

Venice for rookies



by Bianca Reyes





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About the Author

Bianca Reyes was born in Washington, D.C. and now permanently resides in Venice. Being raised in a South American household, her travels to Latin America began from a young age, and upon obtaining a degree in psychology at the University of Virginia she continued to travel on a regular basis for work and pleasure. One of her first jobs involved traveling as an event coordinator for foreign Ministers of Justice and Finance at the International Monetary Fund. While that gave her a glimpse of the world through the institution's eyes, her contrasting global views and true passion for exploring and discovering other cultures pushed her leave the Fund and become a real estate agent. Being her own boss allowed her to take a year off in 2008, move to Venice, master the Italian language (in addition to Spanish and French), and travel to over five continents. Finally deciding to remain in Venice, her career as a marketing manager for an international booking site led to a better balance between her private and professional life. Venice "sucked her in" (as the locals say) and she finally set down her anchor in one of the world's most unique cities. She has traveled back and forth between the States and Europe since 1999 for studies and pleasure. Bianca loves salsa dancing, prefers being a foodie at a restaurant than cooking at home, and has a great affinity for dogs and horses. This book was born from her quirky habit of keeping lists of everything combined with her passionate love for Venice.

Author's Acknowledgements

Thank you so much to my parents for giving me the opportunity to study abroad and get my first glimpse of Italy and believing in me no matter what. Thank you Carlos (entrepreneurial genius brother) for wanting to invest in me from so early on, and Lorenzo (music-inspired thoughtful kid brother) for keeping my head straight. Finally, thank you Andrea for pushing me to follow my dreams.

All pictures are originals taken by Bianca, who encourages you to take many more on your trip!



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Floating Market at Ponte dei Pugni

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Hi Venice Rookie!

This for Rookies guide is meant to be another way to explore and to get a taste of the Venice I fell in love with—a city of random legends, cool historical tidbits, and amazing postcard-like scenery. Once you set foot in Venice, you'll understand why people call it “romantic, enchanting, mesmerizing, and La Serenissima (the Serene one).” This guide is meant to save you time and money—not by taking the less-is-more cheap route, but by teaching you how to make informed decisions based on all the research and experience I have gained over the years by showing my friends and family the city. After learning which tour was worth it and which could be skipped, I made a variety of simple itineraries (for the various types of Rookies out there) with helpful hints (for example, how to avoid ticket penalties or how to detect imitation Murano glass), easy-to-follow instructions, short reviews, and videos. None of the places mentioned are sponsors of this book, so everything mentioned is based on what I personally recommend to those close to me and where I go myself.

For the record, I am not a history buff and probably never will be (as dates and names barely stick around in my memory bank for more than ten minutes) so this guide will not be providing detailed history lessons. However, I will give you great links to audio tours and, more importantly, I will focus on unusual tales, interesting historical trivia, and the best places to get some grub and vino to help you be part of the city and its culture.

My goal is to give you a sense of how the locals live. I'm not the kind of visitor who goes to all the museums or tourist attractions. Aside from keeping the tourist expenditures to a minimum, I don't believe in cutting costs when it comes to eating! The ritual of dining is huge in Italy, as you may well know, and as the majority of you are here for just two to four days, that means we have about eight dining opportunities I need you to relish! Thus, all the restaurants mentioned are hand-picked from the ones I have been to and are considered to be top-rated by local standards. Look for  and “**Rookie Pick**” which is a quick way to see my favorite events and hot spots.

For all you Rookies out there, I hope you enjoy Venice for Rookies. Make the most of your stay and take advantage of everything Venice has lurking around the corner!

Bianca Reyes



Icon Legend



Rookie Pick - Bianca's favorite events and hot spots.



Rookie Hint - Helpful hints for traveling smart.



Rookie Savings - Tips for getting the most out of your money.



Interesting Fact - Interesting trivia tidbits.



Venice Legends - Infamous Venetian stories throughout history.



Recipe - A quick way for you to make your own Italian food for cheap.



Outdoor Seating - Places with outdoor seating.

Note: Italian words will be italicized *like so*.

The Basics

Benvenuto a VENEZIA! Welcome to Venice!

