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# AN ITALIAN GETAWAY

TRAVEL

TRIP REPORTS

By **Sandy Bornstein** on September 01, 2024

**8 MIN READ**

# Visiting Milan and Sailing the Venetian Lagoon

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More than a decade ago, Ira and I spent a day in Venice during a Mediterranean cruise. Our brief stay in Venice did not offer sufficient time to explore this remarkable city. We added Venice to our list of future destinations. Sadly, Ira passed away before we returned.

I was reluctant to visit Venice by myself. But my desire to explore Venice prevailed. I dreaded the thought of navigating the intricate canal system on my own. To simplify my adventure, I took advantage of Uniworld Boutique River Cruise's spring promotion for solo passengers and embarked on a mid-summer 10-day Milan, Venice & the Jewels of Veneto adventure. In addition to exploring Venice as a passenger aboard the S.S. La Venezia for 8 days, I spent two nights in Milan, participated in a half day Lake Como cruise with a stop in Bellagio, toured Verona, and was treated to a wine-paired meal in the Italian countryside.

This comprehensive itinerary provided opportunities to explore most of Venice's popular attractions. Unlike large cruise ships that are restricted from docking close to Venice, S.S. La Venezia provided incredible access to Venice's lagoons and allowed adventuresome passengers the option to wander around Venice on their own. The easy-going riverboat atmosphere was conducive to making friends. Solo passengers did not need to eat alone unless they chose to do so.





*Inside Milan's Duomo Cathedral.*

## Milan

I arrived at the conveniently located Rosa Grand Hotel after the group orientation was completed. I immediately joined a walking tour that was heading to the nearby Duomo Cathedral. The construction of this massive structure, holding approximately 40,000 people, began in 1386. Surprisingly, it took five centuries to complete this impressive building.

On the next day, my guided walking tour focused on two noteworthy sites—Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper and Castello Sforzesco. Our group had timed tickets to enter the building housing Leonardo's 15th century masterpiece. My attention remained in that century after a short drive to the well-preserved fortress. During the tour, I learned more about Italian



history.



**Left:** Sandy Bornstein at Castello Sforzesco. **Right:** Looking Down from Bellagio Overlook.

## Lake Como

Before boarding a motor coach headed to Lake Como, I picked up a vegetable panini since lunch was not included in this half-day excursion. I was fortunate to sit on the side of the bus that offered amazing views of the countryside and the lake. Our small group enjoyed a private tour aboard a medium sized boat. On the way to our brief stop in Bellagio, our guide pointed out an abundance of famous buildings and homes dotting the shoreline.

Amongst crowds of tourists, I scurried up the stairs to the Bellagio overlook. After taking a few pictures, I strolled down the steps. Periodically, I weaved in and out of the shops and boutiques lining both sides of pathway.



Next, I headed to the nearby botanical garden gate. Due to a lack of time, I chose not to pay the entrance fee. Instead, I returned to the pier well ahead of the designated departure time.



*View from Lake Como Boat Ride.*

## Verona

Our early morning departure from Milan, provided time for a guided walking tour of Verona. We passed by many notable landmarks and paused outside Juliet's house. Our guide was quick to point out that historians are unable to connect this house with Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*. Despite the lack of authenticity, visitors take pictures of the balcony and pose next to Juliet's statue. Online sites promote the myth that touching Juliet's breast will bring luck in love. Not knowing what my future will bring,

I gladly posed for this amusing photo.



*Left: Sandy Bornstein at Juliet's Statue in Verona. Right: Main street in Verona.*

## Welcome Aboard the S.S. Venezia

I boarded the riverboat at the Terminal S. Basilio and unpacked my suitcase. I was eager to get settled and begin my weeklong Venetian Lagoon adventure. Most of the passengers were already aboard the vessel when we arrived. Within no time, people were mingling with one another in the common areas and clustering at the bar areas.

## Doge's Place

Uniworld is known for its customized tours. At the Doge's Palace, passengers are treated to an early morning private tour. Since I entered the doorway well before the official opening time, I avoided the stifling summer heat. My digital images were taken with ease. Upon completion of our special tour, we were free to explore Venice or be escorted back to the riverboat.





*Inside Doge's Palace.*

## **Afternoon Scenic Sailing Through the Venetian Lagoon**

As we sailed the lagoon for a couple of hours, a knowledgeable guide offered a comprehensive overview. Most of the passengers sat on the upper deck taking advantage of the scenic sailing. Individuals recovering from jetlag headed to their cabins.

