



CUT-OUT-AND-GO GUIDE | LOVERS' VENICE



instant escapes

Lovers' Venice

Skip the Cornetto-ad clichés and fall for the city — cringe-free

It's one of the world's most seductive cities — but it's all too easy to get it all too cheesy. Want to avoid a romantic weekend shared with every other swooning couple? We've scoured the city for sweet little churches, heart-stirring art and mist-wreathed lunches beside the lagoon — where the tourists fear to tread. Here's *the lovers'* lowdown. **By Rachel Spence**



SEE & DO

● The most serene wake-up call in town is breakfast on the waterfront terrace at Angiò Bar (Riva San Biagio, Castello 2142; ① on map). Puff-perfect *croissants*, espressos with a kick, perhaps a **splash of Prosecco in your fresh orange juice** — and the Bay of St Mark's before you, like your own private beach.

● Remember your vows over **Sunday Mass at the jewel-box church of Castello's San Giovanni Il Bragora** (sgbattistainbragora.it; ②), set in a pretty square. The priest gives his blessing to the community, from elderly ladies to young believers, under one of the most moving paintings in art history, the *Baptism of Christ* by Cima da Conegliano. Its languid limbs and limpid light seem to underline the power of love.

● Stretched above Santa Maria della Salute Church ③, the tie-dyed skies that inspired Turner will seduce you on a twilight tour with guide Cristina Gregorin (slow-venice.com; two hours £128 for four). Included is a private sunset sail down the Grand Canal to the **hidden backwaters of Cannaregio, splashed with the light of the moon**. The romantic highlight is an *aperitivo* on the terrace of Algiubagio restaurant (algiubagio.net; ④), facing Isola de San Michele ⑤, the cemetery island: quite ghostly with its coal-black cypresses.

● What would the 16th-century nuns have made of the 'couples' rituals' now

CELEBRITY APPROVAL

The craftsman is cagey about clients, but a little bird told us that a certain Jack Sparrow has one in his own dastardly image.

Love's young dream: strolling in a deserted St Mark's Square at sunrise; below, boats moored in the Venetian lagoon; Santa Maria della Salute Church dominates the Dorsoduro peninsula

practised at their former home, the deluxe Palladio Hotel and Spa (see Stay, overleaf; ⑥)? Some are sinful — ergo perfect for lovers. The two-hour Ritual of Dreams ticks off a **Turkish bath, scalp massage and Feng Shui facial massage**, before a foot rub with goat's-milk mousse (£213pp). Beats a box of *Milk Tray*.

● Quirky keepsakes to take home? In Cannaregio, the rafters of Roberto Comin's top-floor workshop (www.marionettesinvenice.com; ⑦) are **hung with Pinocchio's, Casanovas and Carnival Queens** redolent of the 18th century, when most of these characters were born (prices from £170). Roberto has been carving posh puppets quietly up here for nearly 30 years, while his sister, Manuela, makes the sumptuous costumes.

● Gliding on a luxury launch — as the morning sun burns the mist off the mirror-still lagoon — is a Clooney-worthy romantic outing, though it comes with a price tag to match. Lagunalonga (lagunalonga.com; from £1,200 for two) can take you to San Francesco del Deserto ⑧, the **rose-fringed monastery island where St Francis prayed with the birds**. Expect lunch cooked on board by a top chef and — as the sun sinks over the belltower of Torcello island ⑨ — Vivaldi performed by musicians on deck.

● Or, more affordably, **you can helm your own gondola**, supervised by an expert: from the water every hidden gargoyle and secret tunnel is on show. A private lesson with one of the local teachers at Row Venice (rowvenice.org; £72 for up to two people) makes for a magical 90 minutes as you navigate atmospheric waterways in the time-honoured way. Remember, Venetians do it standing up!