The Top 20 things that you probably want to do while in Venice:

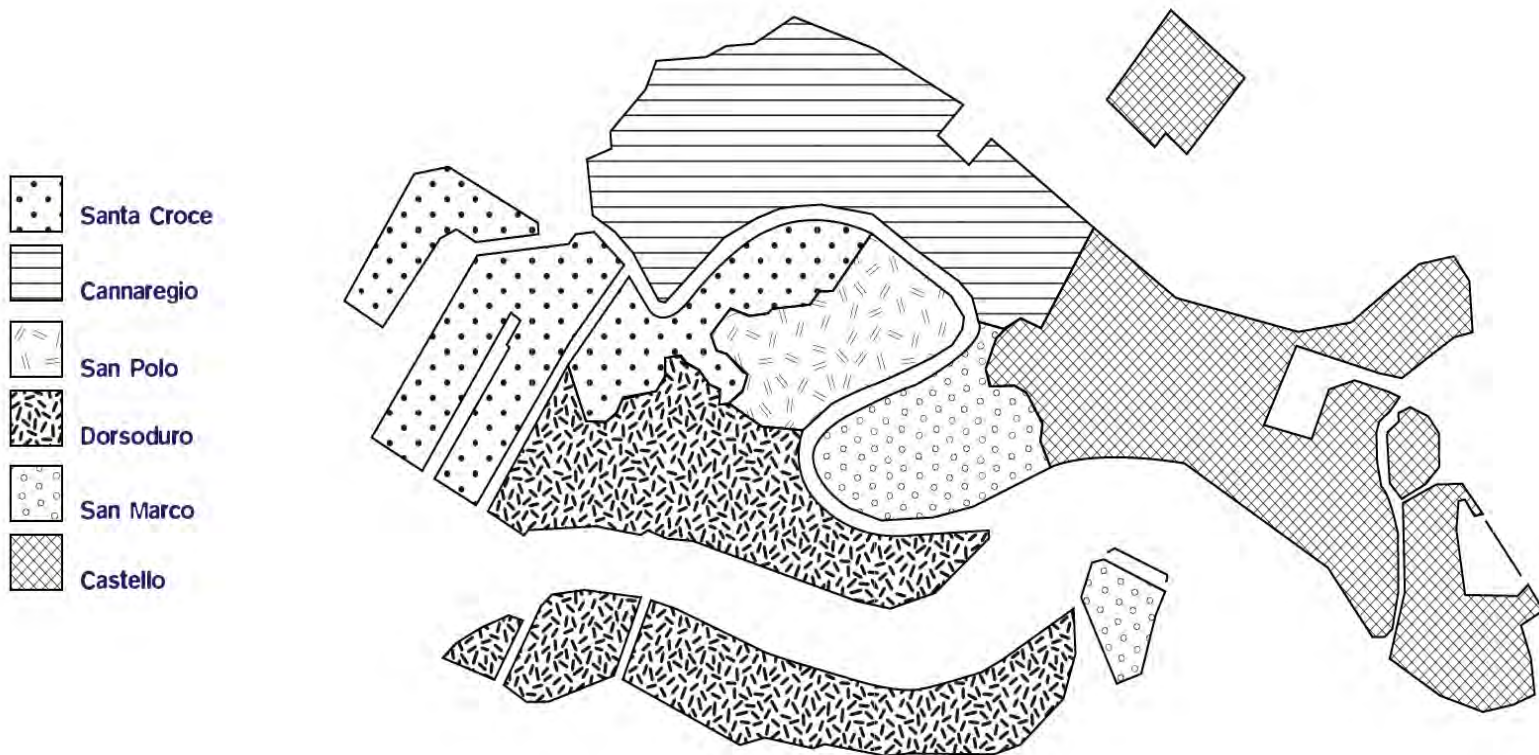
1. Take a gondola ride
2. Cruise down the Grand Canal
3. See a glass blowing demonstration
4. Find an authentic mask (not a mass-produced one from China)
5. Have a romantic dinner
6. Visit the surrounding islands—Murano, Burano, & Lido
7. Play with the pigeons in Saint Mark's Square, or scream, "I love this woman!" like the [DeBeers Jewelers commercial](#)
8. Slush through the **acqua alta** (flooding)
9. Eat plenty of homemade pasta
10. Take a picture kissing over a bridge
11. Take part in the festive **Carnevale**
12. Swim in the Adriatic sea by day and return to the quiet floating city by night
13. Enjoy the amazing mosaic work in Saint Mark's Basilica
14. Listen to a live musical or theatrical performance
15. Learn Italian
16. Party on a boat
17. Taste the lagoon's seafood creations
18. Visit at least one of the many art galleries
19. Get lost in the city
20. Take a part of history home with you!

