

Inundated Venice braced for more flooding, strong winds

16 November 2019, by Sonia Logre With Charles Onians In Rome



Venice's mayor ordered the iconic St Mark's Square closed as the latest sea surge struck

Venice was on red alert for more floods and fierce winds on Saturday after an exceptionally high tide swamped the city of canals, where authorities have declared a state of emergency.

Mayor Luigi Brugnaro ordered the iconic St Mark's Square closed on Friday as the latest sea surge struck with strong storms and winds battering the region.

It reached a high of 1.54 metres (five feet) just before midday—lower than Tuesday's peak but still dangerous.

"I'm forced to close the square to avoid health risks for citizens... a disaster," Brugnaro said.

In the afternoon the square reopened as [water levels](#) receded.

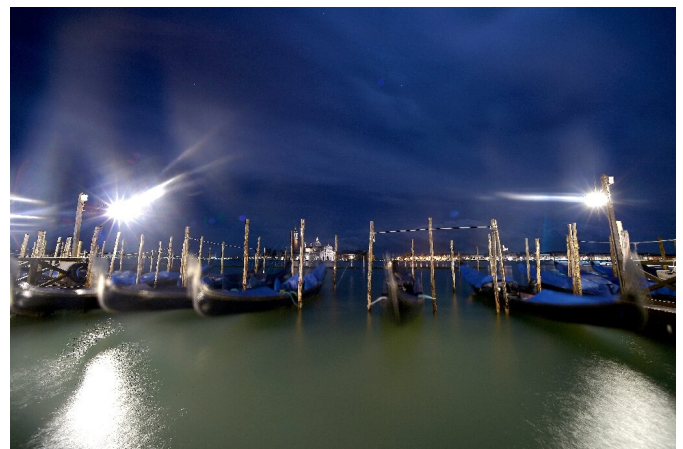
But civil protection authorities issued a weather "red alert" for the Venice region on Saturday, warning of violent winds.

Churches, shops and homes in the UNESCO [city](#) have been inundated by unusually intense "acqua alta", or [high water](#), which on Tuesday hit their highest level in half a century.

"We've destroyed Venice, we're talking about one billion (euros) in damage and that's just from the other day, not today," Brugnaro said.

The crisis has prompted the government to release 20 million euros (\$22 million) in funds to tackle the devastation.

"It's shocking to see this, having [water](#) up to your knees," Mexican tourist Oscar Calzada, 19, told AFP Friday.



Churches, shops and homes in the city have been inundated by unusually intense "acqua alta", or high water

Surveying the damage, Culture Minister Dario Franceschini warned the task of repairing the city would be huge. More than 50 churches had suffered damage, he said.

"Seeing these places first-hand gives the sense of

a much greater disaster than TV images show," Franceschini said.

Hotel reservations cancelled

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte declared a state of emergency for the city on Thursday.

Residents whose houses have been hit are eligible for up to 5,000 euros in immediate government aid, while restaurant and shop owners can receive up to 20,000 euros and apply for more later.

Mayor Brugnarò on Friday also announced the opening of a fund where people in Italy and around the world could contribute to the historic city's repair.

One tourist, Italian Nicole Righetti, said she would be willing to pitch in.



The crisis, driven by bad weather, has prompted the government to release 20 million euros (\$22 million) in funds to tackle the devastation

"It would be a shame to no longer be able to see these places, and I think everyone should give," Righetti said.

Some Venetians, used to the inconvenience of their city's rising waters, nevertheless expressed frustration.

"All the stock in the basement is lost," lamented Luciano, a worker at a shop along St. Mark's Square.

He said he remembered well the infamous "acqua alta" of 1966, when the water rose to a level of 1.94 metres, the highest-ever since records began in 1923.

Floods close Saint Mark's Square



Satellite map of central Venice locating St Mark's Square

"These so frequent high waters have never happened before... this time there's so much more damage than in the past," he said.

Hotels reported cancelled reservations, some as far ahead as December, following the widespread diffusion of images of Venice underwater.

Climate change warning

Tuesday's high waters submerged around 80 percent of the city, officials said.



Venice is home to some 50,000 residents but receives 36 million global visitors each year.

Many, including Venice's mayor, have blamed the disaster on [global warming](#) and warned that the country prone to natural disasters must wake up to the risks posed by ever more volatile seasons.

The Serenissima, as the floating city is called, is home to 50,000 residents but receives 36 million global visitors each year.

A massive infrastructure project called MOSE has been under way since 2003 to protect the city, but it has been plagued by cost overruns, corruption scandals and delays.

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