

THE WORLD

BY STEFANO PITRELLI

ROME — On the first day of their trip, the American tourists climbed to the top of St. Peter's dome, admiring Michelangelo's architectural marvel and its panoramic view.

On the second day, they met up with their tour group to visit ancient Roman aqueducts and enjoy a traditional pasta lunch. And in the afternoon, they listened to a man who had been abused by a Catholic priest talk them through his own personal hell.

"We came here for St. Peter and the Colosseum, but when they offered us this experience, I just wanted to go," said Joseph Purdy, 72, a retiree from Rehoboth Beach, Del.

The juxtaposition of scenic and tragic is hardly new to European tourism. As Purdy noted, "You may go to Germany for the beer and the castles, but the Holocaust did happen there, Hitler happened, so you wouldn't understand German history if you didn't take into account concentration camps, as well."

But as people begin to travel the world again for the first time since the start of the pandemic, there may be an increase in demand for the sort of tourism that involves more than stunning sites.

"This is what mass tourism has been gradually morphing into," said Vincenzo Nocifora, a professor of the sociology of tourism at Rome's Sapienza University. "I'm no longer leaving so as to just 'see' things. I'm seeking an experience. I want to go home enriched by something meaningful."

The United States has seen that instinct evident in people making pilgrimages along the new Civil Rights Trail.

U.S.-based tour operator Overseas Adventure Travel has included what it calls "controversial topics" in its programs for many years. New this year, though, was the hour devoted to "how the Vatican and the Italian authorities have handled decades of abuse allegations."

For that, the tour company flew in Francesco Zanardi, one of Italy's most vocal advocates for survivors of clerical abuse.

Zanardi, 51, lives in Savona, in northwest Italy. Starting when he was an 11-year-old altar boy, he says, he was raped by a priest at least once a week for five years.

A framed, smiling portrait of Zanardi from around that time was on display in the artist studio where he met the visiting Americans on the outskirts of Rome.

He was offered a place to sit, but he remained on his feet, constantly moving around, as he asked whether anyone knew why people like him choose to call themselves survivors.

The tourists all said no.

He talked about how too many young victims attempt suicide, about how they often develop drug or alcohol addictions.

"I used to have a problem with drugs, as well, and tried to kill myself four times," Zanardi said. "But unlike me, so many other friends didn't make it. Those who remain — they are the survivors."

Then, with a matter-of-fact delivery, he told the audience how his mother had taken her own life once she came to realize what had happened to her son. The tourists audibly gasped.

Bette Robbins, 74, kept flinching and shaking her head in solidarity, as she took in the most painful details of Zanardi's life

Taking in sights — and issues

In Rome, tourists explore ancient ruins and current topics such as church sex abuse



PHOTOS BY STEFANO PITRELLI/THE WASHINGTON POST



story.

Robbins, who spent most of her life in Seattle as a city official, said later that this was her fifth or sixth time vacationing in Italy but the first time she had met an abuse survivor.

"That I know of," she added.

She said she felt angry about the abuse Zanardi suffered, and angrier still about how neither the Vatican nor Italian prosecutors seemed to be taking the problem seriously enough.

"The public needs to be outraged," she said.

The experience of the afternoon session would stay with her, she said. "It won't go away for a long time. I won't forget this."

Not all the tourists in the group joined for the session — two had opted out, according to representatives from the tour operator.

"They just couldn't bear it," said Simona Salvatori, senior vice president of the Italian branch of Grand Circle Corporation, the parent company.

Anthony Pontorno, 66, the husband of Purdy, from Rehoboth Beach, said he was initially hesitant to go.

But he appreciated that Zanardi had "put a face to" the church abuse scandal.

"Not that we ever thought it didn't happen," Pontorno continued. "But here was this human being — it was no longer a news article."

The tourists peppered Zanardi with questions: "What does the pope say?" "Are some countries doing a better job?" "Do you go to church today?" "How are your days now?"

He answered that Pope Francis had done little to compensate victims, that Italy was a decade behind the United States in addressing the issue, that he no longer went to church but that his days were "quite normal."

"Victims are subjected to psychological, emotional and social deprivation," he said. "If they learn how to cope with those, life can move on."

At the close of the session, the tourists gave Zanardi a round of applause.

There was no time for follow-ups, since a second group was already outside, waiting for their turn.

"Have fun visiting Rome!" Zanardi said earnestly.

