

# TOP 10



**Not to be missed!**

**Our top hits – from the absolute No. 1 to No. 10 – help you plan your tour of the most important sights.**

**★ ST MARK'S SQUARE ▶ 54**

Loved by Napoleon, this piazza boasts no fewer than 5 of the city's highlights: the Basilica San Marco, the Campanile, the Torre dell' Orologio, the Palazzo Ducale, the Museo Correr and the historic cafés.

Guggenheim – transformed it into a home for creations by such painters and sculptors as Giacometti, Magritte, Picasso and Pollock.

**★ SANTI GIOVANNI E PAOLO ▶ 82**

The largest Gothic church in the city serves as the final resting place of no fewer than 27 Doges.

**★ SAN GIORGIO MAGGIORE ▶ 56**

This Benedictine Abbey, built by Andrea Palladio, is the final resting place of two Doges. Don't miss the view from the Campanile.

**★ MURANO ▶ 154**

Artistic glass has been blown on this lagoon island for 1,000 years. Several "Fornaci" show visitors how a vase or piece of jewellery can be created from raw glass in just a few minutes.

**★ PONTE DI RIALTO ▶ 118**

The world-famous Ponte de Rialto bridge lies in the heart of the old trade district.

**★ BURANO ▶ 156**

Burano's colourful houses used to show fisherman the safe route home, even when thick fog hung over the lagoon. The place is also famous for its richly decorated bobbin and needle lace. The women in the Museo del Merletto show how this delicate material is produced.

**★ MERCATO DI RIALTO ▶ 120**

With its artfully arranged fruit and vegetables, freshly caught fish and seafood, the Rialto market is a true feast for the senses.

**★ ACCADEMIA ▶ 136**

Discover 800 works by Bellini & Co. spanning five centuries on the south bank of the Grand Canal.

**★ IL GHETTO ▶ 100**

All other ghettos take their name and form from this walled-off Jewish quarter in the Sestiere Cannaregio. With its kosher shops, restaurants, Torah schools and synagogues, the Ghetto is flourishing again today.

**★ COLLEZIONE PEGGY GUGGENHEIM ▶ 140**

Wild parties were held in this palace on the Grand Canal before its owner – art-lover Peggy

# 'O SOLE MIO' – Getting around in Gondolas

Venice is the best place in the world for simply messing about in boats. Originally decorated with bright colours, gondolas had to be painted black from 1562 to put a stop to the overly ostentatious gaudiness with which the noble families were beautifying their vessels.

There is a specialist boat for every purpose and occasion – mail, goods and rubbish barges, hearses, fire engine, ambulance and police boats, sleek fast taxi boats, private pleasure craft and the *vaporetti*, the public transport boats (► 33–34). Travelling through Venice's canals in a gondola is a real luxury (unless you're on board one of the traditional *traghetto*).

## Black, Streamlined and Fit for Purpose

It's unclear exactly when the gondola's unique form was developed. What is certain is that their long, slim shape and low draft – making them perfect for the city's narrow, shallow canals – had come into being by the 11th century. Gondolas measure in at 10.87m (35.66ft) in length and 1.42m (4.66ft) at their widest point. To counteract the weight of the Gondolier at the back, all the boats are equipped with a "ferro" at the prow, a heavy metal plate with a curve representing the Doge's cap and six teeth in honour of the Sestieri: San Marco, Giudecca island, San Polo, Cannaregio, Castello and Santa Croce. The "felze" – a wooden cabin with a semi-circular roof that sheltered passengers from the summer sun and the elements in winter – can only be admired in historical paintings today. That this gondola cabin doesn't completely fall into obscurity is down to "El Felze", a society for the preservation of gondola culture. This association unites all of the tradespeople involved in building a gondola from 280 individual pieces in less than



A gondola ride under the Rialto Bridge



The jetty on the Grand Canal: Room for one more...?

four months: the Squerarioli (boat builders), the Ottonai and Fonditori (metal workers), the Intagiadori (woodcarvers), the Remeri (forcola carvers), the Tapessieri (upholsterers), the Calegheri (shoemakers), the Fravi (ferro makers), the Indoradori (gilders), the Bareteri (milliners) and the Sartori (tailors).

