

Title:

Ya Mule! Backpacking in Siena, Italy

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Summary:

Ah, the glamour of backpacking through Europe. Of course, the glamour comes with a price as I found in Siena, Italy.

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Article Body:

Ah, the glamour of backpacking through Europe. Of course, the glamour comes with a price as I found in Siena, Italy.

Siena

Siena is located an hour or so outside of Florence, Italy. My handy dandy guidebook suggested it was a side trip that just had to be made. A medieval structure located behind protective walls on the top of a hill. The central area was generally closed off to cars and it was a taste of true Italy. Who was I to argue?

As I sat on the train, I check my backpack for any excess weight. I had already discarded or sent home unnecessary items and was feeling pretty light on my feet. Next thing I knew, the train had stopped and I was standing on flat road next to a rolling hill covered in trees and homes. Siena proper was at the top.

The thing about rolling hills with lots of foliage is they are simply evil. You can never get a grasp on how far it is to the top. You keep thinking the top appears to be a few hundred feet in front of you until you reach it. Then you discover it is just a dip before another upward section. The hill up to Siena is just such a rolling hill. Throw in a road that twists all over the hill like a drunken sailor on leave, and you'll never scoff at a moped again.

Getting in touch with my inner mule, I began to climb and tame the great beast. As I trudged along, I thought of all the great people that must of walked up the same hill throughout history. As I stood in the shade panting, I thought all of

those great people probably hitched a ride instead of walking like me.

After thirty-five minutes or so, I was seriously starting to think about hitching a ride. Of course, this would mean admitting defeat. The battle between my genetic male stubbornness and "this sucks" attitude was intense. Like a mule, I kept going. Five bends, three dips that I could have sworn were the top.

Just as I was giving in...a wall. A really big wall. I passed it and suddenly was in a large parking lot area with tourist buses. Hands on knees, shirt soaking, I tried to maintain my dignity as the tourist looked at me like I was insane. Did that moron walk up here? One even took a picture!

After composing myself...err, getting my breath back, I booked a room in a little hotel. The young lady working the desk seemed hesitant, but I made some comment about it being a long way up from the valley. She started giggling and I had the room.

I showered and went looking for trouble. Well, trouble that was on a flat surface. In the town centre, I stumbled upon a small café selling Mexican beer. Being from San Diego, this was nirvana. My inner mule was quickly appeased and the hill of death forgotten.

Reflecting on my climb from a historical perspective, I learned a good lesson. It is far better to be behind the wall than trying to attack it!