



# Carnival of Arts

Venice is not a sentimental place of honeymoon. Never mind the classic scene of a couple having a romantic ride in a gondola on a canal. Save your visiting energy for exploring the city's spectacular display of arts.

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED  
BY DAWN OOSTERHOFF



Over the years, Venetians have flooded the world with voluptuous paintings and wines, music, Marco Polo spice-route flavours, and bohemian-chic fashion. During the Renaissance, art flourished with acclaimed Venetian artists such as Giorgione, Rosalba Carriera, Pietro Longhi, Tintoretto, Titian and Paolo Veronese. Composers such as Adrian Willaert, Ottaviano Petrucci, Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli filled the churches and halls with their music. And glass-making, well established in Venice since the 13th century, enjoyed the benefits of world-wide distribution as a result of being produced in Europe's commercial and trading hub.

Shakespeare portrayed the beautiful city of gondolas in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*. In the 19th century, the intense sensations of the past and the hauntingly beautiful continuance of Venice lured and held the hearts of later writers like James and Hemingway, major poets such as Byron and Browning, and art critics and essayists. The visual influences of Venice - her architecture, art works, and picturesque landscape - inspired great literature. No

*Photo on previous page: Artisan-crafted carnival masks in a store window in Santa Croce.*



other place has given so many famous writers quite this combination of ingredients.

You'd think the city would take it easy after all of that, maybe rest on its laurels. But Venice refuses to retire from the inspiration business. Venetians are artists and it is no coincidence that even today, the Biennales and Mostra (film festivals), as well as the art of the glass created in Murano, still allow Venice to shine with one thousand fires in the eyes of the whole world.

The 19th-century Romantics got it wrong: Venice is not destined for genteel decay. Rather, billionaire benefactors and cutting-edge *biennales* are filling up those ancient *palazzi* (palaces) with restored masterpieces and eyebrow-raising contemporary art and architecture, and back-alley galleries and artisan showrooms are springing up in their shadows. The people who made walking on water look easy are already well into their next act.

### Look

Art lovers can enjoy displays of spectacular paintings and sculptures by well-known artists at any of a number of galleries and museums. This includes modern as well as historic masterpieces. Churches also provide venues for seeing established masterpieces up close and personal.

For a glimpse of today's Venetian as artist, lose yourself in the narrow *calli* (alleyways) of the city, particularly near Accademia and in Santa Croce. You'll glimpse artisans hammering out shoes crested like lagoon birds, cooks

*Left: In narrow alleyways, you'll glimpse artisans at work. A craftsman hones an oar rest for a gondola. Lower left: Exploring Venice at night along the Grand Canal. Below: Venice should be heard as well as seen. Street violinist.*



whipping up four-star dishes on single-burner hotplates, and musicians lugging 18th-century cellos to riveting baroque concerts played with punk-rock bravado.

### Listen

Venice should be heard as well as seen. The notes of the historic music masters still resound in and all around Venice. Concerts abound in churches and concert halls with tickets easily acquired. Music also thrives in the squares, particularly in Piazza San Marco where a pricey cup of espresso will also buy you a seat in the midst of a tag team of small orchestras and bands.

Most of all, the sound of Venice is the absence of the sound of cars. The ear can discern the slam of wood shutters, heels tapping up and down the stone steps of bridges,

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the abbreviated drama of whispered conversations, waves kicked against the seawall by boats, the staccato of rain on canvas awnings, and always, always, the heavy, sad sound of bells.

### Explore Venice Early and Late

Venice is best when caught between acts, before cruise ships dump dazed newcomers off in Piazza San Marco with three hours to see all of Venice before lunch, after the day trippers rush off to beat afternoon traffic, and at night when the eye is not distracted by the radiance of gilded domes. Explore Venice in its precious downtime, when gondoliers warm up their vocal chords with scorching espresso on their way to work, and mosaic artisans converge at the bar for *tesseræ* shoptalk over a spritz (prosecco-based drink).

Venice cannot be reduced to a postcard. The art of Venice permeates daily life, from the doorbells, to the wardrobe, to speech, thought, and laughter. The love of beauty is omnipresent in Venice. Venice is its own carnival of art.

*Above right: Explore Venice between acts. Early morning at Piazzetta San Marco.  
Bottom right: The love of beauty is omnipresent in Venice. Attractive gloves beautifully displayed in a stored window.*

