



Venice

# TASTE OF EUROPE

Say 'ciao' and 'hola' to southern Europe:  
Sites and tastes every woman should experience

**W**hen my husband-to-be was sent to England on a temporary work assignment, I said what any woman planning a wedding two months away would say: "How soon can I leave?"

Shortly after I joined him in England, we embarked on an historical and gastronomical adventure through Italy and Spain – one that every woman should try at least once.

## Romance in Venice

First stop: the island city of Venice. An Italian co-worker warned my fiancé, "Don't bother going without Kristin. It is a very romantic place; going without her will only make you feel lonely."

While I'd recommend Venice to anyone, alone or "con amore," the city does breathe romance. Glittering canals carry gondolas past historic palaces and picturesque outdoor cafes. Off the water, we explored the cobblestone "streets" (since Venice is car-less, they're only a few feet wide) winding past homes, boutiques, cafés, museums and cozy hotels.

Before long, my usual brisk stride slowed to a leisurely stroll, enjoyed hand-in-hand with my previously hand-holding-averse fiancé. Venice works its magic on everyone.

As if Venice wasn't romantic enough, the popular St. Mark's Square – daytime haunt of tourists, vendors and

pigeons — at nightfall transforms into a giant dance floor, with couples twirling to dueling orchestras.

My taste buds found temptation lurking around every corner in Venice: pastries, pastas, seafood, cheeses, and, of course, Italian ice cream, "gelato."

I also fell for "cicchetti," tiny appetizers served during happy hour. And oh, what a happy hour (or two) it was! At the Osteria Portego bar, I filled my belly with the bite-sized meat, seafood and veggie treats. Did I mention the 70-cent glasses of wine?

When we finally sat down for a traditional dinner, we



Rome

BY KRISTIN BRANTMEIER



feasted at the popular Taverna San Trovaso, where the courses just kept coming and coming... I found myself wishing my wedding dress had bigger seam allowances.

There's more to Venice than just delectable food and tasty inexpensive wine, though. Venice offers an endless selection of markets, galleries and boutiques. Murano glass, made on a nearby island, is crafted into a variety of handmade jewelry and decor.

### Historic Rome

After two days in romantic Venice, we took a train to the hustle and bustle of Rome. We started our sightseeing at the beginning: ancient ruins. First, we toured the stadium-like Coliseum, once the site of torturous battles for public amusement.

Despite its gory past and crumbling condition, the Coliseum is a design and construction marvel.

On the same cobblestone paths Julius Caesar once walked, we explored the Roman Forum. As I surveyed the remains of temples and monuments in the grass and dirt, it was hard to believe the Forum was once the center of the modern world.

Later that week, we visited St. Peter's Basilica and the papal treasures of the Vatican. We joined the neck-craners under the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, which was even more impressive than I expected.

My appetite, whetted by Venetian cuisine, was not disappointed in Rome. Even takeout pizza tasted like a cheesy slice of heaven. Our traditional-style feast at the Hostaria Romana restaurant included a roasted vegetable "antipasti" course, seafood pasta course, and mouthwatering braised lamb main course, followed by perfect tiramisu and coffee.

While the cuisine was impressive, a trip to Rome wouldn't be complete without exploring Italian fashion. Even more enticing than the stylish clothes and lingerie were the shoes – footwear that looked so good, I didn't care if it killed my feet. If not for limited suitcase space, I'd have snagged multiple pairs.

### Rome



### Delicious Barcelona

Alas, I left Rome without replacing my wardrobe. We flew to our final destination, Barcelona, Spain, and with the help of local friends crammed the major to-dos into two days.

We devoured paella at an Olympic Harbor eatery, munched tapas on La Rambla, explored the whimsical architecture of Antoni Gaudi, and danced 'til dawn at a club. (If you think you're too old for late-night clubbing in Spain, you're wrong: Everyone from 18-year-old hipsters to graying baby boomers makes the scene.)

Back "home" in England, I tackled my transcontinental wedding planning. As visions of gondolas, gladiators and Gaudi filled my head, I knew southern Europe hadn't seen the last of me.

### Barcelona



On the same cobblestone paths Julius Caesar once walked, we explored the Roman Forum. As I surveyed the remains of temples and monuments in the grass and dirt, it was hard to believe the Forum was once the center of the modern world.

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY  
WISCONSIN

Higher Learning. Greater Rewards.

School of Adult Education  
APPLETON CENTER

3232 N. Ballard Rd., Appleton  
Phone: 920-968-0933  
www.cuw.edu

NEW CLASSES START EVERY MONTH!