



# FORTRESSES IN THE LAGOON

FIRST TRIP:: Fortresses in the lagoon

DEPARTURE: Mestre train station

ARRIVAL: Mestre train station

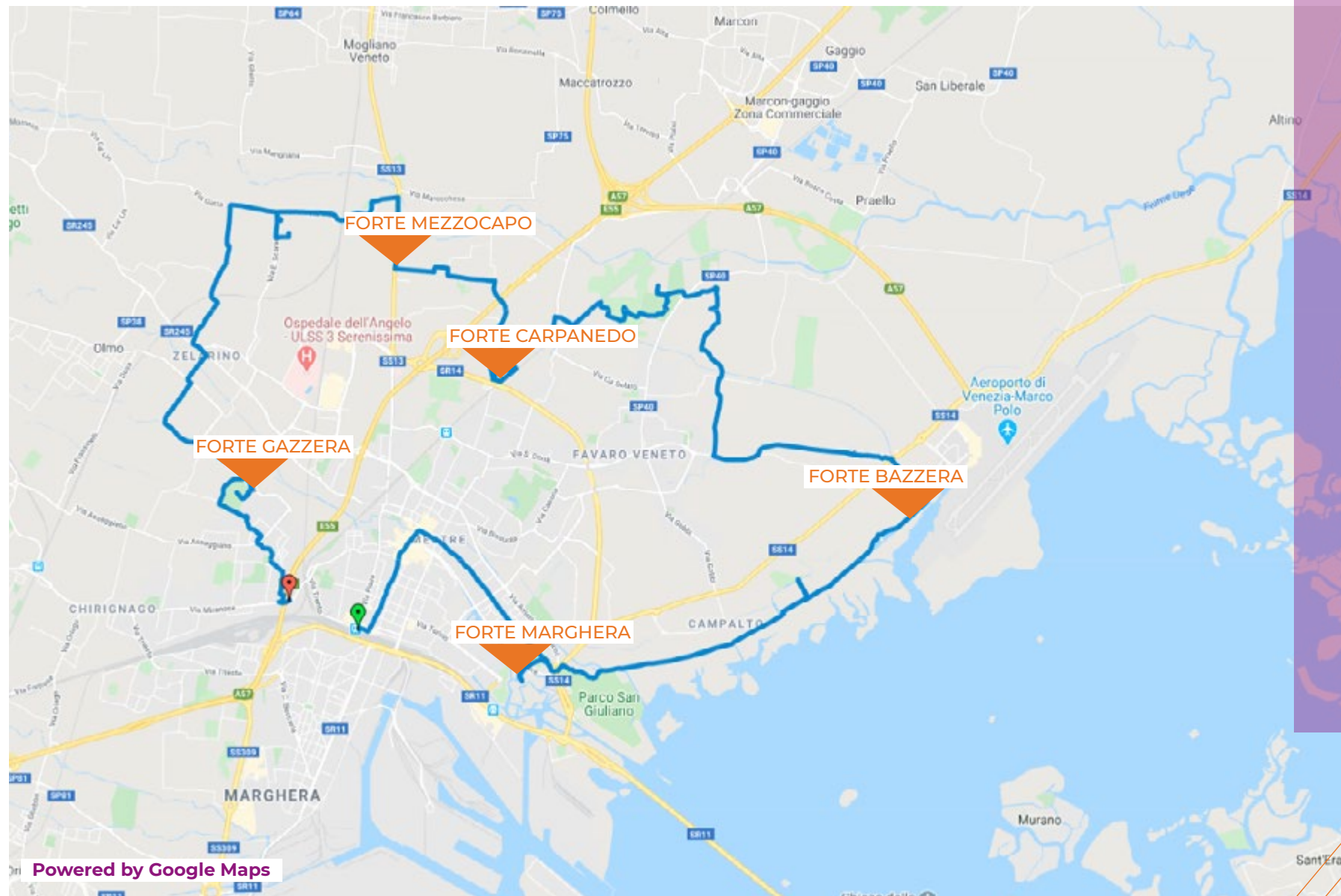
DIFFICULTY: Easy, mostly on cycle paths, some secondary roads

LENGTH: 42 km approx.

