

Untold Italy Episode 48 - Venice - where to stay

Ciao everyone! Come va? How are you doing? It's Katy hosting the show today and I am so looking forward to chatting about the difficult decision of where to stay in Venice with you today. As many of you know, Venice is my favorite city in Italy and deciding where to stay can be very difficult. But don't worry, after listening to this episode you'll have a good idea of the areas that are good to stay in and the styles of accommodation available.

Now if you want more detailed advice and help planning your travels you should definitely join us on Untold Italy Insiders. This is where Italy travel experts meet travel planners in our online piazza to learn about Italian culture, food, wine and history and get vacation ready. We know this year has been a bit of a fizzer in that regard but if you want to go to Italy in the next year or two, there is no better time to start planning your itinerary and selecting places to stay as there will no doubt be a huge rush of visitors once travel becomes possible. You can find more information on our special Italian club at untolditaly.com/insiders

Now, before we talk about Venice firstly I wanted to say a big thank you to so many of you who've been leaving your comments, ratings and reviews. We get such a thrill when they show up on our feed. Here's a couple that really brought a smile to our faces:

Great show

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I have enjoyed your podcasts during this time of prohibited travel. Your comments and guests have transported me to the land I love and cannot wait to visit again. My wish list of regions and places to visit grows almost every week. Thanks

K.A. from PA via Apple Podcasts · United States of America · 11/04/20

Explore Italy

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Great podcast about Italy... travel, food, and things to see. Love their guest interviews as they explore different parts of Italy. Thanks Ladies!

habfam via Apple Podcasts · United States of America · 11/03/20

Bella Italia

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

"I absolutely love this podcast which I came across earlier this year and which has helped me navigate my 2020. With a long daily commute I look for inspirational podcasts and I have to say that Untold Italy provides me with plenty of that. Katy and Josie have lots of fabulous information on planning your next trip to Italy. The guests also add an extra appeal and really interesting facts and suggestions. Congratulations on such a great podcast and I look forward to each episode."

anitatravel via Apple Podcasts · Australia · 11/13/20

Grazie, thank you to all of you. That really means so much.

General comments on where to stay in Venice

The first thing you need to know about Venice is that it is a series of islands in the middle of what is known as the Venetian lagoon. And it is very small. The main historic area is about 4 kilometers east to west and just under 3 kilometers north to south and comprises 118 islands, give or take. You can get from one end to the other on foot in around 20 minutes so long as you don't get lost. So wherever you choose to stay, it's going to be close to most things. This area is divided into 6 main districts and you'll find a broad range of accommodation in most of them including chain and boutique hotels, airbnbs and apartments and family run bnbs. You'll want to check on the style of accommodation. Venetian style is traditionally opulent with brocades, tapestries, gilt furniture, velvet curtains and frescoes but that is not for everyone.

Secondly, that being said, while Venice is very walkable and it's easy to get from A to B on foot, it's also the kind of place where you do not want to be walking your luggage around.. Remember this is a city of cobblestones and there are over 400 bridges in Venice - remember all those islands?. Only 4 of these bridges cross the Grand Canal. So should you get off the vaporetto or water bus on the wrong side of the Grand Canal you may need to back track quite a lot. When you are doing your trip research, pay close attention to whether the accommodation is close to a vaporetto stop and / or has a private dock that can be reached by water taxi. This is especially important if you have mobility issues or are traveling with small children. Or, you overpacked!

The third thing you need to know is that the closer you get to Piazza San Marco, St Mark's Square, and the Grand Canal, the higher the prices are for accommodation and pretty much everything. Of course staying on the Grand Canal with views out over the city and the passing traffic is on many a wish list but during this episode I'll share with you some alternatives which I think are equally as interesting and beautiful and incredibly romantic too.

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Fourthly, there are many places to stay that are not right in the 6 main historic districts I'll talk about today. But when you choose these options, know that you are making a choice that will involve more travel time to the main areas you may want to see..This might be perfectly fine and in fact next time I visit I'll likely stay on one of the outer lagoon islands but I have been to Venice many times and am looking for a different experience than many first time visitors.

Lastly, you may hear people say that the cheapest area to stay is Mestre which is on the mainland. Now, I'll talk a little more about Mestre later but I'll tell you right now that it is my firm opinion that you should stay on the lagoon where you'll find the tiny laneways, canals, bars and palazzi. After all, this is why you've come all this way to Venice.

So I will talk a little more about that later but for now, I'll start by telling you about the district of San Marco where you'll find the famous piazza and basilica of the same name.

San Marco

This is the tourist hub of Venice and apart from the piazza, basilica and palazzo ducale you'll also find the Rialto Bridge and Bridge of Sighs here. In fact many visitors barely venture beyond the San Marco district which is actually a real shame. This is the area where you'll find the big crowds and packed streets, high class restaurants such as Quadri and Caffè Florian and absolutely magnificent 5 star hotels like the [St Regis](#), the [Gritti Palace](#) and the stunningly luxurious and exclusive [Aman Venice](#) where George and Amal Clooney were married. These are the places you'll want to stay if you are on honeymoon and /or treating yourself..

