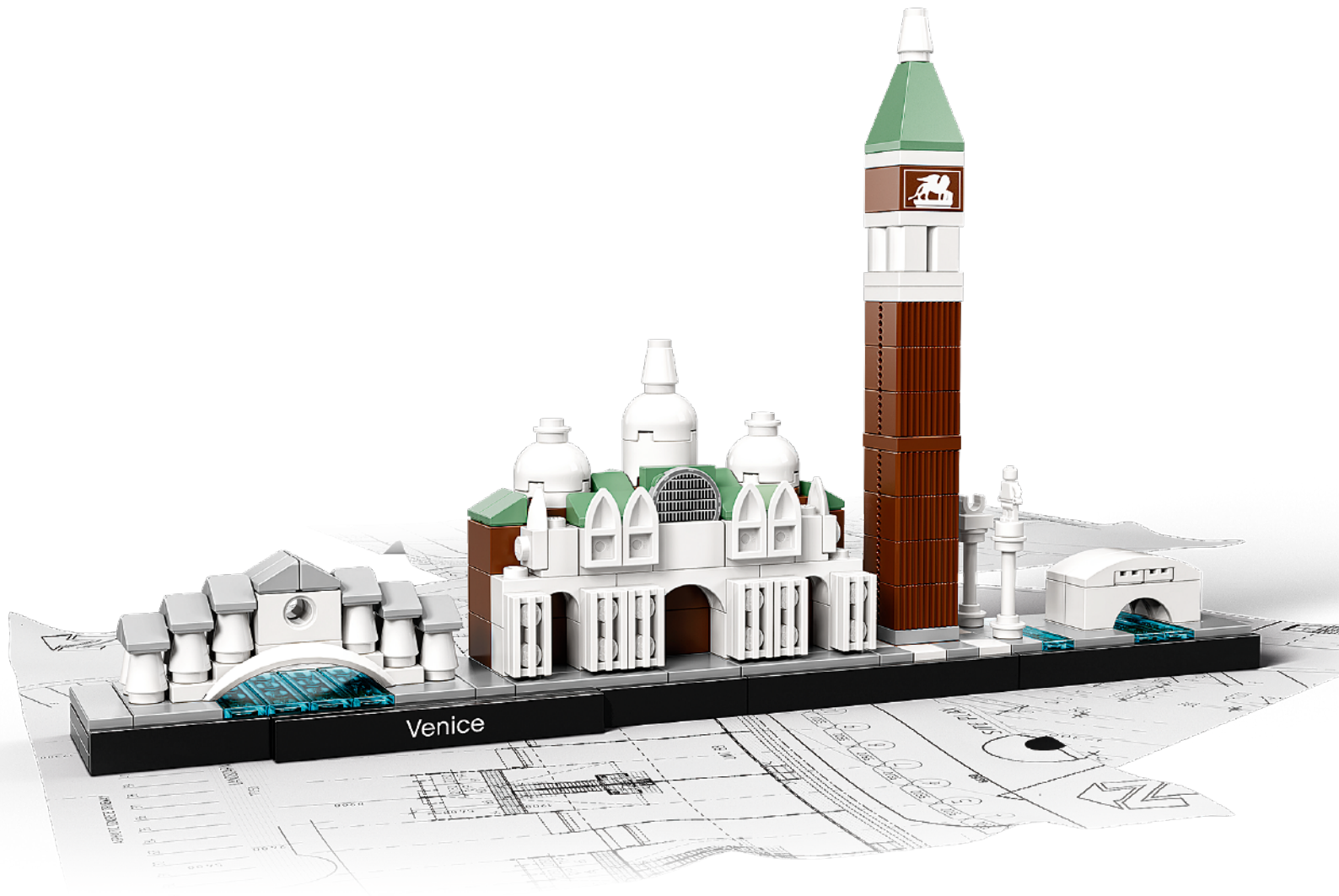




Architecture

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Venice
Italy



Venice

Built on over 100 islands in a marshy lagoon at the edge of the Adriatic Sea, Venice has a skyline that rises from the water to create a unique architectural experience. There are no roadways or cars in the historic city; instead 177 canals crossed by over 400 bridges give access to innumerable narrow, mazelike alleys and squares.

While the origin of the city dates back over 1500 years, the golden age of Venice occurred during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance periods when it became one of the most powerful republics in the eastern Mediterranean.

Today the city is facing major challenges including gradual subsidence, flooding, and problems caused by its popularity as a tourist destination. More than 60,000 people visit Venice each day—more than the population of the city itself—putting pressure on the city to accommodate these guests while maintaining its unique nature and identity.



