

# Untold Italy Episode 222: Must have experiences in Venice

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 222.

Ciao a tutti and Benvenuti to Untold Italy, the travel podcast, where you go to the towns and villages, mountains and lakes, hills and coastlines of Bella Italia. Each week your host Katy Clarke takes you on a journey in search of magical landscapes of history, culture, wine, gelato, and, of course, a whole lot of pasta. If you're dreaming of Italy and planning future adventures there, you've come to the right place.

## Katy

Ciao everyone, I hope you are all happy and well and excited to visit Italy if you're heading there over the summer months or happily planning your future adventures.

A couple of months ago I was back in Venice for a few days with the Untold Italy team and we had such a lot of fun exploring the city. It was a little bit cold and wet but Venice is always beautiful and we managed to see and do a few things new to me and discover some hidden pockets of the lagoon city that most visitors miss out on as they are rushing through.

And it got me thinking about the essential Venetian experiences I wish everyone could have and those that I return to time and again and of course I wanted to share them with you.

These are those things to do that are unique to Venice and will stay with you for a long time to come. It's a choose-your-own-adventure story too because over the years I realized that these activities fall into a few different themes or categories so without further ado let's get started as I share my favorite Venetian experiences.

One. Experience the city from the water. Number one on the list should be no surprise because Venice is of course a city built on water but it does constantly surprise me that so many people miss out on the pleasure of viewing and experiencing life on the water Venetian style. Or, perhaps it's limited to a squashed trip inside a Vaporetto or water bus. Anyway, if you're going to Venice please make sure you spend some time on a boat or vessel of some sort so you can appreciate this incredible city from its foundations, the magnificent lagoon!

Gondola - symbol of Venice and icon of the city, gondolas are sleek, romantic and simply one of life's must-dos in my opinion. Pick up your gondola on a secluded side canal and enjoy the serenity as it glides along the water with only the slightest sound from the gondolier expertly maneuvering the oar in its lock. Your gondola can hold up to 5 people and rides are around 30 minutes costing €80. It will cost you a bit more at sunset but you know, it's worth it.

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Especially if your gondolier is inclined to burst into song - not guaranteed unfortunately but the element of surprise is good enough for me.

Row Venice - if you are impressed by the gondoliers then why not learn to row another traditional Venetian boat? At Row Venice, a team of expert female rowers share their skills with visitors and help you to navigate your own vessel along the back canals of Cannaregio .. and if you're brave out onto the lagoon. Rowing these vessels comes down to technique that you quickly pick up however don't think you've mastered it so quickly, these young women tell tales of racing at speed in local regattas which are humbling to say the least. They go so quickly - many tens of strokes of the oar per minute that I have sore arms just thinking about it. This is a great activity for teenagers and anyone who has seen one too many churches and museums. Getting out on the water and trying out a new skill is such a great way to experience and build a connection with a city. So I was really thrilled to recommend this experience to a client when she mentioned her son was a rower of a different kind of boat.

### **Katy**

Water Taxi - have you seen the supremely cool water taxis in Venice? These wooden retro-style boats are sleek and look like they are for celebrities only but actually, anyone can take one. They are not what you'd call cost-effective but they are the most efficient form of transportation to get you to and from the airport or around the city if you have a lot of luggage (not recommended) and especially if your hotel has its own dock - lots of fun but again generally restricted to the 5-star hotels as you can imagine. This time I organised a shared water taxi transfer from the airport to my hotel and I just loved seeing the huge smiles on the faces of the new visitors to Venice who joined me as they cruised into the city in the most fun way possible. George Clooney style I like to say or if you've ever seen photos from the Venice Film Festival, all the stars arrive that way.

### **Katy**

Boat tour - My favorite boat tour of the city actually makes use of a taxi to show you many different sides of Venice. You join the tour close to Piazza San Marco and take the taxi boat across the lagoon to San Giorgio Maggiore where you disembark and take in some of the best views of the city. I'll tell you more about that stop later but it's a wonderful start to this tour that also visits several neighborhoods, the Arsenale shipbuilding yard and many small side canals before ending in a grand finale on the grand canal, zooming under the Rialto and Accademia bridges. Of course, you have an amazing local guide with you who shares stories of Venice that reveal its unique culture and history. I'll put a link to this tour in the show notes. I've done it a few times now and would take it again in a heartbeat.

