

Welcome to Venice

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, Palazzo Ducale and Basilica di San Marco add double exclamation points. But wait until you see what's hiding in narrow backstreets: neighbourhood churches lined with Veroneses and priceless marbles, Tiepolo's glimpses of heaven on homeless-shelter ceilings, and a tiny Titian that mysteriously lights up an entire cathedral.

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*.

Historic Firsts

The city built on water was never afraid to attempt the impossible. When plague struck, Venice consulted its brain trust of Mediterranean doctors, who recommended a precaution that has saved untold lives since: quarantine. Under attack by Genoese rivals, Venice's Arsenale shipyards innovated the assembly line, producing a new warship every day to defeat Genoa. After Genoa backed Christopher Columbus' venture to the New World, Venice's ship-ping fortunes began to fade – but Venice wasn't about to relinquish the world stage, going on to become the launching pad for baroque music and modern opera.

Defying Convention

Eyeglasses, platform shoes and uncorseted dresses are outlandish Venetian fashions that continental critics sniffed would never be worn by respectable Europeans. When prolific Ghetto publishing houses circulated Renaissance ideas, Rome banned Venice from publishing books. The city was excommunicated for ignoring such bans – but when savvy Venice withheld tithes, Rome recanted. Venice's artistic triumphs over censorship are now displayed in the Gallerie dell'Accademia.



Why I Love Venice

By Alison Bing, Author

In Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, Venetian explorer Marco Polo describes the cities he's seen to Kublai Khan – only everywhere he describes is actually Venice. From the moment you arrive, you'll understand why. Venice floods the imagination with possibility, launching dreams like ships from its Istrian stone shores. Gothic palaces, art biennials, masquerade parties: every seemingly permanent fixture of this floating landscape is the culmination of a thousand creative efforts, anchored by a thousand years of travellers' tales. Yet the city's glories cannot be exaggerated or repeated enough; Venice makes Marco Polos of us all.

For more about our authors, see p328.