

The Best of Venice

You don't exactly have to jump on the next plane in order to see Venice while it's still around, but scientists are warning that only a miracle—or more advanced engineering than exists today—can save one of the world's most fabled cities of art and architecture, especially in view of global warming and the possibilities of ocean levels rising 6 meters (20 ft.).

The most recent reports indicate that Venice is sinking faster than had been anticipated. The gloomiest forecast is that the encroaching waters of the Adriatic Sea could devastate Venice within this century, especially if global warming causes waters to rise even faster.

What a catastrophe that would be. Surely there is no more preposterous monument to the folly of humankind than *La Serenissima*, the Serene Republic of Venice, a fantasy city on the sea.

Once you arrive and are stunned by all the architectural wonders and riches of Venice, its vivid colors of sienna, Roman gold, and ruby peach, you may think that reports of tide damage are overblown. Once you experience your first flood and see for yourself how close the sea is to sweeping over Venice, you'll most likely change your mind.

Pollution, uncontrolled tides, and just plain old creaky age are eating away daily at the treasures of this cherished city of art. As the debate rages about how to save Venice, with no real solution in sight, the waters just keep rising.

Why did those “insane” Venetians build on such swampy islands and not on dry land, of which there was plenty centuries ago?

In an effort to flee the barbarians, Venetians left dry dock and drifted out to a flotilla of “uninhabitable” islands in the lagoon. For a long time, Venice did elude foreign armies intent on burning, looting, and plundering. Eventually, Napoleon and his forces arrived; however, the Corsican's intent was never to destroy Venice.

Foreign visitors have conquered Venice in ways most barbarian armies did not. Some 10 million people visit Venice every year—and that's only counting the visitors who actually spend the night. Since Venice is known as an expensive city and has only a limited

number of accommodations, there are countless day-trippers invading every day, all summer long. Few Venetians desire the presence of so many day-trippers, as they tend to spend little money. Some Venetian officials, to counter the presence of these nonspenders, have advocated that the city institute an admission charge.

Those who spend the night and dine in the restaurants are received with a much warmer embrace by the merchants, hoteliers, and restaurateurs. But even these big spenders are viewed with a certain disdain by Venetians, who'd rather have their city to themselves. However, high prices have forced out many locals, who've fled across the lagoon to dreary Mestre, an industrial complex launched to help boost the regional economy and make it far less dependent on tourism. Mestre, with its factories, helps keep Venice relatively industry-free, though it spews pollution across the city—hardly what the art of Venice needs.

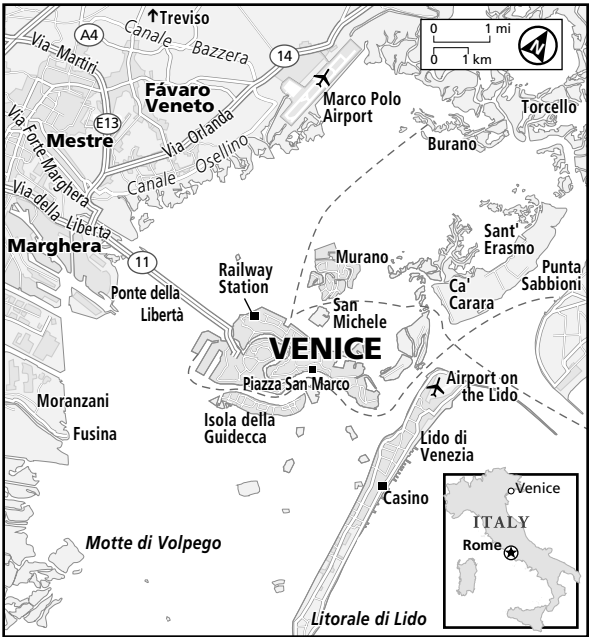
The capital of the Veneto, Venice encompasses some 466 sq. km (180 sq. miles), if Mestre, Marghera, and the islands of the lagoon are counted. Of these square kilometers, about 260 (100 sq. miles) are water. The city is built around some 117 islands or, as is often the case, “islets.” Venice is bisected by 177 canals, including its showcase artery, the *palazzo-* (palace-) flanked Grand Canal. The islands are joined together by 400 small concrete-and-iron bridges, the most important of which are the Accademia, the Degli Scalzi, and the Rialto, all spanning the Grand Canal. Venice itself is connected to the mainland by a 5km (3-mile) bridge that crosses the Venetian lagoon to Mestre.

What will you find in Venice? Unendurable crowds; dank, dark canals and even danker, claustrophobic alleys; outrageous prices; and a certain sinister quality in the decay. But you'll also find one of the most spectacular cities ever conceived.

