

# Venetian adventure

**Venice, with its myriad of islands and waterways, proved an irresistible destination for a historic boating break**



## the boat **Magnifique**

The 10-berth 14.5 metre Magnifique is powered by a 62HP Nanni diesel engine which is supplemented by a bow thruster for manoeuvring in confined waters. Capable of reaching 5 mph, the Norfolk-built motorcruiser is operated by Connoisseur from their Casier base on the River Sile.

## the author

### **Richard Johnstone-Bryden**

Richard is a marine author and photographer who travelled to Venice with his wife Aline. Friends Sally and Gareth completed the crew.



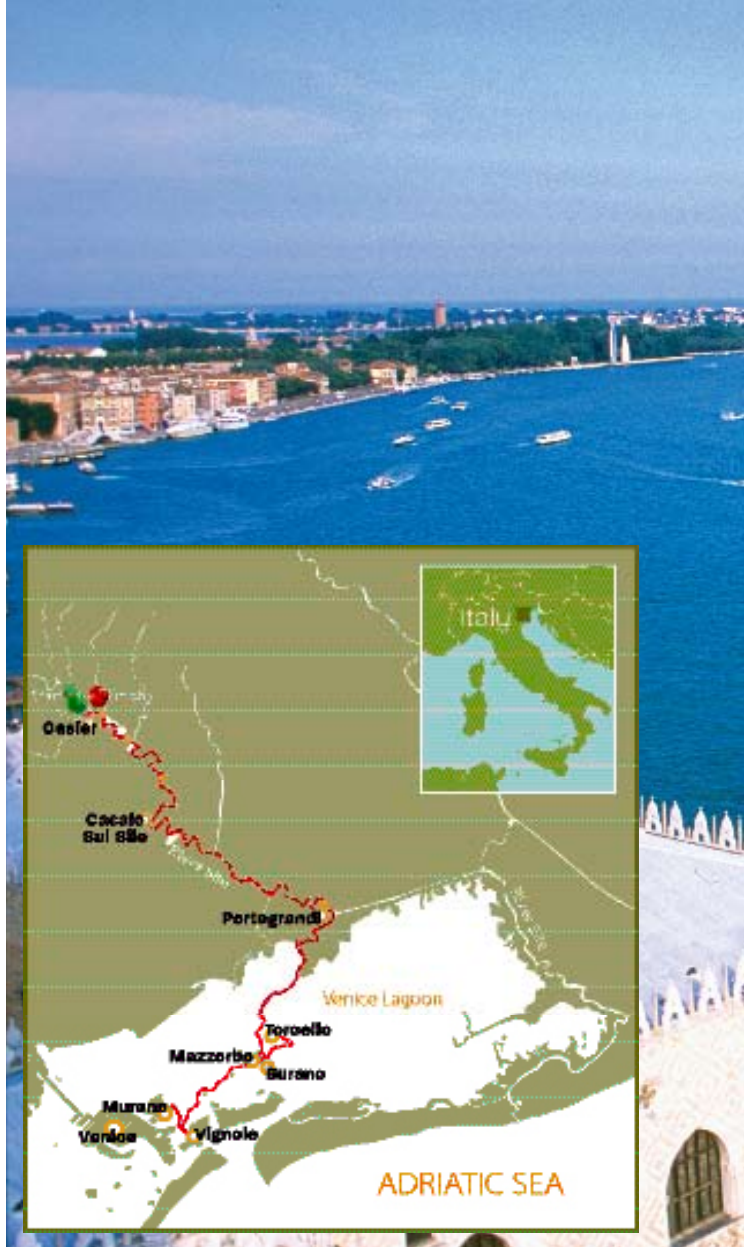
**Y**ou don't have to be in a gondola to explore the Venice Lagoon, as I found out when we chartered one of

Connoisseur's 14.5 metre Magnifique self-drive motorcruisers. In the course of a week, I discovered that beyond the stunning sinking city lies a magical wetland of beautiful islands, linked by tree trunk-lined canals, that lead, via locks, to rivers running through marshland, open fields, woodland and enchanting pockets of civilisation.

Connoisseur's Venetian base is located to the north of the Lagoon in the town of Casier on the picturesque River Sile. Travelling from the UK to Casier is straightforward, thanks to the direct services operated by Ryanair from either Liverpool or Stansted to Treviso and from the airport it takes just 10 minutes to reach the boatyard by taxi. The timing of our flights enabled us to explore Casier and stock up on fresh provisions before it was time to board our hireboat and begin our Venetian adventure.



