



### WHY GO?

**This small marine metropolis may not be the political and financial powerhouse it once was, but it still stands defiantly on its subaqua foundations as one of the most impossibly beautiful, bustling and visited places in the world.**

### WHEN TO GO

Venetian weather is fairly reliable so expect hot summers with fairly cold winters. September is usually perfect weather-wise. Hotel prices in Venice will usually all depend on what time of year you visit. There isn't any definitive answer when it comes to what constitutes low, medium and high season – indeed, many hotels will only differentiate between low and high. Generally speaking, low season is January, February (excluding the carnival period) and December (excluding Christmas and the New Year). The medium season is March (excluding Easter), July, August and November. And high season is April, May, June, September and October

### GETTING THERE

#### By air

A host of airlines fly to Venice, including some low-cost carriers to the city's two airports ([www.flightmapping.com](http://www.flightmapping.com) for routes). Marco Polo airport is 10 miles from Venice itself, whereas Venice/Treviso airport is 35 miles out, a good 40-minute bus journey at least.

#### By rail

You can also get the train into Venice from the airport. Or if the train is really your thing, you can

# Venice

We negotiated the labyrinthine canals to find out what to see and do, as well as good places to stay and eat

also travel by train all the way from London to Venice, for which you would most likely have to make two stops in Paris and Turin or Milan. Visit [www.raileurope.co.uk](http://www.raileurope.co.uk) or you can see what it costs to book your tickets separately in France ([www.voyages-sncf.com](http://www.voyages-sncf.com) and Italy [www.trenitalia.com](http://www.trenitalia.com)). Alternatively, you could travel from London to Venice by coach ([www.eurolines.co.uk](http://www.eurolines.co.uk)), though it will take you around 30 hours!

### GETTING AROUND

An island of islands, Venice has got obvious logistical limitations. However charming it is, you can at times lose your bearings. Venice is broken into different districts, or 'sestieri', but the address system can be confusing and seemingly nonsensical. It's better to try and get your bearings from landmarks, water bus stops and connecting streets.

#### By water bus

The Actv water bus, or *vaporetto* operates throughout the whole of Venice – including night buses. It's the cheapest and most practical way of getting around. A week's pass costs €50, which may seem costly, but 1, 3 or 7 day passes are more economical if you make several journeys a day (which is likely). Tickets are available at the offices in Piazzale Roma upon your arrival in Venice, some stops, or on board from the attendants. But if you're not a confident Italian-speaker, you'll have to ride your luck as not all of them speak English (visit [www.actv.it/english/home.php](http://www.actv.it/english/home.php)).

The tickets are as follows:

Single journey costs €1.50  
60-minute ticket costs €6.50  
12-hour ticket €16  
24-hour ticket €18  
36-hour ticket €23  
48-hour ticket €28  
72-hour ticket €33  
7-day ticket €50

#### Walking

Walking is a fantastic way of exploring the city, though getting lost is a strong possibility. It's a relatively small city and you can usually use the water as a point of reference. Bring a map with you. For more, see [www2.comune.venezia.it/mappacomune/indexEN.php?lang=en](http://www2.comune.venezia.it/mappacomune/indexEN.php?lang=en).

Remember to look out for the *traghetti* (ferries) which look like gondolas (without the pomp). They'll take you across the river for €0.50.

#### Taking a taxi

Water taxis are very expensive, though they are the quickest way to get around the city. However, the high cost can easily be avoided by getting water buses. If you are in a rush then the taxis are the best option. The amount of passengers and luggage can affect the price. Expect to pay an eye-watering €95 or so from Marco Polo airport to your hotel.

#### By car

Those driving to Venice can park at the city limits just after the causeway by the Piazzale Roma. Beyond this point there are no cars in Venice.

### WHAT TO SEE AND DO

#### Itinerari Segreti

[www.museicivici veneziani.it](http://www.museicivici veneziani.it)

The fascinating secret walking tour of the Doge's Palace (Palazzo Ducale) is usually booked up so buy your tickets in advance to make sure of a place. You'll go into the alleys and secret hidden doors of the palace – all very cloak and dagger. **Open** Three English-speaking tours run each day, at 9.55am, 10.45am and 11.35am  
**Admission** €16 or €10 for concessions

#### San Marco

[www.basilicasanmarco.it](http://www.basilicasanmarco.it)

There's no getting away from the beautiful square with its wonderful Basilica and bell tower. The

basis for the present Basilica dates back to the 11th century and is one of the most beautiful examples of Byzantine architecture this side of Constantinople. The visit inside of the Basilica lasts around 10 minutes, and a quiet, but very firm dress code is enforced, when we visited people were asked to cover up despite the heat. Entry is free so expect a long queue – the whole square might be crowded with tourists throughout much of the year. The bell tower is also a must, offering a dizzying panorama of the beautiful city that will last in the memory.

