

# Venice

## September 2015



To reach Venice, we boomed across Italy in two days. There were surprises.



The first was the moment we left France. Once you tunnel through this natural fortification, you're in Italy proper.



The first surprise was how much of a fall it was from France. It was like leaving Fifth Avenue and crossing the bridge into Brooklyn.



Quickly tiring of the winding coastal roads, we struck off into the interior, which is initially just as winding.



Our first night we found parking in a small village glued to the side of the mountain. This led to the second surprise, more of an epiphany.



On the tiny square of the tiny town was this commemoration of soldiers fallen in WW-I. One family lost 10, another 7. Every young man in the village and surrounding must have marched off to his death. That must have not only devastated the families – but the economy. That was the entire youth of that generation blown to bits in places like Verdun. Without them to work the farms, the village must have struggled and been under a cloud of depression for 20 years. Just in time for Mussolini....



The third surprise was how entirely flat the enormous Po river valley is. Italy is not thought of as a flat country. It extends basically across the entire north and is the richest part...though it's still dowdy compared to France. It was so flat, uninspiring and boring I didn't take any pictures, outside of the fortress of Montagnana, 50 miles short of Venice.



Venice is built atop a huddle of over 100 islands, as every idiot knows. It's joined by a narrow 2.3-mile-long causeway to the mainland. Imagine it sticking out of the top left of the picture, at an angle leaning to the left.



Crossing it to Tronchetto, the “parking island,” bordering Venice.



The long, long brown strip at the top of the water, beyond the marina, is the causeway. This is taken from our parking spot. Not so bad. (If the horizon doesn't look straight, see your optometrist. Immediately.)



I was here in '73. Guess what? It hasn't changed.



Perhaps the prices have. I don't know what gondola prices were 42 years ago but a half hour is now 80 Euros. 100 in the evening. And I didn't hear any singing.



The Dragon Lady, now gun shy since she had her last iphone snatched out of her hand in Buenos Aires, holds the replacement a little closer to home while shooting pictures. Venice's miles and miles of narrow footpaths and canals cry out to be photographed. It's the biggest labyrinth I've been in.



This is a Su shot. She's bloody brilliant. Not the pigeon front and center.



It's a city it's guaranteed you'll get lost in – but that's part of the fun. Fortunately, there's good maps available with good suggested routes, and there's clearly marked squares, always with a church, at frequent points to get bearings. St. Mark's Square is the focus of course.



The loooooong line into St. Marks is on a catwalk over water. There had been a heavy rain a couple of days earlier which caused flood damage on the mainland. We happened to drive through it shortly after. One village was a mess.



Yes, yes, Venice is sinking. We all know that, though it's slowed to 1-2mm a year since they stopped pumping ground water. However, if seas rise this century according to predictions, a sea dike a la Holland will have to be built.





You can see two other wide strips of water from St. Mark's balcony. It drains slowly. We thought there were a lot of people that day. We knew one of those monstrous cruise liners was in.



But when we took the skytrain in the second day, we counted seven of them! *Seven!*



St. Mark's Square now looked like this. I wrote my first travel article (on Spanish drivers) in October 1973 and I've had hundreds published since. I have never, ever seen such a tourist magnet anywhere in the world like Venice. Yes, London, Bangkok and New York are the top

draws – but Venice is getting 80,000 visitors a day with a population of 60,000. Trains and tour buses also arrive continuously – and this picture was taken in the off season!



Fortunately Venice is just large enough that it can handle it.



It's got a great ambience. The quartet played old romantic songs from the '50s.



There were three competing café/musical quartets and we chose one in the shade. Relaxing, sightseeing and enjoying, that's what this town is all about.



The indoor part of the Florian Cafe whose outdoor part we were enjoying dates back to 1720.



Major cool place.



Even the tiniest places were filled with character. Here's one now, on the right.



Even the pizza is delicious. Forty years ago you got a small, round, hard and flat piece of dried dough, covered in the thinnest layer of cheese and tomato sauce. They called that a pizza. The Wops have since learned from America how to make a proper pizza.



I loved the window layout of these fresh offerings at another restaurant – laid out as if lifted from a 16<sup>th</sup> century Dutch canvas.



And, of course, Wop ice cream. The best in the world.



The shopping is eclectic and the window shopping – even for me! – was fun.



One of the tricks I've learned when I hit a new place is to immediately check out the postcards. It's a shortcut to learning what the most important attractions are.



Though Venice is so famous that everyone knows about the Grand Canal.



And the Rialto Bridge across it. Actually, I'm cheating. It's covered in scaffolding for renovation so I shot a postcard.





Artists of all caliber are everywhere. Venice is very much an artists' colony.







Of course Wopettes are hot – and love to dress hot.



You see them strutting all over Venice like this. Honest.





That's why even old guys like this are so happy.



Since everyone is in such a good mood, let's call it a wrap.