

VENICE: FROM OVER TOURISM TO DEAFENING SILENCE



Venice, one of the most affected European destinations by mass tourism, is now going through a never-before-seen situation: the city is completely without visitors due to the coronavirus pandemic and the population's self-isolation.

It is not just Venice but all of Italy in a nationwide lockdown when nobody is allowed to go outside without a good reason.

"From a selfish point of view, I feel privileged because I can now admire the beauty of my city undisturbed. What's for the future? That's my anxiety," says one of the residents.

Last Christmas, Venice suffered a wave of cancellations due to the high tide phenomenon, which happened several times after the strong flood in November. Back then, hotel managers said that cancellations went up to 45% in most city establishments.

Venice welcomes more than 4.6 million tourists every year who spend the night in the city. However, the city also receives 18.4 million one-day visitors, according to estimates released by the International Center of Studies on Tourism Economy of Venice and thus over-tourism has been a growing problem for the city.

Before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, 70% of day visits in Venice were concentrated in four hours and in very specific areas of the city, which as a consequence became highly saturated places.

Meanwhile, the historic center of Venice has been losing inhabitants at a rate of 1,500 people a year since the late 90s. The reason is according to the locals the fact that the oldest part of the city is becoming friendlier towards tourists than its own citizens, so they pack their bags and move to the mainland.

The decrease in all types of activity, including tourism, has left the city with astounding images of desolate streets; however, zero tourism has also caused an improvement in water quality in the historical and monumental city of Italy.

In China, as well as Italy, air quality has improved substantially in recent weeks due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdown, as satellite images have shown.

Many outlets have covered the details of this unique yet positive side effect of coronavirus. In Italy, in addition to the drop in polluting gases such as NO₂ according to the European Space Agency (ESA), the measures implemented in the so-called 'red zone' of the pandemic (first in the northern region, and then throughout Italy since March 10) have also been the source of unusual images of the Venice canals.

Some of the pictures shared on social media by Venice residents show that water quality has improved dramatically in the last two weeks.

In some parts of the city, the change has been so drastic that water in the canals is practically transparent and brimming with significant amounts of small fish, presumably from the Venice lagoon and the Adriatic Sea.

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