

# Venice

The world's most beautiful city offers suitably chic restaurants and, hidden in narrow side streets, a few well-priced local gems. Here's **olive's** pick

Words JONATHAN BUCKLEY Photographs CARLA CAPALBO

Venice, as any Venetian will tell you, is its own world. Detached from the mainland for the first 1,500 years of its existence, it developed into a city-state that was politically, architecturally and culturally unique. Despite the inroads of tourism the city retains a clear sense of its own identity: foreigners, to the Venetian way of thinking, come from *al di là del ponte* (beyond the bridge). Venice's culinary culture is unique, too. Set within the Venetian lagoon, with salt marshes in one direction and the open waters of the Adriatic Sea in the other, it has a repertoire of fish and seafood that's more extensive than any other Italian city. Roam through the **Rialto market** and you'll find a mind-boggling profusion of fish, clams, molluscs, cuttlefish, prawns and other crustacea, most of which will have been scooped out of the water just hours earlier.

The cityscape of Venice – and the absence of cars – makes dining here an unforgettable experience. All over the city there are restaurants on quiet little squares, overlooked by crumbling palazzi, or beside backwater canals where the only sounds are the hubbub of conversation, the slapping of water on stone and the occasional whine of an outboard motor. You'll also overhear the soft and slurred dialect of Venice and read it on menus that might offer such delicacies as *anguèla* (sand smelt, a variety of fish), *baicolo* (young sea bass), *canòce* (mantis prawn), *garùsolo* (sea

snail), *schie* (small grey shrimps) or one of the three grades of common shore crab: *masanèta*, *spiàntano* and *moèca*.

Everyone knows that Venice is one of the most beautiful cities on the planet. In high season, the number of tourists pouring into the city every day is greater than the number of people who actually live in it. Once a city of 250,000 people, Venice has now shrunk to a town of around 70,000 inhabitants – around the same size as Harrogate – a number that's falling with each year. So it's hardly surprising that Venice, blighted by *menù turistico* syndrome, used to be a city in which only the wealthy ate well. This is no longer the case because recently there's been a distinct upturn in the number and quality of mid-range places to eat. True, mid-range in Venice (£27-£40 a head) means something more expensive than mid-range in most other parts of Italy, but at least there's a greater range of decent places than there has been for a long time.

A distinctive feature of the Venetian eating scene is the **bàcaro**, which in its purest form is a bar that offers a range of *tapas-like cicheti* (sometimes spelled *ciccheti*). This will typically include *polpette* (small beef and garlic meatballs), *carciofini* (artichoke hearts), anchovies, whitebait, *polipi* (baby octopus or squid), grilled cuttlefish (*sepe roste*), hard-boiled eggs, peppers and courgettes cooked in oil. Some *bàcari* also produce a few more substantial dishes each day, such as



**Opposite: Seafood antipasti at Vini da Gigio (1); stop for a coffee and some people watching in Piazza San Marco (2); preparing carciofini, or artichoke hearts (3); Andrea of Bancogiro (4); Caffé Florian (5); seafood at the Rialto market (6); granseola, or spider crab, at Da Fiore (7); stock up on Venetian chocolates at Ciocolateria Vizio Virtù (8)**

risotto or seafood pasta. In the last decade or so there's been a *bàcaro* revival, and you're more likely to find a seating area in the newer establishments – in the older ones it's more common to eat standing up, or seated on stools at a counter. Good food is also served at many of Venice's *osterie* (or *ostarie*), the simplest of which are indistinguishable from larger *bàcari*, with just half a dozen tables, while others have sizeable dining areas. Just to make things supremely confusing, several *osterie* have no bar at all – some of these are bars that have evolved into restaurants, while others use the name *osteria* to help give the establishment an aura of unpretentiousness and good value. (And to further blur the division between bars and restaurants, several of Venice's restaurants have a separate bar area on the street side of the dining room, which may or may not remain open during dining hours.) While Venice has numerous fine restaurants, many of its *osterie* offer food that's of a very high quality, and in an ambience that's typically more Venetian. 🍷

