

Venetian Class



A visit to the floating city of Venice is best timed for the winter months, when the light is low and the tourists are back home. **Phil Malpas** reveals its secrets.

The recent introduction of economy flights from a number of provincial airports has truly confirmed Venice, the "Queen of the Adriatic", as a most desirable weekend destination.

It is advisable to pre-book a water taxi to transfer you from Marco-Polo airport to your chosen accommodation. This may seem expensive at £40 but the extravagance is worth every penny.

The best time to visit is midwinter, when peace and tranquility return after the roaring heat and jostling tourists of summer have departed. Wrap up warm, though, as the temperature can hover well below freezing from dawn to dusk. The shorter days mean the magical hours around sunrise and sunset are more easily attainable and the relatively low sun offers

Photo Essentials

- Endless photographic opportunities exist around **San Marco** - try taking the lift to the top of the Campanile and photograph straight down for interesting patterns when low light creates long shadows.
- **Gondolas** can be used to great effect for iconic Venice images. Look for areas where they are moored in numbers and select tight compositions for graphic results.
- The **Grand Canal** is best seen from Accademia or Rialto bridges. Choose your moment carefully when the 'right' boat is in the 'right' place.
- The wonderful **Mediterranean Light** can be emphasised by using reflections to double its effective area in your compositions.
- Take a trip to **Burano** where the brightly painted, shuttered houses offer excellent opportunities for colourful results.
- Pay a visit to **Campo St. Barnaba**, where fresh vegetables are sold from a moored barge, giving great opportunities for candid shots.

spectacular lighting throughout the day. You may wake to find the city shrouded in mist, which lends an almost mystical silence to the city's unique ambience. Illuminated streetlights can make a great subject at dawn, but work quickly as they all switch off about half an hour before sunrise.

It is worth investing in a good map, but don't refer to it too often. By far the best way to discover the city is to lose yourself among the labyrinth of canals, bridges and endless empty walkways, just occasionally using the map to get your bearings.

Virtually everywhere is accessible on foot - you could probably walk around the entire city in a day. My advice is to select

Below Ponte de la Chiesa. For this image I chose a day when flat overcast conditions resulted in reduced contrast allowing the capture of textural detail

Ebony SV45te 300mm Velvia 1/2 sec f64



Below Grand Canal and Salute from Accademia Bridge. I tried this composition at various times of the day. This example at 7am is enhanced by the warm early light.

Ebony SV45te 300mm Velvia 1/4sec f32





a particular region each day and explore every shady walkway and secret passage in search of that special composition. If you are visiting Venice for just a few days, concentrate your efforts in the sestieri of Santa Croce and San Polo, the area around Accademia, the Grand Canal itself and, of course, Piazza San Marco.

Venice abounds with possibilities. Once you have selected your subject you face the decision that can make the difference between an acceptable result and a truly timeless image. I like to record what I have found, making the most of the conditions at the time, so at least I have an acceptable image. I then try to visualise my subject in different lighting conditions. Would it be better earlier or later in the day? Would it be better in flat, overcast conditions? Would I prefer it lit from a different direction? Then, with a Polaroid or digital image as reference, I return when conditions better suit the subject. The beauty of this approach is that all the decisions about where my tripod should be, which lens I should use and how exactly I should frame the shot have already been made. I can now focus on simply photographing the light that illuminates my chosen subject

Above San Giorgio from San Marco at dawn The light here was changing incredibly fast. Over a 10 minute period, as the sun rose, I had to reduce my exposure by 4 stops! If you use a handheld spotmeter, like me, it is vital to keep checking your chosen exposure.

Ebony SV45te 150mm Velvia 60 secs f16 0.6 ND Grad

Patience is a virtue when photographing in Venice. Even at quiet times of the year you will find, no matter how early you rise, you have other photographers for company. This can be a great opportunity to share thoughts and ideas. You will also need to deal with constantly changing elements in your composition. People, gondolas, motorboats and vaporetti will move in and out of your viewfinder at a rapid rate. My advice is simply to enjoy your surroundings, take your time and choose your moment carefully.

You may also find that the attraction of a photographer with tripod is too much for certain tourists. Rather than photograph Venice, they prefer to photograph themselves with you! If such a situation arises it's best to stop what you are doing, join in, and smile for the camera!

Travel Notes

Location Northeastern Italy on the Adriatic Coast.

Getting there Go/Easyjet from London Stanstead, East Midlands or Bristol airports - return flights from under £100 - see www.gofly.com.

Getting around You can get anywhere on foot - but also use the vaporetti or waterbuses for longer trips. Of course you must try a gondola ride at around 60-80 Euros, depending on the time of day.

Accommodation Hundreds of hotels to choose from, ranging from £30 to £300 per person per night! Try www.1st-venice-hotels.com, or hire an apartment through www.venice-apartments.com.

Where to eat Again hundreds of restaurants, cafes and bars. Mostly Italian food with the emphasis on fish.

When to go To avoid crowds don't go during Carnevale (10 days prior to Shrove Tuesday) and high summer. Best time is November to February.

What to take Comfortable shoes, warm clothing, tripod, ND Grads, polariser, a variety of lenses and lots of slow film.

Further Information Everything gets more expensive the nearer you are to San Marco or Rialto. The DK guidebook Venice and the Veneto ISBN 0 7513 4693 4 is excellent.