

Breathtakingly Beautiful

Venice

The City That Floats
On The Sea

For 15 centuries, the sight of Venice has aroused amazement. With magnificent palaces rising straight up from middle of the sea, this unique city is navigated by gondolas gliding through watery canals, not cars. The entire city is adapted for life on the water, including police, firefighters, ambulances and even buses. Any supplies that residents may need or want must be delivered by boat.

At first, a modern tourist visiting the city may not realize that Venice once represented the epicenter of a mighty empire. The Republic of Venice rose to undisputed prominence in the Middle Ages, dominating the Mediterranean with its superior ships for a thousand years and ruling faraway lands.

At the same time, Venice boasts a more sinister distinction: It was here that the concept of the ghetto was first conceived, and its Jews were squeezed into a few tiny neighborhoods, despite their tremendous economic importance to the city.

This summer, Zman traveled to Venice to explore its colorful history and rich Jewish roots. Join us on a pictorial travelogue and learn about this fascinating city of the sea.

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The city of Venice in northeastern Italy has long dazzled people with its exotic way of life, where virtually all transportation is by way of its canals. In fact, no matter where you go in Venice, you are always by the water. Going to work, to the doctor or shopping for the week's groceries involves climbing into a motorboat, a "water bus" or one of the sleek, elegant gondolas that taxi people around the city. In many places, walking down the front steps of a building brings you straight into the canal!

The canals are not just streets in a figurative or optional sense. They lie at the heart of what it means to live in Venice. The city's entire infrastructure is dependent upon the water. The 435 bridges connecting Venice's 126 islands to each other are pedestrian walkways that cannot accommodate vehicles. Numerous narrow streets crisscross each island, but to preserve the city's serene quality of life, ground vehicles (first horse-drawn carriages, then cars, trucks and even bicycles!) have always been outlawed. Most of these ancient streets, called *calli*, are in any case little more than narrow alleys. Wide streets were not needed because canals have always been the main way to get around Venice. Pedestrians walking along the quiet paths hear only the echoes of footsteps, not beeping horns and noisy diesel engines.



Map showing the collection of islands in the center of Venice, along with other islands that make up Venice, including the famous island of Murano that manufactures Venetian glass.

Instead, an entire specialized fleet of city boats has been developed. Think of all the vehicles any modern city needs: police, fire, ambulance, garbage collection, taxis, buses, delivery trucks, private passenger vehicles and more. In Venice, all of these exist—as boats.

For centuries, and down to the present day, Venice has radiated a mystique. As people meander through the small stone-paved streets littered with historic buildings, some of which have been standing for more than 1,200 years, they wonder how the city came to be. How, and why, were the houses and elegant palaces built on water and what holds them up? How does the city provide its residents with electrical power and sewer service without streets? Is it true that the city is sinking?

Venice's uniqueness, beauty and rich history draw some 30 million visitors per year. Tourists love taking rides on the delightfully decorated, iconic gondolas piloted by gondoliers sporting their stylized hats, black-and-white striped shirts and heavy Italian accents as they make their way through the spider's web of picturesque canals. Shops, museums, restaurants, mansions and apartment buildings built literally at the water's edge, and often right in the water, make Venice a novelty and have led to its world-wide fame.

Venice's sheer age—over 1,500 years—makes it a beloved spot for history buffs. Architecturally, Venice boasts a cornucopia of styles representing a wide range of time periods and cultural influences, including classical Roman, Byzantine, classical Islamic and Ottoman design, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque. Tourists can patronize art and natural history museums, as well as numerous historical palaces, as they wander among ancient structures, awed by impossible-looking feats of engineering.

Naturally, a city that exists literally in the midst of the sea should excel in seafaring. Indeed, at the height of its power and influence, Venice was the epicenter of a vast trading empire, expanding its immense

Venice... 126 Islands!

At first glance, Venice's center may look like a typical city divided into blocks. A closer look will reveal that it is actually composed of over 100 small islands! Each little neighborhood of the Rialto, Venice's central area pictured here (residents say it forms the shape of a fish), is actually its own island—completely surrounded by canals and linked by foot bridges. In fact, no cars, trucks or even bicycles are allowed in Venice.

