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Sweet travel advice for independent travellers

Avoid being ripped off in Venice (and other places)

Transcript 020

June 2007

Craig: Hi, I'm Craig

Linda: And I'm Linda

Craig: Welcome to the Indie Travel Podcast at www.indietravelpodcast.com. Recorded, this week, in Wiener Neustadt, Austria.

Linda: This is show number 20, can you believe it?

Craig: I do - sometimes it seems like a long time! On this week's show we're talking about how to avoid being ripped off after our weekend trip to Venice.

Linda: But before we get started, it must be time to welcome our new subscribers. Either something's terribly wrong with our stats program, or there's a whole load of new listeners who have subscribed over the last week. So welcome.

Craig: Yeah, giddyay. We're independent travellers ourselves and we've been on the road for almost 18 months now - we're trying to pass on a brief tip every week. We like to keep it short and simple, publishing each Friday. On the second Friday of the month we review a product or service that we've used and on the last Friday of the week we feature an interview with someone interesting we've met along the way. Of course, everything we say's coloured by our own travel experiences, but we do try and make things reasonably universal, so these tips are helpful no matter where you're from or where you're going.

Linda: Hopefully anyway! Our website's at www.indietravelpodcast.com and you can find out more about us there as well as downloading transcripts of most shows. We've also got a blog where we document our travels if you'd like to have a look -- it's www.mars-hill.co.nz/blog, we'll have a link in the show notes.

Craig: So, let's get into it: We celebrated Linda's birthday in Venice last Saturday and we had a great time with a couple of new friends. Unfortunately we walked out of

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several bars with a lot less money than we thought we would.

Linda: Venice is obviously never going to be cheap! And I don't think any independent traveller -- or any traveller at all really -- will begrudge paying for a great experience, however we did feel very ripped off when we paid more than we expected.

Craig: So our first rule, is to assume nothing. We lunched at a nice little restaurant where the advertised wines were cheap and the meals reasonable. Unfortunately two mid-sized beers set us back 7.50 each ... when wine, which was advertised, was about 2.50 a glass. Just because some things are cheap doesn't mean everything else will be. Even when language problems are going to embarrass you, do check for unseen prices.

Linda: Despite the meal being good, and the atmosphere being fine, it wasn't worth the 2.50 - two euros fifty - per person service charge. Especially when the service price wasn't advertised anywhere.

Craig: Rule two - in such a tourist-centric place, check for hidden costs. Some places we looked at were charging both service charges and cover charges ... and I'm just not too sure what the difference is ...

Linda: I think the difference is about 2.50 per person.

Craig: Uh-huh. So, anyway, it pays to check.

Linda: So we learned from our mistakes at lunch, and carefully negotiated our way through dinner - we had a great meal and paid what we expected to.

Craig: Yeah, this is not about being cheap, it's about how much money you think you'll spend.

Linda: Yeah, we had a great time at dinner. After dinner we met up with some friends who were also in Venice and headed out to a cafe/bar. We choose one on the corner of a nice piazza with outdoor seating and friendly looking staff. We're in a bit of a lean period at the moment, so we settled for soft drinks - after checking

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the label on the fridge which said they were 2.50, we had a really good time with our friends, outdoors in Venice.

Craig: Yeah, it was beautiful. There were some problems when we went to pay. The menus that our friends had looked at, and the prices on the fridge, were apparently only for takeaway drinks.

Linda: That wasn't mentioned anywhere though.

Craig: And I'm not sure how many people would want to take away a glass of wine. But, since we had sat down we had to pay according to the other menu. This menu was hung on the side of the door where none of us had seen it and it meant our two cans of soft drink went from 5 euros to 9 euros. One could buy about 10 litres of soft drink for that price. Or a very nice bottle of wine in most Italian restaurants!

Linda: Rule number three, then, to avoid being ripped off in heavily touristed areas is to remember rule number one: assume nothing. Look stupid, ask dumb questions and find stuff out ... and check for hidden menus as well ... And I guess tip four kind of goes without saying...

Craig: They're hidden ... they're difficult to find.

Linda: Well, see if you can find them! And I guess tip four kind of goes without saying anyway ... go with a local friend and take their advice or, if you don't have a friend, try to be as un-touristy as possible. Try the local language before resorting to English, even if you sound stupid, try to fit in as much as you can. Look for restaurants filled with locals, even if they're a bit more drab. And also, in Venice, quite a lot of restaurants have a "tourist menu", which sounds awful but is usually a two or three-course meal for a fair price, and the price includes the service charge and cover charges.

Craig: I think the most important thing though is not to stress out too much about it. You're there to have a good time and, while you don't want to be leaking money, you don't want to be stressed about every euro or paranoid about getting ripped off. This post isn't about saving money; it's about meeting your expectations.

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Linda: And for shop owners and service staff - make sure you give the customer what they expect for the price they expect. We'll be back in Venice - there's no question about that - and now there's another three places that we won't be going back to and won't be getting our cash ... and a couple that will. So, in summary, Rule one: Assume nothing.

Craig: Rule two: Check for hidden costs - by asking outright.

Linda: Rule three: Remember rule number one.

Craig: Rule four: Make a local friend and follow their lead. So that's us for show 20 - avoid being ripped onff in Venice (and other tourist locations). If you've got something to add, drop by www.indietravelpodcast.com where you can leave a comment under the show notes, or email us mail@indietravelpodcast.com.

Linda: And until next week, travel well.

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