

# A Policeman's Venice

This beguiling city takes on a new aura of intrigue when you peek behind its touristy mask to glimpse the Venice captured by international crime writer Donna Leon

By Wendy and Rob Lindsay

Vaporetti on the Grand Canal.

We had long dreamed of visiting Venice, but after our friend Jan introduced us to the wonderfully literate crime novels of Donna Leon, we were even more entranced. American-born but Venetian by choice for the past 25 years, Leon weaves evocative descriptions of the city throughout her 16 novels—the 17th, *The Girl of His Dreams*, is to be released in May—and her enduring and endearing protagonist, police commissioner (*commissario*) Guido Brunetti, is an intriguing guide as he walks his city in pursuit of justice:

*He was a surprisingly neat man. Tie carefully knotted. Hair shorter than was the fashion. Even his ears lay close to his head as if reluctant to call attention to themselves. His clothing marked him as Italian. The cadence of his speech announced that he was Venetian. His eyes were all policeman. (Death at La Fenice)*

After what seemed years of planning, we finally arrived in Venice by train last summer. From the station, we hauled our luggage aboard a vaporetto (water bus) for the first of many trips down the Grand Canal, the watery main street of Venice. It was June, before the main tourist rush of July and August, yet the Grand Canal was a crowded highway of water taxis, gondo-

las, launches, and vaporetti—an exciting place to be.

The canal waters lapped at the very walls of the unbroken sequence of palaces, hotels, and churches lining both sides of the canal in a splendid profusion of colour and centuries. Most looked solid and in good repair despite what we'd read about the city crumbling and slowly sinking. However, when we looked more closely through the camera lens, here and there were patches and crumbling bits and a few old dowagers showing their age. Later that evening, the scene had changed....

*...these were the hours when, for Brunetti, the city became most beautiful, just*



*as they were the same hours when he, Venetian to the bone, could sense some of her past glory. The darkness of the night hid the moss that crept up the steps of the palazzi lining the Grand Canal, obscured the cracks in the walls of churches, and covered the patches of plaster missing from the facades of public buildings. Like*

Gondolas waiting for tourists.