

Piazza San Marco



Gentile Bellini, Procession in Piazza San Marco, 1496, Venice, Accademia Galleries

The area of Piazza San Marco has always been the religious and political core of Venice, a counterbalance of the commercial pole of Rialto. The only piazza in the city (the other open expanses are called campi), San Marco attracts the Venetian community for official occasions: processions, events, festivals, and public games. At the beginning and until the 11th century, the San Marco Basin stretches up to the Basilica with a wet dock and completely surrounds the Duke's Palace. The piazza is still in rammed earth and only in 1267 it is paved with bricks in a herringbone pattern as can be seen in paintings such as Procession in Piazza San Marco by Gentile Bellini. Between the 13th and 15th centuries, the Basilica and the Palace take on a similar conformation to the current one while the belltower dates back to the 16th century. **Mauro Codussi** (1440-1504) design the Clock Tower on the side of the Old Procuratie (where the Negozio is) completed by **Jacopo Sansovino** (1486-1570) afterward. The New Procuratie (opposite) are built between the late 16th century and the 17th century. The pavement in trachyte dates back to the 18th century and is a design by the architect **Andrea Tirali** (1657-1737).



Did you know...?

San Marco has always been animated by numerous shops selling any kind of goods. In 1731, coffee is so fashionable to number 34 sellers only in this area. For ages, in the piazza one can drink an "ombra de vin" (a "shade" of wine) since wine was kept cool in the shade of the belltower. Under it, in the loggia, a crowd gathers to see the lotto ballot. After the tragedy of the two world wars, the piazza is again the place where the residents gather, and, at the time of the building of the Negozio Olivetti, it reinforces its fame of one of the most elegant places in the world.



Francesco Guardi, View of Piazza San Marco, 1760 c., London, National Gallery



Basilica of St Mark's in a historic photo

The first building of **St. Mark's Basilica**, as a palatial chapel, dates back to the early 9th century, near a previous church dedicated to St. Theodore. The new edifice has also a political function (after the election the Doge delivers his speech there). In the Basilica, the remains of the patron saint are kept after they were taken from Alexandria in 829. They are the symbol of the independence of the Venetian state from Byzantium. A second building of the church is necessary in 976 after a fire, and a third stage takes place starting from 1063.

A gothic masterpiece, the **Doge's Palace** displays a layering of elements. It raises in the Early Middle Ages on late Roman remains. It is composed of three blocks that include previous buildings: the wing overlooking the water (with the Sala del Maggior Consiglio), rebuilt in 1340; the wing overlooking the Piazza (with the Sala dello Scrutinio) whose construction starts in 1424; the Renaissance wing, with the Doge's living quarters and the governmental offices, rebuilt between 1483 and 1565.



Doge's Palace



Doge's Palace, internal courtyard



A cup of coffee at the Florian in a day with "acqua alta"



The Caffè Quadri

Caffè Florian, Quadri, and Lavena have been the destination of celebrities for two centuries: after Casanova, Tommaseo, and Manin, protagonists of the Venetian Risorgimento, it is the turn of Clark Gable, Sophia Loren, and Andy Warhol. After WW2, the Venetians themselves are regulars. With the sound of the small orchestras of the cafès, life in San Marco is peppy and lively. In the late 20th century, the socio-economic transformations change irreparably the commercial fabric of the Piazza. The reopening of the Negozio is a sign of the recovery of the place's quality.