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# Genevolution - Italian City Looks To Open It's Arms To The World After Recent Bridge Tragedy



**Christian Johnston** Contributor ⓘ

Travel

*Exploring new frontiers and the forces that shape them*

This last September during an unusually warm mid-morning, 43 names were read aloud echoing across the main Piazza De Ferrari Square in Genoa, Italy. Respectful applause was mixed with women and men quietly in tears and made for a somber mood at the 30-day memorial of the bridge collapse that killed 43 people. The Prime Minister of Italy, Giuseppe Conte, was greeted with some rumblings of skepticism as he promised to bring quick national aid and repairs. He was followed by Genoa Mayor Marco Bucci who was met with light accord as he spoke somberly, with words of humility and hope. Finally, opera singer Fabio Armiliato lifted morale as he closed the memorial with the operatic words.



Bridge collapse memorial services at Piazza De Ferrari SHELBY KNICK

The one-month memorial was a chance to see Genoans come together and demonstrate the Ligurian strength and resilience that they are known for. Mayor Bucci expressed hopes that this timeless city will move forward wisely. Genoa is often overlooked as a city but the recent bridge collapse tragedy allows it a rare chance to rebuild, destruction can be the mother of creation.

Opening its arms through the shrouded veil that has concealed it for years, it now invites the West to rediscover Southern Europe's forgotten maritime hub. With an even more recent train disaster, Genoa is faced with many challenges that require a carefully laid out plan, with realistic goals.



Bridge collapse memorial services at Piazza De Ferrari SHELBY KNICK

I made my way down an ancient stairway to a gorgeous coastal marine fishing village on the Eastern edge of the city called

Boccadasse just as the sun was setting. I was here to meet up with Mayor Bucci's assistant Matteo Garnero prior to my more formal meeting with the Mayor himself the following morning. The restaurant where we were meant to meet appears to be in a hidden picturesque little place most would never know how to find. As I walked through the narrow streets teaming with end of day conversations of the Genovese drinking aperitivo's, I was reminded how 2 years ago I came through Genoa only to quickly transit to a ferry en route to Sardinia, not realizing any of the real potential here.

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We were seated in a little historic square on the edge of the fishing village at a restaurant that had apparently been around in some form or other for 200 years. Matteo expanded a bit about the plans they had to invite the outside world in to be a part of this move to rebuild after the horrific bridge collapse. The disaster has apparently created a moral battle, compounded with a mounting logistical challenge. The bridge represented a major artery between the important ship yard to the North, as well as the in-bound/out-boud traffic from France and beyond. The recent tragedy effects not only Milan and Turin but other supply to-cities to the North.



The fishing village of Boccadasse SHELBY KNICK

Matteo continued, “You will hear about some important things we have been trying to create in order to bring an anguished population a united Genoa, emerging stronger than ever!” He goes on to tell me how much the Mayor has done already, and how loved in part because he worked as a manager in the U.S for years. “He’s not a politician” everyone kept telling me as they feel the notorious bureaucracy in this city (and country) in the past has made for a skeptical populous. I finished my native fresh pesto dish with homemade “pansoti” (the local version of ravioli) as he tells me “it was all invented here, the pesto, the pansoti...” along with the banking industry, and the development of modern checking accounts. “It was Genoa that finally financed Columbus’s expedition to the New World (He was funded by the Queen of Spain, whose money resided in the banks of Genoa). “There is so much history here, but we have been a closed city for a very long time. It is time the world can see the real Genoa.” I glanced out from the historical cobblestone port restaurant as the warm breeze began to cool a bit and the sun faded over this perfect turquoise fisherman’s bay. I looked around and didn’t see a single person on their phone, I also realized how I haven’t seen any real western tourists.

I took a stroll back to my Hotel Palazzo Grillo in the old city to grab another notebook and finish writing some questions for the Mayor. The hotel was built in 1545 by the Domenico Grillo and last year it’s renovations were finished and

perfectly preserves so well its original features that made it a symbol of the Genoese upper class of the sixteenth century.



Hotel Palazzo Grillo HOTEL PALAZZO GRILLO

The authentic Italian cafe culture just washes over you in any direction of the Palazzo Grillo. In many ways these treasures seem to be tucked deep beyond what most people would see. I am mostly curious just how much the Mayor and the locals want this city to change.

