The first human settlements on the Venice Lagoon islands date back to the 5th and 6th centuries, when the inhabitants from the mainland came to this semi-swamp area to escape the barbaric invasions that followed the fall of the Roman Empire.

The populations coming from mainland Venice settled in the lagoon, fighting as hard as they could to survive: little by little this group of pieces of land surrounded by water took on the semblance of a real town, a town that was so unique and special that it would become the only one of its kind in the world.

The new inhabitants built several rafts of various sizes, supported by strong wooden poles that were fixed to the underside. The rafts were connected to each other with wooden walkways and houses, buildings and monuments were then built on them.

When Venice had a big enough population to begin to deserve the title of city, it was then annexed to the
Byzantine Empire, while maintaining its own independence.

In 697, Venice elected its first Doge, giving life to a new government: the Dogado (Maritime Empire). However, the event that finally made Venice's name in the world took place in 828, when two enterprising Venetian merchants stole the Apostle Mark’s body from Alessandria in Egypt, and secretly transported it to Venice.

A huge church, consecrated in 1094, was built to house the remains of the Saint, who then became the patron saint of the city: the Basilica of San Marco.

Since the very beginning, Venice showed strong inclinations towards trade. This increased to the point that at the end of the 11th century, the city set up close trading connections with Byzantium.

This was the start of the Republic of Venice, which was finally consecrated in 1202 through the 4th crusade that saw the conquering of Byzantium and then the islands in the Aegean and Ionian Seas.

The eastern city was sacked and the booty was taken to Venice, where it was used to decorate churches and palaces. The four bronze horses that still adorn the main facade of the Basilica of San Marco were also part of that booty.

After the 4th crusade, Venice gained a strong political role due to the fact that it now controlled a large part of the Mediterranean and it also increased its military power and its trading.

The city's historical rivalry with Genoa exploded under the form of four wars that were fought one after the other until a truce was finally agreed at the end of 1381, when Venice beat Genoa in the famous Battle of Chioggia (1380).

Venice then realized that it was necessary for the city to have bases on the mainland too and began to expand towards Padua, Vicenza, Verona, Brescia and Bergamo. Venice’s prestige grew at the same rate as the increase in the land it

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**Food Specialities**

*Baccalà mantecato:* or cream dried cod, to be spread on bread and accompanied by a good glass of wine.

*Sarde in Saor:* A typical winter antipasti dish from Venice, sarde in saor is made of fried sardines, d i p p e d i n p a r t i a l l y fried onion raisins and pine nuts and other spices and sprinkled with plenty of vinegar.

*Moleche:* small green crabs deep fried to be eaten alone or with salads.

*Frittelle:* you can find them just during Carnival. This deep fried pastry can be filled with cream, chocolate or apples. The typical recipe is with raisins.

*Moleche:* a very savory dish, calf liver and stewed onions. Often served with polenta.
controlled and was thus given the name of Serenissima.

However, danger was round the corner: the Serenissima was so busy expanding on the mainland that it did not realize that the Turks’ power was expanding rapidly, to the point where they took over Constantinople (Byzantium) and some cities on the Greek and Albanian coastlines.

The League of Cambrai was founded in 1508: this was a sort of coalition against Venice which most of the European powers joined. Venice managed to maintain some of its land after seven years of war, but it lost its control over the Mediterranean.

In the 17th century, the Serenissima had to give up Crete, one of its historical lands and the whole of the Peloponnesus area to the Turkish Empire. In the period that followed, Venice’s political power was seriously damaged but there was a considerable increase of the arts and literature in the city, which gave rise to the creation of works of art by Tiepolo, Pietro Longhi and Canova and to theater plays by Carlo Goldoni.

In 1797, Napoleon Bonaparte conquered Venice, and sacked the whole area, just as he did in the rest of the country. A short while later the Emperor handed over the city to Austria, a ruler that was never accepted by the Venetians: in 1848, the Austrians were run out of the city by a group led by Daniele Manin, and the second Republic of Venice was proclaimed. This new republic did not last for long, however, as Venice was annexed to the new Kingdom of Italy in 1866.

