



The Wayfarer

By Dawn M. Wayand

Venice - City of Romance



If you're looking for one of the best romantic getaways, Venice, Italy is your "golden" rose in the garden. From its views of the Laguna Veneta and Adriatic Sea, to its Venetian and Greek gothic-style churches, Venice offers visitors a combination of architecture, history and everlasting romance.

Once you arrive into Venice via the train station Santa Lucia or from the Venice Marco Polo Airport, both located on the mainland, you will have to take a water taxi or "vaporetto" to get to the island of Venice.

The streets of Venice are a web of bridges, canals and sidewalks. The central point of the city is the Piazza San Marco. As seen in movies "The Italian Job" and "Just Married", San Marco Square is the large courtyard covered with socializing blackbirds. It is surrounded by the Museo Correr building which has a succession of Istrian stone archways housing halls with chambers, and

is landmarked by a clock tower near the water's end facing St. Mark's Basilica and Palazzo Ducale. The Museo Correr has showcased the art and history of Venice since 1830 and contains exhibits such as Venetian armor, coins and notable artwork like the "Two Venetian Ladies" by Carpaccio.

St. Mark's Basilica is intensely ornate inside and out and you may never again see something of such spectacular design. Not only is the entire inside of a Renaissance paneling with many archway ceilings, but the walls are actually sprinkled with gold mosaic tiles. On the outside,



the architecture consists of 5 huge domes. For \$1,5 EU, you can tour the upstairs of the basilica and experience amazing views of the city from its balcony.

When I went to Venice in December 2002, it was cold and rainy, but it dangled on the edge of the Carnivale

season and the presence of its upcoming annual celebration was very obvious.

Among the majority of stores selling blown glass figurines, which Venice is very well known for, there were also many shops selling a variety of masks ranging from colorful and glittery to black and white, and in paper mache or porcelain for the upcoming Carnivale festivities.

Other areas and sites to visit in Venice are the Santa Maria Della Salute, which is a church located on the peninsula facing San Marco Square, and the Rialto Bridge area in the middle of the island where many sidewalk vendors can be found selling their wares.



A truly romantic experience while in Venice is a gondola ride. I will forewarn you, gondola captains will try to overcharge you, but keep in mind that you can haggle and that each of the boats are individually negotiable and that there are at least 100 in Venice alone. If you're not happy with the price one captain offers, ask another. It's good to know some Spanish or Italian to negotiate. I was fortunate enough to have met a friend who spoke Spanish that bargained us down from \$80EU for a 15-minute ride to \$50EU for a 45-minute ride on a gondola.

Venice is definitely a very romantic city to be appreciated by its old-world charm, but it is what it is - a lot of beautiful water and many basilicas. If you're just passing through for the Venetian experience, I'd recommend no longer than a 2-3 day stay because it is a small island. Give yourself an extra day or two if you are

there for an opera, exploring as a big history buff or also visiting the other popular nearby islands of Lido, Murano and Burano.

Whether just you're exploring or grabbing a romantic getaway, Venice is a very beautiful, historical and romantic place to visit and create memories in Europe!

Travel Planning Tips: Europe Vacation Tips Series Part III - Making Transportation Arrangements

You've decided where you want to go. You've booked your flight. Now it's time to figure out how to get from Point A to Points B, C, D, etc. for your trip.

I can't say much for traveling by rental car between cities and countries as you would think you'd see more driving, but realistically, you might spend more time panicking about directions, foreign street signs and driving on the correct side of the road (in certain countries). Sometimes it's less of a headache to just take the train and see the countryside scenery along the way from the train windows - sometimes you'll even get there quicker.

For train tickets and scheduling, I use and recommend www.raileurope.com. If you use this website, have the order in which you will be traveling to your destinations handy. When perusing train schedules, you will see that you can buy individual tickets for train travel between each city or country. That is not always your best option. If you are traveling between three or more countries, sometimes it's better to purchase a "Selectpass". Discounts are offered if you are traveling with more than one person or if you are under the age of 26. Passes are offered in increments of 5, 6, 8, 10 and 15 days to be used within a 2-month period between 3, 4 or 5 countries - you choose the combination.



Planning your railway travel takes some time and some thought due to the ticket rules. If an overnight train leaves before 7pm local time, you are charged for 2 days on a Selectpass. The Eurostar, which is the only train that goes between Europe and the United Kingdom, is an additional \$75 (a discounted rate for Selectpass holders) and it doesn't take any days away from the Selectpass. The fees for the Selectpass will get you access to be able to reserve seating or couchettes on the train. Seat prices range from \$11-22 USD and second-class couchettes (sleeping quarters) are usually around \$28 USD. First class couchettes are more and not really necessary or worth it. You're only paying for a bunk to sleep on and the only difference between first and second-class couchettes are that first-class sleeps 4 people (in 2 bunks of 2 beds) and second-class sleeps 6 people (in 2 bunks of 3 beds.)

