

Understand Venice & the Veneto

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High-profile scandal, unsustainable tourist numbers and a shrinking population – the lagoon city is sailing through challenging waters.

HISTORY 202

After controlling the Mediterranean for 500 years as a maritime power, Venice changed tack and conquered the world by charm.

ARCHITECTURE 215

From glittering Byzantine mosaics to postmodern palaces, the city built on water astonishes at every turn of the gondola.

THE ARTS 225

Discover how this tiny city earned an outsized international reputation for colour, sensation and subversion.

THE FRAGILE LAGOON 237

With rare wildlife and a seafood bounty, Venice's lagoon inspires international admiration – and local conservation efforts.

Venice Today

It seems that everyone wants a piece of Venice, from selfie-stick-wielding tourists and foreign entrepreneurs to avaricious politicians and the rising Adriatic Sea. As La Serenissima sails further into the 21st century, new (and revisited) challenges are stirring up some rather choppy seas. How does a city reconcile its magnetism with its fragility, its longstanding individuality with an increasingly homogenised, globalised world?

Best on Film

Pane e Tulipani (Bread & Tulips)

(2000) An AWOL housewife starts life anew in Venice.

Casanova (1976) Fellini's take on Venice's seducer with Donald Sutherland tops Lasse Halström's with Heath Ledger.

Don't Look Now (1973) A couple's demons follow them to Venice in Nicolas Roeg's taut thriller.

Casino Royale (2006) James Bond hits the Grand Canal (don't worry, that palace survived).

Best in Print

Watermark (1992) Nobel Laureate Joseph Brodsky's 17-year fascination with Venice spills onto every page.

Invisible Cities (1972) Italo Calvino imagines Marco Polo recounting his travels to Kublai Khan – yet every city he describes is Venice.

Stabat Mater (2009) Tiziano Scarpa won Italy's top literary prize for this tale based on the true story of Antonio Vivaldi's orphan-girl orchestra.

Shakespeare in Venice (2007) Alberto Toso Fei and Shaul Bassi unravel local legends intertwined with Shakespearean dramas.

Welcome to Veniceland

In 2015, a record-breaking number of visitors hit Venice over the Easter weekend, considered the official start of the tourist season. While a boon for the tourist sector, not everyone is popping the *prosecco* (sparkling wine). According to a 1988 benchmark study by Ca' Foscari University, the city can sustainably accommodate 7.5 million annual visitors, a far cry from today's near 30 million arrivals. The pressure is increasingly evident, from the overcrowding of *vaporetti* (commuter ferries) to accelerated damage to the very pylons and limestone foundations that keep Venice afloat.

It's also affecting the cost of living. When tourists are willing to pay €1000 a week to rent an apartment, renting to locals for a quarter of the price seems hardly enticing to many landlords. Soaring real estate prices have also hit the commercial sector, with a growing number of everyday businesses being forced to close down. Talk to any local long enough and chances are they'll lament the dwindling number of useful services – from shoe repairers to bakeries – not to mention the growing number of tatty souvenir shops taking their place. Many of these shops sell cheap, foreign-made products at prices Venetian artisans simply cannot match. Together, these pressures are fuelling the city proper's dwindling resident population, which has plummeted from 175,000 at the end of WWII to less than 60,000 today.

These challenges are propelling a number of grass-roots organisations – including Venessia (venessia.com), Salviamo Venezia (salviamovenetia.wordpress.com) and We Are Here Venice (www.weareherevenice.org) – to raise greater public awareness of these issues, as well as to lobby politicians to take concrete action to protect Venice's environment and heritage. Exactly what action to take remains a hotly contested issue; the ever-growing number of proposals include stricter