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**THINGS TO KNOW**

**The high tide**

In the fall, especially in October and November, it very often happens that the tide rises and the water overflows the banks of the canals, flooding the city: the foundations, the alleyways, the fields, the ground floor of the houses, the churches and the shops. The rising water is a problem for the Venetians but it is an unusual, exciting experience for tourists as it is a unique event. Seeing Piazza San Marco flooded by a still lake of water is most certainly a unique, magical moment, which has been immortalized several times over the years by famous photographers.

The names of the calli, campi and campielli (lanes, squares and little squares in Venice)

The Venetian Calli have unusual names that are usually either taken from the city’s history or from an event that took place right on the very spot, or from the jobs of the people who lived in that lane or square. The names of the streets are written on small white squares that are placed on the outside of the buildings and that are called ‘nizioleti’ (tissues).

**Gondolas**

Gondolas are one of Venice’s most famous symbols worldwide. This typical Venetian boat is extremely ancient and is the result of a series of extremely complex craft techniques. A gondola is 11 meters long and weighs 600 kilograms. In spite of its considerable weight it is quite easy to maneuver by just one person using a single oar. We recommend you visit the Squero (boatyard) at San Trovaso where gondolas are still made today by the master craftsmen using the ancient techniques.
WHERE TO GO

Piazza San Marco
Piazza San Marco is the only “Piazza” in Venice, as all the other squares are given the name “Campo”. From the very beginning, Piazza San Marco was designed and built as an extension of Palazzo Ducale and the San Marco Basilica, the true centers of political and social life in Venice. The space originally taken up by the square was rather narrow and had a canal running through it: the Rio Batario. In 1172, the Doge Sebastiano Ziani bought the whole area and reclaimed the canal. He then had extension work started which ended in the Piazza San Marco that we now know today.

Opposite the Palazzo Ducale, and in place of the old wharf, a small square was created where two tall columns coming from Constantinople were installed. A winged lion was placed on one column, which is the symbol of Venice, and on the other column there was a statue of San Teodoro, the old patron saint of Venice, who was then replaced by San Marco.

The larger part of the square that stretches out in front of the Basilica, is 170 meters long and is trapezium shaped. The edge of the square is bordered by the old and new Procuratie, and the Napoleonic Wing which is now the home of the Correr Museum.

The Bridge of Sighs
This is one of the most popular tourist sights in Venice. The bridge connects the Palazzo Ducale, where prisoners were tied, to the prisons known as the Piombi. The bridge was built on the orders of the Doge Mario Grimani and was made in stone from Istria. It was decorated on the outside with Baroque patterns.

The beauty of the structure has given the bridge a romantic connotation in complete contrast to its actual use. The sighs that the bridge inspired were definitely not sighs from people in love, but from the prisoners who had just been sentenced to years in jail in the terrible “piombi”.

Mercerie
Mercerie cut the old city center into two parts, connecting Piazza San Marco to Rialto. This is Venice’s main throughway, the heart of the city’s commercial trade since ancient times when the precious fabric shops stayed open until late.

The Mercerie are divided into three parts: Mercerie dell’oroloio (that starts from Piazza San Marco), Mercerie de San Zulian and Mercerie di San Salvador, that come out right on Campo San Salvador, next to Campo San Bortolo.

All the Mercerie are full of shops and boutiques of all kinds: from luxury jewelers such as Cartier and Rolex to fashion
boutiques such as Sergio Rossi for shoes and Krizia for clothes.