ROAD FUND: Both paved and unsurfaced roads

RECOMMENDED BIKE: City bike, mtb, gravel





# THE MAP



You can dedicate a whole day to this lovely tour, especially thought for city bikes, hybrid, or e-bikes, less recommended for more athletic and expensive racing bikes.

For two reasons: first of all it is on mixed terrain, cycle paths plus dirt and bumpy surfaces, and main roads; and then because you may need to tie up your bike to visit some sites and this does not please racing cyclists.

We suggest you see all the forts, to get an overview of the protective “shield” they created around **Venice**.

Some of them are worth just passing by, the most interesting thing being the road to get there, while others are worth a real visit, that can last up to a few hours.

## CHURCH OF SANT'ELENA AND SANT'ANTONIO





# THE WOOD OF ZAHER



Today, thanks to various associations of citizens and to the Municipality of Venice, these fortresses are nothing but peaceful sites



## ORIGINS

Austrians started building this defense system, called **entrenched camp**, in the early 19th century, but it was the French who completed the work during the Napoleonic occupation. The idea was to have an “arch” of fortresses from Malcontenta to Tessera for complete control of the area

Unfortunately the construction of those forts took so long that once finished most of them proved obsolete compared to the warfare technologies that had developed in the meantime.





Built to withstand cannon fire and not rifled rounds and ogives, they were never really used for defensive purposes.

Today, thanks to various associations of citizens and to the Municipality of Venice, these fortresses are nothing but peaceful sites, public areas for recreational use, hosting cultural and popular events that improve the attractiveness of the city and the quality of life of its residents.

From Mestre train station take the well-signed cycle path to **Forte Marghera**, a 19th-century fortress and former barracks of the Italian Army, about five kilometers from the city center.

