

VOL. 14 NO 2 SPRING/SUMMER 2016  
www.cruiseandtravellifestyles.com

FEATURING:  
BEST OF THE  
**BALTIC**

# CRUISE & TRAVEL LIFESTYLES

**Vintage  
Bordeaux**

Spirit of Sedona

Hola Havana



CANADA \$5.95

*experience*

NEW CULTURES AND TIMELESS FAVORITES

ROMANCING EUROPEAN RAILS | REGATTA DAY IN VENICE





# Nautical performance art

A new annual event reignites Venice's centuries-old love affair between sails and the sea – and also creates a spectacular show for visitors to the City of Water.

**LYNN ELMHIRST** had a yachtsman's view of the 2nd annual Venice Hospitality Challenge.





Aerial view of the Venice Hospitality Challenge at the entrance to the Grand Canal.





## Venice already has a busy calendar

of acclaimed festivals, from the historic decadence of the masked Carnevale early in the year, to the high concept 'Italian modern' Biennale of contemporary art and architecture late in the fall.

Yet Venice has embraced a new annual celebration that reconnects mariners and the glamorous waterways of Venice, and elevates their reunion to performance art. Visitors to Venice in October were treated to a spectacle that added a whole new level of breathtaking to the vistas of St. Mark's Square, gondolas plying the maze of villa-lined canals, and the famed bridges spanning them.

Italian and international racing yacht teams converged on the City of Water for the 2nd annual Venice Hospitality Challenge. The race is a

competition – but also a collaboration – between some of the top luxury hotels in Venice, and the organizers have something more in mind than just a thrilling yachting race.

"We want Venice to be seen from a different angle," Antonello de' Medici, Managing Director of Starwood Hotels and Resorts in Venice and one of the event organizers, explains the motivation for the new festival, "and the lagoon and the water are the best venue for all experiences in Venice, from the early Venetians until now."

The concept is simple... and dramatic. Yacht teams, the cream of the sailing world, (Sailing World Hall of Fame member Paul Cayard was among the most recent eight teams), race against each other to complete a six nautical mile course through the most iconic marine real estate of Basin and the Lido.

Each of the maxi yachts displays

a banner of its host hotel. I was invited to join the team of the Italian yacht Idrusa, carrying the colors of the Westin Europa & Regina, not just as we navigated a weekend of events – each held at a different storied Venetian host hotel – but also in the yacht on race day.

Don't imagine being a guest on a maxi-yacht during a race is a relaxed afternoon on the water! I found myself trying to keep my balance – and the camera dry! – as we tilted (perilously, for my camera) close to water level when the yacht heeled in the wind, scurrying from port to starboard and back again, avoiding being hit by the boom as the crew worked the sails and called instructions in Italian. It was absolutely thrilling.

It was also surreal.

For the duration of the race, it seemed modern day Venice was in a state of suspended animation.

Cruise and industrial water





MATTEO BERTOLINI

Clockwise from left: Italian racing yacht Idrusa sails past St. Mark's Square. Idrusa crew waits for the wind to rise. A competitor yacht catches the wind. The author during a quiet moment in the regatta.

traffic was halted, returning the city to one of the iconic scenes of 18th century Venice painted by Canaletto, but with ultra sleek and modern maxi-yachts superimposed, slicing across a waterscape that has changed little since Canaletto's time.

We sailed past excited visitors lining the waterfront, packing the terraces as the race progressed and word spread of the splendid display of yachts racing in such close quarters to Venice's ancient promenades. The view from shore must have been just as incredible as ours on the yachts. The course brought us close enough to see spectators' faces lit up with the joy of the unexpected nautical ballet of circling yachts, sails flowing and slapping in the winds, animating the glorious canvas of the church and villa-lined waterways of Venice.

The race was even televised on close-circuit TV in host hotels. We could just make out guests on

the terrace bar of our hotel, keeping one eye on the race 'live' as it passed through St. Mark's Basin before them, another eye on the glorious aerial footage on the TV screen, and their hands on bellinis. (I was only seeing the bellinis in my imagination. But if that is not how to experience the 'Dolce Vita', then guests were completely missing the point!)

The Westin Europa and Regina's Hotel Manager, Alessandra Pagano, next to me on the yacht Idrusa during the race, couldn't wait to speak to hotel guests after the race. "They were so excited because nobody knew before, the race was a surprise for them, like a gift from the city of Venice!"

Did we win? No, the Idrusa was not one of the teams to win a hand-blown Murano glass trophy, but for me, the awards ceremony was anti-climatic anyway.

It wasn't just the dramatic scenery that was transported back in time. With water traffic minimized, the usual modern sound track of life in Venice was dialed back, an audio experience organizers like Antonello de' Medici hoped would foster a more 'intimate relationship with water' for Venetian residents and visitors.

"We had nearly silence, and when you only hear the sound of the boat on the water, and the wind that is accompanying that, that is something really unique."

"Venice is water," Alessandra summed up the philosophy behind adding a regatta to the city's festival schedule, "It is a unique city in the world, and we need to preserve it. Sailing is respectful of people and nature. A perfect match." ■

**IF YOU GO:** Find out more about the Venice Hospitality Challenge at [www.venicehospitalitychallenge.it/eng](http://www.venicehospitalitychallenge.it/eng).