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# *Venice. City of dreams.*

## A week in Venice, what to see, where to go and Photograph

A Venice evening taken from the "Riva Degli Schiavoni"

### Where do you start (the logistics)?

I understand the dilemmas you face regarding your choice of time to go, do you go during a major event like the Carnival, during the hot summer and it's crowds or during the winter with the risks of Aqua Alta (flooding) issues.

All those issues aside you still have to find a way to get there, by far are the low cost Airlines are a better choice but check where they land when they say to Venice. Then there is booking seats, airlines like "Easy Jet" & "Ryan Air" only allow you to book 6mths ahead of your chosen departure date, unlike Major Carriers with whom I travel with permit 12 mth ahead booking. Having said all that there are only a limited number of seats to your destination, so book early. Then there is the hotel, here things are a little more easy with great deals through out the year, our choice is to stay in Venice but from a cost issue you might choose to stay on the mainland, but it comes at a cost of lost time getting into and out of Venice.



Above: The early morning quiet before the tourists arrive.

### So what of Venice.

Venice is divided into six regions, I will talk about each of the regions and what they have to offer the photographer. Finally I will take a Vaporetto along the "Grand Canal" which many re-guard as the Arterial Heart of Venice. I aim to show you there is more to Venice than the main tourist areas. A good idea before leaving home is to read a little about the city, it will make your stay more memorable and make you search out the more remote places to photograph. I will barely scratch the surface of this fine city in this article, you need to see and photograph it for yourself, and fall in love with it as I have.



In the distance is the Campanile of the S. Giorgio dei Greci on the Rio di S. Lorenzo.  
Like several of the campaniles of Venice it has a lean due to subsidence.



**The technical stuff.**

*So far we have not mentioned the technical issues you face. Its really quite simple, consider when you are going, what time of day you wish to do your photography, and the type of photography you are going to do, simple, ah you say!*

*Lets look at it in more detail. Myself and three fellow photographers chose to photograph the Carnival in February, This meant being up before the Sun and avoiding the crowds, That's the plan but you won't be alone when you arrive in "St Marks Square" or on the "Riva Degli Schiavoni". Even before its light the costumes will be there and it then turns into a free for all with photographers even organised group shoots with little thought to curtesy of fellow photographers.*

*Camera bodies of any make will suffice, even Hybrids but fast lenses are the order for this time of day, 50mm f1.8, 24-70mm f2.8 and for us, the 80-200mm f2.8 is a wise choice as it keeps you away from all the elbows of others. There is nothing wrong with slower lenses like 18-55mm f3.5-5.6, or 55-200mm f3.5-5.6, even better choice would be 18-200mm f3.5-5.6. but you will need to consider upping your ISO to ensure a good shutter speed. So far I have not mentioned Tripods. Save them for later when the crowds have gone, and the evenings .*

*We talked in length before we left the UK about what we should leave behind, two of us being Nikon users made it simpler, we each took our favourite lens then a assortment of lenses as a pool we each could use. The real issue was Camera bodies, here we took a backup in our case a D2X for either of us to use in the event of a failure of our main bodies, You really should think about a backup even if its only a point and shoot, who knows what could happen.*



Above: St Marks Square can be busy and stressful, you can have as many as 20-30 photographers all trying to get the same image, our advice is walk away until it becomes quieter or fight with the rest! Your choice.

So as the early morning light improves life and photography get easier, or so you would think. The late arrivals now start to arrive, for myself its time for breakfast at the hotel and time to sort out a action plan for the day. This has in the past included a trip to the Island of Burano. But like most days it's wondering of the beaten track away from the tourist haunts. Each of the regions has something to offer, you will walk over many bridges, just stop and have a look at them, each one has its own character and back drop, then there are the many churches, palaces, narrow alleys not to mention the every day workers and markets used by the locals. Never shut your mind off when walking around, look at everything from the crumbling brick work, to the marble clad church exteriors and the traffic on the Grand Canal.

I have said little about how to photograph or what you should take on your walkabout. Keep it simple and light. Lenses like a 18-200mm f3.5-5.6 would be a good choice. A wide angle say 12-14mm will give you that little extra when you are in confined places. Bye all means take a flash gun if your camera does not have one built in, just to add fill in, in dark alleys.

As for churches etc they are no go in most for photography, those that do usually do not permit flash so its usually down to high ISO's or very slow shutter speed (but you left your tripod behind) so find something to rest it on and use the cameras timer to trigger it or a remote/ cable or shut-

**Castello (West)**

Like most of Venice getting around is best done on foot. This sestieri area really is split in two areas E&W, we will concentrate mainly on the West. In this area are some amazing buildings, churches and canal walks to take in. Here you have the "Reva degli Schiavoni" which can be walked along to the far east of this sestieri, for its length it over looks the logon with spectacular views.

