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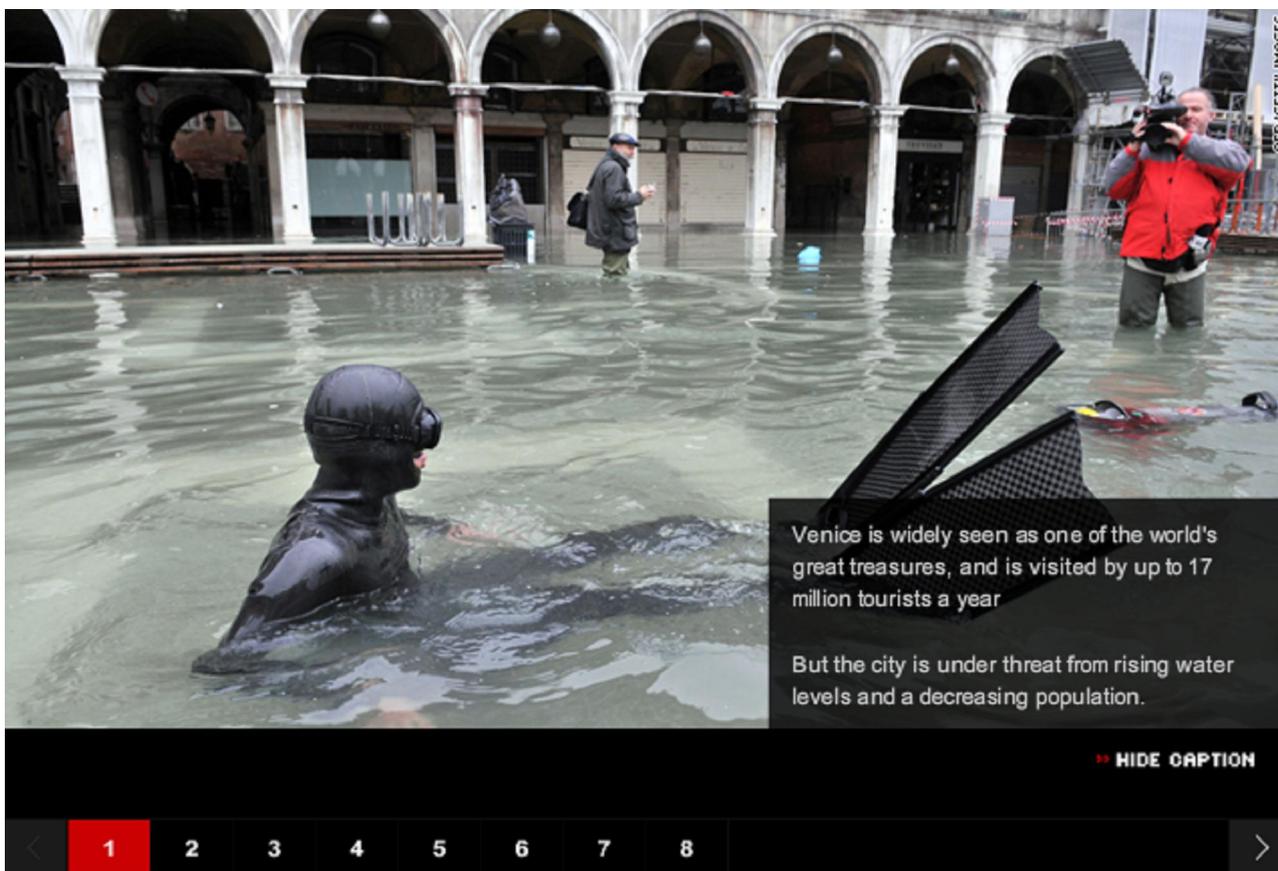
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Battling to keep the 'real' Venice afloat

By **Laura Allsop** for CNN

June 9, 2011 -- Updated 1109 GMT (1909 HKT)



STORY HIGHLIGHTS

Venice's architecture under threat from flooding and rising water levels

Population dwindling as more residents leave for the mainland

Locals complain of commercialization of city

(CNN) -- It is widely regarded as one of the wonders of the world, attracting millions of tourists a year, but the city of Venice faces ongoing problems that threaten its ability to stay above water.

The city's flooding issues are well known: Each year water surges through its famous streets wreaking havoc on historic buildings, often damaging priceless art.