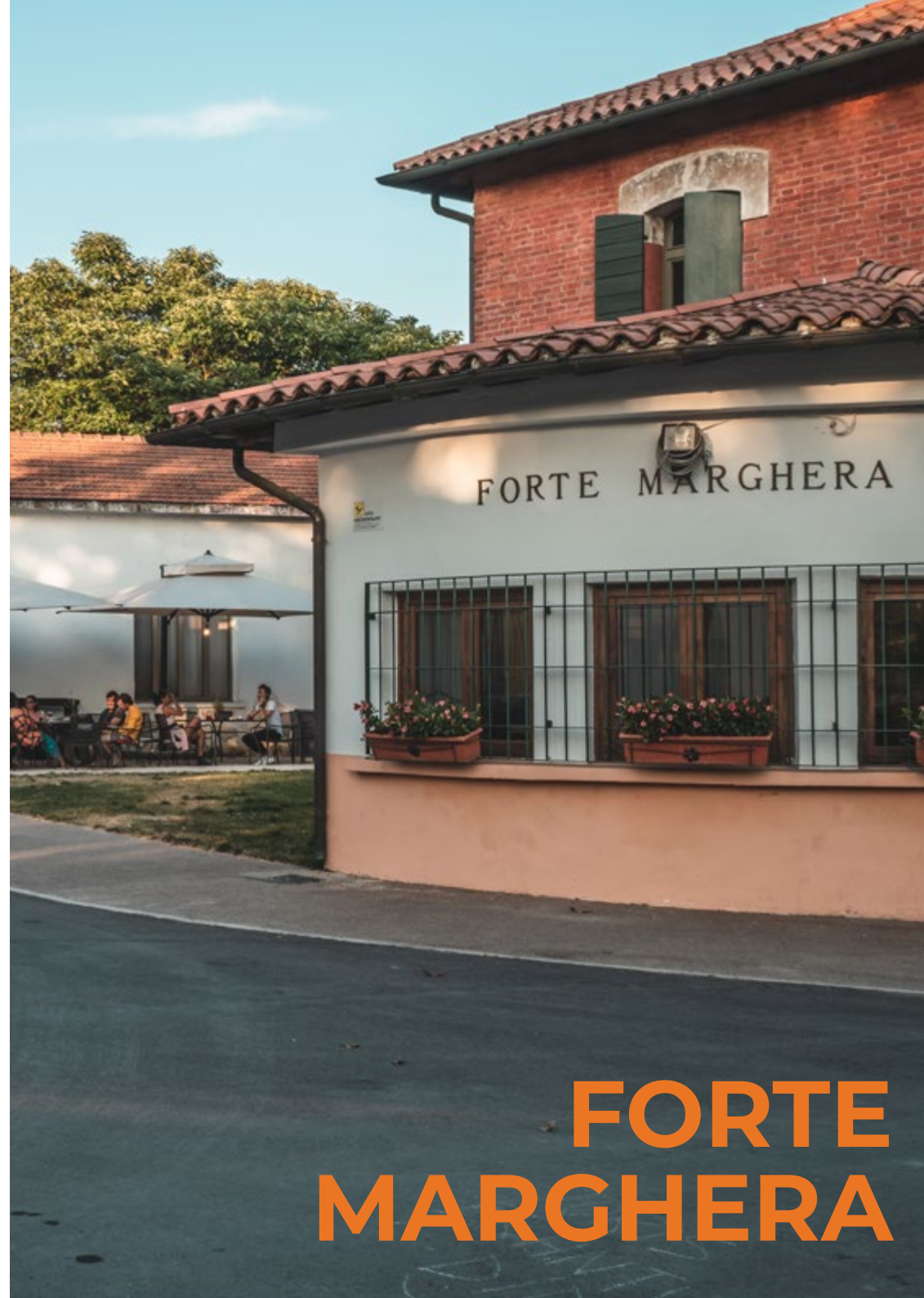
The name comes from the ancient town of Marghera, after which modern Porto Marghera is named too.

Property of the Municipality of Venice, it is used as a public park, and a venue for events and cultural productions. It is a beautiful old and lively village where you can go for the many activities related to the Biennale of Venice, but also for three delicious little restaurants, each one different in style and menu: a fairly rustic steakhouse, a pizzeria and a fine bistrot, where you can taste dishes that have been creatively reinvented from classical and local cuisine.

From April to September you can also come here for the concerts organized every evening from Tuesday to Sunday.

The fortress is managed by Forte Marghera Foundation, and the restaurants are run

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# FORTE MARGHERA





by a social cooperative. We highly recommend a visit for lunch, dinner or aperitif. Closed on Mondays.

The tour continues toward **Parco San Giuliano** where you follow a beautiful bike path surrounded by green and trees, with Venice in sight, running along a canal where Mestre residents tie up their boats.

This cycle path soon turns into a wide path in the open countryside, taking you to **Forte Bazzera**, a powder keg built in 1910 to reinforce the defenses of the entrenched system, and the only one to have survived intact in structure with a moat, lightning rods and sentry-boxes.

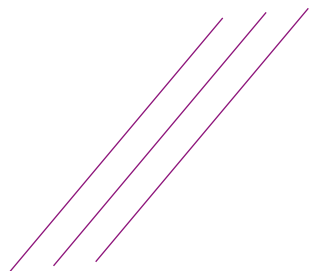
Set between the **Bazzera and Osellino-Marzenego canals**, Forte Bazzera is a natural bridge between rural environment

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# FORTE BAZZERA







and the lagoon ecosystem. Abandoned for years and used as a junkyard, the area has been reclaimed and converted, and now hosts theatrical and musical events, fairs and markets, waiting to become a lagoon park.