The good news is that you can do ALL of this and save over \$200 during your trip. The bad news is that you may gain a couple of pounds during this vacation.

A detailed history of Venice can be found in various places, such as good ol' [Wikipedia](#), the downloadable mp3 tours, and along our journey in this guidebook.

City Layout

Historic Venice is divided into six *sestiere*, or districts. All of these areas are safe and equally beautiful to walk through, so you can wander around without too much on your mind. But of course, don't be too negligent and fall into a canal! Don't leave your purse or backpack unzipped or leave your smart phone on a public bench, because the city isn't completely rid of pickpocketers. Nearly 50,000 tourists a day visit Venice, and I don't want you to be an unlucky Rookie.



Santa Croce – The innermost part is great to roam around, with fewer tourists and more local artisans.

Cannaregio – The train station, Jewish Ghetto, and longest shopping promenade are located here.

San Polo – Enjoy the oldest bridge, great restaurants, and the not-to-be-missed Rialto Market.

Dorsoduro – Mingle with the university crowd or shop at smaller boutiques. Includes Giudecca Island.

San Marco – Where the only basilica and entrance to the city are located as well as many tourist traps.

Castello – Home to the Biennale Art Exhibit, runner's circuits, and the only area with trees and grass!



The Basics

Rialto, in the San Polo district, was the first settlement. As Venice rapidly grew, San Marco became the main docking site for larger vessels and the entrance to Venice became what you see today, between the two tall columns in Piazzetta San Marco. From here on, when I say “Venice,” I am referring only to the historic center—the island itself and not the mainland.

It is amazing to think that Venice was originally just a bunch of islands with a few makeshift bridges, requiring rowboats to get from one part of the city to another. The original buildings had main entrances facing the water, and as the city grew, more and more dwellings were built in a haphazard fashion. This is why you will find some alleyways that are extremely narrow. The builders through the years didn’t think about people walking on the streets, because all commuting was done by water. However, with business booming, eventually some streets needed to be wide enough to allow horses to walk through and these streets are called **salizada**.

Here is the list of what Venetians classify as “streets or alleyways” (from widest to the most narrow). Of course, only Venetians would be so clever as to name them with this precision as if to create some sort of order inside the labyrinth they created. Canals also follow a similar nomenclature.

- a) **Salizada** – widest alleyway where horses could walk through;
- b) **Ruga** – a commercial street with storefronts;
- c) **Calle** – most common name for a regular alleyway, mostly residential;
- d) **Calletta** – a narrower alleyway;
- e) **Ramo** – the narrowest street; ramo literally means “branch.” These usually end in a dead end;
- f) **Sottoportego** – a covered passageway.

There is only one piazza in all of Venice: Piazza San Marco. The rest of the squares are referred to as either **campo** or **campiello** (a smaller square).



Rookie Hint: If you see signs for Venezia-Mestre (the mainland), do not mistake this for Venice. Be careful not to book your stay in Mestre (more on this in the [Accommodation: Where to Lay Your Head](#) chapter). Venice, or Venezia, is the word for both the island and the mainland, so the mainland hotels use this to their advantage. When choosing where to go by train, the train should go to Venezia S. Lucia (short for “Santa Lucia,” which is the name of the historic city center’s train station). If you see a full street address for a hotel at which you are considering staying (ex. “Via XYX”), this is the mainland and NOT the island. There are no Via (“driven streets”) anywhere on the island (except the bus depot). Venice uses postal addresses, not street numbers.

Hotel Pricing Chart

\$	€17-88 (US\$25-\$130)
\$\$	€88-135 (US\$130-\$200)
\$\$\$	€135 and up (US\$200+)

Rialto Area

“Sleep in an Old Nun’s Palace in the Heart of Rialto”

\$\$ – *Pensione Guerrato* (www.pensioneguerrato.it):

