

Florence, or Firenze to Italians, is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. From our traveling experience, it is our favorite in Italy, not only for its timeless charm, but because the other big cities there have turned into tourist traps.

Rome is crowded, dirty and has turned into a 24-7 tourist rip-off. We couldn't even visit the Vatican, the Forum or the Colosseum without being overwhelmed by street vendors, creepy would-be guides, urchin pickpockets, phony costumed characters and non-stop commercialism. Also, all public toilets in or near the landmark buildings are pay. If you don't know the exchange rate, the surly guards will grab everything you have in your hand, whether an English pound, an American dollar or whatever.

Venice is still unique when viewed quickly, but once one goes strolling along the narrow streets or drift by the canals, one can see and smell that the city has degenerated into a glorified sewer. The famed flocks of pigeons in San Marco Square look great in photos, but in reality are dirty pests that flock and poop all over people, and fight to scarf up the expensive birdseed in a tiny paper cup sold by greedy vendors.