Crewmembers Gareth, Aline and Sally soak up the sun as they pass St Mark's Square



“Cruising past the world famous Venetian waterfront marked the holiday high point”

Behind its curvy lines, the Magnifique is a sturdy motorcruiser built to endure years of abuse at the hands of the inexperienced. And, as we were also about to discover, she is ideally suited for the inland cruising we were about to undertake. Our floating home proved to be remarkably manoeuvrable in the confined waters and was generally a pleasure to handle. The upper helm position provided good all-round visibility, although I would have appreciated a transparent lid to prevent the wind catching the charts.

That one gripe aside, the Magnifique has one feature that sets her apart from her competitors – a vast sundeck with enough room for all of the party to enjoy the scenery while cruising or share alfresco meals and drinks when moored up somewhere special.





The Magnifique can sleep up to 10 people, split between four double berth air-cooled cabins with a convertible double berth in the saloon. With only four people in our party it was sheer luxury. I suspect the conditions would have become relatively congested though, with a full compliment on board, especially at mealtimes in the saloon. That said, the galley was well equipped to cater for a full boat, packed with good quality cooking utensils including an espresso coffee machine for that perfect kick-start to the day.

Our cruise began with the 15 nautical mile passage down the River Sile to Portegrandi Lock. At the time of our trip the water levels in the river were approximately 1.5m lower than normal so the base manager advised us to stay as close to the centre of the channel as possible. Without the assistance of an echo sounder, I had to rely on my crew

to keep a good look-out for shelving mud banks on the inside of river bends and vegetation along some of the straights.

The view of the islands from San Marco's Basilica is breathtaking

Three hire boats leave the Casier base en route to Venice via the River Sile

The river's remarkably clear water made their task a little easier, thus enabling them to appreciate the grand waterside villas and abandoned wooden burci barges that we encountered on the initial 5.5-mile stretch to Casale sul Sile.

The remaining 9.5 miles to Portegrandi were equally picturesque and with no fees or requirement to book, a short blast of the horn sufficed

to request the opening of the gates to Portegrandi's lock, which links the River Sile to the lagoon. Once inside, the water level dropped by a foot before the gates opened to release us. Five minutes later, we were heading through open marshland as we cruised along the 5 mile reed-lined Silone Canal.

On the horizon we could see the area's distinctive, leaning bell >>>



**START 1 Casier**

5.5 miles

2

**Casale sul Sile**

9.5 miles





**The Grand Canal is 3800m long, 30-90m wide, with an average depth of 5m**

towers and curious looking structures used to catch fish, consisting of a large net suspended from four metal lattice masts.

Roughly halfway along the canal we picked up the trail of upright tree trunks, called bricola in Italian, used throughout the Lagoon to indicate the extent of the various navigable channels.

Not wishing to pay marina fees in excess of €80 per night, we headed for Connoisseur's moorings on the island of Mazzorbo. Once round its southern bank, we encountered the relatively choppy conditions generated by strong winds gusting across the 2.5-mile stretch of open water between

Mazzorbo and Murano. Despite our Magnifique's low-sided hull and modest engine power, the weather posed no major problems as I brought her

alongside. With only the assistance of my inexperienced friends to rely on, this episode demonstrated that, as long as one member of the crew can handle a craft, this trip is perfectly safe for those new to boating.

Mazzorbo and Burano are two small islands connected by a footbridge. Mazzorbo is strictly residential with only one restaurant and no shops. Extremely peaceful and quiet all year round, its inhabitants are devoted to fishing

The view of the Grand Canal, approaching Piazza San Marco, aboard a vaporetto

and cultivating their orchards.

In stark contrast Burano is the most populated island in the lagoon and its female residents are well-known for their lace making. Dozens of lace shops line the heart of the island's streets but be warned handmade lace comes with a hefty pricetag.

Burano is also recognised by its brightly painted houses. Rumour has it the colours of the houses follow a specific system originating from the golden age of its development –

“Not wishing to pay expensive marina fees, we used public moorings”



### Favourite haven Vignole

Vignole, together with its neighbouring island of Saint Erasmo, has been described as the Lagoon's market garden. Not surprisingly, there was little to see apart from fields of crops and a popular taverna along the southern bank offering good quality Italian cuisine at surprisingly economic prices. The sheltered public moorings (free of charge) turned out to be an unexpected treat as we watched the sun setting over

the neighbouring island of Murano while enjoying a glass of wine and the evening chorus of the local birds. Despite the island's small population it is linked to the vaporetto network which enabled us to leave the Magnifique behind to explore Venice itself.

