



# “Your Cities Do Not Exist”

## The City and The Imagination in Italo Calvino’s “Invisible Cities”

Spring 2025 Seminar (HUMC 394-01)

Cities physically exist, but are not the same for everyone who inhabits them, or everyone who visits them, or for those who have never been there but wish to go.

Students will read Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*. The Cities in the novel are imagined cities. The book is a series of conversations between the ruler Kublai Khan and the Venetian traveler Marco Polo who tells marvelous tales about the cities of the Khan’s empire. Cities and Memory, Cities and Desire, Thin Cities, Trading Cities, Hidden Cities: these are just some of the cities Polo describes. At points the Khan and the reader begin to suspect maybe these are all the same city. Or maybe all cities. *Invisible Cities* is beautiful, strange and puzzling. In this class we will explore the elaborate dream-like structure of the novel, its riff on and homage to travel writing, but more importantly, the question: what is a city? How is it different and the same for everyone who has ever lived in it, or visited it, or imagined it?

### Spring 2025 Seminar: HUMC 394-01

- Dates: Thursdays at 2-3:50 p.m.  
February 20; March 6, 20; April 3, 24, May 1 and 15.  
Saints Tekakwitha and Serra Hall, Room 200-F
- Instructor: Lisa B. Smith  
Department of English  
lsmith@sandiego.edu
- Details: One (1) unit of credit  
Pass/fail only  
No prerequisites or technical skills required.  
Open to all upper division students.  
Seven class sessions