This characteristic palace, built in 1288, was donated to the nuns of San Lorenzo, and for the next eight hundred years they rented out rooms. Piero and Roberto, the current owners, have kept the decor in the simple, traditional Venetian style, even after renovating the building. The twenty-five rooms are spacious by Venetian standards—most have original Venetian chandeliers inside the rooms, and some have a view of the Rialto Market square. They have double rooms with shared bathrooms (only sharing with two other rooms) as low as €90 a night, including breakfast, A/C, and Wi-Fi (in the lobby area). The breakfast isn’t skimpy, with croissants, coffee/tea, bread and jam, cereal and milk, and fruit, so you can start your day right. Downside: For light sleepers, the rooms with shared bathrooms are on the lower level near the dining area, so it can get noisy in the morning as they prepare breakfast. Also, the noise from the Rialto market just below can be distracting, but to look at the bright side, you don’t have to go far to get fresh food! Tel: +39 041 528 5927 / 041 522 7131, guerrato@gmail.com. **Location: (San Polo) Calle drio la Scimia 240a. Walking directions: From the Rialto Mercato stop (Vaporetto #1), exit the waterbus to the right, and follow the waterfront until you get to Calle drio la Scimia on the immediate left (just after the first two vendors) to building #240a.**

“Grand Canal Palace”

\$\$ – *Al Lion Morosini* (www.lionmorosinipalace.com):

The staff serve breakfast on the balcony overlooking the Grand Canal, and on average it’s \$130 for a double room with a shared bath and \$170 for a double room ensuite. All the rooms are in full Venetian decor and while they don’t have Wi-Fi, it’s still a great feeling to know you’re sleeping in a palace! Rooms with a canal view or A/C cost more. This campiello is well-known amongst locals for its legend, happy hour, and restaurant

“Three Forks” for best restaurants, and “Three shot glasses” for top bars, and so forth. In 2011, the wine awards went to a couple of Veneto wineries. If you want a spectacular wine, look for the Amarone della Valpolicella Cl. (’06) by Allegrini, Colli Euganei Cabernet Borgo delle Casette Ris. (’06) by Il Filò delle Vigne, Soave Cl. Campo Vulcano (’09) by I Campi, or Valpolicella Sup. (’06) by Marion. These are all exceptional bottles.

Drink Glossary

Ape: (short for **aperitivo**) is the same as aperitif, but refers to any type of alcoholic drink at happy hour. A glass of wine can cost from €2 to €3.50 on average.

Baccaro: A Venetian pub which usually has a variety of local wines sold by the glass and some local appetizers or finger foods for pairing.

Bianco: Refers to white wine.

Ombra: a glass of wine (red or white)

Rosso: Refers to red wine.

Spritz: This is the Venetian cocktail which consists of white wine or prosecco, soda water, ice, and your choice of one of the two liquors, Campari or Aperol. Campari is the bitterer of the two and is red in color. Aperol is a little sweeter; usually the ladies’ choice, and orange. Depending on the bar, they will either garnish the drink with an orange slice or green olive.

Sgroppino: This is usually ordered after dinner and tastes like lemon sorbet. It’s made of lemon juice, lemon ice cream, and a shot of vodka or prosecco.

Bellini: This cocktail is from the famous Harry’s Bar (near the San Marco-Vallaraesso stop), which coined it (Hemingway’s drink), and sold it at €18 a pop. It is made of prosecco and peach purée.



Drinks

Venetian Pub Crawl

When you hear the terms **giro d’ombre** or **giro dei bacari**, they basically translate as “pub crawl,” a round of drinks at the local bars. This usually occurs daily from 6PM to 9:30PM. The Venetian ritual begins with drinking a glass of wine or a spritz while chatting with friends and taking in some fresh air. Since most pubs are quite small, the bar area is meant for ordering, and the gatherings stay outside the establishment

to people-watch and gossip. Cheers! There is no open container law here! Take in a glass along with a **cicchetto** (Venetian dialect for “appetizer”), and you’re off to a good start on your bacaro trip.

The main pub crawl areas are **Rialto**, **Cannaregio**, and **Dorsoduro**, which have certain **campos**, or streets, lined with bars, but they all have slight differences. The Rialto area has a mix of locals, both young and old, but it’s right on the Grand Canal and most bars are concentrated at the Rialto Mercato stop, so it’s good for those who are lazy and want to hit one bar after another. Cannaregio is more for the experienced pub-crawlers who like to have a little walk between each stop, as there are some places in alleyways off the main promenade, Strada Nova, and behind the Jewish Ghetto, which is where you’ll find a more eclectic crowd. Finally, Dorsoduro has most bars around or inside the large square, Campo Santa Margherita. Here, you can find anything from a rasta-reggae-style bar which sells wine by the liter from €2 and up, to a traditional pub filled with students and young professionals. The **giro dei bacari** can start as early as brunch, but usually occurs right after office hours and continues again after dinner.



