We were delayed returning to the boat in September due to a hospital appointment that could not be put off, so a week later than planned we took the Ryanair flight to Trieste arriving late on Saturday evening. Looking forward to relaxing onboard with a beer we arrived at the pontoon only to find our berth occupied by a much larger boat looking nothing like Captain Ginger. A search of the marina proved fruitless so we retired to the bar for sustenance wondering where we would sleep that night. Several phone calls later, on a hammerhead at the end of the pontoon, outboard of a 55 foot yacht and looking rather dwarfed we found CG – time for another beer to celebrate!

The following morning set about cleaning and provisioning the boat ready to leave the next day. The weather had been bad for the previous two weeks with strong winds and thunderstorms but it was calm with a gentle breeze as we left on the tide to navigate our way through the shallows of the canal out to the open sea and set course for Venice. We had a good sail the first day and spent the night at Port Santo Marguarita. With bad weather again forecast we stayed a second night here and set off the next day, in the rain, to explore the seaside town of Caorle. A pleasant little spot with a lighthouse built into the church steeple but bereft of visitors and the beaches which should have been wall to wall flesh were rain lashed and deserted. In the end we took a taxi back to the boat as we couldn’t face the return journey on foot in the heavy rain.

In contrast the next day was bright and clear as we set off on the 20 mile journey to the Venice Lagoon to berth once again on the island of Certosa. The three days here were spent seeing the sights, taking a Vaporetto up the Grand Canal and doing the one thing you can do in Venice for free – watch the world go by. The queues for the main attractions are so long it can take on average 45 minutes to get to the head of the queue but we found that for €2 you can book a timed entry on the internet. This we did and walked straight into St Marks Basilica and joined the snake of visitors walking the route around the building. We paid extra to visit the museum with its wonderful mosaics, tapestries and the original four horses. We also had the advantage of being able to access the roof terrace and share with the replica horses the commanding view of the square.

Next we caught the ferry to the island of San Georgio which has a Campanile only slightly smaller than the one in St Marks Square but with no queues and cheaper! This gave a fantastic all round view with St Marks Square opposite. We were also treated to a free exhibition by Michelangelo Pistolletto based on the use of mirrors which he believes constitute an image of the world both humans and society which was fascinating.
Early on Thursday morning we caught a Vaporetto to St Marks Square, walked to the Rialto Bridge and the local market with its vast array of fresh fruit and vegetables, fish market and butchers shops. Suitably laden down and feeling pleased with ourselves we found a café and joined locals for breakfast of coffee and croissants. Back to the boat then off again to visit the islands of Murano famous for glass making, Burano for lace and Torcello a peaceful little island with an old monastery and museum. On Murano we watched a demonstration of
glass making by a “Master” (which it takes twenty years to become) and one can appreciate why the hand-made glass is expensive even at the factory shops. Sadly, the island is past its heydays and from the sea you can see many of the old furnace buildings falling into decay. On Burano we sat in the early evening sun and drank Aperol, a popular Italian digestive similar to Campari (now made by Campari) but with only 11% alcohol content. We were rather taken with this and sought a local mini market to purchase a bottle. After talking to the shopkeeper and on his suggestion, bought a bottle of the same stuff, but not branded, for half the price! It had been a long day and we were glad to return to the peace of Certosa for a meal onboard and an early night.

Sunrise is now not until 0645 so we were up at 0600 with a cock crowing in the background to make a pre-dawn start for the 50 nautical miles across the Adriatic to check into Croatia at Porec. It was a bit foggy with a flat calm sea as we made our way up the main channel passing three blocks of flats disguised as cruise ships on the way, St Mark’s Square will be busy today!

We had a good crossing, motoring for the first half then a good sail up to the harbour entrance at Porec where we moored to the Customs Quay to check in prior to going into the Marina. Drinks in the cockpit catching the last of the sun followed by a meal onboard and then a wander along the Riva to join the crowd listening to an open air pop concert. The following day was Sunday and with a forecast of thunderstorms we decided to stay put, which proved to be a wise choice!

Porec it turned out was to be our base for the next couple of days as the rain was relentless and without the sun the temperature dropped dramatically – time for winter woollies! It wasn’t time wasted though we have now planned our itinerary for the return journey by car from Monfalcone to London and booked Airbnb for our stops en-route.

Tuesday dawned bright and cheerful and we set off to continue our journey south to anchor in a pretty little bay just south of Pula. In the summer it can get crowded here with upward of a hundred boats but today there were just three of us and one of those has since left! One of the joys of cruising out of season.