**Admission** €8 – be warned that the (very loud) bell is still working to full effect

### ■ Gondolas

A romantic holiday-must or a jumped-up, kitsch tourist trap – either way, gondolas aren't cheap. You can either take a short *paseo* (ride) or a long one – the prices we were quoted was €150 (long) and €100 (short). Agree a price beforehand and try to avoid high water or weekend evenings. Often gondolas moored in the quieter waterways will take you on a more beautiful, secluded route than along the Grand Canal, lovely though it is.

### ■ Il Lido

The less glamorous, quiet island to the east of Venice is worth the 15-minute boat ride from St Mark's Square (normal *vaporettos* connect it), if only for its lovely, long fringe of beach. The waters are warm and the beach will be busy in summer, but largely with locals instead of hordes of tourists.

### ■ Murano, Burano and Mazzorbo

The tiny island of charming and drowsy Murano to the north is the home of the glass-blowing trade which is so famous in Venice. The glass trade moved here in the 13th century for fear of fire in the centre of Venice. Be aware that going on glass tours can end in a sales pitch and you might be better off exploring the island on your own. The islands of Mazzorbo and Burano are connected by a wooden bridge offering beautiful views of the city. The lace and multicoloured houses make every street a pretty postcard. The 41 and 42 *vaporetto* connect Murano with Venice.

### ■ La Fenice

The rebuilt Phoenix Theatre is gorgeous and grand, so seeing an opera or a string ensemble is a fantastic Venetian experience. Guided tours also run and cost €7 ([www.teatrolafenice.it](http://www.teatrolafenice.it)).

## GOOD PLACES TO STAY

The majority of the *locandas* (hotels), are furnished one way – classic Venetian style. Don't expect to find too many avant-garde touches. Remember that prices will vary wildly depending on whether you visit in high or low season. It's always worth checking ahead to see if you can get any cheap online deals (email and they may give you individual offers), and ask if you can pay

in cash. This may be cheaper than paying by card. If you can, travel out of season to get the best out of the city when prices tend to be cheaper. The prices listed here are for the cheapest double room for two people, with breakfast and taxes, in November 2009.

### ■ Hotel Belle Arti

☎ 00390 41522 6230

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

Set on a leafy, flower-laden street, the entrance to the Belle Arti is through a beautiful garden patio, which is strewn with outdoor sofas and recliners. Rooms are easy-going, but still elegant. Slightly dated bathrooms aren't enough to detract from the stylish interior of the hotel though. €129 (£112)

### ■ Hotel Fiorita

☎ 00390 41523 4754

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

Found in a tiny, sleepy square – Campiello Novo, (don't be deceived by the San Marco address, you're closer to Accademia Bridge). The square is beautiful and a welcome dose of golden silence away from the bustle of the tourists. One of the hotel's biggest attractions is its lovely exterior, resembling a bucolic villa that would look more at home on a Tuscan grove than in a city. The charming Fiorita is cloaked in greenery and pretty flowers. Rooms are fairly simple, but cosy, some of the terracotta and cream colour schemes seem a little tired but that should hardly matter. €120 (£104)

### ■ Oltre il Giardino

☎ 00390 41275 0015

[www.oltreilgiardino-venezia.com](http://www.oltreilgiardino-venezia.com)

Overlooking a beautiful garden, this tranquil and stylish country house once belonged to Alma Mahler, wife of the Bohemian-born composer. Its 6 rooms all look out on to the green and each one is individually furnished in its own style – dark chocolate and turquoise colours mix in around rich oil paintings and leather sofas. Breakfast is served outside among the olive, magnolia and pomegranate trees in the warm summer months – a little oasis of rare green. €200 (£174)

### ■ Locanda San Barnaba

☎ 00390 41241 1233

[www.locanda-sanbarnaba.com](http://www.locanda-sanbarnaba.com)

