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## Lipari and Aeolian Islands September 22, 2012

Fall is just touching the air this Saturday morning, now my twentieth day of travel. The island of Lipari (leap-ah-ree) is the largest in this archipelago of nine volcanic isles off the east coast of Sicily. Lipari is a tourist village geared for serving the passenger ferries of tourists that arrive daily. The main drag in town is busy during the evening promenade, but the side street vendors and cafes have little business. Summer is June through August, and while the weather is perfect, days are still longer than night, the heat that drives swimmers to the water has diminished, the vast stretches of beach umbrellas are in process of being stored and families with school age children are not about during the day.

Hotels come to the traveler at the boat on this island and others that I have visited in the Med. As I disembarked the home owners with B and B signs line the gangway extending little signs and cards toward the traveler. My hotelier thrust his card which I accepted whereupon he followed me down the gangway rapidly pointing to his paper describing the accommodations. "Si, Si" is my reply, after which I attempt to ask the cost with my standard "tariffe" with a questioning lilt. I hear a "quartenza" in there somewhere, meaning forty something, after which we proceed.



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My host proudly escorts me up an alley off the main street lined with potted plants and hanging laundry to his family quarters. His mother Maria emerges from the sitting area with smiles and grace. While language and dialect are difficult they convey the wish to know “how many nights”? Indication of more than one and up to four brings smiles and inspection of the quarters. A clean and pleasant remodel of the old family building, with four studios above the family house and a terrace, makes the decision easy. Then the moment, “passo-porto”, asks Maria. I hate giving the document up, yet in these little places there is no paperwork, no signatures or contractual agreements, just understanding of the price secured by their possession of your passport. I have become accustomed to this process and surrender the booklet without worry.



The son now takes over a bit of negotiation on price again. To finally confirm the price I take out two twenty-euro notes, all nod in agreement. Their eyes light a bit, through gesture and rapid talk I realize they are asking for the funds now, before stay. Irregular, but so is the entire situation, so I give it up, making the moment very happy to my hosts. The younger son shows up later, he works with tourists and drives taxi, the older son perhaps forty years, appears to be the boat greeter. Maria is the true host. A small boy toddles around the alley, while an old man sits in a chair most hours and greets me with a voice filled with sharp gravel and polite words.

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Italian, I just love the language. The lilt of the word endings, the pauses and cadence when spoken by natives is almost lyrical. When making a point, whatever it may be, the speakers pause to refresh, then rattle of the point with machine gun staccato. When questioning, there are long waits with drifting consonant sounds that trail off with expectation. At the fish markets the sounds are almost argumentative as the women and vendors seemingly bark at each other, but always end with smiles and gratzia. This language is negotiating and quality control.

Travel friends, Liz and Ed, mentioned a ferry to Napoli (Naples) that left on Monday. Checking and rechecking printed material confirmed this was indeed a current schedule. Leaving on Monday evening the ship arrives the next morning, Tuesday. With my flight from Milan on Thursday, plans to get back must take firm shape. Previous intent by train to Messina, followed by long train trip up the entire Italian peninsula gave way to ferry to Naples by night.



Today then became another day of fabulous travel connections. Italian Time took over initially, everything printed informed me I would need to stay in Lipari for two more nights to make the Naples connection. Person to person with locals gave the critical info, high speed hydrofoil ferry to another Aeolian Island, Panarea, would leave in four hours. Panarea is a stopping point for the Naples ship.

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This moment now in Panarea with ticket in hand for Naples in two days, I have reached the farthest point from home. Travel towards home starts on the Naples ferry.

Salina, the volcano in the distance, continually vents a dark vapor forming a long bluish cloud trailing off into the distance on this windless day. Closer, one kilometer off, many rocky basalt towers of an ancient volcanic core jut vertically from the sea. One of the spikier ones is crested with hexagonal columns, caused by slow cooling from within, similar to Devils Postpile in Sierra Nevada or Pilot Rock in the Siskiyou. Incredibly dramatic scenes.

