

6th International Universities Palio-RegataStorica di Venezia 2017

The Regatta Storica is a celebration of Venetian heritage as one of the most influential and powerful Maritime Republics in the Mediterranean. The first Sunday of each September the Grand Canal sees itself transformed as a historical water pageant with roots dating back to the 16th century takes over the city, culminating in a series of side by side races; one of which being the International University Palio.

For the fifth year, a mixed team from the University of Warwick Boat Club were delighted to accept the invitation to Venice to take part in the university rowing challenge over the course of the weekend.

After being warmly welcomed by Anna, a member of the University of Venice Ca'Foscariteam on the Friday, we were soon settled into our accommodation on Giudecca, just south of the centre of Venice and only a short waterbus journey from all the sights.



After the torrential rain on Friday night, by Saturday morning we were dry and ready to test the water and go out for a practice in the Venetian-style galleons. We were met at the Ca'Foscari Boathouse by Sergio, who was wonderful in showing us the ropes. He helped us to launch the 800kg vessel and reminded us that we had superior Italian prosecco to look forward to after the rowing was all over. Sergio's tips were greatly appreciated, as although this season we have proved ourselves in carbon fibre lightweight shells, the galleon boats were a totally different kettle of fish.



The warm Italian hospitality continued as Ca'Foscari treated us to lunch before the preliminary races that took place in the afternoon. We were pleased to be supported in the launch by Gillian, Ingrid and Chiara, administrators from the University of Warwick and directors of the Warwick in Venice Programme.

The results of the afternoon decided structure of Sunday's concluding races, which saw Warwick placed in the B final against the University of Padova, whilst the home team University of Venice Ca'Foscari were to be up against the University of Vienna in the A final.

Once again, we were treated to Venice's finest cuisine on Saturday evening, with all teams taking part in a dinner along the canal. Unfortunately the weather in Venice was a little more temperamental, and a series of spectacular thunderstorms and lightning flashes led to us all making a quick dash to take cover and finish the dinner inside the Ca'Foscari University building. (It is at this stage that we would like to thank the organisers and leaders for their quick thinking!)

Sunday was the day of which we were all waiting for with much anticipation. After having time to explore the city in more depth in the morning, we made our way to the Ca'Foscari Palace, which was the hub of the Venetian University. It was at that moment that we realised the enormous scale of the RegataStorica as we were brought out to a balcony behind the Italian national television cameras and the famous 'machina' (a spectacular floating stage in front of the palace), which would be our finish line. We began to watch the

crowds filling up the banks of the canal and as the historical procession began we tried our best to keep our nerve and contain our excitement.

As we strapped our feet into the boat and pushed off around the corner towards the Rialto bridge (which would be our start line) the electric atmosphere of the city became quickly apparent. Although the crew have raced at other prestigious rowing events with big crowds, the Regata Storica was altogether something else. The buzz of the Italians celebrating their heritage in a carnival manner certainly had our adrenaline pumping as we paddled up the canal.

After waiting for the final gondolas in the procession to pass, the Padova crew and ourselves turned round and lined up under the Rialto Bridge. Our start was strong, with Warwick using our tactic of speedy hands to get out of the blocks quick and establish a lead. There was a true Venetian-style course obstruction when a gondola strayed into the path of the University of Padova, causing their oars to clash with ours. We remained strong and came out of the blade battle still in the lead. It was evident however that Padova's tactics and experience in the old-style boats were superior and having paced themselves from the start they began to overhaul Warwick and finished slightly ahead on the line.

Regardless, the experience of taking part in this spectacle was absolutely unforgettable. The spirit of friendship and competition amongst all the crews of different nationalities made the Regatta a unique international event. The event concluded that evening back at the Ca'Foscari palace with the presentation ceremony and Sergio's long-promised prosecco.

Finally, the following morning team members were invited by Chiara (Warwick in Venice programme coordinator) to look around the Palazzo Pesaro-Papafava, Warwick's teaching facility in a stunning gothic-style 15th century building in the heart of Venice.

Overall, the rowing squad would like to thank all the organisers and sponsors both in Venice and at Warwick, as well as the Erasmus scheme for such a fantastic opportunity to meet and competewith other crews on an international level. We have all absolutely loved taking part in the Universities Palio, and gaining an insight into the Warwick in Venice programme at the Palazzo.



The hospitality and welcome we have received both on and off the water this weekend has been phenomenal, it is such a wonderful event to be a part of and we are all very grateful. The Warwick in Venice partnership truly is something to be celebrated and encouraged, and as a rowing team we are proud to be involved.

By Orla Miller (UWBC)