**MUST DO: CAPPUCCINO AT FLORIAN, UP TO £10 ■ GLASS OF WINE AT AL VOLTO, FROM £1 ■ DOUBLE ROOM NEAR THE CHURCH ►**







9



10



11

Left: Visit one of Venice's many gelaterias (9); baby octopus, or polpo, on celeriac at Corte Sconta (10); Lucia Proietto, owner of Corte Sconta (11); Opposite: The Grand Canal

**EAT**

**Best restaurant in Venice**

Most Venetians will nominate **Da Fiore** (map ref 13), near Campo San Polo. Classic fish and seafood dishes are complemented by a huge wine list and perfect service. Book early.

**Best for big names and views**

The best-known restaurant in Venice is Harry's Bar, which has a superb kitchen, impeccably courteous staff and prices that will make your eyes sting. Better to take a boat-hop over to La Giudecca, where its lower priced sibling, **Harry's Dolci** (map ref 32), is open from April to October.

**Best for daily specials**

**Corte Sconta** (map ref 22) has established itself as one of the top restaurants in the city. If it weren't so well hidden in a narrow lane, it would be perpetually packed.

**Best for family-run authenticity**

**Vini da Gigio** (map ref 3) is, by Venetian standards, excellent value. The menu features specialities such as masorino all buranella (Burano-style duck) and – as the name suggests – the wine list is remarkable.

**Best newcomer**

**Anice Stellato** (map ref 1) stands beside one of the northernmost Cannaregio canals, away from the tourist hot spots. If you can't get a table – it's frequently booked solid – drop by for some tapas-style dishes at the bar.

**Best modern Venetian cooking**

Reservations are essential at the seven-table **Alle Testiere** (map ref 17), where Venetian classics are given a delicious twist.

**Best osteria for cicheti**

At **Alla Vedova** (map ref 4), the selection of cicheti is famously comprehensive.

**Best osteria in Rialto market**

Savour a glass of wine at one of **Bancogiro's** (map ref 8) Grand Canal-side tables, or go upstairs to the brick-vaulted dining room for a simple plate of sarde

incinite, 'pregnant sardines', which are sardines stuffed with raisins, garlic, pine nuts and parsley.

**Best osterie near Piazza San Marco**

Restaurants within a 100-metre radius of the piazza are generally mediocre, but one notable exception is **Osteria-Enoteca San Marco** (map ref 24), a stylish bar-restaurant.

**Best trattoria**

Atmospheric **Mistrà** (map ref 33) occupies the top floor of a former factory in the Giudecca boat yards. At lunchtime, the menu is brief, plain and cheap. In the evenings there's fish and seafood, at prices that are higher but still reasonable.

**Best frittura mista**

**Osteria Sant'Elena** (map ref 31) serves up an excellent plate of frittura mista (fried mixed fish).

**Best for meat**

The eponymous Marisa at **Dalla Marisa** (map ref 2) is a butcher's daughter so expect to find duck, tripe, beef and pheasant on offer at this tiny trattoria. Booking essential.

**Best pizza**

Nestled in the shadow of the church of San Giacomo dell'Orto, **Il Refolo** (map ref 6) serves arguably the best pizzas in Venice.

**Best gelateria**

The creations at **Causin** (map ref 18) are rated among the finest in the country, and the café has seating on the Campo Santa Margherita.

**Best gelato in a cone**

Drop by the tiny but renowned **La Boutique del Gelato** (map ref 15).

**Best tiramisù**

The quintessential Venetian dessert is tiramisù, and the most delicious version is at **Didovich** (map ref 14).

