

Venetian Splendor

As intrepid voyagers venture safely back out into the world, travelers to Venice will find plenty of room to explore this magical seaport city and the surrounding Veneto region as Italy welcomes visitors again without the usual throngs of tourists.

ENCHANTING VIEWS OF VENICE

One of the most elegant ways to truly experience Venice, the City of Water, is *from* the water aboard the Uniworld *S.S. La Venezia*. This sleek river ship cruises along ancient canals past Renaissance and Gothic palaces and out to a wide lagoon dotted with picturesque islands and fishing villages.

After a complete renovation in 2020, Uniworld welcomed *S.S. La Venezia* as the fleet's newest one-of-a-kind floating luxury hotel.

The river ship is a jewel box of design elements inspired by the artistry of Northern Italy. Murano glass chandeliers, gilded decor accents, mosaic tiles, and rich Fortuny fabrics create an onboard atmosphere of elegance and nostalgia. The size of the ship is intimate, with fifty-seven luxuriously appointed staterooms and six suites. But the 126 or fewer guests on board will find everything they need, from cocktails and entertainment in Hari's Bar and Lounge to multicourse dining paired with exceptional wines in the Ristorante Rialto. There's a small spa and a well-equipped fitness room with water level views. Atop the 360-foot length of the ship, the Lido di Venezia sundeck is outfitted

Right: The luxurious Uniworld *S.S. La Venezia* river ship offers passengers an unforgettable way to explore the city of Venice and its myriad waterways.

Floating

The

City



with comfortable seating shaded from the sun to feel sea breezes, sip an Aperol Spritz, and gaze at the passing scenery. Guests are transported even while they're sleeping, thanks to the handcrafted Savoir beds in each stateroom. Marble bathrooms are outfitted with Asprey bath and body products. An onboard staff of over forty ensures excellent service, but guests can ultimately thank Bea and Toni Tollman, the mother-daughter duo overseeing every detail of each Uniworld family-owned boutique river cruise experience.

VENTURING INTO VENICE

A photographer's dream, the beauty of Venice is magnified by the brilliant reflections of its bell towers and red-roofed palaces cascading across the waters that surround and entwine this city built on one hundred plus small islands. There are no roads, only canals that pulse with the daily activity of water taxis, gondolas, and all manner of little boats delivering the mail, groceries, and other needed supplies, not to mention performing the necessary business of garbage collection. This ancient network of canals winds through Venice, a city of over four hundred footbridges and a labyrinth of winding alleyways.

Above and right: S.S. La Venezia is an architecturally stunning vessel whose interiors and amenities are just as lovely as its destinations.

Expert-guided walking tours on Uniworld's visit include the must-see fourteenth-century art-filled Doge's Palace and the expanse of Piazza San Marco (Saint Mark's Square) with its colossal bell tower, Campanile di San Marco, the tallest structure in the city.



The capital of the Veneto region, Venice has a history that comes alive with every footstep as you wander and wonder at the architectural gems and learn stories of the lives lived and lost in this magically unique destination. Expert-guided walking tours on Uniworld's visit include the must-see fourteenth-century art-filled Doge's Palace and the expanse of Piazza San Marco (Saint Mark's Square) with its colossal bell tower, Campanile di San Marco, the tallest structure in the city. Today, visitors will find shorter lines to climb the tower and plenty of room to take photos in the piazza as Venice is just awakening to the new reality of far fewer tourists. The pigeons that once flocked here to perch on outstretched hands for a vacation photo and a bit of corn are mostly gone too, as the practice of selling bird feed was discontinued. Not gone is the chill of walking over the Bridge of Sighs, where doomed prisoners were once led to their death, or the quiet reverence as you absorb the Byzantine architecture of the Basilica di San Marco. One of the perks of being on a luxury river cruise is the connection made to gain special access to popular attractions.

S.S. La Venezia passengers were treated to a private after-hours tour of the Basilica di San Marco just at sunset, as the last of the day's bright rays shot through the windows to illuminate the walls of glittering gold mosaics. Also shimmering at sunset was a thin layer of water across Saint Mark's Square, a sign of the rising tide and Venice's love-hate relationship with its watery boundaries. Today, Venetians carry an app on their smartphones alerting them to possible flooding that might mean wearing rain boots that day or, at worst, the possibility of school and event cancellations.

CRUISING THE VENETIAN LAGOON

A trip to Venice shouldn't stop at the city limits. Stretching out over 210 square miles, the Venetian Lagoon is a watery world of its own pulsating with classic wooden speed boats, large and small sailing vessels, fishing boats, ferries, and vaporetto water buses making their way from seaport to seaport. Fed by the Adriatic Sea, this shallow saltwater bay is home to the famous handblown-glass factories on the island of Murano and the lesser-known artisan lace makers on the tiny island of Burano with its rainbow of brightly painted houses. At the southern end of the lagoon sits



Above: A morning aerial view over Saint Mark's Square in Venice, Italy

Photo by Ingus Krukutis/Shutterstock

Left: The famous Bridge of Sighs (Ponte dei Sospiri) in Venice with a row of gondolas headed toward Ponte della Canonica in the background

Photo by Mirelle/Shutterstock



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Above: Venice's gorgeous Basilica di Santa Maria della Salute as seen from the water at sunset

charming Chioggia, a fishing village where open-air markets are great places to shop for local handicrafts. A day trip from Chioggia takes you to the gastronomic epicenter of Italy's Emilia-Romagna region and the medieval town of Bologna and to Ferrara, just south of the Po River. Ferrara is home to Al Brindisi, the world's oldest wine bar (founded in 1435), and the not-to-be-missed cappellacci—tortellini pasta filled with pumpkin.

VENETIAN SUNSETS

Travel has changed. Where once it was common to hop from country to country on a European vacation, now it's often more manageable to navigate one nation at a time due to evolving health regulations. The upside is that it allows time to relax and explore the nuances of a destination when you concentrate your travel time in one place.

According to a recent survey by Virtuoso, Italy remains at the top of the list for US travelers even in these changing travel times.

Another trend noted is an uptick in trips planned around enjoying foods and wine. Passengers aboard *S.S. La Venezia* showed that to be true on their final full day in Venice: they enthusiastically joined the ship's executive chef on a shopping trip to the city's iconic Rialto Market. Menu selections of market-fresh octopus and branzino (European sea bass) with local artichokes and tiny seasonal plums were the stars of the gala farewell dinner. The ultimate magic arrived via the dining room windows, where Venice was revealed in all its glory, glistening in the sunset under the light of a rising moon. ▀

Visit Uniworld.com to learn more about their many cruise offerings or to book your trip of a lifetime!



Carolyn O'Neil is an award-winning Atlanta-based food writer who specializes in culinary travel and healthy lifestyles. She believes that travel is the ultimate way to learn about the people of the world and that cuisine is the most exciting way to learn about their histories and cultures. Visit her blog at TheHappyHealthyKitchen.com.