large Calanda beer and dug into the set and very Swiss menu of Gnocchi, veal and noodles on a mushroom sauce. Yummy!