Baccari (by Districts)

Rialto

“Young Urban 20s Crowd and Pumping Music”

\$ – Muro Rialto

The fluorescent-colored lighting, aluminum bar, and big-screen TV outside makes this modern bar stand out from the rest of the wooden taverns. It is known for its **spritz** and the punky, gelled-hair, and very tanned clientele. There is a small selection of sandwiches if you can’t wait until dinner, and a glass of wine starts at €2. Depending on the bartender, you can also get decent cocktails at €5. Popular rail drinks like Vodka and Lemon soda or a Rum and Coke are familiar to the bartenders, so stick to those as other cocktails might be disappointing to you. During the daytime there is a mixed crowd, including some tourists, but after office hours, the crowd gets younger

Museums Only

Museum Pass: (€18 / Ages 25 and under: €12) – Includes the Doge's Palace plus ten musei civici (Museo Correr, National Archeological Museum, Monumental Rooms of the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Ca' Rezzonico– Museum of Eighteenth-Century Art, Museum of Palazzo Mocenigo, Carlo Goldoni's House, Ca'Pesaro, International Gallery of Modern Art and Oriental Art Museum, Glass Museum – Murano, Museum of Natural History, Lace Museum – Burano*) regularly €18, but reduced to €12 for those under twenty-five-years-old or over sixty-five. If you know your travel dates in advance, check www.veniceconnected.com, which has the same museum pass for less if you go during low- or mid-season, or if you want to only use the pass in the afternoon versus the whole day.

The Doge's Palace ticket costs €13, and includes the entrance fee to the palace and the less-visited Correr Museum, the Archeological Museum, and the Monumental Rooms of the Marciana National Library. It also lets you choose to see ONE of the following seven museums: Ca' Rezzonico, Palazzo Mocenigo Costume Museum, Casa Goldoni (the residence of a famous playwright), Ca'Pesaro (modern art), Museum of Natural History, Glass Museum–Murano, Lace Museum-Burano*. My choice of the seven would be Ca'Rezzonico.

* Closed currently for renovation purposes.



Rookie Hint: Do you want to beat the Doge's Palace ticket line? Buy the same ticket for €13 at the Correr Museum in Piazza San Marco and then run back to the Doge's Palace to jump the lines!



(Clockwise from Top Left) Basilica San Marco/Rialto Bridge/Doge's Palace/Bridge of Sighs

Churches Only

The Chorus Pass allows you to enter over fifteen churches (normally €3 entrance fee for most churches) and see their amazing artworks an unlimited number of times for a year. The cost is just €10. If you have a student ID and are under twenty-nine-years-old, this is reduced to €7, while children under the age of ten can get it for

free. The pass can be purchased online in advance or at any of the churches (such as the Redentore, Frari, or Santa Maria del Giglio, to name a few), and includes a fact-sheet in various languages plus a free map! Remember to bring something to cover your shoulders, and don't wear anything too skimpy! www.chorusvenezia.org

Transportation Only

Regarding only *vaporetti* (waterbuses) with ACTV. (See the [Getting Around section](#) to get a Rookie Savings tip.)

Attractions

The entire city of Venice is itself an attraction, with its amazing architecture, winding canals, and charming little nooks. However, when I travel, I usually check out the main worthwhile sights, one or two paid museums, wander into random churches, and then go off the beaten path. The list below includes the main cultural places which I feel are must-sees, but if you want to learn about more hands-on, historic fun facts and legends (all free), be sure to check out the [Rookie Tours & Legends](#) section.

Rookie Recommended Main Attractions:

Piazza San Marco and Basilica San Marco (Free)

While some of the most expensive yet historical cafés (where a coffee can cost over \$12) from the 1720s have monumental status, such as Caffé Florian or Gran Caffé Quadri, the piazza is free to roam. It has a gorgeous view of the Basilica, the Tower, and the Doge's Palace, not to mention the flocks of pigeons (which are not to be fed as they are destroying some of the buildings). The square was built in order to have uninterrupted views from all angles and to display stolen treasures on the facade of the Basilica, such as the bronze horses from Constantinople (the originals now lie inside the San Marco Museum inside the Basilica on the upper floor, which can be accessed for €4). However, the piazza wasn't always this big. For centuries, the Rio Batario (River Batario), cut half-way across the square, separating the two halves; it wasn't filled until the twelfth century. The Basilica (built in 1063) is free to walk inside the main floor, and you should walk around twice to marvel at the mosaic work made from millions of crushed bits of gold, glass, and semi-precious stones on the walls, ceilings, and marble floor designs. The golden altarpiece is a separate exhibit inside which costs €2. **Open Monday through Friday 9:45AM–4:45PM, and Sunday 2PM–5PM**

Rookie Tours and Legends

Location: From the Peggy Guggenheim Museum, continue east just over the first bridge that takes you to the Church of San Gregorio in Campo San Gregorio.



