

# Venice – ‘La Serenissima’

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(Or me, my selfie stick and I.) by Roger Wheeler.



**MILLIONS of words** have been written by some of the world's most distinguished writers about Venice, undoubtedly one of the world's most beautiful and romantic cities, so what can I add? There are hundreds of websites and dozens of tour companies wanting to help you enjoy the place, you don't need them.

The British have had a love affair with Venice for well over 500 years, and with over 16 million tourists a year it can get quite busy. Our trip was a surprise present for my husband's 40th birthday; needless to say he was overwhelmed.



You run out of superlatives when describing Venice and none of the paintings or photos you'll have seen do the city justice, it is quite simply breathtaking. It must be like living in a picture postcard or a film set for the 270,000 residents.

There are 400 bridges, all with stunning views, which of course have to be photographed. Here you'll meet some of the hundreds of the 'selfie stick' street sellers who wave them at you constantly, they will wave them at you constantly even if you don't have a smart phone. And of course most of the weeks 500,000 tourists must take selfies, everywhere.



The Grand Canal

We flew to Venice with BA, which has four flights a day from Gatwick to the main Marco Polo Airport (the budget airlines fly to Treviso Airport 40km from the city – sometimes economy is not economic).

We were advised to take the Alilaguna water bus from the airport into the city, (€27 return) but the boats are crowded, the windows are so filthy you can't see much and the drivers not particularly friendly.

There is an excellent Aerobus service (€6), which takes you in comfort right to Piazzale Roma bus terminal in the city near Ferrovia train station. From there you can walk to your hotel or take one of the many water buses which go to every part of the city. Venice isn't big, you can walk from one side to the other in less than 30 minutes. You will of course get briefly lost, but there are signs on almost every corner directing you to San Marco via the Rialto. Get a decent guidebook with a map, we very quickly got our bearings and found our hotel but still got lost on our third day, but that is all part of its charm.

We stayed at the Ca' Nigra, a stunning 22 bedroom hotel right opposite the Ferrovia on the Grand Canal itself. A really lovely place, with the friendliest staff, particularly the two attractive young brothers who are in charge of breakfast and morning reception. The hotel is, like all the others on the Grand Canal, a beautifully restored 17th century palace, small rooms but very comfortable all red velvet with a huge Murano glass chandelier and balcony. Tell them it's a special occasion on arrival and they give you a glass of prosecco in the garden right beside the Grand Canal. A visit to Venice is always a special occasion. The only quibble was the shower, if you weigh more the 90kg you wouldn't fit in it. We paid €922 – £645 for four nights B&B through Booking.com; I asked the hotel that if we booked direct would we get a discount. After much discussion it came to about £18, so went through the agency anyway. This hotel does not have a restaurant, apart from the stylish breakfast room, but you will eat out at some of the little local restaurants. Of course if you want to stay where the Clooney's got married, at the Aman Canal Grande, you will be paying about €5,000 per night or at the new St Regis where it's a mere €9,000 per night.



St Mark's Square

Everyone has to see the Piazza San Marco (the most beautiful square in Europe according to Napoleon), St Mark's Basilica (a truly awe-inspiring building), the Doge's Palace, the Rialto Bridge, as well as all the well-publicised attractions. Don't buy anything near these sites, not even a coffee, the entire area is full of tourist shops and selfie stick sellers.

A drink at the famous Harry's Bar in St Mark's Square costs £20+ and a coffee £10; on the Grand Canal, just round the corner, a coffee is £6 but just three minutes away it's down to £2.50.

Like all major cities Venice can be expensive. Dinner at the Hotel Danielli is about £250 without wine, but if you wander into the back streets, where the restaurants are still busy, a good meal with wine can be €100/£70 for two. Avoid any restaurant with an 'all day' menu, that's strictly for tourists. The tiny narrow alleys that give Venice its charm can be just a shoulder-width wide, with the buildings going up to over six storeys.

By far the best value is a Venice Citypass, €30 for a two-day pass from the Tourist Office on the corner of St Mark's Square. You can use them on every water bus. A single costs €7 per trip and over two days we took about ten trips so it's a bargain.



Before you go, log onto [venetoinside.com](http://venetoinside.com) and get some *Skip The Line Passes* which let you walk past the queues and straight into the famous places. They cost €2 each but must be bought in advance and only online. We avoided the clichéd gondola ride: €80 for 40 minutes and €100 after 7pm, with an additional €50 for an extra 20 minutes. You can see all of Venice either on foot or on the water buses; the gondolas are the oldest tourist rip-off in the world.

Worth seeing is the Ghetto, the oldest Jewish quarter in the world, very atmospheric, and Arsenale – a beautifully restored military area just off the Grand Canal, the site of the annual Venice Biennale.

Venice is full of museums and beautiful churches all of which charge, including the Peggy Guggenheim Collection. This world-famous gallery, the most visited attraction in Italy is also on the Grand Canal. It houses a collection of modern art regarded as the most important in the western world, with Picasso, Miro, Mondrian etc, if modern art is your thing then it's a must. If, however like us this sort of art fails to excite or even interest you then save the €15 entrance fee.



Burano

Of course you have to visit the islands in the lagoon. Murano, where they have been making glass for over a thousand years is an extremely popular destination and if you must buy a piece of glass then buy it here. My advice is to take the next boat on to Burano, it's much prettier than Murano and quieter.

Back in Venice itself on the island of Guidecca you have to visit the Hilton Molina Stucky Hotel's Skyline Bar, it has the best views in the city and its free, unless you have a drink, then its not, two G&T's cost €56 – £40, but they were large gins and the view is unbelievable.

One of the most interesting things that we noticed was that hardly anyone smokes and if you prefer your men clean-shaven and without any 'body art' then Venice is the place for you, Conchita Wurst's influence hasn't reached here – yet.

Go in spring, there are fewer tourists; you will leave Venice wanting to return.

[www.venetoinside.com](http://www.venetoinside.com)

[www.hotelcanigra.com](http://www.hotelcanigra.com)

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