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Budget Travel

How to do... Venice on the cheap

After checking in to the city's slickest new hostel, Becky Barnicoat finds low-cost ways to eat, drink and see the sights while, far right, Paul Miles enjoys a quieter night, with equally amazing views

The last time I stayed in a hostel, a steaming drunk, muscle-bound Californian clambered in to my bunk, before a group of backpackers wrestled him out. The floors were wet and sticky, and coated in tangles of matted hair. The showers had no doors, just stained curtains on rusty hooks. Privacy was the inside of your sleeping bag.

So I wasn't exactly looking forward to my stay at the brand new Generator hostel in Venice. I needn't have worried. Like an artisanal burger or a craft ale, the hostel is a basic sticky reimagined for the 21st century - a hostel fit for a new generation of travellers who've grown up on, well, artisanal burgers and craft ales.

We approached by boat, in the dead of night. The hostel sits on the shore of Giudecca island, facing the city, and is connected to Saint Mark's Square by a 24-hour vaporetto (waterbus) service. The pretty red brick building, built in the 19th century as a grain warehouse, has recently been made over by the people behind hotel and members' club Soho House. There are two private doubles and dorms for up to 10, with prices starting at a distinctly un-Venetian €15 a night.

As our boat pulled in we could see coloured lights twinkling in the



windows. The ground-floor lounge and bar area is a vision of hipsterdom all exposed brickwork, baroque sofas and bearded bunks tapping away at their MacBook Pros. Gorgeous people sipped Aperol spritzes at the bar; a DJ was spinning smooth grooves.

Venice is notorious for its unexciting nightlife - most locals don't live in the historic centre of the city, and the bars tend to close early. So the opening of Generator is a welcome addition to the city's nightlife scene.

People sat in groups on the waterfront, chatting as Venice glittered in the distance

was filled with the deep, long bellow of a ship's horn, and Venice was blotted out by a 500-metre cruise liner, gliding across our field of vision like the spaceship in Independence Day.

That night, the hostel was back in full swing with a mix of travellers and locals getting lechered at the glittery bar. Having spent eight hours tramping around the city, we didn't feel sparkling enough to join them, so headed to our dorm for an early night. Apparently we were the only ones: the building echoed with the

Bars and bargains Venice for the thrifty

Snack ... all the time

If you're happy to swap a sit-down meal in a restaurant for a stand-up snack, you can save a fortune - as well as getting a chance to rub shoulders with the locals. A proper Italian breakfast is cheap and fast - coffee and a pastry knocked back standing at the counter of a *panetteria*. Da Bonifacio (Castello 4237, Calle degli Albanesi) is moments away from the tourist heave of the San Marco ferry terminal, hidden down a crooked passage to the left of the Danieli Hotel. Order an espresso and a sweet, comforting *tortino di riso*, a pastry filled with rice pudding.

At lunchtime seek out one of the many *bacari* that pepper the city. These are small bars that serve *cicchetti* (tapas-like snacks for €1-€2). As well as being a fantastic way to fill up cheaply, they're usually full of locals: stylish, loud, downing prosciutto and *crostini* topped with paper-thin prosciutto or creamed salt cod. You can find a *bacaro* on most corners, but we loved All'Arco on Calle Arco, which is full of old men and ladies with tiny dogs, and Alla Vedova on Ca'D'Oro, where we tucked into delicious *polpetta* (meatball) and tiny glasses of vino bianco.

Join the traders

Venice's most important food market, the Mercato del Rialto, is at its most bustling early on Friday and Saturday, when locals and chefs are loading up with ingredients for the weekend. Wander among stalls piled with bundles of bright, shiny chillies, swordfish and glistening, inky-black squid. Shop for prosciutto, cheese, bread and fruit for a picnic or pop in to one of the traders' bars, such as Al Merco, Cici San Polo, Fondamenta Riva Olivo for an *antipasticcina* and glass of prosciutto. It's how the traders like to roll.

Take the 'bus'

To appreciate the impossible dreamlike beauty of Venice, you have to get out on the water. Private water taxis cost over €70 but the more affordable vaporetto (waterbuses) can take you all over the lagoon. Line 2 travels the Grand Canal, making fewer stops than Line 1, so is usually less crowded; it then loops round to Giudecca, giving

Hit the beach

When you're stomping through Venice's hot streets all day, to jump in to one of the canals is overwhelming. Do not do it. The water is stagnant and filthy. Take the vaporetto to the Lido. Hire bikes at Lido On Bike (Santa Maria Elisabetta, 2/7) and head down the island to the beach, the last one along. It's reserved (warning: it also wets naturists), and is the widest. Lido will chime, drift wood and sea birds. Trattoria al Ponte a rustic restaurant in Malamore short walk or bike ride from a good spot for an affogato.

Drink

Dining out in Venice is expensive. It comes as a surprise to discover drinking is cheap, which means why locals can often be spotted with a glass in hand from room to room. A glass of prosciutto or a spritz (a mini prosciutto and Aperol or Campari) is no more than €2.50 in an area north to Cannaregio, a peaceful district, and do a mini bar-crawl in Fondamenta degli Armenini. Highly-rated Caffè Dado and



Get out of town

Your money goes much further if you can escape the centre of Venice into one of the city's residential neighbourhoods - which is not without a map, more than one city, there's a surprise on every corner.

Wander through the Rialto with the Grand Canal on your left into Santa Croce, a vibrant quarter. Osteria La Zucca (€19.04-19.52) has a bar near Campo San Polo. This is a busy, atmospheric area. And Alaska Gelateria (Calle Barò) does a mean big ice cream, go south into the Dorsoduro. We stumbled on the Churr Barmas (which appears in Jones and the Last Crusade) an added bonus there was a market going on outside.

We also discovered Car Margherita, a bustling street with affordable places to drink. We settled down with cured meat and glasses in Osteria alla Bifora (Calle Margherita 2930), a bar in a butcher's shop. **BB**

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