

Venice

From Salzburg we will travel over the alps to Venice, the birthplace of Baroque composer Antonio Vivaldi and home to the first opera house. Venice is a charming city full of canals and winding streets. Once you step away from the main thoroughfares, it is easy to get lost so find a good map. The main square is called Piazza San Marco. One thing you will immediately notice is the large number of pigeons, not only in the square but everywhere. Please note that it is against the law to feed the pigeons. Birds can make a mess! It is suggested that the "mess" be wiped immediately off of skin but that you wait until it is dry to brush off your clothing. In the square you will find the Basilica di San Marco which was built to house the bones of St. Mark whose remains were stolen from Egypt by a pair of Venetian merchants in 828 A.D. They smuggled the bones past Muslim customs officials by stuffing them into a barrel of pork. When touring the Basilica, you may be required to check anything larger than a purse. The Basilica is naturally illuminated between 11:30 AM and 12:30 PM and contains many beautiful mosaics. The Grand Canal is the main aquatic thoroughfare in central Venice. The S shaped waterway follows an ancient riverbed and is about 2.5 miles long. It varies in width from 98 to 230 feet. The best way to see it is the #1 Vaporetti from Piazzale Roma or the railroad station toward San Marco. At night, the canal is lit up. The Rialto Bridge is the main pedestrian crossing of the canal.

Everyone wants to ride a gondola. Believe it or not, there are official rates for rides. A 40 minute ride for 6 people will cost 80 euro and each additional 20 minutes costs 40 euro more. At night the rate goes up to 100 euro (50 euro for each additional 20 minutes). Having your gondolier sing will cost extra and, if demand for rides is high, they may disregard the official rates altogether. Remember to negotiate your rate and the length of your trip before you even get on the boat. If a gondolier is not willing to bargain, move on to the next boat. Of course, you can always take the traghetto, a public gondola ferry (everyone stands) to cross the Grand Canal at a cost of 0,50 euro. Vaporetti are another alternative to travel on the canals. A one way ticket (biglietto di corsa semplice) will cost E6,50 but you can purchase a 12 hour card (biglietto dodici oro) for E16 which allows unlimited rides during that time. Be sure to have your tickets validated at a yellow stamping machine before you get on your first vaporetti.

Of course, you will want to eat. Restaurants in Venice serve a lot of fish and family run restaurants (osterias) will likely offer regional dishes. The wines in this region include prosecco, pinot grigio, tokai, Read the menu carefully. There is often a pane e coperto (bread and cover) charge per head and a servizio incluso or servizio compreso (service charge) of 10-15% may be included, especially in the square. Some places charge you just to sit and listen to music. If the service charge is not included, a modest 10% tip is appropriate. Bring cash because many places do not accept credit cards. You could also wander through the Rialto Food Markets (erbena is fruit and vegetables and pescheria offers fish). And then...there is always gelato.

Many of you will have shopping in mind and Venice has many beautiful things to offer to the wise and careful shopper. There are many street vendors selling art, craft and leather goods, glass and souvenirs. You will encounter street vendors selling counterfeit designer handbags. Know that it is illegal to sell or buy these bags. If you are caught, you may be fined up to E10,000. Handbags varying quality of construction and material. Some are actually made in the same factories as the real ones. If you absolutely must have a bag,

know what you are looking for and how much you are willing to spend/negotiate. The sellers are often called *vu compra* because of their misuse of the Italian language and most come from Senegal. If you are interested in Muran glass, be careful to only shop at those stores which display the “*vetro murano artistico*” trademark decal in the window otherwise you may end up with glass made in China. Popular glass items include loose beads (available at L.A.V. Cooperative Vetrana), realistic looking hard candy and miniature fish bowls. Remember that glass can break. Other possible souvenirs include gondolier hats, carnival masks, *torrone* (an almond confection), games, stationary and lace.