**Reader recommendation**

'**Da Ivo** (map ref 34) is a small, unpretentious candlelit restaurant with great food including tagliarelli with truffles (when in season). Try to book a table overlooking the canal.' Tara Bloohn, London







## DRINK

**CAFÉS** Coffee was first sold in Venice around 1640, when it was dispensed as a medicine. Eighty years later in 1720 a café called **Venezia Trionfante** (Venice Triumphant) was opened on Piazza San Marco by Florian Francesconi. Now operating as **Florian** (map ref 26), and decorated in an 18th-century style, this is still the café to be seen in. It's also the priciest: a cappuccino at a table will set you back around £5.50, and if the café's band is playing you'll be taxed another £3.80. For many Venetians, the best coffee in Venice is to be found on the opposite side of the piazza at **Lavena** (map ref 25), which was one of Wagner's favourite haunts. It's less expensive than Florian, too. Or enjoy superior coffee at non-silly prices at the chic **Caffé del Doge** (map ref 12) or the excellent **Rosa Salva**, which has

three branches in the city; the most characterful is on Campo Santi **Giovanni e Paolo** (map ref 9). **BARS** There's no better place to sample valpolicella, bardolino and soave than **Al Volto** (map ref 16), a dark little enoteca that sells around 100 wines by the glass, and has around 1,000 more by the bottle. The humble **Cantina del Vino già Schiavi** (map ref 29) is something of an institution. A homely bar and well-stocked wine shop, it also does excellent cicheti. Something of the spirit of bygone Venice also endures at **Do Mori** (map ref 11), a well-hidden little bar in the Rialto district. The style-conscious should go to **Centrale Restaurant Lounge** (map ref 23), which markets itself as the hippest bar-restaurant in town. Venice goes to bed early, but Centrale is open until 2am.

## SHOP

The **Rialto** is one of Italy's great food markets. Look out for produce labelled 'Sant'Erasmus' (or 'Rasmo'), which is grown on the island of that name. You'll also find the best cheese stalls here, wine sellers, butchers and bread stalls, plus a scattering of tiny stand-up bars on the periphery, perfect for a glass of wine. Various **alimentari**, or delicatessens, are found in the vicinity, the best of which is **Aliani Gastronomia** (map ref 10).

The Rialto market is open Monday to Saturday from 8am to 1pm; the adjacent **pescheria** (fish market) is closed on Monday as well. Smaller markets are held in various squares every day except Sunday, including **Rio Terrà San Leonardo**, **Campo Santa Maria Formosa**, **Campiello dell' Anconetta** and **Campo Santa Margherita**. For chocoholics, **Cioccolateria Vizio Virtù** (map ref 19) is an essential call.

