



hungry traveller.

# 48 hours in VENICE

It's one of the world's most beautiful cities, with a food tradition that carries the influences of a thousand years of far-flung maritime trade. But how do you avoid the rip-off tourist restaurants and eat like a local? Kathryn Tomasetti takes an insider's tour



GONDOLIER, FOLLOW THAT GOURMET!  
San Giorgio Maggiore  
and the Grand Canal



Kathryn Tomasetti

Threaded by countless miles of silvery canals and set amid placid lagoons, Venice's close-packed palazzi and grand churches appear to rise from the sea. And it was the sea that enabled the city to amass its power and wealth. For more than a millennium, from the 7th century to the 18th, Venice was a maritime superpower, its fleet trading with the Ottoman Empire, North Africa and even China. Exotic spices and tropical produce on their way to Europe stopped here first. It was inevitable that, over the years, Venetian cuisine would adopt the flavours of a dozen nations. With 48 hours to spend in the City of Water, my husband and I made it our mission to enjoy those flavours to the full.

### Traditional feast

To get to grips with the city's trademark flavours, we started with a splurge-worthy meal at **Le Maschere** (splendidvenice.starhotels.com; mains around £19). It's here that local chef Massimo Ceccarelli offers up plate after plate of specialities such as creamy salt cod (see recipe, p126). In an interior courtyard splashed pink-red by stargazer lilies, the restaurant buzzed with elegant Venetians and the odd Italian A-lister. A crowd of animated Chinese businessmen were working their way through

platters of shrimp and *chiadini* mushroom pasta, while the pianist picked out a medley of tunes.

We began with Bellini cocktails, a blend of prosecco and peach purée said to have been invented in the 1930s by Giuseppe Cipriani, founder of Venice's infamous Harry's Bar, just a five-minute stroll away. The fruity aperitif contrasted with a platter of sea-fresh, briny antipasti, which included mounds of *schie* (lagoon shrimp), anchovies steeped in a vinegar marinade and a sublime crab salad served in the pink shell. A simple basket of crudités with olive oil dipping sauce followed, with tender salt-baked sea bream. For dessert, we polished off a plate of chocolate and chilli pepper biscuits, and our first *sgroppino*, a Venetian lemon and sparkling wine sorbet.

"You'll eat and drink well everywhere in Venice," according to chef Ceccarelli. Not all would agree, but just hours into our trip, plumply sated, we were ready to believe him.

### Floating market

Mornings in Venice are ideal for aimless adventures, leisurely coffees – and serious food shopping. **La Barca** (the boat), now permanently moored along a pretty canal at Campo San Barnaba, is one of the only vessels still selling fresh fruit and vegetables full-time (closed Sundays). Just a couple of decades

ago, a fleet of boats visited the local island farms at dawn, then floated their way through the city, stopping to sell the produce to residents.

A 10-minute stroll away, the 1,000-year-old **Mercato di Rialto** (closed Sunday; fish market also closed Monday) is the city's biggest market. Just west of the Rialto Bridge, it's part produce, part fish – and almost entirely sourced from the lagoon. Crowds of resident shoppers load up trolleys here daily, selecting porcini mushrooms, huge butternut squash and bouquets of minuscule chilli peppers. Keep an eye out for items labelled *nostrani*, which signifies 'ours' (or locally grown), and may include *canocce* (mantis shrimp), *castraure* (baby artichokes) and scarlet radicchio.

### A bite and a nip

In Venice, there's no lunch more local than hitting a *bàcaro*. These typical bars are best known for their well-priced regional wines such as Soave, Valpolicella and Bardolino. Each one also serves *cicchetti*, bite-size Venetian nibbles similar to Spanish tapas. Many *bàcari* are solely daytime venues, which make them excellent, wallet-friendly spots for lunch.

**Cantina Do Mori** (Calle dei Do Mori, San Polo), hidden in the alleyways behind Rialto Market and established in 1462, claims to



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## Where to stay

### CA' PISANI

A 14th-century palace just south of Venice's famous Accademia Bridge and a 10-minute walk from St Mark's Square, Ca' Pisani is a petite but plush boutique hotel. Artworks by Italian futurist artist Fortunato Depero (1892-1960) adorn the elegant 1940s Art Deco interior. Buffet breakfast is served alfresco on the street.

*Dorsoduro 979; capisanihotel.it. Doubles from £145*

### VENISSA

The Ostello at Venissa has six sleek bedrooms within a renovated manor house. Each room combines an interesting blend of the antique with the modern and offers glorious views over the vineyard, vegetable gardens and terraced restaurant, as well as the pretty canals surrounding Mazzorbo.

*Fondamenta Santa Caterina 3, Mazzorbo; venissa.it. Doubles from £80 per night; minimum stay two nights*

**FROM LEFT** A watery byway; unloading produce for the market, such as fish from the lagoon and local artichokes; open-air breakfast, bell tower and vines at Venissa

be Venice's oldest *bàcaro*: legend even has it that Casanova was a regular. A chalkboard, hung among fading newspaper clippings, charts dozens of varieties of local wines – all at around £2.50 a glass. Pick of the nibbles are the *francobolli* (postage stamp) sandwiches with classic fillings such as shrimp salad or egg mayonnaise (80p-£1.60).