**Mooring** Free public quay  
**Services** Rubbish disposal, and point of access for Vaporetto network

**Eating places** One taverna

Portegrandi 3

5 miles

4

Mazzorbo

2.5 miles

5

Vignole



if someone wishes to paint their home they must send a request to the government, who will respond by making notice of the certain colours permitted for that lot. This practice has resulted in the myriad of colours that characterises the island today.

After a restful night's sleep we slipped our lines and headed to the public moorings at Vignole. On arrival we abandoned Magnifique for the day and caught the vaporetto (waterbus) to Venice, as it's the best way to see the Grand Canal. Although you can use visitor moorings at two tourist marinas on the outskirts of Venice one night's stay will cost between €80 and €120 depending on the size of your boat. You are not permitted, however, to cruise up the Grand Canal. My disappointment of not being able to take our Magnifique along this legendary waterway overlooked by palaces, museums and churches soon turned to relief when I saw the chaotic



Until the 19th century the Rialto Bridge was the only bridge that crossed the canal

The Grand Canal is lined with beautiful museums, galleries, hotels and moorings



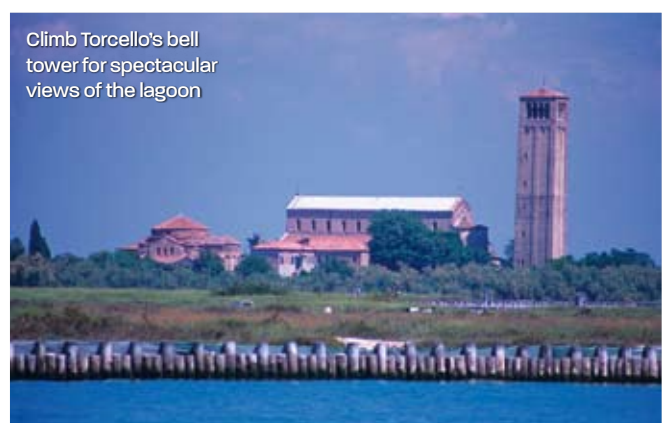
scene of gondolas weaving in-between the endless stream of watteraxis and vaporetto. Once ashore, this beautiful city exceeded our expectations as we were captivated by sights including Basilica San Marco's golden mosaics, the bustling Rialto market, gondolas gliding along the numerous minor canals and the lavish interior of the Doge's Palace – once home to the rulers of the Venetian Republic. As the crowds started to ebb away from the Piazza San Marco we enjoyed an aperitif at one of the cafes along its edges. Like any tourist trap, the prices were steep but the setting was incomparable.

Cruising past the world famous Venetian waterfront dominated by the Doge's palace, San Marco's Campanile, the city's mint, and the entrance to the

As moorings in Venice are so expensive it is best to visit the city by vaporetto (waterbus)



Climb Torcello's bell tower for spectacular views of the lagoon



1.5 mile

6

**Murano**

3.5 miles

7

**Torcello**

1 mile



## CRUISING VENICE

Grand Canal by the Baroque church of Santa Maria della Salute, marked the high point of the entire holiday. By sailing these waters at our own speed we could take the time to fully appreciate the breathtaking views. Having satisfied our curiosity, we caught the vaporetto and returned to Vignole for the night, via the southern edge of Giudecca for a tantalising glimpse of the southern lagoon's distant islands.

Next we sailed north to the island of Murano, which proved to be the only disappointing part of the trip. Apart from the local glassware, promoted by a very persistent salesman, and the 12th century Basilica dei Santi Maria e Donato, the island appeared to have little to commend itself. And unlike the other places we visited, Murano's inhabitants seemed to dislike tourists.

Venice used to be world famous for its glass blowing but many years ago



Burano's streets are lined with shops selling handmade lace, from ladies top to bed linen

production was transferred to Murano to protect Venice from the frequent fires caused by the kiln furnaces. Moorings on Murano are few and far between, however, so if you fancy a visit to the glass factory it is easier to reach the island by vaporetto.

At our next port of call, the island of

Torcello, we enjoyed a leisurely lunch up on the sundeck in the shadow of the 7th Century cathedral. Later we burnt off the calories by climbing the bell tower to enjoy some of the finest views across the lagoon. Apart from the impressive cathedral you must visit the bridge named 'Ponte del Diavolo'. The name dates back to an ancient legend which talks about witches, lovers and devils....and apparently the devil still haunts the bridge today, concealing itself in the shape of a harmless black cat. We kept our eyes peeled but didn't see any furry felines.

An early morning visit back to Burano, to pick up fresh provisions, really brought home the importance of the canals and boats to the everyday lives of the islanders. The sight of barges delivering fruit, vegetables and even the mail, showed that the canals were much more than a playground to be enjoyed at weekends. Sadly, our own glimpse into their world was drawing to a close as we embarked on the 21.5-mile passage back to Casier. Rather than spend our final night afloat at the base, we stopped at the nearby public moorings at Osteria de Nea in front of the Osteria alle barche restaurant, where we enjoyed live music and freshly caught fish from the owner's nets on the lagoon.

