

UNESCO'S ULTIMATUM: KEEP THE CRUISE SHIPS AWAY



The city of Venice is a UNESCO world heritage site, but if in a year it does not prevent the big cruise ships to enter its channels, the recognition will be withdrawn. The decision was taken last week by the UN agency for education, science, and culture, which has surprised the city's administration.

UNESCO, based in Paris, claims that the Italian municipality, which is supposed to manage the heritage of the Serenissima Republic of Venice, should put a limit on mass tourism that has been past the line. The Agency stated: "The Italian State has to provide a detailed road map and a progressive management plan".

It will not be an easy task, however, because both **the municipality and the cruise companies are opposed, clearly or surreptitiously, to the prohibition.** Since UNESCO put Venice under review in 2017, the Italian authorities have already presented several projects. The most interesting – a marvel of Italian genius – is called Mose (experimental electromechanical module, in Italian). These are ingenious gates that could open and close according to the water flows.

Water flow control is urgently needed in Venice because, due to climate change, it is one of the first cities in Europe that will be flooded by the rise in sea levels. At high tide, the floodgates would close, and vice versa at low tide, safeguarding an acceptable level for the city, all built on islands.

Cruise tourism in Venice has increased significantly over the years. In 2017, 480,000 cruise passengers arrived in the Italian city, which increased to 561,000 in 2018. All this in a town that has imposed a "limited number" of visitors per day, which are controlled at the end of the bridge that connects Venice to the mainland. **At the next UNESCO meeting in Azerbaijan, in July, Venice will be given a year to "show that it will respect the rules of environmental protection and safeguarding of cultural property."**

But politicians, pressured by local administrators, environmentalists, and shipowners, seem that they cannot find the solution. There are plans for cruise ships to enter, from the sea, another mouth of the lagoon and dock in a distant maritime station of the Rialto Bridge, the Doge's Palace and the San Marco Square. But who tells the tourists that they will pass through Venice without seeing it?

The route of the cruise ships in Venice

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