The third fortress on this tour is **Forte Cosenz**, once a powder keg, too. You can reach a nearby refreshment point by following a beautiful cycle path, part of our “woods and gardens” tour. Just mind that in via Lazzaretto you will find yourself on a main road with traffic.

The following fortress is **Forte Carpenedo**, worth an extended visit. You might even consider making a reservation for a guided tour.

The association that manages the fort - ten volunteers and four employees - is made up of historians and enthusiasts who are happy to share all the beauty, history and secrets of the building.

They also run a bar. They will welcome you warmly at the entrance, proudly identifying their activity as a “a social business, where profits are reinvested in improve-

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# FORTE CARPANEDO





ments and renovation of the area". You might want to experience a "special tour" and listen to historical accounts, surprising anecdotes and stories, and have a complete visit of the building.

You will learn the full history of this fort, which was built at the end of the 19th century, inspired by the forts designed by Austrian Colonel A.

Tunkler (also called of Prussian type). It is part of what is known as Campo Trincerato di Mestre, a widespread system of fortresses on land (in addition to one on the lagoon). Tunkler designed his forts with the surrounding territory in mind, exploiting whatever aspect could be functional to the fortress, intervening on the environment to camouflage the architecture and influencing agriculture by binding farmers with specific obligations and prohibitions.

The purpose of this fortress was to defend Venice, its port and especially the military

# FORTE CARPENEDO

Arsenal from any attack coming from the mainland.

To enter the fortress you will cross the bridge (a drawbridge at the time) walking under a large and solemn portal, absolutely not camouflaged.

This is the rear entrance, where there is no need to hide, while on the opposite side the building was hidden from the sight of those arriving: everything was designed to keep watch from the inside and see as far as possible without being seen.

On the sides you can see one of the 4 caponiers that allowed soldiers to defend the entrance from the narrow vertical slits. You then access the central body of the building, called central traverse hall, where the logistics was based: headquarters, various service and office rooms, infirmary, tailor workshop.

Along the front of the fort and on the sides, there are dormitories, kitchens, ammunition depots and a stable. These rooms are all connected to a single traverse hall 350 meters long that runs through the entire building. The stairs that wind along the corridor lead to the attack area and the artillery positions.

Extensive and fascinating, the tour is more like a journey through time. Rooms and settings have been reconstructed to the last detail by volunteers with millimetric precision. In the infirmary, for example, you will find medical instruments, as well as crutches and stretchers for the wounded, and bandages too!

The canteen, stables and dormitories have a very strong evocative power as well, just like the stories about the life of soldiers, living inside that dark and closed space, ventilated only by effective air intakes...



**DIRT  
FORTE  
BAZZERA**







Tour guides talk with passion and knowledge, taking visitors back to those distant times.

There are so many curiosities and details that you could spend hours listening to them! For example, you will learn that the numbers that appear, with a regular pattern, on the walls were used to indicate muster points even to the illiterate, who were very numerous at the time.

