

The Secret Venice of Corto Maltese

Fantastic and Hidden
Itineraries

HUGO PRATT
GUIDO FUGA - LELE VIANELLO

Rizzoli  Lizard



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Translation by Elizabeth Holtam



*Travelling makes you wiser,
but he who departs dull
will return dull.
(Anonymous)*

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Before presenting the itineraries, we would like to share with you some of the considerations we made while planning the final layout of this book. There were thousands of different ways to propose sites to visit and things to see, based on the thirty years of uncountable walks around Venice in the company of Maestro Hugo Pratt.

Our basic idea was to wander around with just one goal: “eating and drinking in good company.” All the rest developed along the way, the result of encounters and improvisations.

To convey the anarchic, surprising, magical notion of this playful wandering about, we had thought about writing a guidebook that would not even be bound as a book, but would simply be a number of loose pages that could be shuffled around and re-composed as desired. It was supposed to be a sort of Tarot deck, with the 22 major and 52 minor arcana cards, the Camel, the Tetrarchs, the Lion of Saint Mark, the 4 Moors, the Sylvan Man, Kronos, the Clock Tower... in short, a game that perhaps someday we will create. It will be accompanied by appropriate drawings and fables and will be a perfect fit for the special nature of Venice, that double labyrinth of land and water.

To allow you to wander off the beaten path without getting tangled up in the maze of little streets and alleys, we decided to be as Ariadne was to Theseus and give you a guiding thread. For this reason, we have described the itineraries as clearly as possible (we hope!).



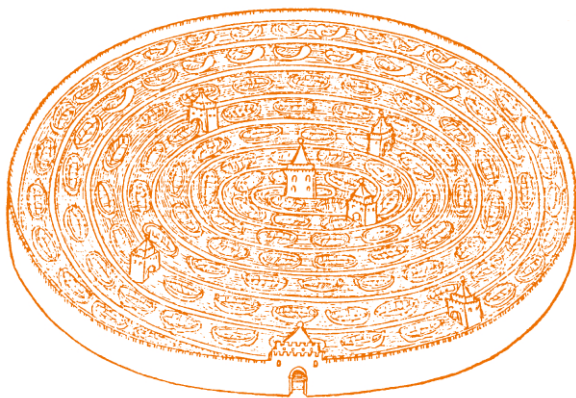
Old newspaper stand
(Campo Sant'Angelo)





We have just one piece of advice for those of you who, unlike us Venetians, are not regular walkers: wear comfortable shoes, the better to enjoy yourselves on these walks, because Venice is a city to discover as a pleasant surprise.

It is interesting to note the difference between a land maze and a water maze. Whereas the former has many dead ends and no movement is expected, the water maze, with all its channels, experiences a constant flow of current; it moves the mass of water in one direction for six hours and then in the other for the subsequent six hours, depending on whether it is flood tide or ebb tide. There is a moment when the two mazes become one. This is when the moon – which governs the tides – and the Adriatic seiche

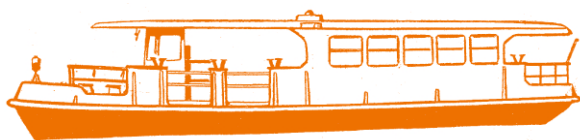


Water maze illustration from the book *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*

raise the water level to such a height that it overflows both its natural and artificial barriers (let's not forget that this city is, after all, just an artifice), invading streets, courtyards and squares, and giving rise to the phenomenon with which the Venetians are so well-acquainted: high water.

Like the water current, masses of tourists flow from

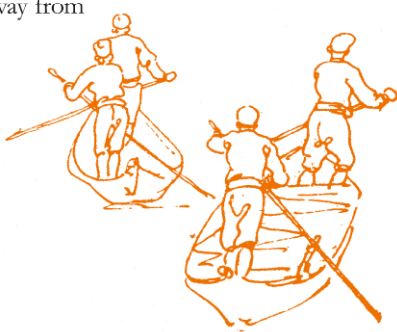




Piazzale Roma and the train station to Saint Mark's Square and back. With no imagination whatsoever, they enter this maze of corridors, and if halfway there they step out of the flowing mass for just a second, they are completely lost. As with any genuine maze, they no longer know if they are still going in the direction of their final goal – Saint Mark's Square – or if they are moving farther away from it. In reality, only by stepping out of the main current can they discover something really intriguing, and see what remains of the true spirit of Venice. One must be like the water, visiting every hidden corner of the city before returning via pre-established corridors, or others devised in the moment.

For first-time visitors we recommend the following: once you arrive in Piazzale Roma or at the train station, catch a Line No. 1 vaporetto (beware of pickpockets) and travel down the main watercourse in Venice – the Grand Canal – all the way to Saint Mark's Square. The most beautiful Venetian palaces overlook this broad-backed sea serpent, each one reflecting in the water a unique monumental façade. They almost remind one of enormous headboards, at least according to the Russian-American poet Joseph Brodsky, who often stayed in Venice, and dedicated to the city a nice little book entitled *Watermark*.

The residences of the city's patricians glide by before our eyes. Historically, the façades of these palaces were adorned with beautiful frescos. Byzantine and Gothic pal-



Detail of a drawing
by Canaletto

