

Traveling with Jewish Taste[®]

Venice: Water (Everywhere), Pasta, and Wine

By Carol Goodman Kaufman



Our water taxi powered over choppy waves, the wind blowing in our faces, when suddenly the City on the Water appeared. “La Serenissima,” the most serene lady, is an historic and most fitting name for Venice. Among the world’s most cultured of cities, its stone and stucco structures hug narrow alleyways and canals – and all beckon us to explore.

But where to start? Venice offers so much to do and see that one must choose carefully.

But first, some history.

While Italy has a fine reputation for its art, food, and wine, it has had a mixed relationship with its Jews.

Ferdinand the First of Naples gave Jews shelter from the Inquisition, but they were later forced to flee to the Ottoman Empire for safety. Jews rose to high levels of government in one era, then were forced to wear the yellow star in the next.

During the Holocaust, Italy took in many Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany, but despite the Fascist government’s refusal to deport Jews to the death camps, about fifteen percent of Italy’s Jews perished. A small community of some 45,000 Jews remains today.

The original ghetto was established in Venice in 1516; the Italian word “geto” meaning “foundry” — the spot on which the original Jewish district stood. Today’s Jewish quarter is a lively neighborhood of shops, restaurants (six kosher), galleries, museums, and synagogues.

Piazza San Marco is both the grandest square in Venice as well as the focal point of its water transportation system. It is dominated by the Basilica of San Marco and the Doge’s Palace (the site of the opening scenes of “Othello”). Unlike many public squares, the piazza is closed to automobiles. Consequently, it is a welcoming place for the hordes of tourists that congregate there surrounded by historic buildings to patronize the stores, galleries, cafes, and restaurants.

The most conspicuous feature of the square is the Campanile San Marco, the bell tower. To the rear of the Doge’s Palace is the famous Bridge of Sighs, which connects the palace with public prisons and was the route by which prisoners were taken to and from the hall of justice. Hence, the “sighs.”

The Grand Canal is the largest in the city, and a tremendous amount of traffic navigates its waters. Many famous buildings are situated on its banks, including Ca’Rezzonico, a palazzo which houses a museum of 18th century Venice. The Venier dei Leoni Palace is the headquarters of the famous Peggy Guggenheim art collection and contains works by Picasso, Klee, and Kandinskij. The Accademia Gallery holds a vast collection of Venetian painters from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The Ca’d’Oro, one of the most beautiful monuments of Venice, is now the seat of the Franchetti Gallery.

For exploring the smaller canals, it simply would not be a visit to Venice without a ride in one of the long boats piloted by a striped-shirt gondolier; who, if you’re lucky, will serenade you.

In order to standardize appearance and eliminate superfluous decoration all gondolas are “black” by law.

Among the many names by which Venice has been known, “La Dominante” best describes her erstwhile prominence in international trade.

Sitting at a crossroads, Venetians were exposed to goods from many nations – from



The Grand Canal

east and west — and cooks took advantage of the produce and spices that filled the markets. For example, local cooks developed polenta from corn brought from the Americas. *Risi e bisi* was prepared once rice arrived from China. And, who could imagine Italian food without tomatoes, also brought from the New World.

And, of course, pasta is the traditional wheat-based food that forms the foundation of many meals — and, indeed, it was for the protection of the wheat crops from marauding pirates that Venice developed its once mighty navy.

The Venetian Lagoon is one of the most ecologically rich bodies of water in the Mediterranean, and it provides the main ingredients for many of Venice’s famous dishes. A typical meal is *sarde in saor*, marinated sardines, just one of many dishes amenable to a kosher lifestyle.

Another popular Venetian dish is *pasta e fagioli*, a hearty pasta and bean soup. *Castraure*, eaten either raw or steamed with garlic, are small purple artichokes grown on the islands of the lagoon, and have made the island of Sant’Erasmus the focal point of an annual fair celebrating the vegetable.

Venetian sweets include *zaietti*, biscuits prepared with polenta flour, and raisins, and *bussolai buranelli*, round butter biscuits meant to be dunked in sweet wine.

And, since Italy boasts more than a million vineyards, wines accompany everything! *Carol Goodman Kaufman, an organizational psychologist and writer, is the author of Sins of Omission: The Jewish Community’s Reaction to Domestic Violence (Westview Press, 2003). She serves on the National Board of Hadassah and chairs the Jewish Community Relations Council of Central Massachusetts. Kaufman divides her time between Worcester, West Stockbridge, and the world.*

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Vegetarian Pasta e Fagioli

(a hearty pasta and bean soup)

1 can cannellini (white kidney) beans, drained and rinsed	2 stalks celery, sliced
1 can red kidney beans, drained and rinsed	1/4 cup minced garlic
1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus additional for boiling pasta	1 sprig fresh rosemary or 1 teaspoon dried
2 tablespoons olive oil	1 quart vegetable broth
8 oz. vegetarian sausage	1/2 cup chopped fresh parsley
1 large onion, finely chopped	3/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
2 carrots, sliced	8 oz. small tubular pasta
1 can diced tomatoes	6 oz. parmesan cheese, grated

- In stock pot over moderate heat, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil until hot but not smoking. Slice sausage into 1/2” pieces and add to pan, stirring until brown, about 5 to 7 minutes. Add onions and sauté about 5 minutes.
- Add celery, carrots, garlic, rosemary, beans, tomatoes, stock, pepper and salt and bring to boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer, uncovered, until carrots are soft.
- In a separate pot, cook pasta in boiling water, following directions on package, until just tender. Drain well, stir into soup, add parsley and adjust seasonings.
- Serve with parmesan cheese grated over top.



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