Atypical, arabesque touches along with marbles and mosaics give this 16th century palace plenty of character, not to mention the beautifully rendered ceiling art depicting angels and cherubs. This *locanda* boasts a fine saloon too, with neo-classic frescoes and multi-coloured light streaming through its stained glass windows. Now for the but. While it's true that this pretty little *locanda* is just steps away from the Ca' Rezzonico water bus stop, some of the prices we were quoted seemed a little at odds with its location. €170 (£148)



### ■ Hotel Dimora Marciana

☎ 00390 41522 0755

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

Despite the website modestly informing you that 'there's not too much to say about our rooms', the Dimora Marciana was in fact one of our favourite hotels, with double rooms as cheap as €60 in low season. Literally a two-minute walk from St Mark's Square (any closer and you'd be sleeping with the pigeons) yet found on a quiet alleyway, with only the smallest of signs to indicate it. It's pint-sized and intimate with staff happy to meet you at the near-by *vaporetto* stop. The unremarkable Venetian doorway gives no clue to the sumptuous interior. Rooms are like stepping inside to a veritable Venetian tardis of decadence with white marble floors, deep blue woven-fabric walls, embroidered with golf-leaf designs and beautiful exposed wood beams. There's also a handy fridge, (hidden so as not to spoil the century-rewinding décor). €100 (£87)

### ■ Ca' Bonvicini

☎ 00390 41275 0106

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

The Ca' Bonvicini is a 10-minute walk from the Rialto, between a quiet strip of malachite water and a tiny alleyway turn-off at the foot of an antiquated bridge (should you be arriving by taxi, you can enter directly by their water door). All the rooms are opulently Venetian, white weave-walls, almost royal beds with beautiful headboards, tapestry frescoes and gold trim everywhere – leaving you somewhere between the eras of Louis XIV and 17th century Italy. Some rooms have a good view of the canal, the occasional skiff sluicing through the quiet waters below. Bathrooms are modern affairs with grey/black marble finish and large, walk-in showers. Ask the friendly staff about a free visit to Murano. €74 (£64)

### ■ Hotel Ai Do Mori

☎ 00390 41520 4817

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

This little hotel debunks the axiom that anything and everything near St Mark's Square is a rip-off.

Double rooms with a bathroom start at a budget-friendly €50 per night and it's within spitting distance of St Mark's Square. Some of the rooms are guilty of being a little dated, but then others are charming loft conversions with exposed wood beams. All the bedrooms, however, are cosy and comfortable. Annexe apartment rooms are also available. **€50 (£43)**

### Hotel Galleria

☎ 00390 41523 2489  
[www.hoteltalleria.it](http://www.hoteltalleria.it)

So called because of its proximity to the near-by exhibitions and art houses, the Hotel Galleria is one of the best-positioned hotels we visited. It's also seconds from the Accademia Bridge, but blink and you'll miss the sleepy entrance by wrought-iron gates protecting a small, leafy courtyard. Once inside this converted 17th-century palace, it's a boutique-style affair – extravagant rooms with original exposed wood beams, faded frescoes and beds so august, you almost feel guilty flopping on to them after a long day exploring Venice. Rooms boast hour-whittling views of either the Bridge or the Grand Canal. **€120 (£104)**

### Pensione La Calcina

☎ 00390 41520 6466  
[www.lacalcina.com](http://www.lacalcina.com)

La Calcina (the Lime House) is a pretty, south-facing terracotta building on Giudecca Canal. Despite being right on the waterfront it's a relatively quiet, tourist-free area and sits along the peaceful promenade from St Maria del Rosario, along to the Palazzo Dogana di Mar. The rooms are all slightly different but all come with wooden parquet flooring and emit a drowsy, cosy atmosphere. Views of the canal are fetching, though unsurprisingly do cost more. The hotel's restaurant, La Piscina, has seating outside on its own private little jetty, alternatively there is a cosy sun roof (reservations may be necessary) to enjoy breakfast. **€130 (£113)**

### Hotel Giorgione

☎ 00390 41522 5810  
[www.hoteltgiorgione.com](http://www.hoteltgiorgione.com)