On the western end is "Ponte della Paglia" and the "Bridge of Sighs" a big attraction, walking east you will pass the hotel "Danieli" built at the end of the 14th century , its worth a quick look inside. Just back of the lagoon front you have the church "San Zaccaria" set in a quiet square and often missed by tourists it has a beautiful Marble facade. By now the battery might be getting low. Staying in the area a walk along the "Fmta Del Osmarin " which runs along side the Rio San Provolo which takes you past old shops and even more palaces and leads you to the church of "San Giorgio dei Greci" with its leaning bell tower. The narrow streets in this area offer up some wonderful photography including some very beautiful small bridges.

Continue East and you will come to the "Arsenale" the maritime 12th century dockyard. It is in some ways a big disappointment as there is no entry to this huge and fascinating area, the only photo opportunities is the towered entrance although interesting in its history not so good for photography.

Sarah Toon one of our group being a Architectural photographer loves this area, with the huge gothic church of "Santi Giovanni e Paolo" just a short walk away, here you will need the widest lens you have even then it will be a challenge to get it all in.

There is so much this area has to offer the photographer so take your time and explore those narrow alley ways it will not disappoint..



The "Palazzo Priuli" on the Rio di S. Severo



**San Marco.**

This is one of the most crowded areas of Venice, very few tourists venture more than a few hundred meters away from St Marks Square. The architecture around Piazza San Marco can only be describe as absolutely breath taking. Here you could rotate 360° and flatten the cameras battery with wonderful images, that is if it wasn't for the throngs of tourists. Its worth mentioning at this point, if you are staying close bye return early evening or after dark, as most visitors are making there way home especially if you go in the winter months, you can have images that can rival the best of Venice night photographs. With buildings such as the “Doge’s Palace”, “Basillica San Marco” and the “Procuratie Nuove” all with there stunning facades , there is the Campanile with its wonderful views for roof top photography from the bell tower. Also take a visit inside of the Basilica (it is free) but buy a ticket to the Treasury which will give you access to the roof, from here you will have a whole new perspective of the square in front of you. Time I reckon the change the battery and the memory card and move around this wonderful sestieri.



The Grand Canal from a Vaporetto on misty cold morning

One of the gems of the area is “la Fenice” the opera house destroyed by fire in 1836 and totally destroyed again by fire in 1996. It was restored to its original splendour and re opened in 2004. For a 10€ entrance fee, and a 3€ you can have a permit to photograph the amazing interior. From here head across to Rialto but don’t put your camera away, try to go via “Palazzo Contarini del Bovolo” its very hard to find but a gem for two reasons, it’s graceful external stairway and the wonderful views from the top. The whole area will excite you so take it all in until you reach the Rialto and its magnificent bridge, what I can guarantee is it will be packed during the day, but late at night or very, very early morning it’s a joy to photograph without the tourists . Tripod is essential, use a low ISO and a wide angle lens, it does not have to be a fast one. We will now leave San Marco even though there is still so much more to photograph.



Crowds on the “Riva Degli Schiavoni”and the Ponti della Paglia with the Santa Maria della Salute in the distance.

**Cannarigeo**

The area has the worlds oldest Jewish Ghetto an enclave since about 1516 and well worth exploring with a wide angle lens, quite a few of the buildings in this area are quite tall, keep your wide angle on and move on to one of the finest Gothic churches in Venice the “Madonna del’Orto”.

The whole area has something to offer the photographer, from canal images, churches to decaying buildings not to mention the huge sweep of the Grand Canal with its palaces, but one church stands out from all the others. Its hard to find as you will discover, its buried amongst ally ways and palaces in a run down area, it is “Santa Maria Del Mircaoli”. When you see it you can not but stop look and say where do I start. Here you will need the widest lens you have pref 10mm even the camera metering can get upset by its Marble façade in a very tight compressed area. By now you should be in need of a cuppa, head back towards the Rialto bridge and the cafes , take time to think about your photography. The area will be busy but great for street photography, switch to a say 18-55mm lens, sit at a table (not one of the expensive ones) and click away as you see the world pass you buy.



You are often surrounded by interest, even up walls.



**Dorsoduro**, Crossing the Accademia bridge takes you into another region and away from the other bustling tourist hot spots. Take time at the bridge to get one of the iconic images looking down the Grand Canal towards “Santa Maria della Salute”. Here its far more quiet. With a huge square the “Campo Santa Margherita” which forms the heart of this area. Here you can photograph street life, its a place full of opportunities, both buildings, churches and palaces all within a few hundred meters. The area has one of the best canal side walks the “Fondamenta Gherardini”, By now the memory card should be getting full and the brain moving into top gear. At this point a walk across too “Zatterre” over looking the lagoon is in order. Its another area over looked by tourists, a great place to have a cuppa and review your images so far. It too makes for some great people watching photographs. Once refreshed a short stroll to the “Santa Maria della Salute” is in order, here you will find tourist but in smaller numbers. Reading the history of the church and knowing it stands on over one million wooden piles will add a hole new dimension to your view of it and inspire you to photograph it from many angles. Think about coming back here after dark to photograph it and the stunning night view across the Grand Canal towards St Marco.