● **Medieval wells, mystical archways...** The cloister at the Castello's Church of San Francesco della Vigna (free; ⑩) is the perfect place to pop the question. Need a little lover's courage? Say your prayers first — before the church's crowning glory, the *Virgin and Child Enthroned*, painted by Fra Antonio Negroponte, featuring the sacred pair framed by a manicured 'orchard' of flowers in full bloom. >



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EAT

● **Pasta-free veggie**

ORIENT EXPERIENCE (Mains about £7)

Because: This local haunt makes a change from Venice's fishy pastas: veggie curries, falafel, hummus and couscous, with divan seating. **Travel's tip:** Self-catering? There's an excellent takeaway service if you'd like to eat at home. *Rio Terà Farsetti, Cannaregio; 00 39 041822 4337; @*

● **The island idyll**

AL GATTO NERO (Mains about £10)

Because: The owner often catches the fish by hand, so it's jumping-fresh when his *papa* (the chef who's been making risotto since forever) turns it into perfection on a plate. **Travel's tip:** Book a canalside table overlooking the island's pretty, pastel-coloured fishing cottages. *Via Giudecca 88, Burano; 00 39 041730120, gattone.com; @*

● **Fishy feast**

ANICE STELLATO (Mains about £17)

Because: It does delicious octopus and sweet-and-sour scampi, followed by a *tiramisu* so light it almost floats, served at a canalside table — perfect for sunset. **Travel's tip:** It's billed as a fish restaurant, but its steak tartare is a carnivore's favourite. *Fondamenta de la Sensa, Cannaregio; 00 39 041 720744, osterianicestellato.com; @*

● **Local by name...**

LOCAL (Mains about £22)

Because: The goby fish in this airy restaurant's risotto have come straight from the lagoon. The chef's contemporary in every way. **Travel's tip:** At £55 for five courses, the tasting menu is top value. *Salizzata dei Greci, Castello 3303; 00 39 041 2411128, ristorantelocal.com; @*

● **Elegant supper**

AMAN VENICE (Mains about £32)

Because: You're in a Grand Canal salon, with frescoed ceilings and chandeliers. Start, perhaps, with burrata spread on a bed of dried tomatoes, then pan-fried turbot revved up with radicchio and Muscat grapes. **Travel's tip:** On a mild night, kick off with a Bellini in the high-walled garden. *Calle Tiepolo; 00 39 041270 7333, aman.com; @*

DRINK & SHOP

● **Classy cocktails**

L'OMBRA DEL LEONE

Because: *Aperitivi* come with views of Santa Maria della Salute Church across the Grand Canal. **Travel's tip:** An Ugo (Prosecco with elderflower and a sprig of mint) is the drink *du jour*. *Calle Tredici Martiri; @*

● **Perfect paper**

ALBERTO VALESE-EBRU

Because: Artisan papers take their evanescent, marbled beauty from the old Ottoman technique of *Ebru*. Buy! **Travel's tip:** Mobiles of semi-precious rocks that float like flying fish (from £50) are light enough for hand-luggage travellers. *Campo San Stefano 347; albertovalese-eburu.it; @*

● **Glass with class**

MASSIMO MICHELUZZI

Because: This master craftsman makes vessels that might resemble mosaics, or reflections on water, but all cross the divide between art and craft (from £515). **Travel's tip:** Call ahead for an appointment with Mr M himself. *Ponte delle Maravegie, Dorsoduro; 00 39 041528 2190; @*

ESSENTIAL DETOUR

Burano is the home of lace, and you can watch makers at work in the Lace Museum (Palazzo Galuppi 187; £4.20)



ASK THE LOCAL

Giusi Scavuzzo is an architect who lives in the Cannaregio district

Some of the **best fresh fish where I live comes from a stall next to Ponte del Guglie** — you have to fight off the seagulls! Opposite is an excellent bakery, too (Panificio Baldin di Baldin Romina 1291; @). I always like to pop into Glamour boutique (Cannaregio 1298; @), at the bottom of the bridge. It's tiny — about six metres square — but it has **clothes and accessories by small, stylish Italian labels**. Nearby is a little bar called Da Nini (Cannaregio 1306; @), which is an institution for us locals — **we sit outside sipping Spritzes, watching the world go by**. I used to come when my daughter was in her pram, and they still ask how she is!

