

# Holland America Cruise

## Aegean and Adriatic Seas

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Our cruise started in **Venice**. We flew into Venice a day early and stayed at Loconda Garffaro Hotel about a 5 to 7 minute walk from Palaza Roma. This hotel is located off the Grand Canal and down a small plaza. Hotel was the originally the owner's family home. Small hotel in a nice location, about 10 minutes from Saint Mark's Square. They do serve breakfast to you in your room and breakfast is coffee, tea, toast with butter and jam and croissants.

For cruise passengers, the hotel is a 10 minute taxi ride from Palaza Roma. Also, there is a luggage storage place at Palaza Roma for large luggage. This is a secured storage place.

We sailed on the Veendam. We had a veranda cabin which was great for the Mediterranean as the weather was perfect and views were great going through the islands.

First stop was **Dubrovnik**. Dubrovnik has an old walled city that has had some restoration done since the early 1990's. It is also on the UNESCO World Heritage site list. Really enjoyed this city. No motor vehicles within the city walls. Parts of the streets are marble. There is an old monastery and one end of the city that still houses a few monks. We did walk around the city and thru parts of the monastery. All the streets except the main one are quite narrow with shops and restaurants and little tables lining the alleyways. The old port of Dubrovnik is within the walled city so only small boats are allowed to dock there. The walled city is home to about 6000 people. There is a newer city surrounding the old one with shopping centers and more modern homes. After visiting the city we went to a restaurant out in the country. The restaurant had been a working grain mill at one time. Sits next to a small river. Lots of out door seating with a wonderful view. Our guide said the restaurant is very popular in the summer time. We had dinner here and food was good. Our servers were in native costumes. This was a nice end to our day.

Next stop was **Santorini**. When we approached Santorini the island looked like it had snow on top. As we got closer you could see this was all houses and shops. Most of Santorini is on top of the Mountains. We had an over cast day so weren't able to see much from the top of Santorini. We did visit a small winery. I had never seen grape vines growing so close to the ground. They grow them in the shape of a basket because of the winds. From the main town you had three ways to get down to the docks and that was by donkey, by tram or by foot. We used the tram. We did talk to people who did the donkey ride and their comments were - very smelly. We didn't talk to anyone who walked down. Most people used the Tram.

**Rhodes** - here we visited the Church of Our Lady which had been restored by the Knights of St. John and sits a top of Mt Filerimos which has a wonderful view of the island and sea. There were lots of peacocks at this site. Then went back down to the Rhodes Acropolis. Then on to the Old Walled city of Rhodes Town. Here we went thru the Palace of the Grand Masters - very nice. Of course after the palace tour we were free to shop or return to the ship. The old city within the walls are for pedestrians and there where lots of shops and small cafes.

**Ephesus** was one of the best sites of this cruise. Here we first went to the Virgin Mary's house which built into the side of a hill above Ephesus. We were at Ephesus for about 2 - 2 1/2 hrs. Our guide was quite knowledgeable and made the tour interesting. This site would be a challenge for anyone who has trouble walking. The path's (streets) are at slight incline down hill and the ground is broken marble slabs and stones. This day ended with a demonstration of Turkish rug weaving by hand.

**Piraeus** - here we did the tour to the ancient Corinth Canal and Corinth. The Canal was dug by hand to connect the Aegean and Adriatic Seas. Ancient city of Corinth is still in the process of being excavated, mostly funded by America. There is a small museum that has an interior court yard that has a lot of statues and other marble pieces. Near this site is a mountain that has a large fortress and castle. You can see this from the site, but access is by car to within about 2 miles, then it is on foot. Not part of the excursion. Looks impressive from the Ancient City of Corinth.

**Katakolon** - Here we went to Olympus to see the ruins. These ruins were the site of the very first Olympics. Very impressive. After seeing the ancient ruins we went to a local tavern in Katakolon. Drove right onto the beach. Had local wines, food and of course Greek music and dancing.

**Koper** - This port is the only commercial port in Slovenia. Slovenia has only 32 miles of Coastline. Koper is small and quite lovely. This is the first time Holland America had stopped at this port. The coastal area here has a lot of hotels and attracts a lot of European tourist for vacations. We visited a local winery, very nice wines; a 600 year old house with the olive oil press on the main floor and 2 rooms above for living quarters. Also saw salt flats or pans, where they make salt from the tide water. Then went to the ancient town of Piran. Dates back to Greeks and Romans and has some wonderful Venetian buildings. It is right on the sea and quite lovely.

Overall we had a wonderful cruise. Weather was sunny and between 65 to 75 degrees every day. All of the ports and sight seeing was interesting. I would go back to Venice, Rhodes, Koper and Dubrovnik again.