Cannaregio The Jewish Ghetto
The Venice Ghetto was the first to be set up in Europe and was founded in 1516, further to laws issued by the Serenissima: The Venetian Jews had to live inside the area bordered by the Ghetto Bridge, and could not leave the area from dusk until dawn. Guards were placed at the Ghetto boundaries to control the Jews’ movements and the Ghetto was closed at night with gates. The hinges of those gates can still be seen today. The word “ghetto” comes from the word “getto”, the noun coming from the Italian verb “gettare”: before the area was made into a residence for Jews, the copper foundries were based here and “gettare” is the dialect word used to explain the work carried out in the foundries. There are 5 synagogues that look out onto Campo del Ghetto: the Canton Synagogue, the Italian Synagogue, the German Synagogue, the Levantine Synagogue and the Spanish Synagogue. The Campo is also surrounded by tall buildings that have up to 8 floors: This is a unique aspect of the buildings compared to all the others in Venice.

Dorsoduro Zattere
The Zattere walk is one of the most romantic and prettiest in Venice. Fondamenta delle Zattere begins at San Basilio and continues alongside the Giudecca Canal, which runs parallel to the Grand Canal, and ends at the Punta della Salute where the old Sea Customs house is located, a truly charming, panoramic place from where you can see the whole of San Marco bay and San Giorgio island as far as the Lido.

San Polo The Rialto Market
The famous Rialto Market has two parts to it: Erbaria and Pescaria. Erbaria is the fruit and vegetable market which is right under the Rialto Bridge, on the opposite side to Campo San Bortolo. Pescaria is the fish market and is just a short walk away, under the porticoes of a neo-Gothic building that looks out on the Grand Canal.

TRADITIONAL EVENTS

The Venice Carnival February - March
This is a wild, enjoyable festival. Carnival has ancient origins and originally lasted for a long time: from December 26th to Ash Wednesday.
In the past Carnival played an important social function: it created a temporary escape valve for the people who were strictly observed all year by the Doge’s government.
In this period they at least appeared to be free, dressing up and partying day and night. Shows were put on in the squares and in Piazza San Marco, especially on Jeudi and Mardi Gras, the most important days of Carnival. Carnivale reached the height of its magnificence in 1700 when it began to attract visitors from all over Europe.
The “maschereri” were founded to meet the growing need for masks: they were true crafts experts for dressing up and created masks and heavy velvet cloaks for the occasion. The most fashionable mask was Bauta, a unisex costume made from a black tricorn hat, a white paper-mache mask that left the mouth uncovered for eating and drinking and a black cloak.

Carnival is still celebrated in the open air today, with public shows and private parties organized in the Venetian palaces. People really let themselves go and there are many tourists around to watch, who either dress up or who just watch. The Venice Carnival has also invented some official sweetmeats: “fritole” and “galani”. “Fritole” can be made with raisins and pine nuts (from Venice) or using a rich custard or zabaiione filling, “galani” are fried slices of dough.

**The Venice Biennale June - November**

The first Venice Art Biennale took place in 1895, after the Palazzo dell’Esposizione was built in the Castello Gardens: The Italy Pavilion.

Works of art by great international painters such as Klimt and Renoir were shown at the Biennale in 1910 and the first national pavilions were prepared. These were due to multiply over the years, until they represented almost all the countries of the world.

In 1948 after the Second World War, the Biennale opened up again in grand style. It exhibited works by Chagall, Klee, Magritte and there was a retrospective exhibition of Picasso’s work presented by Guttuso.

In 1980 the Architecture sector was set up. This occupied the area of the Shipyard’s rope-making buildings. At a later point, the Art Biennale and the Architecture Biennale decided to alternate each year, each allowing the other to use all the space available for their exhibits, including the Pavilions in the Shipyard gardens.

**Festa del Redentore (The Redentore Festival)**

The Festival is held the third Saturday and Sunday of July.

This festival has its origins in a religious vow, just like the Madonna della Salute: During the first plague in 1576, the Doge promised to build a church dedicated to Christ the Savior if the scourge that was destroying the city could be beaten.

The year after, on July 13th 1577, the plague finished, and the Senate decided to start a city festival on the third Sunday of July each year. The Church of the Redentore (Savior) was built on the Giudecca island and a temporary bridge was built to it for the festival, to connect Zattere to Giudecca.