The tourists went back to their hotel.

Other days of their trip would include visits to the cliffs of Sorrento, the traces of Pompeii and the volcano at Mount Etna. They would also discuss the Italian mafia while in Sicily and the murder of an investigative journalist in Malta.

But on this night, according to their schedule, there was "time for one more gelato before bed."

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Bette Robbins, 74, of Metamora, Ill., follows her group of fellow tourists at Rome's Parco degli Acquedotti, or Park of the Aqueducts. The group, seen resting next to an ancient Roman aqueduct, combined traditional sightseeing with an afternoon of discussion with an Italian clerical-abuse survivor — an experience organized by the tour operator. Francesco Zanardi, 51, founder of a clerical-abuse survivors group, arrives to talk with the tourists at an artist studio in Rome.

DIGEST

IRAN IAEA chief confirms uranium metal uptick

Iran continues to produce uranium metal, which can be used in the production of a nuclear bomb, the United Nations' atomic watchdog confirmed Tuesday, in a move that further complicates the possibility of reviving a landmark 2015 deal with world powers on Iran's nuclear program.

In a report issued by the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna to member nations, Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi said his inspectors had confirmed that Iran had produced 200 grams of uranium metal enriched up to 20 percent. Grossi had reported in February that his inspectors had confirmed that a small amount of uranium metal, 3.6 grams, had been produced at Iran's Isfahan plant.

The production of uranium metal is prohibited under the nuclear deal, which promised Iran economic incentives in exchange for limits on its nuclear program,

and was meant to prevent Tehran from developing a nuclear bomb.

The United States unilaterally pulled out of the deal in 2018, with then-President Donald Trump saying it needed to be renegotiated. Since then, Tehran has been steadily increasing its violations of the agreement.

— Associated Press

FRANCE Thousands evacuated in Riviera as fire rages

French President Emmanuel Macron said firefighters were able to "stabilize" the blaze that raced Tuesday through forests near the French Riviera, forcing thousands of people to flee homes, campgrounds and hotels in a picturesque area beloved by residents and tourists alike.

It was the latest blaze in a summer of wildfires that have swept across the Mediterranean region, leaving areas in Greece, Turkey, Italy, Algeria and Spain in smoldering ruins.

The wildfire started Monday



ALEXANDROS BELTES/EPA-EFE/SHUTTERSTOCK

Polish firefighters battle a wildfire at Mount Pateras in Greece's Western Attica region on Tuesday. Another large wildfire broke out on Monday in the densely wooded Villia area northwest of Athens, triggering an evacuation alert for eight villages.

evening about 24 miles inland from the coastal resort of Saint-Tropez. Fueled by seasonal winds coming off the Mediterranean, the fire had spread across 12,000 acres

of forest by Tuesday morning, according to the Var regional administration.

About 6,000 people were evacuated. At least 22 people

suffered from smoke inhalation or had minor fire-related injuries, officials said, and two firefighters were among the injured.

Officials warned that the fire risk would remain high through Wednesday.

— Associated Press

37 killed in Niger attack: Armed men killed 37 civilians, including 14 children, in an attack on a village in southwest Niger, according to internal security service memos and a local official. The attack occurred in a commune in the Tillabery region near the border with Mali, where Islamist militants have massacred hundreds of civilians this year. The attacks are part of a wider conflict spanning the borderlands of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger in Africa's Sahel region, where Islamist extremists are seeking to take control.

Poland yields to E.U. on judicial disciplinary chamber: Poland told the European Union that it will shut down a chamber at its Supreme Court devoted to

disciplining judges, an issue at the center of a dispute with Brussels. The Polish government said it sent a letter conveying its intent to the European Commission on Monday, the deadline for doing so. The E.U.'s top court had said that the chamber undermined judicial independence and contravened E.U. law.

Skeleton, evidence of Greek language found in Pompeii: Archaeologists in the ancient city of Pompeii have discovered a remarkably well-preserved skeleton during excavations of a tomb that also shed light on the cultural life of the city before it was destroyed by a volcanic eruption in A.D. 79. A skull bearing tufts of white hair and part of an ear was found in the tomb in the necropolis of Porta Sarno, as were bones and fabric fragments. An inscription on the tomb suggested that its owner helped organize performances in Greek in Pompeii. It was the first confirmation that Greek was used alongside Latin in ancient Rome.

— From news services