Hoped that the city's problems can be fixed

But Venice also faces the problem of a dwindling population and an increasing influx of tourists that locals claim it is incapable of keeping up with.

Photographs purporting to show the "real" Venice -- as opposed to the familiar, tourist-friendly images on postcards that seem frozen in time -- are currently on display as part of the city's contemporary art biennale.

[Haiti, Iraq show for first time at political Venice Biennale](#)

They were created as part of specially commissioned portfolios by contemporary artists, including [Nan Goldin](#), and their eventual sale will raise funds for [Venice in Peril](#).

The UK-based charity has been working in Venice since the catastrophic floods of 1966, restoring damaged buildings and works of art and now producing research on the city's rising water levels, tourism and population issues.

There are no more people, there is no more culture, there is no Venetian way of life, and the city is every day more like a museum

--Matteo Secchi, Venessia.com

Falling population

Venice in Peril says that up to 60,000 tourists can enter into the city in any given day -- doubling the population. Those numbers can swell further during big cultural events like the biennale and city's famous film festival.

"There are no more people, there is no more culture, there is no Venetian way of life, and the city is every day more like a museum," said Matteo Secchi, spokesman for local protest group, [venessia.com](#). "You come to visit a museum like Pompeii."

Secchi and his followers are fighting to maintain Venice's population, which has dropped dramatically since 1951 when it was just under 175,000, say Venice in Peril.

In 2009, when the population was estimated to have fallen below 60,000, Secchi and other locals staged a symbolic funeral procession the city they felt had died.

But Secchi, a hotel owner, doesn't blame the tourists; he is aware that the city needs them in order to survive. He and his supporters are lobbying Venice's Mayor, Giorgio Orsoni, to diversify the city's industry away from tourism so fewer residents will leave to take jobs on the mainland.

[Beyond the gondolas: A guide to contemporary Venice](#)

Big business

Secchi says Venice is "under attack by big business" and points to the advertising billboards that cover historic buildings being renovated, the cruise ships that sail into the city and houses bought up by corporations and left unoccupied.

The Venetians that are left are incredibly resilient, intelligent, active people

--Jane da Mosto, environmental scientist

It is this increasingly commercial aspect to the city, seen as necessary for boosting its finances, which prompted Venessia.com to stage their "Welcome to Veniceland" protest in 2010, in which members of the group paraded around Venice dressed as cartoon characters, lamenting what they see as the "Disney-fication" of their home.

Michele Zanella, from the Office of Statistics at the Municipality of Venice, admits that Venice's decreasing population is "undoubtedly a problem," and forecasts that the number of resident people may slump further in the next decade.

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Venice is not a city that attracts the young, he says, and its population is aging all the time. He agrees that one of the biggest problems facing residents is the high price of accommodation, which of course is driven ever higher by tourism -- the "principal industry in the area."

Money issues

Environmental scientist and Venice resident Jane da Mosto says that the city's problem with tourism could be better managed.

She believes a basic tourist levy could help the city raise necessary funds to maintain its historic buildings. It's money that has been hard to find in recent years, she says.

Much of the money from Italy's central government to the city has gone into funding the controversial billion-dollar MOSE flood defense project.

Slated for completion in 2014, it is hoped the defenses -- one of Italy's biggest ever investments -- will stem the tide of sea water coming into the city.

"It's a bet, of course, but I believe in it, in the sense that it has to achieve its goals," said Paolo Canestrelli, Director of the Center of Tide Forecasting and Signage at the Municipality of Venice.

"One doesn't even discuss (the possibility of it not working), because having spent so many resources, and so much energy on a project that may not work -- it doesn't bear thinking about."

Hope for Venice

With its architecture under threat, and with fewer and fewer residents, it is tempting to think of Venice as a dying relic. But da Mosto, a resident of over fifteen years with four children, does not take this gloomy view.

She says that she sees Venice's problems as a microcosm for those affecting many other cities across the world, and that "if you can fix it in Venice, it can be fixed everywhere else too."

Zanella, from the Office of Statistics, meanwhile says that despite Venice's many troubles, he sees it as a city undergoing important changes rather than its death throes.

"Right now, during the Biennale, it seems a city almost too alive," he said, adding that cultural showcases maintain the city's vibrancy.