1 Frommer's Favorite Venice Experiences

- **Riding the Grand Canal in a Gondola:** Just before sunset, order some delectable sandwiches from Harry's Bar and a bottle of chilled prosecco, then take someone you love on a gondola ride along the Grand Canal for the boat trip of a lifetime.
- **Sipping Cappuccino on Piazza San Marco:** Select a choice spot on one of the world's most famous squares, order a cappuccino, listen to the classical music, and absorb the special atmosphere of Venice.

Venice & Environs



- **Sunning on the Lido:** The world has seen better beaches, but few sights equal the parade of flesh and humanity of this fashionable beach on a hot summer day.
- **Contemplating Giorgione's *Tempest*:** If you have time to see only one painting, make it this one at the Accademia. The artist's haunting sense of oncoming menace superimposed over a bucolic setting will stay with you long after you leave Venice.
- **Trailing Titian to the High Renaissance:** Known for his technical skill, use of brilliant color, and robust style, Titian was a master of the High Renaissance. In Venice you can see some of this great painter's major works (the ones Napoleon didn't haul off to Paris) in the Accademia, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, and Santa Maria della Salute.
- **Spending a Day on Torcello:** Of all the islands in the lagoon, our favorite is Torcello, the single best day trip from Piazza San Marco. Visit to see Santa Maria Assunta, the first cathedral of Venice and home to splendid 11th- and 12th-century mosaics. But also come to explore the island, wandering around at

leisure in a place time seems to have forgotten. Follow your discoveries with a lunch of cannelloni at Locanda Cipriani, and the day is yours.

- **Making a Pub Crawl in Search of *Cicchetti*:** There's no better way to escape the tourists and mingle with locals than wandering Venice's back streets in search of local color, drink, and *cicchetti* (the local version of tapas). By the time you've made the rounds, you'll have had a great time and a full meal—everything from deep-fried mozzarella and artichoke hearts to mixed fish fries and pizza. Finish, of course, with an ice cream at a gelateria. A good place to start a pub-crawl is Campo San Bartolomeo near the Rialto Bridge—one of Venice's authentic neighborhoods.
- **Paying a Visit to the World's Greatest Outdoor Market:** When you tire of Gothic glory and High Renaissance masterpieces, head for the **Il Mercato di Rialto** (Rialto Market; p. 97). Here you can sample local life and see what the Venetians are going to have for dinner. Barges, or *mototopi*, arrive throughout the day loaded with the rich produce of the Veneto area. Somehow, blood-red oranges are bloodier here, fresh peas more tender and greener than elsewhere, and red radicchios redder. Of course, you'll get to meet all the sea creatures from the lagoon as well. Sample a pastry fresh from a hot oven at some little hole in the wall, then cap your visit at the vendors' favorite place, the **Cantina do Mori**, Calle do Mori 429 (☎ 041-5225401; p. 165), where you can belt down a glass of wine made from Tocai grapes. There's been a tavern at this site since 1462.
- **Wandering Around Dorsoduro:** Dorsoduro attracts everybody coming to see the Peggy Guggenheim Collection or the Accademia—but few stick around to explore the neighborhood in any depth. Susanna Agnelli, sister of Gianni Versace, keeps a place here, as do many wealthy industrialists who could afford to live anywhere. Yet parts are so seedy as to look haunted. The most intriguing promenade is the Zattere, running the length of the district along the Giudecca Canal.
- **Visiting the Island of the Dead:** For a Venetian, "the last gondola ride" is to **San Michele**, in a traditional funeral gondola decorated with golden angels. San Michele is a walled cemetery island shaded by massive cypresses, and there's no place quite like it. Celebrities are buried here, but so are ordinary Venetians.

Time stands still in more ways than one at this cemetery. There's no more room here; today, Venice has to send its dead to the mainland for burial. But poet Ezra Pound, who lived in Venice from 1959 until his death in 1972, made it just in time. It's reached by *vaporetto* no. 52, running from Piazza San Marco to Murano.

- **Seeing the Sun Rise on the Lagoon:** For us, there's no more enthralling experience than to get up before dawn and cross the lagoon to San Giorgio Maggiore. Architect Andrea Palladio knew exactly what he was doing when he created the church on this exact spot. The church faces Piazza San Marco and the entrance to the Grand Canal. While the tourist zillions are still asleep, waiting to overtake the city, you'll have Venice to yourself as the sun comes up. The architectural ensemble seen in the first glow of dawn, the panorama in all directions as the city awakens, ranks as one of the greatest man-made spectacles on earth.
- **Experiencing Venice at 2am:** You'll truly know the meaning of the word *spectacular* when sitting at 2am on an outdoor seat on *vaporetto* no. 1 as it circles Venice. Only the most diehard night owls will be onboard with you. With its twinkling lights and "Titian blue" skies, Venice at this time takes on an aura unique in Europe. It's very quiet at this hour (except for the sound of the *vaporetto*'s motor). Perhaps a gondola will silently glide by. The buildings themselves take on a different mood and color, looking like ghostly mansions from another time. When you get back home, this experience may be the one that lingers longer in your memory than any other.

