

VENICE SEEKS NEW PATHS FOR TOURISM



Signposts like "Do not sit down", "Respect for Venice" or "Priority for Venetians" are from old times. Times when Venice was still discussing the restrictions for tourists. Now, Venice seeks new paths for tourism.

There was a lot of scolding about mass tourism, the many people who clog the small alleyways and have their picnic on the Rialto Bridge. About the cruise boats that actually nobody wants to have and yet so many need them.

Meanwhile, one hears the clattering of his own shoes in the alleyways or the sloshing of the waves in the canals louder than the hustle and bustle of tourist masses. Since the Corona lockdown, Venice is in crisis. Venetians or Italians from the region suddenly discover the city for themselves and enjoy an almost magical atmosphere - but the money for hoteliers, restaurant owners, tourist guides and the municipality is missing. The economic damage is hardly quantifiable.

"Today we are facing a city that is really empty and at a point zero," says tourist guide Elena Degan. The single mother, like so many others, lives from tourist revenues and has had no income since March. At the same time, she hates the masses. "The situation in Venice, Rome or Florence has reached an unbearable level." She lives in central Venice. Wherever a craftsman closes down, a bed & breakfast or a hotel opens, she says.

There are only about 50,000 inhabitants left in this UNESCO World Heritage city. Most people move to Mestre on the mainland. However, tourism has risen continuously in recent years, with around 13 million overnight stays last year. Therefore the city actually wanted to demand a controversial "entrance tax" from July 1st. Then came Covid-19. The tax was postponed until next year. And the politicians are now suddenly begging for tourists looking for new paths for tourism.

"We are open again," announced Mayor Luigi Brugnaro. A "reassuring message" to the world was now necessary: Venice is safe. Now the borders must reopen. Because only then can international tourism, which is particularly important for Venice, begin again. After all, most visitors come from the USA, China, Great Britain and Germany. Now, EU citizens are allowed to travel to Italy again.

The regional president of Veneto, Luca Zaia, speaks of a "COVID-free" region. This is not quite true. Veneto was one of the first two flashpoints in Italy. But compared to neighboring Lombardy, the region has managed to control the situation with many tests and has now reported about 2000 positive cases.

Even before Corona, Venice had to experience bitterly what it means to rely solely on tourists who suddenly stay away: In November, a flood caused great damage, and the images of a city flooded for several days scared away the visitors.

Cities which live mainly from foreign tourism, such as Venice and Florence, would now suffer greater losses than cities which also lived from domestic visits, according to a study by the Italian tourist board Enit. There, tourism would not fully recover by 2023.

Mayor Brugnaro now promises class instead of mass - "new and intelligent tourism". But what

exactly he intends to do to achieve this is unclear.

"We are currently experiencing tourism close to the way it was 50 years ago," says environmental scientist Giovanni Cecconi from the University Ca' Foscari in Venice. "It's not enough now to simply reopen and go on as before." Not only the people from the surrounding area would come back to Venice. Fish and birds had returned to the lagoon because they were no longer deterred by the engine noise of the many ships. Without motor traffic on the waters, the quality of the waters increases.

Also, no cruise ships are currently docking in Venice. Cecconi believes that the time in which cruise tourism lies idle should be used to devise a model for the future and move the port out of Venice. "Cruise tourism is the maximum of superficial tourism." For years there has been a controversy that cruisers destroy the environment and the fabric of the city.

The action alliance No Grandi Navi does not only want an end to cruise ships in the entire lagoon. **The organization now has a list of demands for the future: honest gastronomy for residents and tourists alike, the settlement of craftsmen and artists in the historic center, affordable rents for locals and a limit for holiday apartments.**

Venice is now at a turning point: back to mass tourism that is unbearable for residents and visitors alike? Or does the city now really have the courage to embark on a new, more sustainable future?

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