"The Venetians that are left are incredibly resilient, intelligent, active people," da Mosto added. "And it's not too late to save Venice and the Venetians."

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abuabbn



Hi, millp3

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Venice has no hope. With the global warming and rising sea level, it will be totally flooded and washed away, just like all the other cities of the world in low lying areas.

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globalogic

WHY?

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briguyla

I say let it sink. There's already enough rickety old towns in Europe anyway.

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joconnor11

What an ignorant comment to make. You should put your head down in shame!

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Peikovian

When NYC had more newspapers, there was a fear that the city would sink under its own garbage. Now thankfully there's the internet. Still mostly garbage, but it's lightweight.

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LizzyE

I visited Venice last year. It's such a shame such a beautiful, albeit smelly place, is coming to this. One thing I will mention, however, is that when I stepped off the train and made my way out of the station, what I first thought was a bit of dizziness turned out to be the actual ground moving wi... [more](#)

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Carm10

La serenissima! Magnifique!

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blizzyness

Pfft. Don't blame global warming...it's just that Italians are gaining weight so they're weighing the city down. Take that Al Gore! *turn your sarcasm detectors on folks*

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steven777

I much rather live in Venice FI.the city is not sinking and we have sandy white beaches!!!

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• **JasonY25**

I visited Venice and It was spectacular. but the reason people are leaving because the entire city is a historical site and If you want to fix a leak in your plumbing you need and an archeologist, and someone from the office of historical preservation to come and approve it first. on top of that i w... [more](#)

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• **14mickey**

I'm glad we visited Venice when we did. There are a number of places I've been to that can no longer be visited...the Torch outside lookout once atop the Statue of Liberty, the observatory atop the World Trade Center, tower two, the second observatory in the Empire State Building, the outside bottom... [more](#)

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• **crackface**

Whos bright idea was it to build a city on top of water. LOL!!!

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• **dfiler**

They had two choices: die, or live in the lagoon.

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• **Shackdaddy83**

Fishermen and traders....

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• **RocknBbyBmer**

I would live in Venice if I could (an American living in Australia now). I've been there a number of times. We lived like Venetians in an apartment converted from a Palace on the Grand Canal. That time was was one of the best times of my life. Didn't mind the tourists. I love Venice and all of I... [more](#)

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• **AnonymousNJ**

I went to Venice in the late 90s as part of a week tour in Italy. I don't recall seeing any billboards at that time. I just remember a few parts of the island being swarmed by people and in other areas, very quiet, which to me was the true face of Venice. Fortunately on my visit, St. Mark's Square w... [more](#)

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• **ii8gavilan**

Just got back from five days in Venice and "Veniceland" is about right. Hordes of tourists clogging all the major sights. Miserable experience. Worst food and service we experienced in two 3+ week trips to Italy in the last three years. Murano glass island is just as bad. We had to work really hard ... [more](#)

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siracco

Another good example of global warming. One day they will speak of Venice like they do Atlantis.....the lost city under the sea. We will all need scuba gear to visit it. I'm sure they will charge a pretty price too. Pity about the art and the buildings. Best see it while you can. I went twice and i... [more](#)

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dfiler

@Mattheus: so Italy is spending tons of money on their largest ever infrastructure project, to keep rising water levels manageable in Venice, but the sea isn't rising? You're off your rocker. Climate change is real, happening now, and the effects can't be denied. Climate denier will have the same... [more](#)

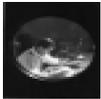
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Mattheus

More like a good example of the loony global warming cult, wanting to blame everything on their religion. Venice is sinking, pure and simple. This has nothing to do with rising sea levels.

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ErichX101X

Install a giant wave machine and call it the Tsunami so we can Boogie board to all the tourist tractions and I can guarantee americans'll be out here by the hundreds.

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Guest

Save New Orleans... Naw... Save Venice! (I recently moved to NOLA and even this long after "the storm" it still a hole, a deadly hole). Now Venice, on the other hand is well worth spending the money, it is one of those places you have to see to believe

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thefactonly

New Orleans was a hole before Katrina. You know that Louisiana is the anus of America. All of the waste flows right through it.

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gerbiltea

New Orleans retained its unique character throughout the years for precisely one reason: apathy.

No one ever cared enough to tear down old buildings.

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pronco

As usual, no published comments on man-made global warming of course.

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