### **Katy**

Vaporetto - Lastly, if it is your only option the Vaporetto or water bus is not a bad way to see Venice. Especially vaporetto number 1 which takes you all the way down the Grand Canal. If you do take this option you need to be strategic and make your way to the back outside section which is pretty small but from there, you have unfettered views of the canal and all the goings on - gondolas and taxis weave their way across the waters along with rubbish or

trash boats and all sorts of water vessels. Watching this action is probably my favorite thing to do in Venice because it is something we take for granted generally how city services are organized in our own cities but you just can't do that in Venice as there is always water to deal with.

### **Katy**

So now you've seen Venice from the water, it's time to see the city from up high. On the boat tour I mentioned you go to San Giorgio Maggiore a church on a very small island on the other side of the lagoon to San Marco. You can get there by Vaporetto or take the tour or a taxi. When you arrive you enter the church and head through to the back where there is an elevator or lift that takes you to the top of the belltower. The views are absolutely stupendous 360-degree views from here. You can see right across the lagoon to the Doges Palace and the Basilica and see all the tiny islands of Venice laid out before you. This last visit I did we had a very clear day and could see the snow-capped Alps glistening in the distance. I think this is the best view in Venice.

Another you might like to try is from the rooftop of the Basilica San Marco. You'll need to buy the special ticket that includes the museum to access the rooftop but it's well worth it. Not only can you see the magnificent gold mosaics of San Marco from a unique elevated vantage point but you then step out onto the domed rooftop from where you can see the piazza with its elegant historic cafes laid out below you, across to the palazzo ducale and yes this amazing view you can soak up for a long time.

Speaking of the cafes, this is a little bonus tip - but they are well worth a visit to spend an hour or so over the most expensive coffee of your life to enjoy the atmosphere of the piazza. Sometimes there is live music but the main attraction is people watching and admiring one of the world's most beautiful squares. These are some of the oldest coffee houses in Europe and you'll also enjoy the smart uniforms of the wait staff and the beautiful decorations within.

Back to the views though and not quite as high as those I have mentioned but the scenes of the Grand Canal from the top of the Rialto and Accademia bridges are worth seeking out. You'll see many photographers at the Accademia at dawn and dusk chasing the perfect pink sky against the glorious palaces of beautiful Venice.

### **Katy**

Which brings us to my third must-do experience in Venice and that's - Eat lots of cicchetti!

We've devoted a whole podcast episode to this most Venetian of eating styles and we'll pop a link to that in the show notes. But for the uninitiated, This is the art of choosing a few small snacks to go with your glass of wine and bar hop your way around town quaffing and snacking. Whatever you do, don't call them tapas but you get the idea.

You won't find cicchetti in any other place in Italy so don't be shy to go all in on the experience either on your own or with a food tour. For lunch, dinner and all the snacking

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opportunities in between, cicchetti resolve all your hunger pangs for a while until it's time to taste some more.

You'll want to try a few different types because I have to say it's pretty easy to get stuck in a cicchetti rut when they really are so delicious. Bacala or whipped salted cod fish is absolute heaven. It's difficult to describe but I'll give it a go. Kind of like a fish mousse, it is light and fluffy and has quite a subtle flavor. You can find it served on crostini (little pieces of bread) or on its own. Delicious!

Of course, seafood is a big theme - anchovies - do not even a thing about the ones you get at home they are disgusting compared to these refined beauties. Refined sardines in saor which is a sour onion sauce are also delicious.

You'll find cheeses and cured meats in a variety of combinations as well as vegetables prepared different bite-sized ways and also polpette or meatballs. It's really a fun way to eat.

And you can try them all over town. There are literally hundreds of bars in Venice waiting to serve you cicchetti. We went to a favorite of mine in March - Al Squero where the cicchetti are tasty but they also have a prized position overlooking a gondola workshop - one of the last in Venice. This one isn't in our friend Monica's book on the bars of Venice but you'll find lots of options there - link in the show notes.

## **Katy**

Time for a bit of culture now and my best tip here is to take a - Peek inside a Palazzo.

