

Dispatches from Italy: A trip to Venice, with glass and gondola

June 15, 2015

By John Miller

Last Friday I went to Venice...

What do I have to say about Venice?

Meh...

Well, let's go into this with an open mind. It started when Isabel, the girl that I met on the plane ride over, said she and some friends were going on a day trip to Venice. Venice was one of the cities I really wanted to see, so, with my roommate Mark in tow, I signed up for the tour on the night I found out.





Quick side note— the tour was run by Bus 2 Alps, a student-oriented tour company. Based on the one time I have used them, I'd recommend them to anyone. The guides were young, helpful and charming, and they seem to have put a decent amount of thought into the whole process. It wasn't too expensive either, only €70. The journey to and from the city went swimmingly; the bus was much more comfortable than the one I took to Nice and they played movies!

Venice is a collection of more than 100 islands that lie in a 200 acre lagoon. The city looks exactly like it does in the movies. It's also astoundingly beautiful, there's no denying that. But it's rather boring.

Sure, you can take a gondola ride (I did), but that's just so you can say you've ridden in a gondola in Venice. It's expensive too; €80 for a group and the price just goes up from there. If you want the gondolier to sing, it's more and if you want to go at night, it's a lot more.

Because of time constraints, I was only able to visit the island of San Marco. San Marco is the most touristy of all the islands; it boasts St. Mark's Square and Basilica, as well as the Venetian government. It also contains millions of restaurants and Murano glass souvenir shops. Seriously, I was drowning in "authentic" Murano glass stores.

When we first got to the island, I was starving (a shock, I know). Our tour guide brought us to his favorite takeout on the island, some artisan pasta place. I ordered linguine with sausage.

I was very disappointed. The noodles didn't taste like anything, and the sauce burned the skin off my tongue and was very watery. But it was cheap enough and it filled me up for the rest of the day.

Murano glass is made locally on the Venetian island of Murano. It's known all over the world for its incredible craftsmanship. Although I didn't make it to Murano, I was still able to see a glassblowing demonstration in a shop.

It was really more of a gallery; the shelves were loaded with tons of incredible and priceless hand-blown glass art. Before my delighted eyes, a master glassblower turned a lump of red hot something into a beautiful pitcher in just a few minutes' time. It was truly astounding. Afterwards I made a small purchase in the gift shop (small in size, not price) and wandered back into the chaotic streets.

Not all the roads are water; there are plenty of smaller streets to walk around on. Bridges span the canals, so I'm fairly certain you don't even need a boat to explore the entire city; you don't even need a boat to get there. Like I mentioned earlier, Venice is just like any other Italian city: hot, crowded, lots of old buildings and people selling selfie sticks.

Honestly, I think you should visit Venice if you have the chance. I wouldn't go out of your way to do it, but if you're passing by and you've got a free day, why not? But don't spend more than a day there.

One last thing, if you go: keep your eyes peeled for pickpockets. I guess it's a big problem there.

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