

# Lapping up a quieter Venice

## ROOM AT THE INN

Stella Martin

**I**t is strangely quiet. The water laps the side of the canal, a church bell rings, a blackbird warbles from a secret rooftop garden. There is no wheeled traffic, no roar from the street, not even a distant highway hum.

I'm nursing my feet. I'm sure I've lost an entire layer of skin from my soles while compulsively wandering this magical city, and I've had to retreat to my room to recover. But, to my great delight, I haven't had to leave Venice. I'm not trapped inside an anonymous hotel but sitting next to a window, gazing past the geraniums in the window box at the comings and goings on the narrow pavements below and on the quiet canal that divides them.

Antica Locanda Montin, in the district of Dorsoduro, has been a lucky find. Although it is just across the Grand Canal from St Marks, this area is a comparative backwater, its squares and crisscrossing canals and alleyways frequented by locals. The tourist mayhem is a world away.

The manager shrugs when I ask how long Antica Locanda Montin has been a hotel. "Two hundred years? Perhaps more. Our family has owned it since World War II."

In that time it has attracted the attention of a list of celebrities, from Peggy Guggenheim in 1955 (a photo of the American art patron embarking on her private gondola at the front door features on the hotel's brochure) to US president Jimmy Carter (1980), Alexander Dubcek (1992), Yoko Ono, Robert De Niro, Brad Pitt and Mick Jagger.

Most of these visitors have come to eat at the Albergo restaurant,



**Secret site:** The inn is beside a quiet canal

tucked in the garden at the back of the hotel, its white-clothed tables lined up in two green tunnels below the vine-laden, barrel-vaulted pergola. We find the restaurant's good reputation is well deserved.

There are just 12 rooms in the hotel, including one single with a tiny balcony and others accommodating three or four guests. Those at the front have canal views; at the rear, rooms overlook the garden and the vine-entwined restaurant pergola. Most are remarkably spacious, with parquet or traditional Venetian terrazzo floors; the furniture is quirky and slightly antique, and the walls crammed with a strange variety of framed paintings.

It's late and I'm back at my window, loath to relinquish my final day in Venice. Laughter drifts up as the last patrons leave the restaurant. A lone figure walks past on the opposite side of the canal:

I can hear his footfalls echoing in the balmy night air and his key as he turns it in the lock of his front door. The church bell rings out the midnight hour and I head for bed. Sadly, tomorrow we will be back in the traffic.

## Checklist

Antica Locanda Montin and Albergo Ristorante, S. Trovaso, Fondamenta Eremita 1147, Venice. Phone: +39 041 522 7151; [www.locandamontin.com](http://www.locandamontin.com).

**Tariff:** Doubles from €85 (\$141) to €150 (low/high season).

**Getting there:** Take the *vaporetto* (water bus)

to the Accademia art gallery. The hotel is a five-minute walk: make sure you have a map. Look for the hotel's signs or telephone for directions.

**Checking in:** Tourists seeking the quieter side of Venice, families, repeat visitors (it is the sort of place you'll want to go back to).

**Bedtime reading:** *Death in Venice* by Thomas Mann.

**Stepping out:** St Marks and the Rialto bridge are about 20 minutes' walk, across the Ponte dell'Accademia. But if you are looking for a quieter time in Venice, just wander the Dorsoduro area around the hotel. Try the rabbit stew at S. Barnaba, Dorsoduro, 2736 Calle Lunga.

**Brickbats:** Finding the hotel can be difficult, and carrying bags over bridges not easy (no taxis). Only half the rooms have ensuite toilets.

**Bouquets:** The breakfast is a lot more substantial than the usual continental coffee and rolls and is included in the tariff.