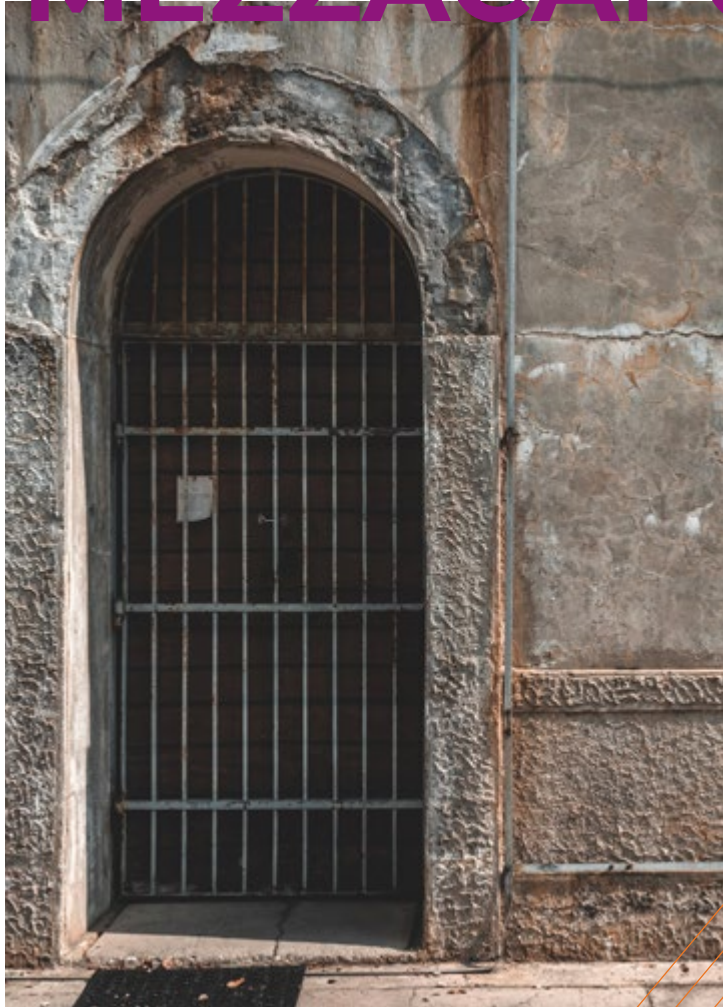
You will hear that the fort was designed to protect ammunition, beasts and men in this order. And that floors were made of solid wood fixed only with copper nails because copper is the only material that wouldn't spark under the iron heels of soldiers' boots: in a powder keg you couldn't certainly risk any sparks! At the end of the tour you will also see something that very rare at the time, even in aristocratic man-

**WOOD  
CARPENEDO**





# FORTE MEZZACAPO



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sion: latrines! It was a real luxury to have this kind of “service” inside the building and not in the open air...

And then, out you go, excited and amazed like children, to keep on with the tour of the outer areas.

The fortress area is partly located in the **Carpenido Woods**, an environment with unique and valuable characteristics.

Walking on the trail that follows the perimeter of Forte Carpenedo, you can make some truly unexpected naturalistic discoveries, particularly extraordinary considering that you are a handful of kilometers from the city center and urban traffic.

For sure birds are the animals that you can most easily observe and listen to, especially during the migration seasons: spring and autumn.

Before leaving you will probably get to meet Gino, a very nice coypu adopted (and christened) by volunteers of the forte. Gino usually goes around with ducks - probably believing to be one of them - and all are part of the Carpenedo family!

It's now time to head towards Zelarino in the direction of Forte Mezza-



capo, twin building to Forte Carpenedo. Here there are two points of interest to consider: the Museo della Civiltà Contadina (Museum of Peasant Civilization) inside, and the Ronda dell'Arte, once the soldiers' patrol route running about a kilometer all around the fortified building, today an open-air museum with sculptures, art installations and "land art" scattered in the park, thanks to art critic Gaetano Salerno, curator of this project.

Cycling along via **Forte Gazzera**, a dirt road with very little traffic, you then get to Forte Gazzera, the first of Carpenedo twin fortresses, actually the original one. Managed by the Gazzera Cooperative since 1998, it is mainly used as a picnic area by families and groups of people in the warm season.

Leaving Forte Gazzera pay great caution to the pretty busy roads (a cycle path is under construction) that take you back to Mestre station, just where you started your trip.

It is advisable to plan your tour of the fortresses on days with mild, not too hot, weather to fully enjoy the journey and the views of Venice in the background, taking time to visit the most interesting and rich in history, getting a glimpse of the others while passing by and enjoying all that Forte Marghera can offer – high-society lifestyle included.

