

Rain boots for high water

62

In Venice in fall and winter, you'd better not leave home without your rain boots. This isn't because of the rain, though—during this time of year, the sea rises rapidly, sometimes by as much as 5 ft. (1.5 m), and floods the whole city.

In the mornings, the sound of sirens announces that the **acqua alta**, or "high water," is approaching. The sea enters **St. Mark's Square**, houses, and shops.

Vaporetti have to change routes because they do not fit under some bridges. The main streets and squares have special footbridges so that you can get around without your feet getting soaked. But if you want to use the side streets, you have to wear rubber boots. You drink espresso in your boots. You go to the movies in your boots. No one is surprised to see businessmen and businesswomen in suits and tall rubber fishing boots. In these seasons, they're the most fashionable shoes in Venice.

But hopefully they won't be needed for much longer. After many years of effort, engineers have come up with a way to stop Venice from flooding. They are building a dam system of 78 hinged gates that will rise up and separate the city from the sea when the tide comes in.

One thing that causes the tides is the **sirocco**—a strong southern wind. In the spring it brings in sandy dust clouds from the African deserts. In the fall it brings rain, often accompanied by thick fog. Sometimes it also blows during winter, which causes snowfall colored with red dust.

63

