

Cruising San Diego, Venetian Style

By Stephanie Levin-Gervasi

American Way - Sojourns

Mamma mia, it's a pleasing sight: sleek black gondolas traversing the waters under a starlit sky to the strains of Verdi and Puccini. Venice, Italy? No, it's San Diego, California, where the city's new Gondola di Venezia is making quite a splash.

Faced with a fifteen-year waiting period for authentic Venetian gondolas, proprietor and gondolier Doug Bothwell settled on the next best thing. Rimming through Italian court documents, he stumbled upon a blueprint for a traditional thirty-six-foot gondola. With respect for the 1562 Venetian decree keeping the flat-bottom boats gaudy-free, Bothwell painted his small fleet Venetian black and decorated each vessel with a ferro (its forks representing the seven districts of Venice) and a brass sea horse.

This is the New World, nevertheless, and Gondola di Venezia adheres to some Southern California comforts. As you cruise past a palm-studded landscape, you can nibble on hors d'oeuvres, sip chilled glasses of vino, and soak up all the romance you can handle. In fact, there have been more than thirty-five marriage proposals aboard Bothwell's gondolas already. Now that's amore!

Rides are \$62 for two people, \$17 for each additional passenger. For reservations call (619) 221-2999.