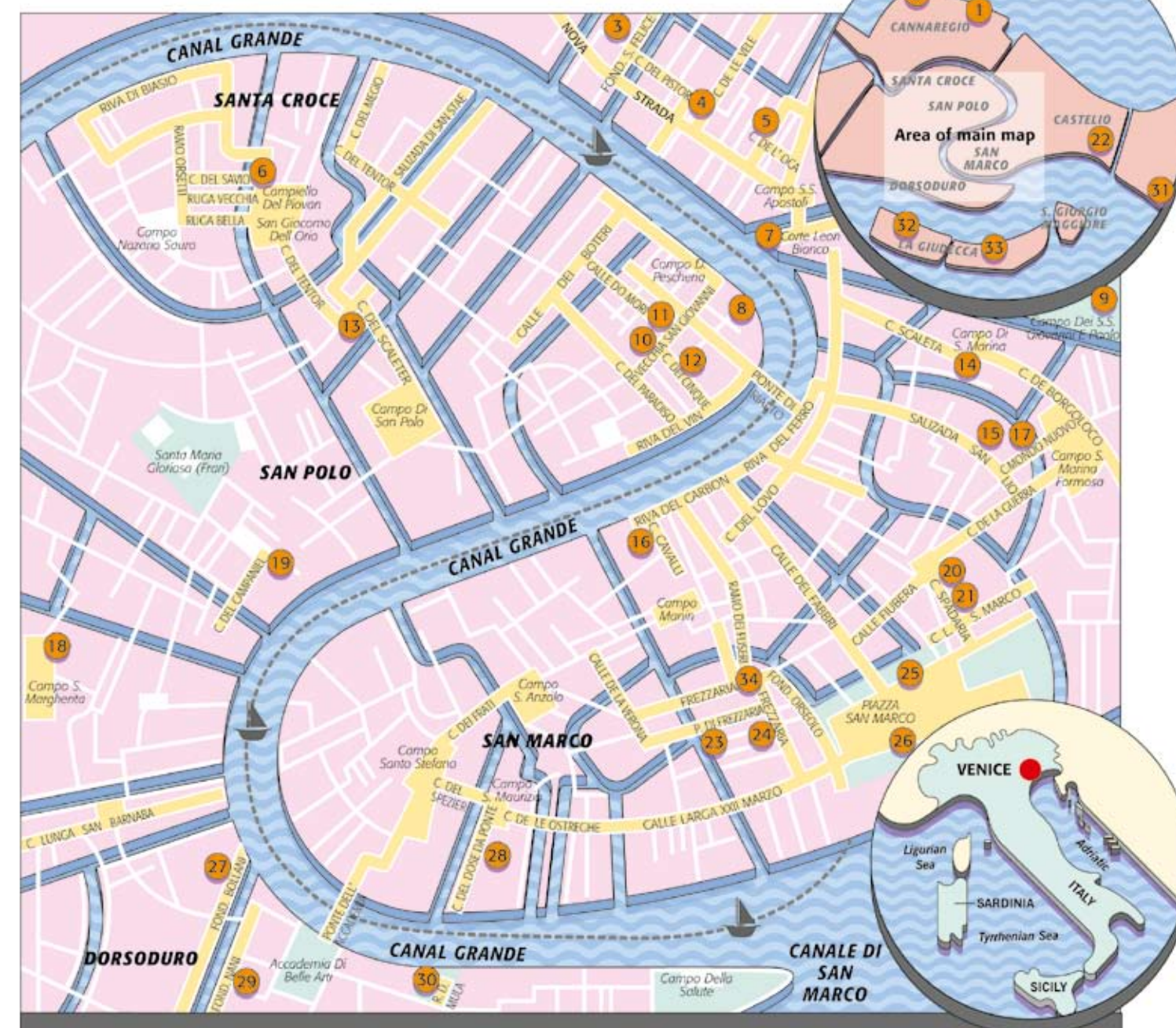
Above left: Rialto market on the Grand Canal. Above: alfresco tables at Corte Sconta (see page 100)

## EAT LIKE A LOCAL

Do as the Venetians do, and indulge in an early-evening spritz (white wine and soda) or **spritz con bitter**, which has the addition of Aperol, Campari or – the darkest, strongest and most bitter Venetian aperitif – Select. Or try a glass of prosecco, the local sparkling white: **cartizze** is the finest type, but just as popular with Venetians is **prosecco spento**, which is prosecco without the fizz. And, by the way, no self-respecting Venetian would ever ask for a Bellini – that's for tourists only.

In most of Venice's osterie you can either hang around the bar to snack on cicheti or sit down for a full meal – the menu will be briefer than in a restaurant but for good value and atmosphere the osterie come up trumps. As you'd expect, fish and seafood dominate restaurant menus, but don't assume that every restaurant in water-bound Venice uses only fresh ingredients. Many use frozen food so always check the small print of the menu, where, by law, the restaurant has to state if anything has come from the freezer; look out for **surgelato** (frozen) on the menu. Venetians eat dinner early – as a rule, don't turn up later than 8.30pm, unless you're dining at one of the city's more expensive restaurants, which tend to keep longer hours. Shopping for cakes or chocolate, including ones shaped like small Carnevale masks, on Sunday mornings is something of a local ritual – the most famous Venetian pasticceria is **Marchini** (map ref 20).

