



Venice & the Veneto

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Best Places to Stay

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Why Go?

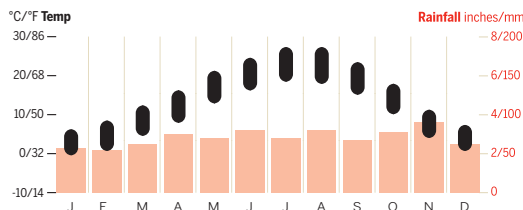
Pinch yourself, and you might expect to awaken from this dreamscape of pink palaces, teal waters and golden domes. Instead you're in Venice, and all five senses never felt so alert. Gondoliers call 'Ooooooeeee!' round canal bends, nostrils flare at fresh espresso wafting from 250-year-old cafes, mouths water at cascades of purple artichokes on Rialto market stalls, and everywhere – constantly – water gently laps at your feet.

Scan the Veneto coastline, and you might spot signs of modern life: beach resorts, malls and traffic. But look closer and you'll discover Brenta Riviera villas opening to the public, and newly restored masterpieces being unveiled: Titians and Veroneses in Venice, Palladios and Tiepolos in Vicenza, and Giottos in Padua.

This calls for a toast with bubbly local *prosecco* (type of sparkling wine) or cult wines from Valpolicella and Soave. Elsewhere in Italy, *cin-cin* (cheers) will do – but in Veneto, raise your glass to *la bea vita* (the good life).

When to Go

Venice



Jan & Feb Snow-covered gondolas, skiers on the Dolomites slopes and Carnevale parties in Venice.

Apr–Jun Canal-side dining, Vin-Italy toasts and Biennale openings (skip pricey Easter holidays).

Sep–Nov Venice Film Festival red carpets, wild duck pasta specials and palatial accommodation for less.

Navigating Venice

Although you can take a train or bus to the western edge of Venice, the only ways to navigate this city are on foot or by boat. Since 1171, the 117 islands that make up Venice have been loosely organised into six *sestieri* (districts): Cannaregio, Castello, San Marco, San Polo, Dorsoduro and Santa Croce. As you cross canals by footbridge, you may notice white signs informing you which *sestiere* you're entering. Directions to Piazza San Marco, the Rialto and Accademia are found on yellow signs – but the best adventures begin by ignoring those signs and wandering Venice's *calli* lanes.

VENETO MYTHS...& REALITIES

Verona is the home of Romeo and Juliet...never mind that they're fictional characters. Lovelorn visitors still leave notes to Juliet on the door of a Renaissance house with a balcony.

There's nothing to see in Padua...except pivotal Giotto frescoes that are the missing link between medieval and Renaissance art, rare botanical gardens planted in 1545 where the Italian Resistance was plotted in WWII, and Galileo's anatomy theatre that revolutionised scientific methods.

Everyone drinks prosecco in the Veneto...when they're not wine tasting in Valpolicella or Soave, or sampling rarely exported IGT blends at Venetian *enoteche* (wine bars) or Verona's annual VinItaly expo.

See one Palladian building and you've seen them all...other than Palladio's 24 Unesco-protected, soaring Veneto villas that raise spirits to the skies, three blinding-white Istrian stone churches with double the dazzle along Venice's Giudecca Canal, and the entire Greek metropolis inside Vicenza's Teatro Olimpico.

There's nowhere to stay the night in Venice...except for all those palaces converted to B&Bs and apartments that have become available in the decade since Venice loosened laws allowing families to open their homes to visitors.

Veneto's Best Freebies

- » **Basilica di San Marco** (p321) Where East meets West under shimmering gold mosaic domes.
- » **Verona's wine country** (p380) Free and fabulous tastings by appointment at area wineries.
- » **Burano** (p347) Surely the most colourful fishing village in the Mediterranean.
- » **Historical Vicenza** (p372) A Unesco-protected urban centre with Palladios at every turn.
- » **Venice's Ghetto** (p343) The world's original ghetto – a centre of refuge, commerce and culture.

DON'T MISS

Winter sports and summer fun are within easy reach of Venice. Skiers head for the Dolomites as soon as the snow sticks – but once it thaws, everyone hits Lido beaches.

Fast Facts

- » Population: 4.91 million
- » Area: 18,378 sq km
- » Unesco World Heritage Sites: 30, including three cities (Vicenza, Venice and Verona), Venice's lagoon and the Dolomites
- » Number of union-certified artisans in Venice alone: 2000

High-Season Hints

Don't miss Venice's Biennale and Verona's open-air opera – if only to dodge summer crowds. Broaden your accommodation and restaurant options by visiting cities on weekdays and Veneto countryside on weekends.

Resources

- » Veneto Regional Tourism (www.veneto.to) has information on what's happening around the Veneto, from dancing on the beaches to biking through the Dolomites.