The Newlyweds and the Skull – During the years of the plague, thousands of Venetians were killed and churches ended up not knowing where to put the bodies as the cemeteries were full. While digging the mass graves, there would be covered piles of old skeletons to bury the new bodies. One evening two fiancées were strolling past the campo when the young man wanted to prove how courageous he was to his pretty soon-to-be bride, so he took her for a walk through the church's cemetery. She was afraid to walk through as it was getting dark but she held his arm tightly. The light was dim and they couldn't tell where they were walking until the young man tripped and realized he had kicked a loose skull into the canal. They nervously laughed but immediately walked back out into the campo and never returned or talked about what had happened.

A few months later, they were married. On their wedding night as the bride went upstairs to prepare for their first full night together, there was a knock at the door. The husband opened the door, only to find a beggar with a hooded cloak asking angrily, "Where did you put it?!" The husband responded, saying he didn't know what the man was talking about. Finally the beggar yelled, "You know! That night when you tripped, where did you put it?"

Frightened, the husband shut the door, locked it and ran upstairs to his wife. Out of breath and with a look of desperation on his face, he fainted. When his wife ran to pick him up she passed by the vanity mirror and to her horror, her face was completely disfigured and her teeth fell out onto her husband's limp body.

Location: From the Salute stop, turn right and go over two bridges (in the direction towards the Peggy Guggenheim museum) to Ca'Dario.



A Deadly Palazzo – Ca'Dario is the palazzo that has killed nearly every owner. It's like the Hope Diamond, beautiful but deadly. The first owner, Giovanni Dario, had it built in the fifteenth century for his daughter. He didn't live there, but she did once she got married only to end up dying of heartbreak after her husband went bankrupt. You didn't have to die inside the house necessarily, just purchasing the home was enough in some cases. In the seventeenth century, Giacomo Barbaro was murdered after his purchase of the home. Immediately afterwards a diamond merchant bought the home but shortly lost everything including his life. In the nineteenth century, an English scientist lived there and ended up committing suicide. The gay lover of the following American owner (Charles Briggs) also ended his life after visiting. And

Jesolo is just past Torcello and Burello Islands. You basically have to cross the whole lagoon and get dropped off at the Punta Sabbioni stop (just a few minutes walk to the best sandy beach), which has the nicest beach on Jesolo Island. Don't expect Caribbean waters, but the water is more transparent than you'll find on Venice's Lido Island and there is a large free public beach area to take advantage of. It's a more natural beach feel than the rest of the resort-like beaches closer to the city center. Punta Sabbioni beach also has a cafe where you can order hamburgers, sandwiches, and soft drinks right on the beach. It's just before the lighthouse and they have bathroom facilities. Parasols and sunbeds cost from €13 to €18 a day, but after 2PM prices usually lower and in front of most of these areas the beach is free to lay on with your beach towel as long as you're in front of rope that divides the paying area from the public section.

Jesolo has numerous apartments and hotels, but the most economical lodging is at their campgrounds. Jesolo has over thirty campgrounds to choose from, which are conveniently located along the beach!



Jesolo

Getting There

An hour ride by waterbus, line LN from Fondamenta Nove is probably the most scenic and direct way, but it will leave you near Jesolo's most natural beach, Punta Sabbioni. If you want to reach the city center of Jesolo (Piazza Mazzini), there is an ATVO bus from Piazzale Roma or Marco Polo airport, which takes about an hour (with no traffic). Both buses and boats run about every half hour.

Jesolo's Piazza Mazzini from Punta Sabbioni takes about twenty minutes but many tourists bike around the island. I recommend taking the bus if you don't have a bike or car, since taxis cost about €15 for a five minute ride.

Dining & Drinks

While there are plenty of pizza bars, cafes and a plethora of restaurants to choose from all over the strip of island, here are some local dishes to look out for: *il baccala in tocio* (cod in red sauce), *moeche* (soft-shelled crabs), *le masenete* (crabs boiled and