

to Trattoria San Basilio, for a warm welcome and delicious home-made pasta.

With hundreds of churches and works of art to explore, it can be hard to choose which to take in, but there are a few we always make a beeline for. The Church of San Pantalon in the Dorsoduro district can be tricky to find, but your reward is a spectacular view of the biggest painting on canvas in the world.

The I Gesuiti church is equally fantastic, and filled with wonderful art — with the bonus of being just a few steps from another lovely lunch spot, Trattoria Storica.

We also find time to catch the ferry to Murano, the island where you can watch glass-blowers at work, pick up a fragile souvenir, and wander streets packed with pretty shops and houses.

Along the way, we've forged our own, unique traditions: Rosie choosing a souvenir for me to buy her from the wonderful Peggy Guggenheim Museum shop, enjoying a hot chocolate in the café of the Ca'Pesaro Gallery of Modern Art, and drinking Aperol Spritz in the Orange Bar, a favourite haunt of local students. Oddly, the one thing we've never done is go on a gondola, as we prefer the bustle of the water bus.

The places we've stayed in have been eclectic, from a roomy Airbnb where we sipped supermarket wine on the sofa, to the opulent Londres Palace hotel, located a few steps from St Mark's Square, for my 60th birthday treat.



Murano glass.



The stunning Venetian sunset from the Hotel Danielli.



The Church of Santa Maria Assunta, also known as I Gesuiti.

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But we've learned that where you stay isn't as important as who you're with. Every time we visit, we discover something new about the city, and about each other.

I've learned that being with Rosie is as relaxing as being by myself, that she's very funny, and that she's great at winking out the best places to eat. Meanwhile she's seen my adventurous side first-hand, knows I'm hopeless with maps and that I hate green olives — even if they're perched in a glass of Aperol.

Although we still see each other regularly back home, and text or call every day, Rosie is engaged and living with her fiancé now, so our trips to Venice are even more special. It's our time to spend together, without partners, jobs or housework intruding. Venice might be considered the city of love, but for me, it will always be about those evenings watching the sunset on the canal — just me, my daughter and a glass of Prosecco.

## Thinking of heading to Venice? Try these insider tips



### Get there by bus

Forget the expense of a water taxi: from Marco Polo airport, the ATVO express bus gets you into Venice in 20 minutes, at a fraction of the price. Buy your return ticket inside the airport, and you'll find the bus stop just outside. Avoid the ACTV bus line — it still goes to Venice, but is slower and has no luggage space.

### Walking the city

*Venice Walks (On Foot Guides)* by Jo Ann Titmarsh is packed with insider knowledge, making walking the streets of Venice a joy. You might still get lost, but you'll find hidden delights, from souvenir shops to fantastic local restaurants at every turn.

### Avoid the tourist areas

Venice has a reputation for being crowded, and Saint Mark's Square and shopping areas such as the Strada Nuova are pretty packed at all times. Head slightly off the beaten track, into the Cannaregio and Castello districts, and you'll find the crowds melt away. ■