AT ALLA VEDOVA, AROUND £1.50 ■ A PORTION OF PIZZA AT IL REFOLO, £5-£10 ■ A BOTTLE OF PROSECCO FROM CANTINA DEL ►



### EAT

- 1 ANICE STELLATO** Fondamenta della Sensa 3272 (00 39 041 720744) A modern, family-run restaurant that's hugely popular with locals.
- 2 DALLA MARISA** Fondamenta San Giobbe 652b (00 39 041 720211) A rarity in Venice – a restaurant specialising in meat dishes.
- 3 VINI DA GIGIO** Fondamenta San Felice 3628a (00 39 041 528 5140) Highly popular, family-run trattoria.
- 4 ALLA VEDOVA** Calle del Pistor 3912 (00 39 041 528 5324) Long-established little

- bar-restaurant with top cicheti.
- 6 IL REFOLO** Campiello del Piovani 1459 (00 39 041 524 0016) Great pizzas from the son of Da Fiore's owner.
- 8 BANCOGIRO** San Polo 122, Campo San Giacommetto di Rialto (00 39 041 523 2061) Atmospheric Rialto osteria.
- 9 ROSA SALVA** Campo Santi Giovanni e Paolo 6779 (00 39 041 522 7949) The most characterful of the three Rosa Salva cake shops.
- 10 ALIANI GASTRONOMIA** Ruga Vecchia San Giovanni 654 (00 39 041 522 4913) The finest delicatessen in town.

- 12 CAFFÉ DEL DOGE** Calle dei Cinque 609 (00 39 041 522 7787) Chic, reasonably priced café by Rialto Bridge.
- 13 DA FIORE** Calle del Botteghe 2202a (00 39 041 731308; dafiore.it) Widely regarded as Venice's best restaurant.
- 14 DIDOVICH** Campo Marina 5910 (00 39 041 520 9268) Tempting pasticceria.
- 15 LA BOUTIQUE DEL GELATO** Salizzada S. Lio 5727 (00 39 041 522 3283) Join the queue at this tiny gelateria.
- 17 ALLE TESTIERE** Calle Mondo Nuovo 5801 (00 39 041 522 7220) Terrific tiny seafood restaurant.

- 18 CAUSIN** Campo Santa Margherita 2996 (00 39 041 523 6091) Venice's best ice cream.
- 19 CIOCCOLATERIA VIZIO VIRTÙ** Calle del Campaniel 2898a (00 39 041 275 0149; viziovirtu.com) Extraordinary selection of chocolates.
- 20 MARCHINI** Calle Spadaria, San Marco 676 (00 39 041 522 9109) Venice's most celebrated pasticceria.
- 22 CORTE SCONTA** Calle del Pestrin 3886 (00 39 041 522 7024) Popular and consistently excellent seafood restaurant.



# foodie traveller VENICE

**23 CENTRALE RESTAURANT LOUNGE** Piscina Frezzeria 1659b (00 39 041 296 0664) The coolest bar-restaurant in town.

**24 OSTERIA-ENOTECA SAN MARCO** Frezzeria 1610 (00 39 041 528 5242)

A great place to eat close to the Piazza.

**26 CAFFÉ FLORIAN** Piazza San Marco 56–59 (00 39 041 520 5641; caffeflorian.com)

The most famous café in Italy.

**31 OSTERIA SANT'ELENA** Calle Chinotto 24 (00 39 041 520 8419) No-nonsense trattoria on the eastern outskirts of the city.

**33 MISTRÀ** Giudecca 212a, Giudecca (00 39 041 522 0743) Buzzing Giudecca restaurant.

**34 DA IVO** Ramo dei Fuseri 1809 (00 39 041 528 5004) Candlelit restaurant that's a favourite of Elton John.

## SLEEP

**5 BERNARDI SEMENZATO** Calle dell'Oca 4366 (00 39 041 522 7257; hotelbernardi.com) Very well-priced two-star hotel.

**7 LOCANDA LEON BIANCO** Corte Leon Bianco 5629 (00 39 041 523 3572; leonbianco.it) Charming hotel with stunning canal views.

**21 AI DO MORI** Calle Larga S. Marzo 658 (00 39 041 520 4817; hotelaidomori.com) Good budget hotel near the Piazza.

**27 ACCADEMIA VILLA MARAVEGE** Fondamenta Bollani 1058 (00 39 041 521 0188; pensioneaccademia.it) Seventeenth-century villa near the Accademia.