Although we were initially attracted to this holiday by the prospect of exploring Venice, we discovered that the lesser known islands, such as Burano and Vignole, were equally enchanting. With more time we would have either gone south to visit more islands or sailed up the Brenta River to Padova. Something for next time, perhaps?

## factfile

### WEATHER

Contrary to our expectations for mid June, we had changeable weather, with anything from heavy rain to bright blue skies and sunshine. With no TV or radio on board we had to ask local people about the latest forecast.

### TRAVEL

Treviso Airport is a 10 minute Taxi ride from Connoisseur's Casier base and is served by Ryanair from Stansted and Liverpool.

### CHARTER COSTS

2008 prices for a seven night trip range from £1,110 to £1,865 for the four berth Caprice, £1,440 to £2,080 for the six berth Elegance and £1,580 to £2,570 for the eight berth Magnifique. Note: all three classes can accommodate an additional two people to the figures quoted by converting the settee in the main saloon into an extra double berth. Fuel costs and a security deposit are extra.

### CHARTS & GUIDES

- Admiralty Charts 1483 & 1442
- Italia Navigable – Venezia, Riviera del Brenta, Fiume Sile ([www.belletteditore.com](http://www.belletteditore.com))
- Adriatic Pilot, Trevor & Dinah Thompson, Imray Laurie & Wilson Ltd
- Venice Spiral Guide, AA World Travel Guides Venice & The Veneto, DK Eyewitness Travel Guides
- Venice Top 25 Sights, AA World Travel Guides

### PAPERWORK

No boating licences are required

### CONTACT

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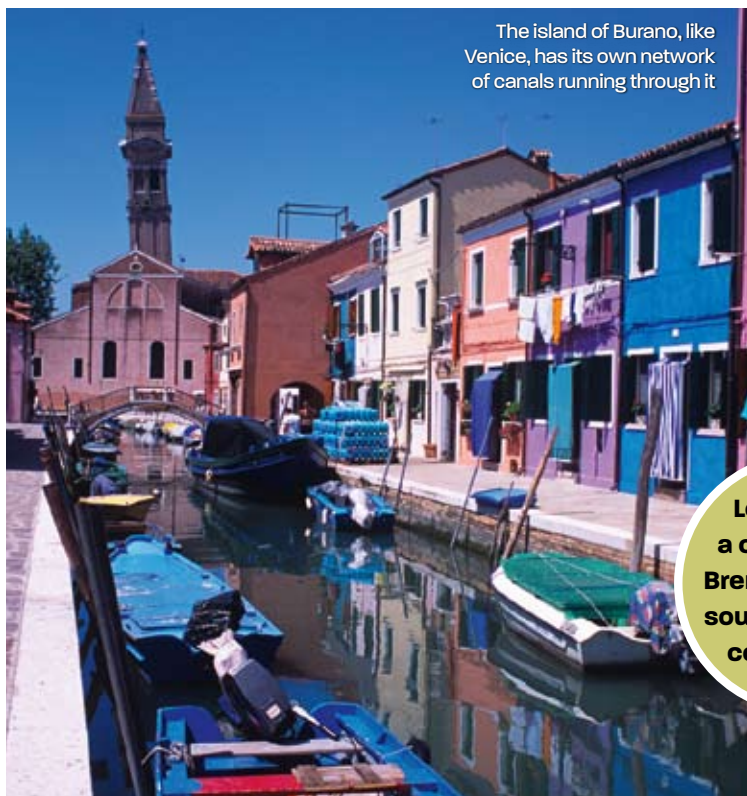
## Favourite haven Mazzorbo & Burano

The islands of Mazzorbo & Burano are linked by a wooden footbridge. The residential island of Mazzorbo is complemented by Burano which is known for its brightly coloured cottages, leaning bell tower and locally made lacework.

**Moorings** Connoisseur's own moorings are situated along the southern edge of Mazzorbo by the wooden bridge.

**Services** Local convenience stores and market on Burano only. There are rubbish disposal points and access to the Vaporetto network on both islands.

**Eating places** Various restaurants and cafes on Burano, but they close very early (8.30pm) when the tourists leave. There is one small bistro on Mazzorbo.



The island of Burano, like Venice, has its own network of canals running through it

Look out for a cruise of the Brenta River and southern Venice coming soon



8 Burano

20.5 miles

9

Osteria da Nea

1 mile

Casier FINISH