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36 Hours in Venice

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By INGRID K. WILLIAMS JUNE 12, 2014



Clockwise from top left: the outside of Al Timon; a display at Laboratorio 2729; the Chiesa di San Sebastiano in Dorsoduro; Suso Gelatoteca; and the boutique Madera. Credit Cristiano Bendinelli for The New York Times

As frustrating as it is fascinating, Venice is not an easy city to get to know. Getting lost is a given. The crowds can be beastly. And yes, the whole place is sinking — literally under rising sea levels, and figuratively beneath the weight of day-tripping tourists. But these obstacles have not hindered this beguiling city from establishing itself over the past decade as the pre-eminent place in Italy for contemporary art. More recently, a wave of high-end hotels has opened along the Grand Canal, and back alleys have been set abuzz with new nightspots and a revived restaurant scene. So leave the famous sights to the crowds and instead drink up the less overt charms of this watery wonderland.

FRIDAY

1. Palace Arts | 3:30 p.m.

Bummed there's no Biennale this year? Don't be. Contemporary art abounds in Venice's ancient palazzi, many of which now house museum-quality collections. One worth visiting is Palazzo Fortuny, an oft-overlooked Gothic palace tucked away on a quiet campo that was once home to the designer Mariano Fortuny. The second floor still houses Fortuny's fine fabrics and family portraits but also contemporary works like a light installation by James Turrell. The current temporary exhibitions celebrate female artists, from the photographs of Diane Arbus and Dora Maar to illusory works by Anne-Karin Furunes in the sunny top-floor studio (through July 14; admission 10 euros, or about \$13 at \$1.33 to the euro).

2. True Gritti | 5 p.m.

Dress up for drinks at a Doge's former residence, the Gritti Palace, now a supremely elegant hotel that reopened last year after a 35-million-euro renovation. Patrician details abound in the pristine lobby, from abundant floral displays and glittering chandeliers to a plush library displaying an exclusive collection of treasures selected by the well-traveled designer and actor Waris Ahluwalia. But the reason to visit at cocktail hour is Bar Longhi, a favored haunt of Ernest Hemingway where that most Venetian of aperitifs — the Aperol spritz — is served on the terrace with front-row views of the Grand Canal and the beautiful domed Basilica di Santa Maria della Salute beyond.

3. Baroque Is Back | 7 p.m.

Cultural preservation extends beyond art and architecture inside the Chiesa di San Giovanni Evangelista, an unassuming church in San Polo. In March 2013, beneath the church's lovely frescoes, the **Venice Music Project** inaugurated a Baroque music series, reviving a style integral to the Venetian Republic in the 17th and 18th centuries. This year, visiting groups and the resident orchestra, the Venetia Antiqua Ensemble, will perform works by Handel and Hasse, as well as the Venetian composers Albinoni and Vivaldi (20 euros).

4. Dream Dinner | 9:30 p.m.

Want to feel as if you're at a private dinner party deep in the Castello district? Snag one of the 16 seats at CoVino, a convivial restaurant that opened last year. Your hosts for the evening will be Dimitri, the chef, and Andrea, who handles everything from serving and suggesting wine pairings to tempting lingering guests with slivers of sublime chocolate cake. There are few choices on the market-driven menu, but also no misses (three courses, 36 euros). Recent highlights included saffron-scented risotto cooked in grape must with a dusting of "Red Cow" Parmigiano-Reggiano, and pan-seared mullet atop stewed pumpkin purée and endive. After dinner, glide home on a vaporetto to admire romantic Venice at its most enchanting: at night, from the water.

SATURDAY

5. Saving Venice | 10:30 a.m.

In December, the recently restored masterwork “Martyrdom of St. Lawrence,” an altarpiece by the 16th-century Venetian artist Titian, returned home to Chiesa di Santa Maria Assunta, the church known as I Gesuiti. View it and the exquisite marble altar inside the church, whose interior underwent restorations sponsored by Save Venice, an organization that has helped preserve hundreds of the city’s works of art and architecture. For a peek at a work-in-progress, head south to the 16th-century Chiesa di San Sebastiano in Dorsoduro to marvel at the jewel-like sacristy and restored ceilings resplendent with paintings by Paolo Veronese.