In case you did not know Venice once dominated world trade or at least the European side of it and the Venetians were a very very wealthy bunch. They made sure they let everyone know about it too. If you want to experience some of the glitz and glamour for yourself then.

The one to rule them all is of course on the top of Venice must-visit lists and that of course is the Palazzo Ducale or Doges Palace in English. The Doge or Duke was the ruler of Venice and wielded enormous power. The palace is one of the most extraordinary buildings in Europe and would have wowed great kings and queens with its opulence. Expect room after room of golden gilded walls adorned in works of art by great Renaissance masters. The palace has a few stories of its own, including famous prisoners and hidden secrets and it's definitely worth a visit.

Art lovers will enjoy stepping inside the Scuola Grande di San Rocco an incredible palace covered in paintings by Tintoretto. This is quite a well-known site but really not many people go there and I just can't fathom why. It's absolutely beautiful and you can really imagine what Venice was like in its heyday. If you go there make sure to check out the paintings in the mirrors provided.

On the Grand Canal, Ca Rezzonico is another favorite of mine. Dedicated to Venice in the 18th century the rooms are restored to their magnificent baroque and rococo glory. There is no pared-back minimalism here. It's 100% excess which no doubt appealed to songwriter Cole Porter who rented the palazzo and staged incredible events including a flotilla of gondolas. The palazzo's position on the Grand Canal is unparalleled and the cafe is right on the water. I love it.

A little more pared back is Palazzo Grimani tucked away in a corner close to the Instagram famous Libreria Acqua Alta bookstore. This palazzo has a small but delightful collection of art amassed by 16th-century doge that includes the sculpture Abduction of Ganymede suspended from a roof inspired by the pantheon.

I could go on but there are so many delightful palazzi to explore in Venice, each with its own focus and I haven't even mentioned the churches which are actually like mini palaces in their own right.

### **Katy**

Get lost in Dorsoduro and Cannaregio. Lastly, you'll hear a lot of people say the best thing to do in Venice is to get lost in the streets and I have to agree. The further you stray off the Google Maps path the more intriguing this city becomes. So wander away from San Marco and Rialto and take a step inside the Dorsoduro, Cannaregio, and Castello districts for a true taste of Venetian life. And moments where you stand in awe of the people of this city who adapted to life on water. A favorite spot of mine is near the hospital Santi Giovanni e Paolo off the Mendicanti canal. Here you'll see a row of water ambulances lined up ready for action if required.

Our guide on the boat tour told us she had to make use of the ambulance service when she gave birth to her son 6 months earlier and wow does that make your mind boggle.. I don't know about you but getting into a small boat to make your way to hospital to deliver your child sounds a bit terrifying. And then we chatted about getting up and down several flights of stairs with a growing baby that doesn't like being in a baby carrier. The resilience of the Venetians is incredible and such a contrast to the opulence of the city's palazzi. I find it endlessly fascinating so do go on a big long walk around the neighborhoods, stop for some cicchetti and admire the goings on.

### **Katy**

So there you have it, my favorite experiences in beautiful Venezia for you to discover for yourself. Venice is truly magical and awe-inspiring and you just have to take a little dip into some of its lesser-known experiences to find out why. Most visitors seem to stick on a very well-worn path from Piazza San Marco to the Rialto Bridge which is a really tiny area and gets crowded easily. If you're experiencing that then take a left or a right and follow your heart and you'll find a wonderful part of Venice waiting for you.

And of course, If you'd like to follow in my footsteps and visit some of my favorite places or book the amazing boat tour or rowing experience, head on over to our website show notes at [untolditaly.com/222](https://untolditaly.com/222) for episode 222.

Thanks to all our wonderful listeners for your ongoing support of Untold Italy. I hope you enjoyed today's show. If you did then it would be amazing if you gave us a rating or review in your favorite podcast app. That way we can reach more Italy travel lovers just like you. If you listen on Spotify you can also leave comments on each episode and I really love reading all of those. Unfortunately, they haven't worked out a way for podcasters to reply to questions on that function but we're pushing for it.

Next week on Untold Italy, we'll delve into another aspect of traveling in beautiful Italy. But until then it's "ciao for now".