

A rediscovered history

CHARLOTTE SKIDMORE visits the beautiful floating city of Venice and stays in a special place that has been brought back to its former glory

FRONTING onto arguably the most famous canal in the world, Palazzo Venart has been restored in a truly spectacular way and transformed into a hotel that is sure to rival some of the best in Venice.

It opened its doors to the public in the summer of 2016 following a two-year project to bring it back to its former glory and that project has surely exceeded all expectations.

For hundreds of years this building was known as Palazzo Bacchini delle Palme before the covers came off each room and piece by piece it was transformed back into a palace (palazzo) ready to welcome its guests once more.

Stepping through the doors of Palazzo Venart for the first time is a jaw-dropping experience. Not just because of the exquisite décor reminiscent of 18th century Venice; luxurious drapes and glittering chandeliers, but also because of the rediscovered history that, quite literally, takes your breath away. Ceilings and walls bear the frescoes of a bygone era, which have been carefully restored so that they shine again - in more ways than one. Look up, look left, look right; everywhere you will see something to delight you and

awaken the senses of sight and touch.

Make your way to the second floor of this 18 bedroom hotel and you'll discover the piano room, which envelopes you in the history of this famous city. You'd struggle to find a more beautiful room in a hotel in which to enjoy afternoon tea. Taking centre stage in the room is a hand-painted Christie's piano, which is surrounded by gild edged décor, lavish drapes and beautifully decorated walls and ceilings.

The room I stayed in is one of two suites in the hotel, the Lord Byron Room. Each room is named after a character from a noble past and is decorated to reflect that character. With

velvet in abundance, our suite was about as luxurious as it gets, with many extra touches making such a difference.

From fresh oranges and water on arrival to bath salts, loofahs, bathrobes

and slippers, every need is catered for.

The lovely lounge area boasts a second flat screen television and has fabulous views over the Grand Canal.

The marble bathroom is truly spectacular with a large shower and double sinks, but for me the stand out feature was the slipper bath behind the king size bed. Many an hour was spent in it after pounding the city's streets.

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The garden of the hotel fronts onto the Grand Canal



GLAM serves food by Enrico Bartolini; the first chef to achieve four Michelin stars at the same time



TOP TIPS

We flew from Bristol Airport and we used the airport parking. This turned out to be extremely easy and convenient, especially for our early morning flight when we just wanted a straightforward solution.

See Bristolairport.co.uk/parking

Get a 24 hour pass for the vaporetto. There are some ticket machines at a few of the stops, but otherwise you'll need to pick one up from a local shop that has the symbol on its window. A 24 hour pass cost 20 euros each and is a good way to get to grips with your surroundings on arrival.

MUST SEE VENICE EXPERIENCES

I've picked out five things that I think you should definitely do on a trip to Venice.

A gondola ride: Okay it's totally clichéd, but when in Venice..... There's nowhere else you can do it like this!

Visit St Mark's Square and the Basilica: This doesn't need an explanation, but just be aware of the prices in some of the cafés in the square. Many have three price structures; one for standing at the bar, one for sitting inside and one for sitting outside.

Visit Doge's Palace: This beautiful Gothic style palace and museum is worth a visit for the ceiling décor alone, but there's so much more. Whilst there go along the Bridge of Sighs and take a look at the former prison- fascinating!

Visit the Rialto Bridge: The most famous bridge in Venice needs a look, but just be aware of the difference in prices in some shops nearby.

The Rialto fish market: Because of the timing of my trip I missed out on seeing this, but I know from speaking to others how interesting it would be. It's closed Sundays and Mondays and closes around lunch time other days.



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The staff at Palazzo Venart reflect the standards you'd expect from a five star hotel and this was followed through into the hotel restaurant for breakfast and dinner. But this is no ordinary hotel restaurant.

Two Michelin star Ristorante GLAM is a contemporary restaurant serving food designed by Enrico Bartolini, who was the first chef to receive four Michelin stars in one go in 2016.

His style is certainly contemporary, but he obviously prides himself on using the freshest ingredients and retaining an air of traditionalism about his food.

The colours he uses in his food are truly spectacular and the vivid nature of these colours make the food leap from the plate into your eyes. The resident chef Donato Ascani obviously takes Enrico's values onboard.

GLAM is Enrico's latest creation and it overlooks the gardens of Palazzo Venart. It has a sophisticated, but contemporary ambience and its fairly small size means

it can retain a personal atmosphere.

The restaurant selects its market-fresh produce, meats and fish in order to create a dining experience never to be forgotten.

I was privileged during my visit to be served a six-course tasting menu with sommelier selected wines and, although a couple of the combinations were slightly too off-the-wall for me, there was a lot to like. Particular favourites included the beetroot and gorgonzola risotto, the dish for which Enrico earned himself a Michelin star, the melt-in-the-mouth veal cheek (accompanied by possibly the best red wine I have ever tasted) and the hazelnut ice cream with warm chocolate cream. The tastes from each of these dishes were divine and they were a real explosion on the palate.

When I left the hotel I wrote something in the visitor book along the lines of 'fabulous place, fabulous city, fabulous staff, fabulous hotel' and I can't really put it better than that. ♦

Palazzovenart.com

Excursions

We did a 'Venice in a day' excursion, which ensured we covered all the main sites. We booked through Walks of Italy as it had a good reputation and, over the course of a day, we managed to enjoy all the following (and more) with a very knowledgeable and enthusiastic tour guide: Rialto Bridge, the house of Marco Polo, the Church of Miracles, Venice's main hospital (from outside), the Church of San Zulian (from outside), St. Mark's Basilica, St. Mark's Square, Doge's Palace, the Bridge of Sighs and inside the new prisons. Plus, we even enjoyed a gondola ride. The price of this tour is around £115 each and is an excellent way to see all the most important parts of Venice. Wear good walking shoes though! walksofitaly.com/venice-tours/venice-in-a-day