



## Venice

*Veneto, Italy*

Venice, an icon of human achievement and architectural innovation, is spread over 118 small islands in the Venetian Lagoon between the mouths of the Po and Piave rivers. The city's structures are built on wood piles, and Venice's many neighborhoods are connected by its famous canals and bridges. Symbolic of an indelible desire to master one's environment, Venice is an engineering wonder and a cultural masterpiece graced with thousands of historic buildings, churches, palaces, and plazas. Inhabited thousands of years ago by the ancient Veneti people, Venice gained prominence in the ninth century as it grew to become a major commercial and maritime power. It has inspired some of the world's greatest artists, including Giorgione, Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese.

The inspiration of Venice is shared by the world today, as tourism is now its major industry. Maintaining Venice, not only as a travel destination but as a community, has become increasingly challenging. A significant factor in this dynamic is cruise tourism, which has increased cruise passenger visitation to Venice by 400% in the past five years, with some 20,000 people debarking per day during the peak season. The large cruise ships have had direct and indirect impacts on flooding, because of dredging requirements and the movement of large ships through the Giudecca Canal. The influx of visitors debarking in fragile historic areas has likewise affected the quality of life for residents, contributing to a 50% decline in the city's population over the past decade. Local residents have formed groups in protest, and the municipality is endorsing the need to consider a large-scale redevelopment plan that would relocate and better manage cruise operations, and mitigate the negative impacts on both the historic fabric and the social wellbeing of the city.

WMF was first involved in conservation efforts in Venice after the floods of 1966, and has been a longtime supporter of projects and programs to ensure its sustainable stewardship. Inclusion on the Watch marks nearly 50 years of WMF engagement in Venice and underscores its commitment to mobilizing international support for protecting this unique and treasured city.