



INFORMATION

Each chapter in this book presents a slice of Venetian history focused on a discrete section of the city, as shown in Maps 1 through 8. Buildings, monuments, bridges, campi, and other geographical locations are described in an order that is easy for visitors to follow on the ground. Street markings in Venice are ubiquitous, but they generally point to only the most obvious locations—the train station, the car park at Piazzale Roma, the Rialto Bridge, Piazza San Marco, and the Municipal Hospital at Santi Giovanni e Paolo. Sadly, the bulk of tourist traffic is almost entirely absorbed by this handful of landmarks. Walking beyond the crowded herd paths that connect them requires more care and preparation, but the reward is access to a city of extraordinary beauty and surprising tranquility.

Chapter 1 of *Venice from the Ground Up* describes two magnificent churches on small islands outside the city, one on Torcello in the far northern Lagoon and a nearer one on the island of Murano. Both churches can be reached by ferry on a round-trip that takes up most of a day. For visitors whose time in Venice is limited, little is lost by beginning the itinerary at the church of San Giovanni Decollato (in Venetian dialect, San Zan Degolà) in the sestiere of Santa Croce. The simplest way to reach this church is to take the #1 vaporetto, which travels up and down the Grand Canal, to the San

Marcuola stop. From there a *traghetto*—a two-man gondola ferry—crosses the canal. The *Salizada del Fondaco dei Turchi* heads inland, and either of two right turns from it leads to the church. The other two early medieval Venetian churches discussed in this chapter are within easy walking distance of San Zan Degolà.

Chapter 2 describes the Basilica of San Marco and the working out of a distinctly Venetian legend for its patron. San Marco, which is one of the most absorbing buildings in the world, is tremendously crowded both because of the press of visitors and because of the increasing restriction on accessible areas of the church. The basilica is open for Mass and illuminated morning and evening. It is least crowded within the first hour of opening, but the mosaics are best seen when the electric lights are turned on, which generally happens between 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. The separate tickets required to visit the presbytery and the balconies are well worth the price, primarily because they give access to mosaics and views of the basilica that cannot be seen otherwise. The narthex or porch of the church, which most visitors seem to overlook as they wait in line to enter the main building, has a mosaic program of incomparable charm and richness that is relatively easy to see in the low-roofed structure.

Venetians learned their civics from watching public parades in the Piazza San Marco, but modern visitors get a taste of the history of Venetian institutions, both the democratic and the sinister ones, from touring the Palazzo Ducale, which is described in the first part of Chapter 3. This building too is likely to be mobbed, but its vastness makes the crowd easier to manage. The second half of the chapter describes private palaces of the Venetian nobility, most of them located on the Grand

Canal. The itinerary begins in Campo San Bartolomeo, a short, pleasant trek up the twisting street called the Merceria from Piazza San Marco, or an even shorter walk from the Rialto vaporetto stop. The best general view of the most representative Gothic palaces of Venice is from the open-air front or back seats of the #1 and #82 vaporetti.

Chapter 4 begins with the Franciscan church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in the sestiere of San Polo and moves through the churches and religious foundations (*scuole*) on the Rialto side of the Grand Canal. It includes Tintoretto's overwhelming program of paintings in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco and ends with a set of magnificent fifteenth-century paintings by Carpaccio, Gentile Bellini, Giorgione, and Titian housed in the Accademia Gallery. Chapter 5 continues through the parallel religious institutions on the north side of the city, including the exquisite church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli, before concluding with a consideration of the façade of San Zaccaria near San Marco.

The itinerary for Chapter 6 begins with the Zecca, or Mint, which faces the Basin of San Marco, and looks at a number of buildings around the Piazza, including the Library, Clock Tower, New Prison, Campanile, and Logetta. Across the Basin from the Piazzetta, Palladio's magisterial churches on the islands of San Giorgio and the Giudecca are among the many examples of Venetian High Renaissance architecture covered in the itinerary.

Chapter 7 begins with the tragic origins of the Baroque church of Santa Maria della Salute, across the Grand Canal from Piazza San Marco, and guides visitors to Venice's most famous boatyard in nearby Dorsoduro. After a consideration of sixteenth-century palaces on the lower

Grand Canal, the itinerary explores two Venetian institutional complexes that were significantly redesigned in the Renaissance: the Rialto market and the Ghetto. A vaporetto ride back down the canal and a short walk to the Arsenal—another Renaissance institution—concludes the day's exploration.

The two faces of eighteenth-century Venice are the subjects that open the final chapter. The first is the mythical Venice of the Grand Tour, splendid in art, music, theater, and Carnival, seductive and dangerous at once. This part of the itinerary begins near San Marco in the first Venetian casino and explores the great Venetian opera house La Fenice, along with other theaters and theatrical church façades in the area. The Baroque palace Ca' Rezzonico on the Grand Canal—now the home of a museum devoted to the eighteenth century—displays fine works by Tiepolo, Canaletto, Guardi, and others. The opposite face of Venice is revealed in the cataclysmic aftermath of the French occupation in 1797. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the city turned away from the sea and evolved into an essentially land-based pedestrian city dependent on the mainland for its sustenance. The itinerary for this phase of Venetian history begins near the train station and explores the chain of major pedestrian thoroughfares that lead from this nineteenth-century point of embarkation through the city to the Rialto, then past San Marco and on to Venice's only green space at the eastern end of the city, site of the Biennale di Venezia.