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# FORTE GAZZERA



## EL TRAMESIN, BEST SNACK FOR THE VENETIAN APERITIF

by Germana Cabrelle

Start with sliced bread and mayonnaise; then cut in triangles and put one on top of the other, or roll in a cylinder, after stuffing generously with tasty combinations of top quality ingredients such as ham and mushrooms; eggs with asparagus; tuna fish with olives and onions.

Not to forget the veggie-friendly and very much Italian – in terms of color – mozzarella, tomato and lettuce. We are talking, of course, about tramezzino, the Italian snack by definition, a kind of sandwich that can very well be thought of as a forerunner of street food. You can find tramezzini anywhere in Italy, and according to gourmands in Mestre you'll find excellent ones. Keep in mind, though, that the 'geographic' paternity for this snack goes to Piemonte, to be precise to a coffee bar in Torino; whereas the name – literally 'tiny in-between' – goes to the poet Gabriele d'Annunzio, not new to inventing neologisms, who wanted to give the idea of something to eat in-between meals.

El **tramesin**, as they call it in Venetian dialect, has definite characteristics: first of all, the bread. It must be soft, milk-flavored, with no crust around, and moist enough to almost melt inside the mouth without need for chewing, thanks to the mayonnaise. And the sandwich must be so abundantly stuffed as to take on a rounded shape.

So beautiful, stuffed and tasty, the best tramezzini-makers were, and still are according to gourmand and connoisseurs, from Mestre. But don't be afraid: you'll eat excellent tramezzini in Venice, too!





### CICCHETTO, A STANDING FOOD BREAK

Etymologically speaking, cicchetto is the small no-stem glass with a thick bottom traditionally used in spirit sampling. In some bacari, old-time Venitian wine bars, it is still used especially to taste wine along with warm mini-meatballs.

In time and by synecdoche, in Venice and Mestre the word cicchetto became to be referred to a quick and tasty appetizer associated with a glass of wine, the so-called ombra, or spritz.

There are different types of cicchetti, from marinated anchovies on toast or the already mentioned boiled meatball seasoned with Parmesan and nutmeg to a slice of bread with creamy codfish on top, or a taste of sarde in saor (agrodolce sardines with onions), or boiled musky octopus.

The specific Venitian tradition is to consume it during a break while standing in one of the many bacari or other food bars hidden along the canals. Perfect finger food: no need to cut it in pieces; no need to sit down at a table.



# RECIPE

## MOECHE, THE (VERY EXPENSIVE) DELICACY SOUGHT AFTER BY FINEST FOODIES

by Germana Cabrelle

The moeca is not a species but a stage in the life cycle of crabs. Only the most expert fishermen of the lagoon can recognize it. It is a secret they won't reveal, having learned it from their fathers and grandfathers, and especially in their own experience on board the boats that go out to sea at dawn. This shellfish can only be found 4 months a year, in April and May, and in October and November.

Also called "Venetian nuggets", moecas are the juicy, very popular and expensive crabs (they cost as much as oysters!) to be tasted fried. From the sorting of a big bag full of crabs you can get just a kilo.

Breeding of these special crabs is done by fishermen called molecanti. Their job, something in between breeding and fishing, goes back to the 18th century and is typical of the Venetian lagoon. Working back and forth from fishing boats to casoni (typical huts with hay roof), these men can be called with good reason the guardians of a centuries-old tradition.

## MOECHE: WHERE THEY LIVE, AND HOW THEY END UP... IN THE PAN

Sandy seabed and brackish waters are the ideal home to these highly prized shellfish. Their large, flattened bodies that molt in spring and autumn leaving their old shell and building a new one. Their average length ranges from 6 to 7 centimeters and color varies between green and grey. They are rich in Omega 3 oils but - be careful - also in cholesterol.

The main recipe of the Venetian culinary tradition provides that moecas must be plunged in beaten egg yolk still alive - so that they can ingest some of the egg - then dipped in flour and finally fried.

A long kitchen routine that adds up to the expensive bill of any restaurant.





# VIDEO EXPERIENCE



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