This bridge has been assembled and dismantled every year since. However, the Redentore is not just a religious festival: whereas the Sunday is dedicated to a pilgrimage to the church and the mass celebrated by the Patriarch, the Saturday night is an event of a completely different kind.

There is a fantastic fireworks display in the San Marco Bay. The fireworks are placed on rafts in the middle of the water and they light up the bay with a thousand colors. The Venetians wait for the fireworks on boats that are anchored in the middle of the bay and take food and drink with them.
They wait until about 10 pm when the first boom signifies the show is about to begin.

**The Venice Film Festival August - September**

Each year the Venice Lido is lit up by lights from all over the world. For ten days it is the center of world social life. The International Film Festival in Venice was set up in 1932, thanks to the encouragement given by the Count Volpi di Misurata, who was the Chairman of the Venice Biennale at the time. The Film Festival started up again in 1946, after a forced break during the Second World War. This was a period characterized by Neorealism, and masterpieces such as “Paisà” by Roberto Rossellini (1946) and “La terra trema” by Luchino Visconti (1948) were shown in Venice for the first time. Later editions of the Festival took on a more international connotation, first on a European scale and then including countries such as the United States, Japan and India in the competition.

In the nineteen sixties the Festival became the launch pad for the English Free cinema and the French nouvelle vague, reinforcing even more the Festival’s international role. The Festival continues to be an event that attracts a lot of visitors, both famous and not so famous, amidst discussions and autograph hunters. They come from all over the world and provide the Venice Lido with a glossy, magical atmosphere.

**Regata Storica (The Historical Regatta) first Sunday of September**

The historical Regatta is one of Venice’s most spectacular and charming traditional festivals. The competition was started in the first half of the 13th century and has been much-awaited event for the Venetians for centuries. This is a parade of characteristic historical boats from the sixteenth century, with the crews dressed in period costumes and led by the Bucintoro, the characteristic boat that represents the Serenissima. After the parade there is a competition on the Grand Canal, which is watched by Venetian fans and enthusiastic tourists.

**Festa della Madonna della Salute (The Madonna della Salute Festival) November 21st**

On November 21st each year in Venice, the Madonna della Salute festival takes place which is memory of the liberation of Venice from the terrible plague that struck the city in the first half of the 17th century. This charming folk festival is centered around the Basilica della Salute, where church goers gather on a pilgrimage from all over the city, thanks to the temporary bridge that is built for the occasion with wooden rafts that cross the Grand Canal and which connect the area of San Moisé and Santa Maria del Giglio with the Basilica.

On the day of the festival, tables are erected opposite the Basilica with all types of sweets on them and there are kiosks that sell candles to light in the church to pray for good health for relatives and friends.

**TOURS AND ACTIVITIES**

**Venice Tour and Gondola Ride:** Experience Venice in all its glory on a walking tour. Explore the many narrow streets (calli) and small squares (campi), and see the Stairs of Bovolo and La Fenice Theatre. Following this exploration you will board a Gondola, and take a Venetian tour through the enchanting maze of canals. The tours ends with the visit of the gothic church of Frari (Franciscan friars) with paintings of Bellini, Tiziano, and sculptures of Canova.

**The Doge’s Palace and Secret Trails:** The beautiful Palazzo Ducale (Dogè’s Palace) that
saw several reconstructions has always been a beautiful façade that masked its sinister underbelly. This tour explores both the exquisite public face with its sumptuous halls of power, elegantly decorated with masterpieces by some of the greatest Venetian artists, as well as the hidden depths of its prisons, torture chamber, and narrow offices. This is an unforgettable experience that will take you from the splendor of state rooms to the piombi (lead) cells.

Wine and Cicheti Tour: Discover the many bars and restaurants that Venice has to offer. Aside from the beautiful buildings, picturesque canals, and narrow streets, Venice is also known for their indulgences of food and drink. Choose from a variety of itineraries that will explore the beauty of the city, while tasting local Venetian specialties, such as the local wine and cicheti (tapas).