During the day in summer - usually from May to September - this area is packed with people wanting to visit the basilica, campanile, Bridge of Sighs and Palazzo Ducale or get the magnificent views down the Grand Canal from the Rialto Bridge. It's much more serene in the evenings and early mornings before the cruise ship passengers arrive, so depending on how you're planning your days then you can avoid the throngs even if you do stay in this area.

Venture away from the Grand Canal and you can find less ritzy accommodation and more airbnbs and quirky finds like the Libreria Acqua Alta - the famous bookstore where the stock is piled high in gondolas. I think if you're looking for a 5 star stay in Venice with views and majesty then San Marco is hard to beat. If you're on a more modest budget then you can get much better value in the other districts.

Cannaregio

So while San Marco is known for grandeur the district of Cannaregio has a more humble vibe. This area in the city's north includes the Santa Lucia train station also includes the ancient Jewish quarter that Monica spoke about in Episode as well as some interesting churches such as I Gesuiti with its incredible Baroque interior and Renaissance masterpiece Santa Maria dei Miracoli

Now as we've mentioned several times on this podcast, the areas near the train stations are not the most charming. Here you'll find basic and functional hotels and bnbs. But wander a few streets away towards San Marco and you can find great value accommodation close to bars and restaurants where locals mix with tourists. Even in the height of summer you can find a shady street to walk down away from the masses. Parco Savorgnan has a play ground which is handy if you're traveling with small kids.

There are some lovely characterful 4 star hotels in this district as well as modern style hotels like [Carnival Palace](#) and airbnbs that look out over smaller canals. And if you're wanting to explore the outer islands like Burano and Murano the Fondamenta Nove vaporetto stops are in the perfect position.

Santa Croce

The other main entry point to Venice is through Piazzale Roma which is where you'll find the bus depot and car parking garages and cruise port. This is the district of Santa Croce which occupies the west of the city. As with the area around the train station, expect mostly functional accommodation here. You can easily get in and out of Venice but you're not in the heart of the action so to speak. So it's a nice area to stay if you're happy wandering around small laneways and poking your head into small campi or piazzzi hung with washing.

Try the area to the east of the Giardini Papadopoli for airbnbs and if your budget is not quite at the Clooneys level and you absolutely must stay on the Grand Canal you'll find better value here in Santa Croce - an example of a traditional hotel is [Hotel Canal Grande](#) - which is right on the water overlooking the Grand Canal and the Riva de Biasio vaporetto stop

San Polo

To the east of Santa Croce lies the city's smallest district called San Polo. Right in the center of Venice, San Polo is home to the Rialto market and the westerly end of the Rialto Bridge, you'll find lots of restaurants and bars in this area and lots of atmosphere. There are small laneways with interesting shops and boutiques and the Scuola Grande di San Rocco which is full of Tintoretto paintings and a must see if you have any passing interest in Renaissance art.

We've stayed in this area a couple of times now and I like its foodie focus and its central location plus the narrow laneways and mysterious side canals. There are some wonderful local restaurants and bars to try and of course the market is lots of fun with all the fresh seafood on display and the general comings and goings of the city on the water which I find endlessly fascinating. The atmosphere is generally relaxed and friendly and there's a big square - Campo San Polo - where you'll find a craft brewery and pizzeria. The [H10 Palazzo Canova](#) is a modern hotel on the Grand Canal and has an amazing terrace and bar overlooking the goings on while [Palazzetto Madonna](#) is more traditional and on a quieter side canal. You'll find Airbnbs here too.

Dorsoduro

One of my favorite areas of Venice is right next to San Polo and it's called Dorsoduro. You'll find many European cities, or actually any world city, has an interesting area around their main universities, and Venice is no exception. Dorsoduro is where the students of the Ca' Foscari University hang out and it's also got an arty vibe thanks to some excellent museums and galleries like the Ca Rezzonico - a gorgeous collection of 18th century art and sculpture and even a vintage gondola in a beautiful palazzo overlooking the Grand Canal. And the fantastic Peggy Guggenheim modern art collection.

In Dorsoduro there are many smaller canals and laneways to explore. We stumbled on the squero or gondola boatyard there. This is where expert artisans repair and restore gondolas which is painstaking and important work. You can get a full view of this on the opposite bank of the Rio di San Trovaso where at the Osteria Al Squero they have tasty cicchetti (Venetian snacks) and wine you can enjoy as you watch the goings on across the water. It doesn't get more Venetian than that if you ask me.