Lined floor to ceiling with bottles of regional tipples, wine shop and *bàcaro* **Cantine del Vino già Schiavi** (Ponte San Trovaso, Dorsoduro) is standing-room only. Locals sip glasses of neon-orange spritz (a cocktail of bitter orange Aperol and prosecco) and gossip in Veneziano, the city's ancient dialect. And everyone munches plate after plate of mouthwatering *cicchetti* (80p), slabs of crusty bread piled high with toppings. We devoured octopus with slivers of raw courgette, prawns in *saor* (a local sweet and sour marinade) and spicy cauliflower *sauté*.

### Island escape

Venice's lagoon isn't only a giant seafood larder. It's also home to more than 60 seldom-visited islands, each with its own traditions and specialities. The island of Sant' Erasmo, for instance, is famed for its violet artichokes, served raw in salads and on polenta or doused in olive oil and grilled. What we think

of as Venice is an island cluster of six neighbourhoods known as the Sestiere (as well as the other islands, there's a not-so-picturesque mainland bit, Mestre, too).

The other islands are sparsely inhabited and feature less on the tourist trail. So hopping aboard a *vaporetto* that plies the half-hour trip from central Venice, we left the crowds behind for the twin islets of Mazzorbo and Burano.

Mazzorbo is home to the **Venissa** estate ([venissa.it](http://venissa.it)), which has the only vineyard in the world growing the giant, golden *dorona* grape. It was thought to be extinct until a few *dorona* vines were discovered on nearby Sant' Erasmo, then planted here a decade ago. Wine lovers come from all over to sip what has been called Venice's liquid gold, historically the preferred wine of the long-ruling Doges (the leaders of the former city-state).

Originally tended by nuns, today the Venissa estate encompasses one hectare of rose-trimmed grapevines, a natural fishpond and a dozen vegetable gardens, as well as a boutique six-room hotel (see Where to Stay) and gourmet restaurant. The food's not bad either. Venissa's spellbindingly original contemporary Venetian cuisine (tasting menu £76) gained its first Michelin star in 2013. A supporter of the local food movement, the »



Turn over for a recipe from chef Ceccarelli >>>

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restaurant gets its fruit and veg directly from the estate's gardens. Seafood arrives on a daily delivery from the surrounding lagoon and wine comes from the vineyard, of course, with a few less expensive bottles from the mainland.

We started with seared scallops and the silkiest borlotti bean soup, followed by lagoon cuttlefish with fennel shaved so thinly it looked like pressed flowers. The popular baccaro dish *cartosso di pesce fritto* (fish and chips in a paper cone) was made elegant by its purple potato crisps. Dessert was classic, yet utterly contemporary: tiramisù topped with raspberry dust and mint. Worth the boat ride? You betcha.

### Sweet souvenirs

Burano, linked to Mazzorbo by a slender footbridge, makes for the perfect post-prandial stroll. The island's cottages are a muddle of candy colours: cobalt, lavender, coral and emerald.

Burano is known for its delicate lacework, but I'm here to hunt down **Pastificio Garbo** (Via San Mauro, Burano). Owner Giorgio is one of only two pastry-makers who bake traditional *bussolai buranelli* biscuits on the island. Traditionally made for Easter, these shortbread-like biscuits are now available year-round.

As I squeezed a small packet of warm bussolai into my handbag, Giorgio quoted an old island proverb, which translates as "After the third little biscuit dunked in wine, everything appears much better". I made a mental note to buy a good bottle of wine to go with them. *Kathryn Tomasetti is a food and travel journalist based in Nice*



### TRY THIS AT HOME...

#### \* Massimo Ceccarelli's creamy salt cod with polenta chips

SERVES 8 AS A STARTER. TAKES 25 MINUTES TO PREPARE, 20 MINUTES TO COOK, PLUS 12-24 HOURS SOAKING

#### delicious. KNOW-HOW

Buy dried salt cod (or saltfish) in fishmongers, delis and some Tesco and Asda stores. See the packet or ask your supplier how long it takes to rehydrate.

**FREEZE** ...the creamy salt cod in sealed plastic bags or containers for up to 3 months. Defrost to serve.

#### 400g dried salt cod fillets (see

#### Know-how)

1 litre whole milk

1 garlic clove

300ml sunflower oil

#### FOR THE POLENTA CHIPS

200g quick-cook polenta

1. Put the cod in a bowl, cover with lots of water and keep in the fridge for 12 hours (or longer; see Know-how). Change the water 2-3 times.
2. Meanwhile, cook the polenta according to the packet instructions. Pour into an oiled 30cm x 20cm

baking tray lined with baking paper and leave to cool and set. When set, remove from the tray, peel off the baking paper, then cut into fingers. Set aside. These will keep in the fridge, covered, for up to 1 day.

3. When the cod is rehydrated (it will be soft and moist), drain and rinse. Put it in a medium pan and add the milk to cover (use more if need be). Bring to the boil, turn down the heat slightly, then simmer for 15 minutes. Strain the cod in a sieve, reserving the milk.

4. Put the cod and garlic in a food processor. With the motor running, trickle in the oil in a steady stream and process until creamy. Season to taste, add 2-3 tsp of the reserved milk, then pulse again briefly.

5. Preheat the grill. Season the polenta, drizzle with olive oil, then grill until crisp. Serve the salt cod warm, drizzled with olive oil, alongside the fried polenta.

**PER SERVING** 490kcal, 33.5g fat (6.3g saturated), 22.6g protein, 22.6g carbs (5.7g sugars), 0.7g salt, 0.8g fibre **Q**

**NEXT MONTH** Kate Humble, Charlie Higson and Mary Berry share their summer escapes and the recipes that keep the holiday feeling going