

## Venice

I have heard a lot about the charms of Venice, and seen many pictures and paintings of scenes in Venice too. Sometimes I have wondered whether some aspects have been a little "embellished" by authors, painters, and writers. With these general thoughts in mind as we sailed towards our berth at San Basilio, I quickly realised that Venice is all that it is claimed to be, and much more indeed. It is truly unique!

Before the Black Prince had stopped moving we were busy photographing the many and varied boats, from small local cargo vessels, regular passenger boats, car and passenger ferries from neighbouring islands, to postmen delivering mail by boat. Yes, the waterways of Venice are the lifeblood of the city, in the same way as roads are to us all at home in the UK.



Once our ship had been cleared by Customs, we began our walk in the general



direction of St Marks Square. You can not do this walk in a straight line, as you have to meander your way through a maze of canal pavements, all starting and ending with a bridge to climb over, and often containing its own square with a church and other outlets such as shops and restaurants. Later, a good many of fellow passengers recounted similar stories of their walk to St Marks too!

At one point the pavement passed by the front of a supermarket. Here two articulated trucks had been carried by a barge to the edge of the pavement,

where their goods were being offloaded direct from the barge to the shop. There is no other way for the trucks to reach the supermarket!

During this walk, some familiar names of buildings, churches, monuments, bridges and street and canal names began to strike distant memory chords. Of course we stopped many times to take photo's, to see what items the shops were selling and at what prices, and to look at restaurant menus - we had planned an evening meal for later! The whole place was full of tourists from many places, some organised into walking tours, and similar groups of children of all ages being lead by teachers. We certainly heard accents from many far flung places here.

Just as we began to feel a little tired, we entered St Marks Square. It is difficult to describe the feelings of wonderment when confronted with the Square itself, the magnificence of St Marks Cathedral, the splendour of the Doges Palace, and the Campanile Tower. These three buildings completely blow your mind away with their own character and styles - and there are many more to delight you. I can now see that you would need more than a day visit to explore Venice, a pleasant thought for a return stay in one of their hotels.



We had to return to the ship in order to join our afternoon excursion - a trip on a gondola. We chose to use a "bus" to get us back to the Black Prince quickly, and in time to grab a quick lunch before our group set out for the gondolas. We walked a quarter of the way to the Grand Canal, followed by a boat for a part of the journey, and finally a walk to an area we had visited during the morning. Yes,

these were real gondolas, carrying just six passengers, and powered and steered by a man with a long paddle standing at the rear. You soon realise that these good looking craft are not too stable, especially when turning corners, and that a trip on a gondola is certainly a once in a lifetime experience!



This afternoon excursion trip included a visit to St Marks Square, and as we had already covered this earlier in the day, we left the party to explore on our own. Our intention was to eventually land up at the Rialto Bridge area, and to eat our evening meal al fresco there. Our journey there took us through narrow streets, with numerous cafes and restaurants, shops selling clothes, shoes and souvenirs, and the further we walked away from St Marks Square the less expensive were the prices! In one such street we visited an internet cafe and sent off one of our cruise reports, dealt with our emails, and read the news of our colleagues on Facebook.

The Rialto Bridge is another wonder of Venice, wide and elegant enough to have rows of shops on either side of the walkway over the bridge, and on its summit



some commanding views of the canal and waterside properties. The main street leading away from the bridge contained more shops, side streets and restaurants, nestling in with many churches and other fine buildings. Here again were many small squares, and it was in one of these squares we chose our eating establishment. I tucked in to a plateful of ravioli, and no, it did not

come out of a tin! Alvina enjoyed a cold plate of parma ham, parmesan cheese, and mushrooms. And yes, after walking over eleven miles that day, we washed this down with glasses of the local draught beer!

By now darkness had fallen, and we made our way to the "bus" station, boarded a number 2 for the journey back to the San Basilio "bus" stop, close to the Black Prince. I have to admit that our "bus" was longer than a UK bus, wider than a UK bus, carried more passengers than a UK bus, and services operated every few minutes. In addition our bus did not have any wheels, and simply floated its way

from canal side bus stops. This excellent service is called the Vaporetto, and again, is uniquely Venetian.



You may wonder why I am writing this report in my name only - Alvina visited Venice many years ago, and still remembers its wonders, and we both decided that I would present you with a first time visit view!

## Ravenna, Italy

We dock at the port for Ravenna at 7.30am and have a hurried breakfast before our tour leaves at 8.00. Everyone is tired after our full day in Venice yesterday, and it is a very quiet coach that leaves the port and heads off to the famous Abbey at Pomposa.

On the way there our guide tells us a little about the surrounding area, which is in fact part of the River Po Delta. Apparently this whole area was marsh land where Malaria claimed many victims - this was eradicated only after WW11 when the allies used DDT to kill off the mosquitoes that carried the parasite. Over time the lagoon has been drained and now there are miles of fertile land where cereals and vegetables are grown, and none of the stagnant waters for mosquitoes to breed.

Along the roadside we can see wooden fishermen's shacks on the banks of the canals; they are perhaps 12' x 6' in size,



and stand on stilts in the water. In front of them are large square nets supported on poles which will allow them to be lowered into the water. There must be a lot of fish here to support so many of them, and of course there are many competing migratory birds here too. We can see lots of herons and white egrets wading in the shallows. The

catch here is mostly eels with some mullet and crabs, and in fact this area was famous for its eel salting and pickling plants, no longer in use.

The Abbey at Pomposa is impressive, and we stop to admire the tall brick bell tower which was erected in 1063. The adjoining church is a mixture of styles, many of the pillars and even the mosaic floors had been reclaimed from older buildings, perhaps 6<sup>th</sup> Century, although the building itself was erected between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Century. The pillars supporting the roof are all different sizes, so it is amazing that it has stood here for nearly 1000 years. We wonder how many of today's buildings will still be standing in 3000 AD!



The real surprises here are the painted frescos on the walls of the church, with no part of the wall being left unpainted. Unfortunately we are not allowed to take pictures inside the church, so you will just have to come here and see them yourselves! Our guide enthusiastically interprets each picture, and it is soon time to board the bus for our next stop.

The town of Commachio is an older and smaller version of Venice, with quiet canals, many bridges and picture post card views. It used to be surrounded by the lagoon, but after the marsh drainage the outer parts of the town can now be accessed by vehicles. We leave our coach and travel on foot to the centre, over one of the large bridges where we have a good view of the old town, and then down one of the smaller canals. The only vehicles in this part of town are bicycles and some of them are ancient indeed!



After our short walk we board the coach again for our journey back to the port. Our driver takes a different route this time, and we pass some beach resorts and camp sites under the pine trees. The pitches seem to be quite small!

We board the ship just in time for lunch and our 1.00pm sailing towards our next port of call - Dubrovnik.