Market stall life. Campo di Santa Margherita

### **San Polo & Santa Croce.**

These two regions merge really as one, it has a lot more tourist than other areas especially around the “ Rialto Bridge” area, having said that it makes for some amazing photography (especially in the late evening) so don’t rule it out, just choose your time to go. Both wide angle and zoom lens are the order here. This area was once the Red Light District of Venice in the 16th century ,there were as many as eleven thousand prostitute and courtesans in Venice the majority based around Rialto, so many in fact that the government set up two state brothels. Moving away from Rialto and away from the fish and fruit market which are best photographed very early in the morning it becomes a lot quieter, like so many of the regions it is crisscrossed by canals all with bridges to be photographed. Amongst the many churches is “Frari” and “San Polo” each is set in a Campo and worth the effort to search out and photograph. This region lends its self to getting lost in, and that’s not hard in Venice as you will all to quickly discover.



A fruit barge moored on the “Rio San Barnaba” Dorsoduro.

Also close to the Rialto Bridge is the “Fondaco dei Tedeschi” It now allows you to access to the roof top of its building giving you fantastic Views of the Grand Canal and the surrounding area.

A new addition to the landscape is the new and controversial “Ponte Calatrava” this bridge which links the area to the railway station. It is one of only four bridges to cross the Grand Canal. The bridge was open in September 2008 and is of modern design, from a photography aspect it is best photographed at night when it is lit up along with the surrounding buildings.

### **The Grand Canal**

This is the arterial blood of the city, take time out at one of the Cafes or Restaurants by the Rialto Bridge and watch the life of Venice go by. You could take a Gondola trip from here or from one of the many stations along the Grand Canal. Look at the many Merchants Palaces that sit on the edge of the canal, even look at the tide times and choose low tide, as it will uncover something of just how bad the building are becoming when in some places you can see the top of some of the wooden piles supporting the buildings. Earlier this year 2017 there where some exceptional low tides, the tide dropped to 28 inches below mean, and in some canals the boats were sat on the mud in the canals. Now they would make a great image.



San Zaccaria in the “Castello” sestieri



The Grand Canal has over 100 Palazzo's on it ranging in styles. A lot of them are now hotels, but many are in a poor state requiring major work. This perhaps adds to the beauty of the canal.

You will not see many of the Palaces as they face onto the Grand Canal but there are locations in all the sestiere where you can look across and see some of these magnificent palaces. They include Palazzo Barbarigo which can be easily photographed from the other side of the Grand Canal, also palazzo Dario, Palazzo Bembo, Palazzo Mamin Dolfen but to name a few.



Above: The Fondamenta Gherardini which runs along side the Rio San Barnaba Canal.



Above: One of the many costumes on the "Ponti della Paglia" with the Bridge of Sighs in the background

### What not to miss

So far we have talked little about the Grand Canal, with out doubt ignore at your peril. Better still go too St Marks Sq jump onto a No 1 vaporetto going up the canal and take the 40 minute ride up the canal to the railway station, its one of the best 40 minutes you will spend on a boat, but read up about what you will see as you travel before you go. Set the camera to idiot proof mode, P, fit a wide to medium lens preferably with image VR on and go for it. You my take 20 or my be 300 images but they will become your memory. They may not be perfect, but hey that is photography, its your pleasure. Walk back or better still stay at the station till it starts to get dark and do the return journey and see it in a different light, so to speak.



A Typical canal scene just off a main tourist area

### So from me!

I have fallen in love with Venice and will be back next year with friends, but may not be for the Carnival as Venice has so much to offer the photographer who opens his mind and eyes in Venice, its all there for you to see and photograph. I have not mentioned in great detail the main tourist hi lights, the "Doges Palace", "The Basilica", " Santa Maria De Miracoli", " The Fish Market" but to name a few, don't miss the chance to see them. They will be crowded difficult to photograph without any one in the shot, so what, the history behind them and there beauty should not be missed. This was never intended as a travel guide or a detailed article on how to photograph Venice. I have put it together to inspire you to go out there and do what you love doing, photographing the world around you, you never know you might get one you will treasure. I will continue to take any one who wishes to join me to Venice.

John



Gondolas on the "Grand Canal" with Palazzo's Grimani, Farsetti and Loredan on the other side of The Grand Canal.