

Venice, Italy at High Water, Oct. 31 to Nov. 4, 2012

As I had a meeting (International Society for Quality of Life Studies) in Venice, Italy to present papers on my research on human suffering, Nancy and I took a quick, 5-night trip to Venice. (Venezia is actually the Italian name for Venice.) We took the trip even though we knew there might be rain and flooding. Sure enough, it rained the first day and a half and during that time, Venice experienced one of the biggest floods, which they call high water events, or "Acqua Altra."

Venice's high water tides are caused by six different forces: astronomical, geophysical, meteorological, global warming, the slow sinking of the City, and the landfill for a causeway with train tracks and a highway to the main land. The first two forces create daily high and low tides, with the water typically rising 1 to 3 feet each day. But because of the other four forces, the tides do not form smooth, predictable changes. The experts can predict the high and low water points pretty well but not for more than two days ahead.

When we first arrived, we had to take a 22 mile water taxi ride from the airport to the hotel. Fortunately, it was dry inside the long taxi boats. Our hotel was on the Island of Gidecca, which is the southernmost part of the City, while the airport is north of the City. My meeting was at the San Giobbe campus of the University of Venice, which was in the northern corner of the Island. We found that we could take the public water bus, for free or almost free, all the way from the hotel to the University. (Photos in the appendix show these water buses and the various locations mentioned.)

At midnight our first night, the high water level rose 140 cm (about 4 feet) above normal and flooded many of the walkways. The sirens wailed over the city to warn people that not only had sidewalks been flooded, but also many boats could not go under many of the bridges due to the high water. The pictures toward the end of the appendix show how high the water was the next morning when many people had to wade to their destination, or just stay home. During the night, the Mayor ordered that temporary wood and pipe walkways be installed for key traffic areas. At 8am the next morning, the TV in our room automatically turned on and woke us up to tell us that the City was flooded. It was actually only about 60% flooded. In 1968, the water rose 200cm and flooded 100% of the city. Nancy brought pretty rubber boots but I had to buy some crude plastic sleeves that fit over the knees like waders.

Many of the doors of the homes had 3' high boards covering the lower part of the doors, in order to keep the water out of the buildings. Given that the real estate is so vulnerable, it is surprising that the housing in Venice is so expensive that most of the workers cannot afford to live there.

Ironically, while we were adjusting to the "natural" flooding of Venice, NY and NJ were hit by the worst storm of the Century. In Venice, it has become a way of life and people

have learned to live with it, carrying boots around for high water emergencies. But, of course, the Venice storm factor does not compare to hurricane Sandy.

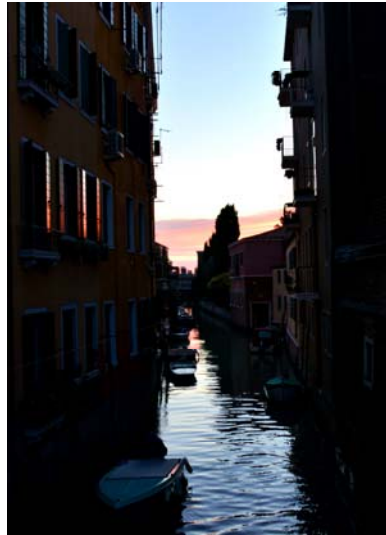
Venice is an inconvenient place to live because in central Venice the only means of transport are boating and walking. You will see a lot of residents pulling little grocery carts and tourists dragging their suitcases throughout the city. None-the-less, the enchantment of the beautiful canals and charming bridges attracts thousands of tourists every day. We were amazed at how crowded the alleys and piazzas were despite the rain and floods.

When we last visited Venice, it was summer and we expected crowds. Apparently, a lot of Europeans tourists go to Venice in the winter, especially for a special weekend. The sun was out for only about six hours while we were there, but as you can see by the photos, Venice is a very colorful and picturesque city even in Winter.

Ron



Arrival by water taxi from airport



Canal at sunset by University



Canal Cannaregio Venice 1Nov12



Elderly rowing team - Venice 1nov12



Gondola and seagull near San Marco



Gondolas in canal behind Basilica



Leaning tower of Venice



Transport in Venice is only by boat or by foot



San Marco Basilica and crowds 3nov12

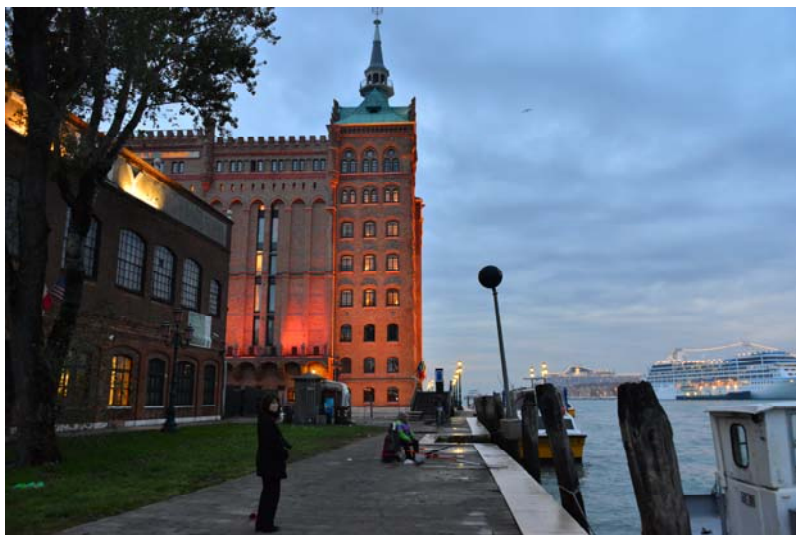
Venice, Italy - Oct 31 - Nov 4 2012



Seaweed washed up from oct 31 2012 high water



Shopping crowds in central Venice 3nov12



Molina Stucky Flour Mill - now Hilton - on Gidecca Island



Supply boat on canal



Typical overflow onto sidewalks during highwater



Walking in venice on oct 31 2012