Rialto Bridge

The Rialto Bridge (Ponte di Rialto) spans the Grand Canal at the heart of the historic city. Built between 1588 and 1591, it replaced earlier wooden bridges that had linked the districts of San Marco and San Polo since the 12th century.

When the last wooden bridge collapsed in 1524, several projects were considered before the city authorities requested plans for a stone bridge in 1551. The architect Antonio da Ponte competed with illustrious competitors such as Michelangelo and Palladio before winning the contract.

His single span design with a 24 ft. (7.5 m) arch included three walkways: two along the outer edges and a wider central walkway between two rows of small shops. The entire structure was built on some 12,000 wooden pilings that still support the bridge over 400 years later.



[“To build a city where it is impossible to build a city is madness in itself, but to build there one of the most elegant and grandest of cities is the madness of genius.”]

Alexander Herzen

Bridge of Sighs

Bridge of Sighs (Ponte dei Sospiri) is an enclosed bridge constructed in white limestone that passes over the Rio di Palazzo, connecting the old city prison to the interrogation rooms in the Doge's Palace. Designed by Antonio Contino, the nephew of Antonio da Ponte who created the Rialto Bridge, the bridge was completed in 1602.

The bridge's romantic name is thought to refer to the sighs of convicts as they saw their last view of Venice before being taken to their prison cells. In reality, very little of the city could be seen through the stone grills covering the windows and the majority of prisoners at that time were small-time criminals.

["I stood in Venice, on the
Bridge of Sighs, A palace and
a prison on each hand."]

Lord Byron



St. Mark's Campanile

As one of the tallest structures in the city, St. Mark's Campanile (Campanile di San Marco) is one of Venice's most recognizable symbols. From here the visitor has an incredible view of the city and lagoon as well as the Italian Alps in the distance.

The 323 ft. (98.6 m) bell tower stands alone in the corner of St. Mark's Square, near the front entrance to the basilica. The brick structure is 39 ft. (12 m) wide on each side and 160 ft. (50 m) tall, upon which sits a belfry housing five bells. A spire caps the tower with a golden weather vane on top.

Though the design of the Campanile is from the 16th century, the tower itself was completely rebuilt in 1912 after the original one collapsed in 1902. The inauguration of the new tower occurred exactly 1000 years after the foundation of the original tower was laid.



St. Mark's Basilica

St. Mark's Basilica (Basilica di San Marco) is the most famous church in Venice and the best-known example of the city's unique Italo-Byzantine architecture.

Built to house the relics of Mark the Evangelist, little is known about the original church buildings, but the current structure is thought to have been constructed between 1073 and 1093. The basilica is laid out in the design of a Greek cross and the tallest of the five domes reach 141 ft. (43 m) in height.

While the layout of the church has remained constant over the centuries, the decoration on the inside and outside of the church has changed greatly. Venice's involvement in crusades and conquests saw mosaics, columns, and friezes from all over the Mediterranean added to the original opulent, golden mosaic interior. Outside, the exterior brickwork was gradually covered with marble cladding and carvings as Venetian vessels returned with the spoils of war and trade.

A symbol of the wealth and power of the Venetian Republic, St. Mark's Basilica remains one of the city's most impressive landmarks today.



St. Theodore and the Lion of Venice columns

Two granite columns stand guard at the entrance to St. Mark's Square (Piazza di San Marco).

On top of the western column is a statue of St. Theodore, the first patron of the city. Here he holds a spear and his foot rests upon a crocodile—representing the dragon he was said to have slain. On the eastern column stands the winged Lion of Venice, the symbol of the second patron of the city, St. Mark.

Both columns are believed to have been erected in about 1268 and it is believed that the city executed convicted criminals between the two columns in days gone by. To this day, superstitious Venetians avoid walking between this pair of columns.

[“There is a glorious city in the sea. The sea is in the broad, the narrow streets, Ebbing and flowing...”]

Samuel Rogers





Facts & Statements



As many of the small islands in the lagoon were spongy marshland, the majority of buildings sit upon a foundation of wooden piles.



Venice has over 450 palaces and major buildings built in a mixture of styles: Gothic, Byzantine, Baroque etc.



During the Acqua Alta (high water) tides can rise up to 6 ft. (2 m) and often flood St. Mark's Square.



Venice has over 170 bell towers. St Mark's Campanile is the tallest one in the city.



Venice is slowly sinking at the rate of about 0.04 inches (1-2 mm) every year.



The Grand Canal is the region's largest canal. Possessing a unique S-shape, it splits the city in half.

References

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