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Venice: The Floating City

By Steven Cronin

For a millennium, Venice has provided inspiration for artists and writers. This coveted city is made up of 118 islands linked by 453 bridges. Each corner of town exhibits individual architectural magnificence, the city combining as one to form a spectacular theatrical stage set.

Beautiful churches adorn the banks of the Grand Canal as she snakes her way through the city. This main artery is at the centre of a myriad of canals running throughout the town.

The lifeblood of Venice is its tourism, a magnet for over 12 million visitors a year. Catering for this influx of visitors, the cities population of 70,000 people continue their daily lives, working the bars, cafes and restaurants.

Despite all this however, it seems that Venice is slowly sinking at the rate of approximately 2 inches every century. Terrible floods in 1966 caused much doom mongering and many people feared that Venice was about to be taken off the map.

The threat to remove funding for vital restoration projects gave serious cause for concern and prompted an urgent response to save the city. It was feared imminent flooding could completely destroy the city; preventative measures were high priority.

The efforts of the past two decades have had considerable success. Reduced pollution, shipping and the restoration of natural sandbanks have all contributed to the cause.

The first settlers of Venice were those fleeing the Barbarians around 400 AD. To create solid foundations for their buildings they drove timber into the mud and began creating a community for their people.

The city's emblem, the winged lion, derived from Saint Mark the Evangelist. The first significant church of Venice was built in the ninth century to house the relics of Saint Mark, and his emblem was soon adopted.

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Venice's trade brought great wealth and prosperity to the city and for many centuries it continued to grow. The city thrived on its colonies and invested its riches wisely. Churches and palaces became commonplace, as were museums to house many newly acquired works of art.

For the past couple of centuries however, the obvious lack of development space meant the city found it difficult to advance further. Wars with Turkey were a drain on the resources and so Venice was content to consolidate.

Despite this, Venice does not rest on its laurels. Every visit offers something new, a fresh experience to take home. Each region of the city has an individual charm, giving the sense there is always something special around each corner.

Steven Cronin owns the City Breaks website featuring city break special offers from luxury hotels to budget accommodations. For more information please visit

<http://www.sargas.co.uk>

A Quick Guide To Venice

By Chic Retreats

Is Venice the most romantic city in the world? It's certainly hard to beat, especially when you're staying right in the centre of things.

Where is it?

Venice is a city built on water – just off the north east coast of Italy, facing the Adriatic Sea – and is famed for its canal network, opulent palazzos and beautiful religious buildings and art. It has an airport on the mainland but from there, you need to take a water bus to reach the city.

Where can I stay?

The best way to experience Venice is in a cool, quiet and sophisticated hotel. These small but beautifully designed hotels offer you respite from the tourist throng and the sort of service you would expect from much more expensive locations. Try Ca' Pisani, a small palazzo that has been sympathetically renovated and decorated to provide a haven of tranquillity, or the Ca Maria Adele, an eclectic boutique hotel in one of Venice's most exclusive quarters.

What can I see?

For a relatively small city, there's a lot to pack into a short visit. The central area of St. Mark's Square with the Doge's Palace and the Campanile is a great place to hang out and soak up the atmosphere, although bars and cafes here can be expensive. Instead, visit the churches, galleries and restaurants that are slightly off the beaten track, where atmosphere and tradition are still rich. If you have time, visit

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the nearby islands of Murano, Burano and Torcello, all historically and culturally worth a visit.

How do I get around?

One of the beauties of Venice is that it has no road network. Most tourists use the waterbus (Vaporetto) system, which is regular and fairly cheap. Those who are looking for romantic Venice can hire a gondola at a greater cost. By far the best way to explore the city, however, is on foot. This way, you can reach the parts of the city that most waterbuses don't travel to and discover architectural and shopping delights along the way.

Chic Retreats is a collection of cool, smart hotels with under 30 rooms and an eye for detail and design. Visit the website by clicking on

<http://www.chicretreats.com>



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