2 Best Bets for Accommodations

See Chapter 4 for full reviews of hotels in all price ranges.

- **Best Historic Hotel:** Hemingway called it "my home in Venice," and the **Gritti Palace**, Campo Santa Maria del Giglio (☎ 041-794611), still rules supreme for those lucky enough to afford its celestial price tags. The 15th-century palazzo of a former doge opens onto the Grand Canal in the heart of Venice. It's like living in a museum, but with all the grand comforts. See p. 45.
- **Best for Value:** In a tranquil part of Venice near the Doge's Palace, **Ca' Dei Dogi**, Corte Santa Scolastica (☎ 041-2413759),

combines luxury and value at the same time, a condition you'll almost never encounter in Venice. Each individually decorated bedroom is the epitome of comfort and style. See p. 49.

- **Best-Kept Secret:** Opening onto the Grand Canal, **Locanda Vivaldi**, Riva degli Schiavoni 4152 (☎ 041-27770477), is one of the best examples of recycling in Venice: It was once the private home of composer Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741). Bedrooms are comfortably lush, and the hotel is appropriately adorned with baroque ornamentation. See p. 52.
- **Best Boutique Hotel:** Near the Accademia, **Ca' Pisani**, Dorsoduro 979A (☎ 041-24014110), a hotel of charm and grace, was originally constructed at the end of the 16th century by a Venetian nobleman. With its wide variety of bedrooms, it's a stylish address that successfully combines modern technology with tradition. See p. 59.
- **Best for a Romantic Getaway:** A one-of-a-kind hotel, the oddly named **DD724**, Dorsoduro 724 (☎ 041-2770262), near the Peggy Guggenheim Museum, is both luxurious and romantic, filled with modern art and elegant touches. It's perfect for a honeymoon, as no one will disturb you unless you need something—perhaps an intimate breakfast or a dinner reservation at an address where you'll never be found. See p. 59.
- **Best B&B:** The most patrician of the *pensioni* of Venice, **Accademia**, Fondamenta Bollani, Dorsoduro 1058 (☎ 041-5237846), is an old-fashioned villa with Victorian-era furnishings and Gothic touches. This venerated choice has long endured as a favorite of the *Room with a View* crowd; it once served as the Russian Embassy. See p. 61.

3 Best Bets for Dining

See Chapter 5 for full reviews of restaurants in all price ranges.

- **Best for Romance:** Since 1907, **Taverna la Fenice**, Campiello de la Fenice, San Marco 1939 (☎ 041-5223856), has stood near the opera house. It still lures with its old-fashioned, romantic atmosphere and its traditional, first-rate Venetian cuisine, specializing in fresh fish. See p. 71.
- **Best-Kept Secret:** Well off the beaten track, **Il Sole Sulla Vecia Cavana**, Rio Terrà SS Apostoli, Cannaregio 4624 (☎ 041-5287106), has existed in some form or other since the

medieval era. Venetians regard it as a secret address, a place to go for authentic recipes, including fresh fish and shellfish. See p. 76.

- **Best Discovery of the Year:** Near Ponte di Rialto, **L'Osteria di Santa Marina**, Campo Santa Marina 5911 (☎ 041-52852239), is rustic yet classic, serving a finely honed Venetian and traditional Italian cuisine in a cozy, warm setting. The team who runs this first-class restaurant is one of the most skilled in Venice, specializing only in deftly handled, market-fresh ingredients. See p. 76.
- **Best for Seafood:** In the San Polo district, **Osteria da Fiore**, Calle del Scaleter, San Polo 2202 (☎ 041-721308), is the maritime restaurant supreme, known for serving the freshest and best-prepared fish in Venice. Here's your chance to dig into all those mysterious fish and shellfish you've been seeing in the open-air markets: tiny green crabs eaten shell and all, sweet Adriatic prawns, you name it—if it swims, it's here. See p. 79.
- **Best Old-Fashioned Inn:** Since World War II, this Dorsoduro legend, **Locanda Montin**, Fondamenta di Borgo, Dorsoduro 1147 (☎ 041-5227151), has drawn diners as diverse as Brad Pitt and Jimmy Carter. Its take on international and Italian recipes, including fresh fish caught in the Adriatic, comes from time-tested recipes that have won repeat fans over the decades. See p. 80.
- **Best Dining in the Lagoon:** On the island of Torcello, reached by vaporetto, **Locanda Cipriani**, Piazza San Fosca 29 (☎ 041-730150), is operated by the same folks who run the legendary Harry's Bar, the most famous restaurant in Venice. This old-fashioned and remote inn is far removed from the tourist bustle of Venice. Its location is romantic and elegant, and the Venetian cuisine—so beloved by Hemingway—is a time-tested favorite. Diners sit on the outdoor terrace in summer. See p. 84.