6. Bacaro Hop | 12:30 p.m.

For lunch, follow the lead of locals congregating outside bacari, traditional Venetian bars specializing in hors-d’oeuvre-size snacks called cicchetti. The alleys behind the Rialto Market are packed with bacari, so start there at Osteria Alla Ciurma, a wood-paneled spot where everything from meatballs to stuffed zucchini flowers is thrown into the fryer. Around the corner at All’Arco, pair pesce-crudo-topped toasts with an ombra, a tiny goblet of wine. Then continue to Cantina do Spade for fantastic fried calamari and crab claws beneath dark timbered ceilings. Finish the ambulatory meal at Osteria Bancogiro, where you can nibble on black polenta topped with baccalà mantecato — the whipped cod spread is a local specialty — at a perch overlooking the adjacent piazza.

7. Tadao’s Theater | 2 p.m.

After transforming Palazzo Grassi and Punta della Dogana into contemporary arts centers for the collections of the French businessman François Pinault, the renowned Japanese architect Tadao Ando turned his attention to Teatrino, a formerly abandoned theater. In May 2013, the revamped, starkly modernist structure reopened with a 225-seat auditorium suitable for performances, lectures and screenings. Take a seat and enjoy what’s on; short films, like a recent pairing of video works from the French artist Laurent Montaron, often loop all day.

8. Dorsoduro Designs | 5 p.m.

Every third shop sells masks and Murano glass trinkets, but for less touristy souvenirs head to the southern sestiere of Dorsoduro. Laboratorio 2729 is a design studio and shop whose modish tableware ranges from cutting boards fashioned from slabs of maple to geometric-shaped wine stoppers. A few doors down, the boutique Madera stocks beautiful jewelry, handbags and housewares from local designers. And across a canal at Gualti, find wearable art like delicate leaf-shaped brooches and statement-making pleated-taffeta wraps.

9. Cannaregio Chow | 8 p.m.

Whet your appetite with a spritz and some cicchetti at Al Timon, a canalside bacaro in Cannaregio where regulars spill out along the sidewalk nightly. Then settle in for a seafood-centric dinner at Anice Stellato, a rustic osteria nearby. Most tables order the frittura mista — a tangle of fried squid, whole shrimp, small fish and vegetables (19 euros) — but don't skip the starters, like stuffed calamari in a rich tomato sauce with grilled polenta (11 euros).

10. Insider Action | 10:30 p.m.

Venice night life got a boost last August when El Sbarlefo San Pantalon opened on an alley in Dorsoduro. Neon-yellow wall lights and pendant lamps illuminate this sleek little bar, where live music on weekends might be a jazz pianist or a rockabilly trio entertaining the crowd. Later, seek out Enoiteca Mascareta, one of the few spots open past midnight. A low-key industry place, this friendly wine bar is where chefs and servers from nearby restaurants congregate after their shifts to flirt over a glass of wine or a well-mixed gin and tonic.

SUNDAY

11. Sweet Start | 10:30 a.m.

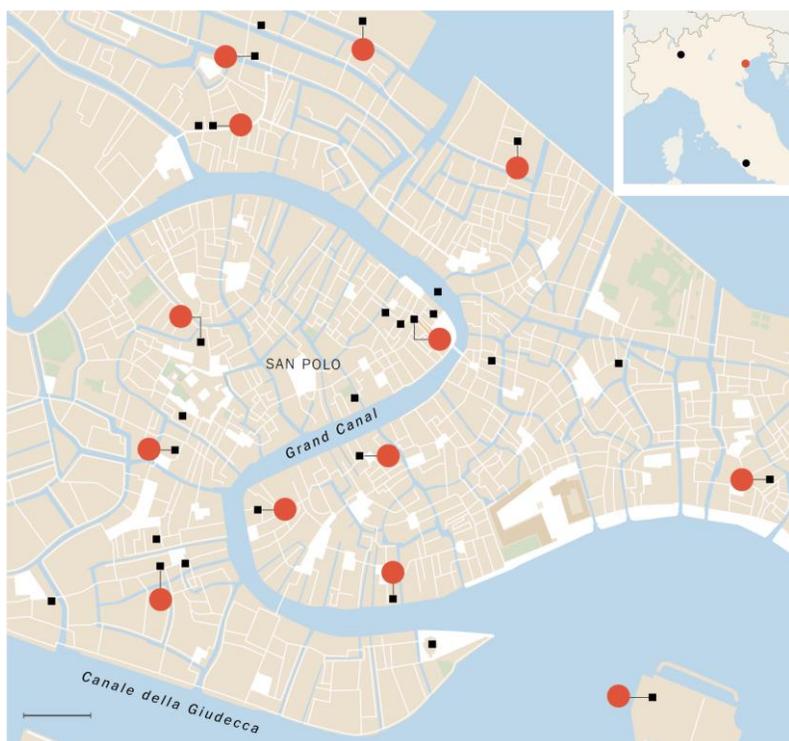
Wake up at Torrefazione Marchi, a bustling coffee bar and roastery where Venetians have been slinging back their morning caffè since the 1930s. It's elbow-to-elbow at the wooden counter, so make haste with a caffè macchiato, espresso "stained" with foamed milk (1.10 euros). Need a more substantive breakfast? Stop at Suso Gelatoteca for a sandwich — of the sweet variety. The artisanal gelateria's twist on an ice-cream sandwich involves a thick slice of panettone stuffed with two generous scoops of gelato, one of which ought to be the divine Manet flavor: creamy salted pistachio layered atop chocolate-hazelnut gianduja (3.50 euros).