**28 NOVECENTO** Calle del Dose 2683 (00 39 041 241 3765; novecento.biz) Beautiful boutique hotel.

**30 DD 724** Ramo da Mula 724 (00 39 041 277 0262; dd724.com) Boutique hotel.

## DRINK

**11 DO MORI** Calle Do Mori 429 (00 39 041 522 5401) The most authentic old-style Venetian bar in the market area.

**16 AL VOLTO** Calle Cavalli 4081 (003 39 041 522 8945) Great wine bar.

**25 LAVENA** Piazza San Marco 133–134 (00 39 041 522 4070) Possibly the best coffee in Venice.

**29 CANTINA DEL VINO GIÀ SCHIAVI** Fondamenta Nani 992 (00 39 041 523 0034) Great bar and wine shop.

**32 HARRY'S DOLCI** Fondamenta San Biagio 773, Giudecca (00 39 041 522 4844) Stylish offshoot of the legendary Harry's Bar.

## GLOSSARY You won't be baffled by menus if you're armed with our handy food glossary

<b>Anguilla</b>	Eel
<b>Baccalà</b>	Salt cod
<b>Bigoli in salsa</b>	Spaghetti in anchovy and onion sauce
<b>Brodetto</b>	Mixed fish soup
<b>Buranei</b>	Sweet egg biscuits
<b>Cape sante</b>	Scallops
<b>Castraure</b>	Purple artichoke
<b>Cozze</b>	Mussels
<b>Fègato</b>	Liver
<b>Frittura mista</b>	Mixed fried fish
<b>Gamberi, gamberetti, gamberoni, scampi, astici</b>	Prawns
<b>Moleche</b>	Soft-shelled crab, often from around the island of Murano
<b>Pasta e fagioli</b>	Pasta and bean soup
<b>Risotto bianco, risotto di mare or risotto dei pescatori</b>	Seafood risotto
<b>Risi e bisi</b>	Pea risotto
<b>Sarde in saor</b>	Sardines marinated in onion, vinegar, pine nuts and raisins
<b>Seppie, seppioline</b>	Cuttle fish
<b>Seppioline nere</b>	Baby cuttlefish cooked in its own ink
<b>Vongole, capparozzoli, cappe</b>	Clams



### ABOUT THE WRITER

Jonathan Buckley is the author of the *Rough Guide to Venice & the Veneto*, and co-author of the *Rough Guides to Tuscany & Umbria* and *Florence & Siena*.



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## SLEEP

Less than £100 per night counts as low-budget here, and in that range you could get a room at **Ai Do**

£40

**Mori** (map ref 21), a welcoming one-star that's amazingly close to the Piazza – the top-floor room has a private terrace looking over the roofs of the Basilica and the Torre dell'Orologio (doubles from £40). Another favourite of cost-conscious visitors is **Bernardi Semenzato** (map ref

£40

5), near the church of Santi Apostoli; in low season you could find a double here for around £40. **Locanda Leon Bianco** (map ref 7) is a charming three-star tucked away beside the ancient Ca' da Mosto palace. Although in summer you'll pay in the region of £180 for a spacious

£70

double overlooking the Canal Grande and the Rialto market, off-season you can bag a room for just £70. **Accademia Villa Maravege** (map ref 27)

£90

is a 17th-century villa that was once home to the Russian embassy, and its garden has a view of the Canal Grande (doubles from £90).

The predominant style for Venetian hotels is deeply nostalgic – loads of damask and Murano chandeliers. If this doesn't appeal, try **Novecento** (map ref 28), a boutique-style three-star hotel with nine rooms and furnishings from

£95

Morocco, Japan and Egypt setting the stylish tone (doubles from £95).

If modernism is more your thing, check in at **DD 724** (map ref 30), which has seven rooms. Located in

£180

Dorsoduro, a quieter part of the city, the hotel is still only a bridge away from busy San Marco (doubles from £180). 📍

VINO GIÀ SCHIAVI £5 ■ A SPRITZ AT DO MORI £1.50 ■ THREE-COURSE SEAFOOD MEAL AT CORTE SCONTA, WITH WINE £60 ■