

Bailliage de Bergen goes to Palermo

A visit to Grand Chapitre d'Italie – October 14th to 18th 2015

Bailliage de Bergen, Norway, wanted to visit to a Grand Chapitre abroad and had decided on Sicily and the 47th Grand Chapitre d'Italie in 2015. We were welcomed by Bailli Délégué, Dr. Roberto Zanghi and his efficient and friendly team. Three new Chaîne des Rôtisseurs members from our Bailliage were inducted by Mohamed Hammam, former inducting officer at our own Grand Chapitre last year. We strongly recommend other Bailliances follow our example.

People from Bergen like to travel. It is a part of our Norwegian culture and history to keep our partners in trade close and to make contacts over the borders. Honoring that tradition, Bailliage de Bergen has made several successful food- and wine tours over the past few years and has previously visited France on more than one occasion.

This time we wanted to try something new. A visit to a foreign Grand Chapitre has been strongly recommended, for every member of Chaîne des Rôtisseurs, so that the Chaîne can be viewed from a different perspective and new impulses gathered.

We took a close look at the Events Calendar and found that the 47th Grand Chapitre d'Italie in Palermo, Sicily, served our purpose well. We then contacted the organizing committee and quickly received a positive reply from Bailli Délégué, Dr. Roberto Zanghi and his efficient and friendly colleague, Monica di Molfetta. After publishing our plans to our members, we started recruiting.

Finally, we had eight participants on the manifest, two of which live in Paris, but with a close connection to Bergen. One of them, Peter, a Russian colleague, had decided to become a member and thought it a good idea to be inducted in Palermo. His Fiancé, Malika, accompanied him and grew a keen interest in The Chaîne during the journey. Two more members from Bergen also wanted to be inducted in Palermo. The exotic surroundings, combined with the generous reception by the Bailliage de Palermo and the fact that Mohamed Hammam, inducting officer at our own Grand Chapitre in Bergen, Norway in 2014, was going to perform the ceremony, added to the excitement.

We decided to come one day early, in order to be able to have time to let the Sicilian mood enter our minds and prepare us for the Italian experience. On Wednesday, October 13th, KLM and Alitalia brought us to Sicily without delay and we soon arrived in Palermo.

We chose not to use the official conference hotel, Villa Igia, but instead chose a small hotel in the center of the old Palermo. This gave us the opportunity to enjoy the historic buildings and museums immediately outside our reception. Our hotel, Posta, although not as grand as Villa Igia, served our purpose well. The service was very good, including generous night cups!

For our first dinner the hotel recommend a small, local restaurant close to our hotel. We enjoyed a friendly staff and food that was traditional, tasty and reasonably priced. On our way back we were served good quality oysters, from a street shop, and finished with Gelato and espresso at a small cafe. It was a good start!

The second day we met with a very sympathetic driver from Palermo who had an eight seat van. Lucky for us, he was happy to be at our disposal during our whole stay. This was very fortunate for us, as we had no trouble getting transport between the various events and places of interest. This arrangement can be highly recommended.

In the morning, we took the opportunity to see some of Palermo's famous buildings, including the magnificent Cathedral. We also visited Villa Igiea to register, enjoy a glass of Prosecco and a Frappuccino on the Terrace, before returning to our hotel to dress for the Welcome Dinner at Charleston Restaurant in Mondello. Originally, Mondello was a small fishing village near Palermo, now it is a suburb of Palermo and a wonderful beach resort with traditional seaside buildings, including the symbol of Mondello, the fantastic art nouveau building, "The Charleston".

The Charleston is also a famous beach restaurant, founded in 1967, with a tradition for gourmet experiences. It welcomed us with a glass of Spumante, tasty hors d'oeuvres, friendly staff and nicely decorated tables. The meal included wonderful fish dishes and for dessert, open cannelloni with caramelized orange zests. During dinner, heavy rain poured down and reminded us that we were in October, but fortunately the rain disappeared in time for us to return to our hotel in dry clothes.

Our third morning we reserved for another tour of Palermo, to learn more of its history. We spent the afternoon at the famous Mon Reale and were impressed by its fantastic mosaic. A wedding that took place in the church during our visit, added to the feeling of tradition. Before returning to the hotel, we tasted traditional Sicilian almond cake, espresso and grappa. We decided to have dinner at the ancient Antica Focacceria San Francesco, founded 1834. It was a busy, very fun place and the servings were generous. An experience to remember.

The main day of our visit was Saturday, and it started early. The Induction was due to take place at 9.30 a.m. Therefore, no time for a lazy morning before getting dressed and get in the taxi for Villa Igiea. The Induction Hall, decorated, with Chaîne des Rôtisseurs banners, had a wonderful view of the sea. Filled with all the new members and many others that wanted to see the ceremony, the anticipation was high!

Dr. Roberto Zanghi and Mohamed Hammam both gave informative talks, explaining the Induction process and the history of our organization. They both made sure that the ceremony went uneventfully. It was a proud moment when was able to decorate my new Bergen members with their ribbons and could hear the cheers from the Audience. I am sure our group will remember that moment with pride and joy.

Afterwards there was time for photographs and we could enjoy the beautiful Sicilian morning, before going to Mondello once more, this time to enjoy a perfect lunch at Alla Terrazza Restaurant in the famous Charleston Building. Everything, including the weather, the tables overlooking the sea and the food, was just right. The meal started with traditional Antipasti, then we were served Primi Piatti, with a beautiful Risotto as my personal favorite. Last, but not least, we had a fantastic, homemade Gelato accompanied by strong, Italian Espresso. After this magnificent lunch, our driver took us back to our hotel for a few hours rest before the Grand Diner.

The evening was beautiful and warm, just perfect for us, all dressed in Gala, when we arrived at Villa Charamonte Bordonaro. This fantastic building, from 1893, originally a private home,

made us fantasize about the life of the rich and famous in ancient Palermo. Amazed by beautifully dressed women, elegant men and live music, we were served numerous, both decorative and tasty antipasti to our tickle our taste buds before we were seated for dinner at the beautifully decorated tables. Ours was a very friendly and international one, with guests from Norway, Sweden, South Africa and Abu Dhabi. The Grand Diner included, among other dishes, traditional Couscos, Prawn Tortelli and a Swordfish Hamburger, all very decorative and tasty. After the meal, we relocated to the garden to enjoy coffee, gelato and a number of mini-desserts in the warm and pleasant evening air. Returning to the hotel, we all agreed that Sicily and Palermo had given us a Grand Chapitre to remember for many years, and that the idea of visiting a Grand Chapitre abroad had been a very good one!

A little too early on the Sunday morning, our driver picked us up and made sure we arrived safely at the airport for the final leg of our journey, back to Norway and Bergen.

Thank you Italy, Sicily and Palermo!

Vive la Chaîne!

Best regards,

Bjarte Askeland
Bailli Regional de Bergen
Norway