The following day I had a chance to spend an hour with the much loved Mayor Marco Bucci, himself. His busy schedule had him running around with back to back meetings and he was pressured from all sides to perform miracles. He has been diligently preparing a detailed three-point reconstruction plan that he hopes to implement quickly. From the modest conference room that serves as his outer office his “every man” charm is apparent. “It has been a very difficult month for our city, but we are going to rebuild stronger. This city that has been illusive, hidden from the outside world. And now will open its arms to the world...We want to also invite new technology and new companies, try and inspire new industry into the city, also those who departed for one reason or another to return from elsewhere... Help revitalize the city’s business and financial sectors with a new outlook towards the future.” His passion seemed authentic, though one can only imagine the pressure to move mountains in a country often lethargic by western standards.

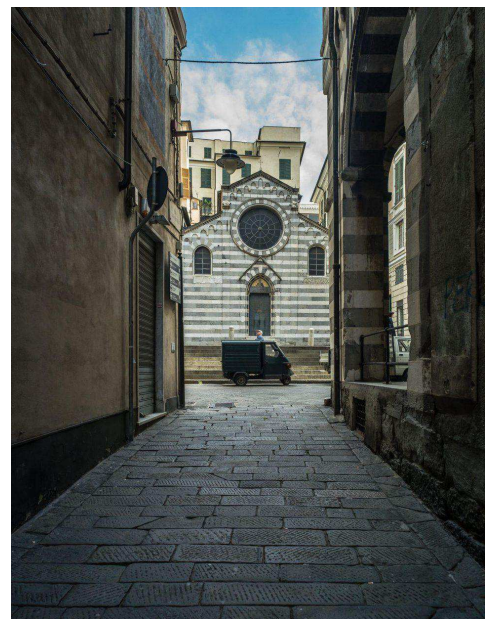
He spoke about how the coming year would bring a long-awaited speed rail line to connect Milan and Genoa in just under an hour and allow for even wider financial growth for the city in a significant way. It will allow the Milanese to commute or have branch offices in a city where real estate is extremely affordable. “We need more than just Milan to help us”.



Mayor Marco Bucci SHELBY KNICK

The need for foreign companies to invest into Genoa in order to help stabilize and potentially grow the economy in spite of the tremendous impact logistically of a major supply chain bottleneck. The Mayor showed me around his modest office wearing his sailboat tie (a symbol of their centuries old tradition). He pointed out the expansive window to the gorgeous medieval building rooftops, the office overlooks... and then the sea beyond. “This is where the New World discovery launched.” He explains the banking tradition here did more than just launch the Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria, this is where so many historical events began. This is where everything from blue jean denim and focaccia were first made. “There is so much to explore here, and we want this to be the rebirth of the future of the city.” We want to be a model for all other parts of Europe.” As the mayor was being hurried into three more scheduled events, he invited me to watch him and his fellow government heads on the “Administration Boat” during a historical sailing regatta that weekend and joked “Some people may wish it to sink, I think we will win.” The Mayor and his team rushed off to handle a myriad of other issues and I was given some of his tourism team to help show me around.

For lunch I am taken even deeper down the winding, never ending paths of Genoa’s medieval city then that seems to go on forever. One of the tourism department heads told me the “Walls and buildings are all so close together there can be no cars, and back during construction, it was to keep invaders out.” In a way it felt like the Medina of Marrakech or Grand Bazaar of Istanbul and it reminded my how the Mayor said the city was closed. We walked past so many things I wanted to see and explore that I but I was going to need a week, maybe a few weeks. Our lunch was a little hidden spot in the old town called “Sa Pesta”, extremely authentic, eight



Genoa's Old Town SHELBY KNICK

dollars for pasta, three dollars for wine. I kept thinking to myself how expensive this would be in LA, and how impossible it would be to find something like this with hordes in other cities like Florence.

In the afternoon the founder of one of the cities more successful festivals, (the Genoa Science Festival), Manuela Arata took me on a whirlwind tour to show the industry of the city. First was the prestigious IIT-Italian Institute of Technology where they are making astounding advancements in robotics among many other inventions. It is a massive facility that is expanding rapidly. Apparently it is one of the global magnets for students working in technology and science at the global level (attendees coming from 40 countries). From there we had a one hour tour of the massive port by boat. The strategic maritime hub sends and receives 2,6 million containers a year from the port.