### **St. Mark's Basilica**

After an early dinner, we traveled by private motorboat to the St. Marks Basilica for another rare treat. This time it was an after-hours tour of the famous basilica which included a light show and an abundance of historical

information. A torrential downpour did not dampen our spirits. I trudged through puddles as my group found its way back to the pier and watched a rainbow form in the distance.

## Vicenza

On the second day, I climbed aboard a bus headed to Vicenza. After an hour ride, I was happy to walk around the small town. The high point was a memorable visit to the sound and light show at the Teatro Olimpico, a 16<sup>th</sup> century structure built by Andrea Palladio. This building is singled out as the oldest Italian Renaissance theater.

Most of my fellow cruise passengers spent their free time shopping for locally made items in the nearby open market and small boutique shops. I indulged in a leisurely Italian lunch at a local café with a fellow passenger.



*Inside Teatro Olimpico in Vincenza.*



# Burano

Shortly after returning to the pier, we set sail for Burano. Our timing was perfect. Most of the day tourists had departed. Our cruise manager, Gyongyi, led a guided tour into this colorful town which included a lace making demonstration at a family-owned boutique.

The next morning, I scampered in and out of raindrops to take more pictures of this beautiful place before the crowds returned to shop. I opted not to take the short boat ride to Torcello for a morning tour of a cathedral with ancient mosaics.



*Early Morning Stroll in Burano.*

# Murano

After lunch, we sailed to Murano. Murano is well known for its handmade glass vessels, statues, and jewelry. Almost everyone returned to the boat with a special treasure.



*Murano Glass Sculptures.*

## Chioggia

Chioggia was our next stop. At this destination, I joined a handful of passengers for a morning bicycle ride. The leisurely-paced ride included several photo stops as well as a walk to a beach where locals gathered.

It was a nice change of pace to peddle along the pathway. While many participants stopped at the open market on their way back to the boat, I headed directly to my cabin so I could cool off before the afternoon excursions.

After lunch, I boarded a bragozzo (red wooden boat) for a scenic tour of the



adjacent lagoon. This region is known for its fishing industry. The second part of the afternoon excursion included a 45-minute bus ride into the countryside to visit the CaZen Estate where I experienced a local food tasting which included several wines.



*Sandy Bornstein Bicycling in Chioggia.*

## **Catajo Castle**

From the Venice pier, I traveled by bus for about an hour to the Catajo Castle. This 16<sup>th</sup> century castle has more than 350 rooms on 40 hectares. While I only visited a small percentage of this magnificent place, the guide provided an historic overview and discussed the legends associated with the ownership of the property. Unfortunately, I was prohibited from taking images of the amazing frescoes adorning the interior walls.

Near the end of the tour, we strolled through the incredible garden known for its imported magnolia and sequoia trees, as well as a beautiful fishpond surrounded by flowers and foliage.

*Garden at Catajo Castle.*

## **Jewish Ghetto**

A handful of passengers embarked on a water taxi ride to the Jewish Ghetto. Our private tour visited some of the major landmarks—including the Holocaust Memorials and a few notable synagogues. Disappointingly, the museum was closed for renovation.

Our local guide transported us back in time to the place where Jewish people were first segregated from the rest of Venice's population in the early part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. She discussed the Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews that lived side by side in this restricted environment until Napoleon conquered Venice in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Do as the Locals Do – Shop & Explore**

On the last day, I traveled by private motorboat to the historic Rialto Food Market. I followed Chef Robbert as he led our group through the aisles adjacent to the food vendors. He pointed out the fish and the produce that would be used for preparing our lunch and dinner.

Before returning to the designated pickup point, I had time to shop near the Rialto Bridge. Later, I visited shops closer to the port. Travelers who like to shop will appreciate the docking locations and drop off/pick up locations for the daily excursions.



*Left: Sandy Bornstein exploring Venice. Right: View from Venice's Rialto Bridge.*

## Traveling Solo in Venice

Venice's canals and pricey transportation system can be challenging for people unfamiliar with the city. As a S.S. Venezia passenger, I took advantage of the group transports and convenient drop off spots. While I chose to participate in all but one excursion, I always had the option to wander by myself or remain on the boat. This itinerary offers a low-stress way to explore Venice, as well as a small assortment of nearby attractions.

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*All photos curtesy of Sandy Bornstein.*

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### **Sandy Bornstein**

Sandy writes about family, intergenerational, and active midlife adventures highlighting land and water experiences. After living as an international teacher in Bangalore, India, Sandy published an award-winning book, *May This Be the Best Year of Your Life*, as a resource for people contemplating an expat lifestyle and living outside their comfort zone. Check out her website: <http://www.thetravelingbornsteins.com/>