

Welcome to Venice & the Veneto

Imagine the audacity of building a city of marble palaces on a lagoon – and that was only the start.

Epic Grandeur

Never was a thoroughfare so aptly named as the Grand Canal, reflecting the glories of Venetian architecture lining its banks. At the end of Venice's signature waterway, the Palazzo Ducale and Basilica di San Marco add double exclamation points. But wait until you see what's hiding in the narrow backstreets: neighbourhood churches lined with Veroneses and priceless marbles, Tiepolo's glimpses of heaven on homeless-shelter ceilings, and a single Titian painting that mysteriously lights up an entire basilica.

Venetian Feasts

Garden islands and lagoon aquaculture yield speciality produce and seafood you won't find elsewhere – all highlighted in inventive Venetian cuisine, with tantalising traces of ancient spice routes. The city knows how to put on a royal spread, as France's King Henry III once found out when faced with 1200 dishes and 200 bonbons. Today such feasts are available in miniature at happy hour, when bars mount lavish spreads of *cicheti* (Venetian tapas). Save room and time for a proper sit-down Venetian meal, with lagoon seafood to match views at canalside bistros and toasts with Veneto's signature bubbly, *prosecco*.

An Artful Lifestyle

Pity the day trippers dropped off at San Marco with a mere three hours to take in Venice. That's about enough time for one long gasp at the show-stopper that is Piazza San Marco, but not nearly enough time to see what else Venice is hiding. Stay longer in this fairy-tale city and you'll discover the pleasures of *la bea vita* (the beautiful life) that only locals know: the wake-up call of gondoliers calling 'Oooooeetee!', a morning *spritz* in a sunny *campi* (square), lunch in a crowded *bacaro* (bar) with friends and fuschia-pink sunsets that have sent centuries of artists mad.

Defying Convention

Eyeglasses, platform shoes and uncorseted dresses are outlandish Venetian fashions that critics sniffed would never be worn by respectable Europeans. Venetians are used to setting trends, whether it be with controversial artwork in the Punta della Dogana, racy operas at La Fenice or radical new art at the Biennale. On a smaller scale, this unconventional creative streak finds vibrant expression in the showrooms of local artisans where you can find custom-made red-carpet shoes, purses fashioned from silk-screened velvet and glass jewels brighter than semi-precious stones. In a world of cookie-cutter culture, Venice's originality still stands out.



Why I Love Venice

By Paula Hardy, Writer

My love of Venice begins with the lagoon in which it stands. Although often overlooked, this 550-sq-km shallow bowl is as great a marvel of engineering as San Marco's golden domes. Every palace and every person is reflected in its teal-coloured waters creating the mirage-like double image that lends the city its magical quality. Not only has it inspired the extraordinary physical fabric of the city and countless creative and technological inventions, but it also shapes the unconventional and creative spirit of all who reside here. Therein lie possibilities barely imagined in other cities.

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