The Giorgione sits haughtily on a quiet street corner just off a charming Venetian square, complete with a small landing stage, clock tower and piano playing pizzeria. It's also close to the water links to the Northern islands. Inside, the

bedrooms are an interesting mix of pale colours, floral patterns and Venetian exuberance – some chambers are split over two floors with a spiral staircase and several cushioned nooks. Some rooms also come with a private terrace, but one of the real lures of the Giorgione is its gorgeous garden (a rarity in this city) beset by flowers and an ornate fountain. Free tea and biscuits are served al fresco in the afternoons. **€120 (£104)**

### Hotel Des Bains

☎ 00390 41526 5921  
[www.desbains.hotelinvenice.com](http://www.desbains.hotelinvenice.com)

The Hotel Des Bains, (where the author Thomas Mann penned and set *Death in Venice*), is found out in the lagoon, on the quiet island of Il Lido. It boasts its own park and virtuoso private beach, overlooking the Golfo di Venezia. Its lip-pursing, Art Nouveau exterior retains its century-old identity. Public rooms are suitably palatial too. Note: this hotel closes from November until March. **€230 (£197)**

### Hotel a La Commedia

☎ 00390 41277 0235  
[alacommedia.hotelinvenice.com](http://alacommedia.hotelinvenice.com)

Conveniently sandwiched between the Rialto and San Marco, lies the grand Hotel a La Commedia. This hotel is a modern take on the Venetian grand hotel, and up until 2006, it was a large bank. Its theatrically-themed metamorphosis was inspired by the nearby Teatro Goldoni (La Commedia is also close to the Teatro Fenice). Rich red show curtains and traditional Venetian theatre masks merge with modern details like icicle-like chandeliers made from Murano glass (the nearby island famed for its glass blowing). The rooms are modern-classic grandiose affairs, plump with luxurious offerings such as the pure gold mosaic trim in the bathrooms. The ritzy rooftop bar provides the panoramic finish to the day, enjoying a traditional spritz or Bellini as the Venetian dusk deepens. **€169 (£145)**

## HOTEL ADVICE

- Many hotels don't have lifts. Always check in advance about access.
- Most hotels will tell you that they're close to or by the Rialto Bridge and St Mark's Square, but find out exactly where your hotel is on the map and how close it is to water links.
- If you're staying on the Grand Canal, remember that water traffic can be noisy.

## USEFUL INFORMATION

Time difference = UK +1 hour  
International dialling code +0039  
Exchange rate £1 = €1.13

## RECOMMENDED BOOK

Time Out Venice, £12.99  
(ISBN 9781846700071)

## GOOD PLACES TO EAT

Prices are for a two-course meal with a glass of wine.

### Osteria Ai Assassini

Rio Terà degli Assassini,  
San Marco 3695

☎ 00390 41528 7986  
[www.osteriaaiassassini.it](http://www.osteriaaiassassini.it)

Deriving its name from the small street it sits on, where rich merchants were killed by hired assassins when trying to avoid the main streets after visiting a local brothel, there's certainly no subterfuge about the quality of the food at this osteria. A new menu is prepared each day mostly consisting of local fish such as the toasted sesame-seed tuna steak. **€45**

### Leon Bianco

Salizada San Luca,  
San Marco 4153

☎ 00390 41522 1180

About as far away from a typical English tavern as you can get, the Leon Bianco ('White Lion') is a traditional and relaxed restaurant that serves up hearty local dishes

at reasonable prices, despite its proximity to St Mark's Square. Ask for a table in the private courtyard outside, which is tranquil and cosy, though not particularly picturesque. **€25**

### Alla Vedova

Ramo Ca' d'Oro,  
Cannaregio 3912

☎ 00390 41528 5324

Alla Vedova, as it's locally known means the 'Widow's Place' (though it's officially called Ca' D'Oro) but the fact that it's popular enough with locals to have its own nickname speaks volumes about this bacari. You can snack on *cicchetti*, (a sort of Italian version of *tapas*) sitting at the bar as well as taking to the tables to tuck in to specialities such as their

famous meatballs or cuttlefish. **€35**

### Caffè Florian

Piazza San Marco

☎ 00390 41520 5641

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

The oldest café in Venice used to be a hunting ground for Casanova (Florian was the only café to admit women at the time) but today you'd have to wonder whether he could afford it – if you sit outside then nothing on the menu costs less than €10. If you are feeling flush however, then this stuccoed and frescoed café is undoubtedly as beautiful a place to take a load off as any, as well as being arguably as famous as any of Venice's well-known landmarks. A coffee and an iced tea costs around €20.