12. Tintoretto Time | Noon

Escape the midday crowds at the usually empty Chiesa della Madonna dell'Orto, whose 14th-century Venetian Gothic facade faces a quiet square in northern Cannaregio (admission, 2.50 euros). Inside are several masterpieces by Jacopo Tintoretto, the Venetian painter who is interred in the church's Chapel of Tintoretto. For more of his works, head to Scuola Grande di San Rocco, a confraternity institution where the upper hall's walls and vast ceiling are decorated with a biblical series so spectacular it is referred to as "Tintoretto's Sistine Chapel" (admission, 10 euros).

13. Water Views | 2:30 p.m.

For a final, unforgettable Venetian vista, hop on a vaporetto bound for San Giorgio Maggiore, an island just east of Giudecca. Alight in front of the 16th-century Benedictine church and ascend the adjoining bell tower (5 euros). From this campanile, the priceless panorama spans the lagoon, the Lido, and the more than 100 islands interconnected by canals big and small that make up this most magical of Italian cities.



THE DETAILS

1. **Palazzo Fortuny**, San Marco 3780; fortuny.visitmuve.it.
2. **The Gritti Palace**, Campo Santa Maria del Giglio 2467; thegrittipalace.com.
3. **Chiesa di San Giovanni Evangelista**, San Polo 2454; venicemusicproject.it.
4. **CoVino**, Calle del Pestrin, Castello 3829A/3829; covinovenezia.com.
5. **I Gesuiti**, Campo dei Gesuiti. **Chiesa di San Sebastiano**, Campo San Sebastiano 1686.
6. **Osteria Alla Ciurma**, San Polo 406; osteriaciurma.it. **All'Arco**, San Polo 436. **Cantina do Spade**, San Polo 859/860; cantinadospade.com. **Osteria Bancogiro**, San Polo 122; osteriabancogiro.it.
7. **Teatrino**, Campo San Samuele 3231; palazzograssi.it/en/museum/teatrino.
8. **Laboratorio 2729**, Dorsoduro 2729; lab2729.com. **Madera**, Dorsoduro 2762; maderavenezia.it. **Gualti**, Dorsoduro 3111; gualti.it.
9. **Al Timon**, Cannaregio 2754. **Anice Stellato**, Cannaregio 3272; osterianicestellato.com.
10. **El Sbarlefo San Pantalon**, Dorsoduro 3757. **Enoiteca Mascareta**, Calle Lunga Santa Maria Formosa 5183; ostemaurolorenzoni.it.
11. **Torrefazione Marchi**, Cannaregio 1337; torrefazionemarchi.it. **Suso Gelatoteca**, Calle della Bissa, San Marco 5453; gelatovenezia.it.
12. **Chiesa della Madonna dell'Orto**, Cannaregio 3512; madonnadellorto.org. **Scuola Grande di San Rocco**, San Polo 3052; scuolagrandesanrocco.it.
13. **Chiesa di San Giorgio Maggiore**, Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore.

Lodging

Better save up before bedding down on the Grand Canal. At the illustrious **Gritti Palace**(Campo Santa Maria del Giglio 2467; thegrittipalace.com), with its 82 recently restored rooms and suites, rates start around 900 euros (\$1,200). And at the **Aman Canal Grande** (Calle Tiepolo 1364; amanresorts.com/amancanalgrandevenice), a rarefied resort that opened in 2013 in a Rococo-meets-modern palazzo, the 24 rooms start at 1,150 euros.

Find more reasonable rates and a warm welcome at the **Hotel Arcadia** (Cannaregio 1333;hotelarcadia.net; from 170 euros), a new boutique hotel with 17 modern rooms in a restored palazzo on Cannaregio's main drag. Included is an outstanding breakfast buffet served beneath wood-beamed ceilings and a gorgeous Murano-glass chandelier.

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