## A Woman in a Man's World

Since it was founded in 1094, none of the 425-strong membership of the exclusive Association of Gondoliers had ever been female – at least not until 23 year-old mother of two Giorgia Boscolo bucked the trend in 2009. Giorgia is the daughter of a Gondolier who – although proud of her – doesn't support her ambition. He believes that "the work of a Gondolier is not suitable for a woman." Many Gondoliers share this opinion, at least partially due to a sense of financial self-interest: steering gondolas is a lucrative tradition, with the men bringing home 5,000 Euros a month.

## Do It Standing Up

Venetians love rowing, and enjoy getting together in clubs to train the whole year round in readiness for the regattas in the summer. Each sestiere (city quarter) has its own club, its own roster of rowing heroes, and its own fans who pack themselves into the best vantage points to cheer on their teams. Gondolas are steered using the "forcola" at the back. How this undulating oar mount is cut from cherry or walnut wood in such a way that its curves and bulges allow the boat to be propelled at a total of seven tempi (ranging from docking mode to top speed) is a well-guarded trade secret among those in the know.

# The Perfect Day

If you're not quite sure where to begin your travels, this itinerary recommends a practical and enjoyable day exploring San Marco and San Giorgio Maggiore, taking in some of the best places to see. For more information see the main entries (► 54–72).

## 🕒 9:00am

Arrive early in the ★ **Piazza San Marco** (► 54) to view its glories before the crowds arrive, then take the lift up the **Campanile** (► 54) for great views of the city, the lagoon and its islands.

## 🕒 10:00am

Stroll across to the 11 **Basilica di San Marco** (ill. right; ► 58), one of Italy's architectural masterpieces and a Venetian-Byzantine treasure-house of mosaics and goldwork. Take in the Galleria, a superb vantage point with a close-up view of the famous bronze horses.



## 🕒 11:00am

Make your way through the piazzetta to the waterfront and the entrance to the 12 **Palazzo Ducale** (► 63), and explore the fascinating interior of this sumptuous seat of the Venetian state and home of the Doge.

## 🕒 1:00pm

Head away from the piazza for lunch, unless you want to splash out at 14 **Caffè Florian** (► 70) or Caffè Quadri (► 73), and walk towards the Accademia. There's plenty of choice on and around the Calle Larga XXII Marzo: try **Vino-Vino** (San Marco 2007a, Calle del Cafetier, tel: 041 241 76 68; www.vinovinowinebar.com), one of the city's most authentic wine bars, which serves a range of typical Venetian snacks (*cicchetti*).

## 🕒 2:30pm

Head back east to catch the *vaporetto* across St Mark's Basin to the island and serene Palladian church of ★ **San Giorgio Maggiore** (► 56), the perfect antidote to the morning's architectural flamboyance.

## 🕒 4:00pm

After returning to San Marco, walk beneath the 16 **Torre dell'Orologio** (below, left; ► 70) to head up the shop-lined 17 **Mercerie** (► 71). You can escape the worst of the crowds here by heading west after a few blocks to



emerge in the Campo Manin. Take your time along the streets leading from here to 18 **Campo Santo Stefano** (below; ► 71); you'll want to browse in the antique dealers, clothes boutiques and specialist paper shops.

## 🕒 6:00pm

Once you reach Campo Santo Stefano, one of the city's nicest squares, it's time for a refreshing drink or one of Venice's best ice-creams at Paolin, where you can sit outside, relax and indulge in some people-watching.

## 🕒 8:00pm

There's plenty of choice for dinner in the San Marco area, but make sure you return to the piazza after your meal, when the buzz of summer voices ensures the square lives up to Napoleon's description of it as "the biggest drawing-room in Europe". Late evening in winter, when the piazza is likely to be silent and empty, is one of the most evocative times to view this superb space.