When booking my train tickets, I usually contact Eurorail directly by email with my preferred schedule requests and any details, special requests or schedule changes (that way everything is visually mapped out.)

I have some scheduling recommendations below but before you arrange your personalized schedule for travel between countries, remember to consider things such as travel time between cities (you can find the time by going to the Fares and Schedules section of the Rail Europe website and searching for schedules between two cities.) Add in metro and/or cab time to/from the train station, the time of day you want to leave/arrive in your departure/destination cities and the latest check-in times for your next destination's lodging. Remember, you also

want to minimize your travel time and optimize your sightseeing time.

Here are some things that have worked for me in the past:

1. For cities with more than 5 hours of train travel involved, book an overnight train even if it increases your travel time to 8-10 hours. You're going to sleep at night anyway and instead of wasting 5 or more hours of sightseeing time and spending \$50 USD or more on a hostel or hotel room, you can pay around \$28USD for a bunk on the night train. Take the latest night train because they all arrive into the destination cities between 6 and 9 am the next morning. That way, you can stay in your departure city a little longer.
2. For cities with 3-5 hours of train travel involved, pick a train time around the 3 or 4 o'clock hour. In Europe, it gets dark between 3 and 5 pm depending where you are and what time of the year it is. You'll leave just before dusk and get into your arrival city early enough to check into your hotel and possibly grab a bite to eat.
3. For cities with travel distances less than 3 hours apart, any time of the day before 6pm is safe because you won't miss your latest hotel check-in time and you'll only lose a few hours of your day.

After looking at the schedule and deciding your train preferences, be it days, times, seats or couchettes and Eurorail v. Eurostar, contact Eurorail with these details and they usually respond within 24 hours with a confirmation of a schedule and a total price requesting you to call with your payment information.

I highly recommend purchasing your tickets ahead online because 1) it can be less expensive in the end since you're thinking it through and not making a hasty decision on the spot, 2) you're guaranteed your seat when you buy your seat reservations online too and, 3)

lines to buy train tickets in any European country can sometimes be a wait of an hour or longer depending on a variety of unforeseeable factors.

Next month, we'll continue with Part IV of this series:

Tips for Packing.

Lodging Pick



Although it is located on the “not as touristy” island of Lido southeast of Venice, I highly recommend

Hotel Le Boulevard as your lodging choice. The only way to get to Lido is by public or private water taxi. Tickets for the public water taxis may be purchased for 6 EU a day (December 2002). The hotel is only a two-minute walk one block east from the dock.

Inside the hotel, you'll find the reception desk straightaway. To the right, the hotel bar and two dining halls reside. Two can stay for between \$75-115 USD per night, which includes the room and an excellent American breakfast buffet complete with details all the way down to little tubs of Nutella for your bread.

From its queen-sized wooden-framed bed and armoire to its typical Venetian windows, the burgundy and



golden-decorated rooms are definitely a perfect romantic nest. Even some of the bathrooms are distinctly decorated in bright red tiled floors and walls, and porcelain white fixtures.

My stay at Hotel Le Boulevard genuinely felt more like an authentic Italian hotel experience than just a place to stay.

Hotel Le Boulevard
Gran Viale Santa Maria Elisabetta 41
Venice Lido

Eats Pick

Don't be fooled by the sweet and persistent Italian old man trying to sell you into patroning his restaurant. Italian-American and Italy-Italian foods taste very differently. My advice: if you can't smell food from the outside, the food probably isn't good and in my experience, has been literally bland.

I did, however, discover an excellent pick amongst a bunch of bland-tasting restaurants called "Ristorante Da Celio". This restaurant, located near the train station, is very timely-decorated with many knick-knacks, pictures and lace on the walls. The tables are dressed in blue and white checkered tablecloths, flowers and candles.

In the art of traditional European dining, I started with a cup of Pasta Fagioli soup. I followed this with a primo piatto (“first course”, in Italy usually a pasta dish) of a half order of tasty prosciutto confettied Spaghetti Carbonara. My secondo piatto (“second course”, typically a protein course) consisted of an order of Entrecote, which is thinly sliced savory beef steak in which they topped it with a delicious pepper cream sauce. I have tried Entrecote in many European cities and this is, so far, was one of the best places to experience it. I recommend, and this is typical, ending your meal with a traditional Italian cappuccino or espresso, and you'll be good to go!

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