

The LUXX list

Private boat trips, Italian castles and this summer's best new boutique hotels. By Lisa Grainger

THE NEW CANAL TOUR →

Mauro Stoppa knew two things as a boy: that he loved the Venice lagoons on which he would spend summer days with his father exploring the backwaters and islands on their boat; and that he could happily spend all day cooking with his mother and grandmother. Today the 64-year-old combines his passions, taking up to 16 guests on one to three-day explorations of the smaller islands of the Venice archipelago on his 17m fishing boat and feeding them delicious contemporary Venetian dishes.

While accommodation in the outer islands had previously not been elegant enough to warrant taking guests out for more than a day's excursion, the recent opening of designer hotels on Burano (Casa Burano) and Mazzorbo (Venissa), and the new ownership of a 17th-century inn in the northern fishing "valleys" has allowed him to create a three-day itinerary. Although these islands are just an hour's slow cruise from Venice, they feel a world away – wide, flat, watery landscapes inhabited by flamingos, bee-eaters and thousands of waders and ducks, with an occasional terracotta-coloured fisherman's house or old cathedral spire breaking the skyline.

Because Stoppa grew up in Venice he knows the best people to guide guests round the places where the boat stops, including the museum on Lazzaretto Vecchio to see the place where quarantine was invented (originating from *quaranta* or 40 – the number of days that ships had to stay there before taking goods into Venice), on Burano for a guided tour through the candy-coloured houses, or at the Venetian-Byzantine Torcello cathedral with its exquisite Murano glass mosaics. His real love, though, is cooking lunches for guests on his floating home, alongside a fellow chef, with



ISLAND LIFE

Clockwise from above: the restored Eolo fishing boat; Burano island; the crew cooks lunch on board

ingredients fresh from the Rialto market and specialist island shops (salami and vegetables from Sant'Erasmo island, cheese from Casa del Parmigiano in Venice, "the best in the city"). A menu may consist of aperitivo of salami-wrapped pickled vegetables, asparagus tempura, a herb risotto, rabbit with raisins and pinenuts and fresh strawberry mousse – all accompanied by wines from the area, including a delicious Marco Sambin pink prosecco made from merlot grapes.

While the boat is comfortable, the real luxuries are the sense of space you get after the crowded canals of Venice and, after a long sunny day of exploring by boat, landing at a very comfortable hotel from which to explore a new destination at leisure. *From £1,763 for three days, including hotels, food and drink; a one-day, eight-hour trip into the lagoons, including an excursion to the market, on-board cooking lesson and a four-course lunch, costs from £440 per person.*