WHAT TO ORDER

On Thursdays, the bakery does fab homemade *gnocchi* (pumpkin or potato, depending on the season); on Fridays, *baccalà mantecato* (salt-cod pâté)



STAY

● **Low-cost lovely**

IL GIARDINO DI GIULIA (Doubles from £60, B&B)

Because: It's a no-brainer for lovebirds on a budget — a tucked-away 16th-century *palazzetto*, done up in cappuccino-cool colours, with homemade breads and tarts for breakfast. **Travel's tip:** You're a short walk from the much-loved *gelateria* Alaska, so go — for rocket and orange, cinnamon, ginger or liquorice ice creams. *Santa Croce 965; 00 39 041 200 7786, ilgiardinodigiulia.com; @*

● **Historic haven**

PALAZZO ABADESSA (Doubles from £81, B&B)

Because: Silk wallpaper, Murano chandeliers, antique furniture, painted ceilings and a glorious walled garden make this a palace fit for a princess (and her partner). **Travel's tip:** You can get a room with a four-poster if you ask — just request on booking. *Calle Priuli, Cannaregio 4011; 00 39 0412413784, abadessa.com; @*

● **Lagoon luxury**

VENISSA (Doubles from £103, B&B)

Because: You're a 40-minute boat ride from Venice in this converted manor house on a secluded island. In your loft-luxe studio room, you'll wake to the sound of gulls, not *vaporetti*. With its walled vineyard and gourmet restaurant, this is an essential lovers' 'leap'. Minimum two-night stay. **Travel's tip:** Don't schlep to Piazza San Marco more than once — eat and nap here instead. *Fondamenta di Santa Caterina 3, Mazzorbo; 00 39 041527 2281, venissa.it; @*

● **East meets West**

NOVECENTO BOUTIQUE HOTEL (Doubles from £120, B&B)

Because: You get to snuggle up in cosy, chapel-quiet rooms close to Piazza San Marco, amid Moroccan textiles and stained-glass windows, before breakfast in a sunlit courtyard garden. **Travel's tip:** Pack light — rooms aren't huge, and wardrobe space is tight. *Calle Dose da Ponte, San Marco 2683/84; 00 39 0412413765, novecento.biz; @*



BEST TIME TO VISIT

Spring is without doubt the season to be here, as the lawns are a riot of tulips, narcissi and crocuses

Red alert: clockwise from top left, the Palazzo Abadessa; paper-chase at Alberto Valesse-Ebru; grand living at the Aman Venice; local speciality, ravioli with guinea fowl and shrimps; modern luxe at Venissa on secluded Mazzorbo island

● **Garden retreat**

PALLADIO HOTEL & SPA

(Doubles from £166, B&B)

Because: It occupies a former Palladian convent on Giudecca island; hide out on a sunlounger somewhere in its walled gardens. Luxurious rooms overlook the canal that fronts Piazza San Marco. **Travel's tip:** For total privacy, get a room in the separate Conventino building, immersed in a bower of white hydrangeas. *Giudecca 33; 00 39 041 520 7022, palladiohotelspa.com; @*

● **Clooney style**

AMAN VENICE (Doubles from £808, B&B)

Because: It's a Grand Canal palace (high ceilings, Tiepolo frescoes, mod-Asian touches) with film-star glamour, where George and Amal's honeymoon got off to a flying start. Doesn't get more A-list than this. **Travel's tip:** Don't get lost in the alleys in search of the back entrance — taxi-boat to the water-gate. *Palazzo Papadopoli, Calle Tiepolo 1364; 00 39 041270 7333, aman.com; @*

GET ME THERE

GO INDEPENDENT

BA (ba.com) has flights to Venice Marco Polo from Heathrow, from £94, and from Gatwick, from £70 return. **Jet2** (jet2.com) flies from Leeds Bradford, Edinburgh and Manchester from £45 one way. **EasyJet** (easyjet.com) flies from five UK airports, including Bristol and Luton, from £19 one way. From May, **Stobart Air** (flybe.com) will fly from Southend from £40 one way.

GO PACKAGED

Citalia (01293 765066, citalia.com) has three nights at a four-star with Grand Canal views, from £451pp, B&B, with Gatwick flights. **Thomas Cook City Escapes** (08718950045, thomascook.com) has three from £189pp, B&B, in a four-star, with Gatwick flights. **Kirker Holidays** (020 7593 2283, kirkerholidays.com) has three in a four-star from £598pp, with Gatwick flights, water-taxi transfers and sightseeing tickets.

FURTHER INFORMATION

See italia.it and visit-venice-italy.com