

Art Agency, Partners


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Avoiding the Crowds

An alternative Venice



Venice and Giudecca seen from Chiesa di San Giorgio Maggiore. Photo: Alamy

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Original Sin

Nobody except its caretakers can enter the largest private garden in Venice, the “[Garden of Eden](#)” on Giudecca, a property that the artist Friedensreich [Hundertwasser](#) instructed be left to nature when he died in 2000.

The previous owners of the villa and its hidden garden were legendary horticulturists—from the Englishman, Frederic Eden, who bought it in 1884 and turned it into a paradise of pine, pomegranate and magnolia trees, to the Greek princess who planted other Mediterranean flowers and plants.

Now, the Hundertwasser Foundation owns the garden and, in accordance with the artist's wishes, won't allow anyone in.

Gliding past it in a boat, I'm always reminded of what a siren call Venice has been to the eccentric.

Geopolitics



The Russia Pavilion at the 2015 Venice Biennale. Photo credit: Phillip Bond/Alamy Stock Photo

Every Biennale, countries that weren't given a [pavilion in the Giardini](#), such as Iraq and Portugal, stage their own separate national pavilions, often in far-flung places around the city. The list of countries with permanent pavilions is a reminder that the Biennale has long been about geopolitics, and Italy's history of emigration in the post-war years, as well as its need for natural resources from abroad.

History reveals itself through the buildings: the Israeli pavilion dates back to 1952—just four years after it was founded as a nation, a testimony to Italy's quick acceptance of Israel as a state. Egypt was given a pavilion in that same year, a post-war balm for Italy's longstanding trading partner with whom relations had become strained under Mussolini. Russia's pavilion was founded in 1914, just three years before the Bolshevik Revolution and some years has sat empty due to lack of submission or political issues (Russia didn't show between 1938-54 or 1978-80). This year, Venezuela [opted to postpone](#) the opening of its Oscar Sotillo-curated pavilion after a political crisis at home.

Most curious, perhaps, is the German pavilion, which was rebuilt to reflect the authoritarian aesthetics of the Third Reich in 1938. People commonly misattribute this to the infamous Nazi architect Albert Speer but it was actually the work of Ernst Haiger). The architecture remains, although artists are constantly refashioning the pavilion, convulsing against the country's modern history and its relationship to national identity.

Girl's Best Friend(s)



The burial place of American art collector Peggy Guggenheim's fourteen Lhasa Apsos dogs in the courtyard of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, Italy

Besides featuring the outstanding collection of one of the greatest modern art patrons of the 20th century in the grandiose Venier dei Leoni Palace by the Grand Canal, [The Peggy Guggenheim Collection](#) also stands out for being the sole museum in the world with its creator, and pets, buried inside it.

Following a fatal stroke in 1979, Peggy Guggenheim was cremated, and her ashes were buried in the palazzo's garden alongside her beloved lifetime companions—her fourteen Lhasa Apsos. Cappuccino, Pegeen, Peacock, Toro, Foglia, Madam Butterfly, Baby, Emily, White Angel, Sir Herbert, Sable, Gypsy, Hong Kong and Cellida rest alongside their devoted owner, with their year of birth and death lovingly engraved on a marble tombstone.

Social housing

Urban planning fact: after the Second World War, the Italian government worried about the declining population of Venice and so built housing projects. Amidst such Renaissance splendor, it's always fascinating to see the Modernist "case popolari" in parts of Venice such as Giudecca and Mazzorbo, a small island adjoining Burano (which is itself one of the most colorful places in Venice—the houses are painted in various bright colors).

From leprosy to enlightenment



San Lazzaro degli Armeni Island, Photo credit: L Angelo Giampiccolo/Alamy Stock Photo

It's a special experience to visit the small island of San Lazzaro degli Armeni. Formerly a leper colony, San Lazzaro was gifted by a Venetian Doge to an Armenian monk called Mekhitar fleeing persecution in Constantinople. He arrived in 1717 with 20 followers and founded a monastery dedicated to the Armenian people. Napoleon—of all people—would later safeguard the island by designating it an academic institution, thanks to its incredible library.

Tombs of the West

One of the great experiences during the Biennale is a trip to the [Cini Foundation](#) on San Giorgio Maggiore. I like being on that island and in this building, which is now a non-profit cultural institution. This year, the Cini Foundation, in collaboration with the Fondazione Burri, is hosting a retrospective dedicated to Italian post-war artist Alberto Burri. Furthermore, the [Faurshou Foundation](#) is staging *Entropy* there, a group exhibition featuring seven internationally recognized Chinese contemporary artists: He An, Liu Wei, Yang Fudong, Zhao Zhao, Sun Xun, Yu Ji, and Chen Tinazhuo. It's worth taking the time to visit the foundation's libraries while you're there—they're vast and magical. It's like visiting the sacred tombs of the West.

Marooned dead



Woman taking care of a grave San Michele Island Cemetery. Photo credit: Lotte Lindberg/Alamy Stock Photo

A really interesting excursion is to [Isola di San Michele](#), an island dedicated to the dead. It's very beautiful and strange. If you visit on a Sunday morning, you'll see old Italian ladies bringing flowers to the deceased. Among the graves are those of Igor Stravinsky, Sergei Diaghilev and Ezra Pound. Perverse irony has it that opposite the cemetery, one can see the hospital across the water.

Escaping the heat

If you ever catch a Biennale during a heat wave, you'll need to escape, since the Italian idea of air-conditioning is the equivalent to standing in front of an open refrigerator. There's a beautiful secluded beach called [Murazzi](#) on the Lido, which is heavenly. The only people I ever see out there are the few dealers I know who are keen swimmers. It's just far enough out for the sea to start looking a little clean again.

Prosecco in the Piazza



People at the outdoor cafe Naranzaria on the Campo Erberia. Photo Credit: Age Fotostock/Alamy Stock Photo

Alongside the water, close to the Rialto Bridge, are two of my favorite places to sip prosecco—[Osteria Bancogiro](#) and [Naranzaria](#) (which is Venetian dialect for orange vendor). Near a particularly beautiful piazza that's set back from the water, they're especially airy for Venice.

Garden of Freedom



"Organic Garden of Wonders," Rio Tera dei Pensieri

Venice offers visitors creative ways to get involved and support the local community. Guests can purchase souvenirs and products cultivated in the ancient garden of the Women's Prison of the Giudecca. The women prisoners adopt organic agricultural methods to produce some forty types of fruits, flowers, vegetables and wild herbs. Products can be bought every Thursday morning at the stand on Fondamenta del Carcere, directly from the same women who grow them.

The Giudecca jail also has a cosmetics laboratory, where female prisoners produce skincare products (under the supervision of a chemist) from the herbs they grow in their organic garden, using traditional and organic methods. Their brand, [Rio Tera dei Pensieri](#), offers four different lines- The Natural Line, The Organic Line, The Traditional Product Line, The BtoB Line for Hotels. These are sold seasonally in a small kiosk in Campo Santo Stefano and can be found in selected stores, hotels and spas. The Bauer Hotel always has the best selection of them in every room.

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