Cavo established in 1780 SHELBY KNICK



Old Town Color SHELBY KNICK

*The Ports of Genoa and in part Savona, handle over a third of Italian seaborne imports/exports and over 60% of Northwestern Italian extra-EU containerized trade. Genoa's plans for the future are all in place to boost the port's leadership in the Mediterranean, and strengthen its position as centre of cargo handling excellence and as a modern logistics platform serving the industrial heartland of Europe. Today, the Ports of Genoa moves annually a total of approximately 70 million tons of cargo, whilst activities related to the ports generate an added value of 10 billion euros. - dr.ssa Antonella Rossi Autorità di Sistema Portuale del Mar Ligure Occidentale*

After exploring the few miles of port inlets to see how much room there is to grow, we set off to the headquarters of Ansaldo Energia. Ansaldo manufactures amongst many things, industrial turbines as well as other energy generators. Alessandra Bocchio Head of Development explained that AEN represents a sense of continuity from the last century as an hotbed of engineering talent, and has contributed in making Genoa an industrial hub today. Moreover, these solid



One of the many container ships each day in port SHELBY KNICK



foundations also signal a bright future for the city. This historic brand has a vast historical importance to the city further made poignant in that the facility happened to be less than 200 yards from the bridge collapse. We went to tour the southern part of the facility where we had a clear view of what was for so many years the central landscape feature with the bridge spanning high above the skyline. It was a chilling feeling walking on the closed road behind the factory to see with my own eyes the immense span of both sides perched high to the left and right missing the almost quarter mile in between. And on the road in front of me trucks and bulldozers continue to dig out the buildings underneath the rubble. Inside the factory the workers seem a bit unfazed, determined to drive forward.



Morandi Bridge SHELBY KNICK

Tourism has been elusive for Genoa considering that only 15 miles away sits the famous quaint port town of Portofino. The rich history of the Italian Riviera has it's fair share of mythology as a playground for the jetset since the 50's. A day trip by boat to Portofino was of course gorgeous but loses it's quiet allure to the din of loud western tourists and made me long for the more quiet... "real" places. It is one of those absolute post card images and no wonder why it's on everyone's wish list, but for me it's best to find your "Zen" in the smaller towns nearby and hiking trails like Punta Chiappa.

The San Fruttuoso monastery deep into the park inspired the likes of Lord Byron during his many long stays in gorgeous Stella Maris hotel perched on the cliffs. It is by far one of my favorite coastal hotels in the world as you can step back in time by way of a serene 20 minute train ride from the city.



San Fruttuoso Abbey SHELBY KNICK



Portofino SHELBY KNICK

My last day was spent at the Genoa boat show with all of its near 200k+ spectators and hundreds of yacht and sailing vendors showing no sign of effects from the recent gridlock fears. In the afternoon I was invited to an extraordinary regatta viewing at the house of the Anna Luisa Cameli whom I met through Francesca Centurione (London expat friend given the honorary title of Ambassador of Genoa by the Mayor). The gorgeous villa perched perfectly overlooking the brisk blue Mediterranean was a primo place for me to yet again feel as though I stumbled across a rare bit of Italian authenticity. The garden and poolside viewing party catered with fine Champagne and hors d'oeuvres had just the right amount of mix of new and old Genovese watching the regatta pass just off the stubbled cliffs, all basking in a late summers warm hue. This was the same regatta the Mayor asked that I might observe and as the 100 sailing boats went past including the “Administration boat” with the Mayor captaining along the spired great rock cliff walls and stately villas was running strong in the lead, and had not sunk (as he had joked). An almost novelistic metaphor for this great city. It’s not lost on this hardy group that they will be able to build stronger from this recent disaster and may even in many ways take the lead.



Regatta of the Ancient Maritime SHELBY KNICK



Renzo Piano Genoa Bridge Design RENZO PIANO

*Renzo Piano, a native of Genoa and the renowned architect behind the [new Whitney Museum](#) and the [Shard](#) in London, donated a design for the new bridge. It's designed to look like the bow of a ship, stretching for more than 3,600 feet over the Polcevera River. According to Piano: "The new bridge will have to be simple and parsimonious, but not trivial. It will look like a ship moored in the valley; a light and bright steel bridge."*

*Piano's design calls for 43 lamps that will cast sail-shaped light onto the deck—a poignant memorial for the 43 people who died during the collapse. The bridge, estimated to cost around \$230 million, is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2019.*

**Christian Johnston** Contributor

Outside the walls of a small mountain cabin in Colorado where I was raised, I knew there was a world that needed exploring. Armed with a camera, notepad and lots of good luck, I snuck into Afghanistan after 9/11 to document the hunt for Bin Laden, followed monks on a march f...

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