Having an empty gas bottle from the last trip, the next day we went into the large marina at Veruda to have it refilled, as before the staff were pleasant and helped us tie up to pier 17 for our short stay. Then it was back out again and a nice little sail under the jib to Pula with several boats going out and even more coming in it was quite busy. The marina found us a berth and after lunch went ashore to explore the Roman Amphitheatre where they have regular concerts throughout the summer. They were setting up the arena for a concert by a Chinese orchestra the next day, so not too disappointed as we would have left by then! The old walled city was delightful in the afternoon sun and we took appropriate refreshments in a little bar in one of the many squares.

There is a wonderful fish, meat and fresh produce market in Pula and the following morning we had a very productive shopping trip stopping on the way back for coffee and croissants. Then it was time to leave and start heading north for an overnight anchorage at Vrsar but the anchorage was very small with one boat already there and a number of lobster pots taking up the remaining space. The marina was full because of a local regatta so we continued to Funtana a short way up the coast where there is a small marina and a large bay in which we anchored. We were the only boat to anchor so we were able to choose our spot away from the marina, just off the wooded shore line with a nice glutinous mud sea bed providing excellent holding – not that we needed it in perfectly calm conditions. That night we had BBQ’d fish cooked whole which were wonderful.
The next day dawned bright and sunny and as we had only sixteen miles to go to our next stop at Umag we had a lazy morning with a late breakfast before getting the anchor up at midday. The wind was light but we hoisted the sails and meandered our way through a string of islands once again heading north. We chose to pick up a mooring buoy at Umag and launched the dinghy to stretch our legs and wander along the quay stopping at a restaurant overlooking the sea to have a drink and watch the sun go down. The nights are drawing in and it quickly gets dark so the blue led solar lights on the stern of Captain Ginger were a welcome sight as we picked our way among the dark outline of boats as we rowed back.

The next morning we re-fuelled and berthed at the customs Quay to check out of Croatia before making our way to Piran in Slovenia. The wind was brisk and although it was a head wind we had a cracking sail right up to the tiny port. Checking in was a simple process before berthing on the outer wall which was quickly filling with visiting boats.

Piran is a favourite port already visited several times and we were able to take advantage of our local knowledge, having a fish dinner in a little square where you order the food through a hole in the wall and collect it when it has been freshly cooked.

The next day we got the bikes ashore and cycled along the coast to the tourist town of Portoroz where it was clearly end of the season with many places already closed for the winter.

The following day was Sunday and time to leave Slovenia for our last sail across the bay to Monfalcone where the boat will spend the winter. Again we had fair winds and a good sail, arriving early afternoon and rafting up alongside two other boats already berthed on the end of a pontoon. After a quick lunch we set about taking off the sails and running rigging, everything to be washed, dried and stowed below for the winter. It was early evening by the time we finished and still had to go into town for food shopping, fortunately no Sunday opening hours here!

Progress was good and we had promised ourselves a road trip back to Slovenia to see more of the country and in particular the Alpine region in the north. We chose the town of Bled as our destination and spent two nights in a quirky little Airbnb.
We walked up steep tree clad slopes along tracks designed only for mountain goats to reach the top of a ski slope to take in the breath taking views. Visited Bled Castle reputed to be the oldest in Slovenia with records dating back to 1011. Perched on top of a cliff, rising 130metres above Lake Bled with commanding views of the lake and countryside, it was once an administrative centre and now a museum. It overlooks the tiny island in the lake below which we visited, rowed there in a traditional wooden boat by a boatman standing in the stern. After landing we climbed the 99 steps to reach the Assumption of Mary Church and sample the traditional Bled Potica Cake in the little café.
We drove to visit the waterfall at Slap Savica, at 78m it is the highest in Slovenia, quite a climb to get there but worth it. On the way we took a wrong turning, thanks to google maps, (the navigator never makes mistakes!) and ended up on roads that passed through tiny villages in rolling countryside and gradually diminished in size until eventually it became a single gravel track! We ended up in a tiny car park and walked a mountain trail climbing every higher until we came to a point where the track forked by which time we had had enough so with aching legs we returned to the car to continue our journey to the waterfall. We had two days at Bled and on the third started to make our way back to Monfalcone, stopping at the National Park to visit the caves at Skocjan. We spent three hours there doing a guided tour of two of the caves. The largest has tunnels stretching for 15km most of them not open to the public. Our tour took us through 5km of tunnels and lasted two hours! The caves are a UNESCO World Heritage site and among the most famous underground features in the world. It was early evening by the time we emerged and continued our journey back to the Captain Ginger. The next day was Friday and time to lift the boat out of the water for the winter. Although the day started out calm by the time we lifted out the bora was gathering momentum and by afternoon we had winds of 35knots which threatened to tear our laundry from the washing line Two days of hard work cleaning, washing sails, canvas work and packing gear away below decks so that by Sunday morning we were ready to start making our way overland back to London.
The end of the sailing season......until next year!