When you want to get to the hustle and bustle of San Marco, it's a gentle stroll across the Accademia Bridge, or you can admire the view down the Grand Canal from the magnificent Basilica di Santa Maria della Salute..

[Hotel Palazzo Stern](#) is a very popular 4 star hotel with traditional Venetian style and a simply wonderful terrace right on the Grand Canal. On the other side of the district facing the lagoon the [Palazzo Veneziano](#) is a more modern hotel with some lovely rooms overlooking a small canal

Castello

The last of the main districts of Venice is Castello. This is where you'll find the Arsenale or ship building yard and Giardini Pubblici gardens where the Biennale art show is held every other year. It's the largest district and you'll find a variety of accommodation plus local restaurants and bars.

I like the area around the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo. 25 of the city's doges or dukes are buried and there's a lovely piazza that bumps onto the city hospital.. It's a short walk from Piazza San Marco but you could be in another world. In this area The [Hotel Ai Cavalieri di Venezia](#) is on a small canal and is worth a splurge. It's a traditional hotel in the style I mentioned earlier with impressive chandeliers made from Murano glass.

If views of the lagoon appeal then there are several hotels along the waterfront but it's best to avoid the Riva degli Schia-voni where many tour groups meet before descending on Piazza San Marco..

This is the area where Venetian local Monica Cesarato suggested visitors stay in episode 35 and I like it a lot too. Tucked down one of the many side streets there's an amazing seafood restaurant Al Covo there where you can try Venetian specialties.

Away from the six sestiere or districts

So there are the main areas of central Venice and as I mentioned earlier, it's best to stay here if you are a first time visitor or returning after a long while as these areas are close to the major attractions and transport in and out

Of course there are other options and I'll quickly run through them so you understand the pros and cons of these arrangements.

- **Giudecca** - this narrow island is set apart from the main districts and offers peace and tranquility just a 3 minute vaporetto ride away from the main islands of the city. Here you'll find the magnificent 5 star [Belmond Hotel Cipriani](#) worth visiting for a drink to enjoy the views of the city. There is also a [Hilton](#) here with a popular rooftop pool and bar. Staying in this district is definitely an option but you will need to rely on vaporetti or the water bus so you need to weigh up costs and convenience. A one way vaporetto ticket is €7.50 or a daily pass or €20 for a daily pass.
- **Lido** - did you know that there are some excellent beaches in Venice? The Lido is where you'll find them. It's an 11km long island in the lagoon with wide sandy beaches and it's quite a contrast to the elegant city. The waterbus from San Marco takes just 20 minutes and you're transported to a completely different atmosphere. There are hotels and Airbnbs there and it is a quieter spot away from the city bustle.
- **Mestre** - this is really another city on the mainland that has a train station connecting to Santa Lucia on the lagoon. In fact often people make the mistake of alighting at Venice-Mestre. It is often touted as a budget alternative to Venice and there is better value accommodation there if you consider room size and prices. However, in my

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opinion, compared with Venice proper it is lacking charm and in reality once you factor in the cost of coming and going compared with the convenience and experience of staying in Venice then the price difference becomes negligible

- **Burano, Murano and the outer islands** - they offer a quieter escape also but once again you need to factor in the time and expense of using the waterbus and the limited facilities on these islands compared to the main districts. As I mentioned at the start of the show, I'd love to stay on Burano with all its pretty colored houses and wonderful seafood restaurants one day but it does mean half an hour by vaporetto each way into Venice. Murano is a lot closer however

Summary

There really are many choices so it's no wonder it gets overwhelming. Just really think hard about what you want out of your trip. If you want lazy days exploring the lagoon and some cultural highlights then Burano may be the perfect spot for you. If you're determined to go all out in Venice then the five star hotels on the Grand Canal will appeal. Foodies should head to San Polo and Dorsoduro for the market and great restaurants and bars. And for that typical neighborhood feel Cannaregio and Castello are likely for you.

So what do I look for in accommodation in Venice? Well, it's definitely a place where you have canal views. Not necessarily of the Grand Canal but one where you poke your head out of shuttered windows and gasp to hear the gentle slap of oar upon the water and the glimpse of a gondolier navigating down a side canal. This to me is all part of the experience of Venice and while you'll pay a little more you will always remember that moment when you gazed out onto your own "private" canal - even if it was only yours for a fleeting moment.

I hope this episode helped you decide where to stay in Venice. I do think it is a place where it is worth spending a little more because after all, Venice isn't really a series of attractions, it is in fact the world's most unique and I think beautiful, living, breathing city

As always all the details of this episode are up on the website at untolditaly.com/48 as well as links to the hotels I mentioned and a selection of our favorite Airbnbs.

That's all for this week. Make sure you are subscribed for the latest episodes as next week's one is very special. You'll be hearing from Corinna Cooke who writes the wonderful Glam Italia travel guides about the subject of her latest book on Florence. So dreamy!

But for this week it's ciao for now!