

LARGE CRUISE SHIPS TO BE BACK TO VENICE IN 2027



Although cruising has a small part to play in Venice's issues, the recent decision by the authorities was quite surprising. Starting in 2027, larger cruise ships will be allowed access to Venice.

The ships will be up to 60,000 GT in weight and 250 meters long, like Silver Nova, Seven Seas Splendor, or Crystal Symphony. **The Vittorio Emmanuele III Canal, which still needs to be dredged, will be the route for these cruise ships** to reach Stazione Marittima, the cruise terminal in Venice.

There are concerns regarding the 60,000 GT limit proposed, as some of the cruise ships belonging to the MSC Group, such as the Lirica class and the new luxury cruise ships from Explora Journeys, are just slightly above this limit in the range of up to 70,000 GT. However, with the new plans, these ships will no longer have to pass through the Giudecca Canal and St. Mark's Square. These areas currently have a limit of 25,000, 180 meters in length, and 35 meters in height for approaching ships.

Endangered Site?

The timing of these plans is particularly daring. A few days ago, Venice narrowly escaped UNESCO's classification as an endangered World Heritage Site. The city council finally decided on a long-delayed entrance fee for the lagoon city just before the crucial UNESCO meeting. However, it remains to be seen whether this decision will be permanent, given the circumstances that are becoming increasingly clear.

In the case of Venice, UNESCO could have set an example for the importance of its institution and for saving other endangered World Heritage sites. If UNESCO had taken a firm stance on Venice, it would have sent a clear message to those responsible for other World Heritage sites. This would have shown the severity of the situation.

Constant Threat from UNESCO

For many years, UNESCO has threatened to put the Venice World Heritage Site on the Red List. This is what UNESCO does when a World Heritage Site is endangered, and those responsible do not do enough to preserve irretrievable cultural assets. The next step would be the complete withdrawal of World Heritage status - as happened in 2019 with the Dresden Elbe Valley due to the construction of a new bridge.

However, at its meeting in Riyadh in mid-September 2023, the relevant UNESCO committee decided not to change Venice's World Heritage status again. To make matters worse, just a few days after the UNESCO panel met, it was revealed that plans were in place to allow many more cruise ships to dock directly in Venice.

Critics point out that to make the destruction of the sensitive ecology of the lagoon efficient, the fairway to the industrial port on the mainland as far as Marghera is to be dredged deeper than

before.

No Intent to Curb Overtourism

As early as 2016, it became evident that UNESCO threatened Venice and thus the city planned to ban large ships to appease the organization. However, the project was not implemented due to a court decision overturning the ban.

It is important to note that Venice does not have the authority to make decisions independently as it is an administrative unit that includes mainland municipalities like Mestre, with a total population of approximately 177,000 residents. Additionally, the Italian government makes most shipping decisions in Rome, far from Venice.

The mainland benefits financially considerably from Venice's tourist magnet and has no interest in limiting massive overtourism. But the city continues to bleed. Only recently, the number of inhabitants fell below 50,000 for the first time. Not a single Venetian currently sits on the city council of the governing parties.

In 2021, the Italian government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Draghi, decided to prohibit almost all cruise ships from entering Venice's old town. This comes after years of debate over the presence of these ships, which are unwanted by many for valid reasons. However, a small group of companies on the mainland profit from them.

Shipping companies may oppose Venice's plans to dredge the city's canals, citing their interest in protecting Venice and their limited financial connection with the terminal. The current situation is also absurd: large ships no longer dock in Venice, but passengers still check in at the terminal building before being taken by buses to the ship on the mainland.

It is up to each individual to decide whether or not the city has benefited from the influx of tourists. The ships continue to enter the lagoon, although they are virtually invisible from St. Mark's Square. This results in many buses carrying passengers, which in turn causes a significant increase in traffic.

Additionally, numerous buses enter Venice from alternative ports, such as Trieste or Ravenna, resulting in a constant flow of tourists. In the 2023 season, around 600,000 cruise passengers are expected to visit Venice on 270 cruise ship calls. This number will increase to one million passengers on 385 calls by 2027. Before the pandemic in 2019, there were over 1.6 million passengers.

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