



Venice at Christmas

Painting, sculpture & architecture in the world's most beautiful city

20–27 December 2024 (MK 595)

8 days • £4,690

Lecturer: Dr Susan Steer

Wide-ranging survey of art and architecture with an emphasis on the Renaissance.

Private after-hours visit to the Basilica di San Marco.

With excursions to Vicenza as well as Padua to see Giotto's frescoes in the Scrovegni chapel.

For the world's most beautiful city, Venice had an inauspicious start. The site was once merely a collection of mudbanks, and the first settlers came as refugees fleeing the barbarian destroyers of the Roman Empire. They sought to escape to terrain so inhospitable that no foe would follow.

The success of the community which arose on the site would have been beyond the wildest imaginings of the first Venetians. By the end of the Middle Ages Venice had become the leading maritime power in the Mediterranean and possibly the wealthiest city in Europe. The shallow waters of the lagoon had indeed kept her safe from malign incursions and she kept her independence until the end of the eighteenth century. 'Once did she hold the gorgeous East in fee, and was the safeguard of the West, Venice, eldest child of liberty.'

Trade with the East was the source of that wealth and power, and the eastern connection has left its indelible stamp upon Venetian art and architecture. Western styles are here tempered by a richness of effect and delicacy of pattern which is redolent of oriental opulence. It is above all by its colour that Venetian painting is distinguished. And whether sonorous or poetic, from Bellini through Titian to Tiepolo, there remain echoes of the transcendental splendour of the Byzantine mosaics of St Mark's.

That Venice survives so comprehensively from the days of its greatness, so little ruffled by modern intrusions, would suffice to make it the goal of everyone who is curious about the man-made world. Thoroughfares being water and cars nonexistent, the imagination traverses the centuries with ease. And while picturesque qualities are all-pervasive – shimmering Istrian limestone, crumbling stucco, variegated brickwork, mournful vistas with exquisitely sculpted details – there are not half-a-dozen cities in the world which surpass Venice for the sheer number of major works of architecture,



sculpture and painting.

There may be rain, there will probably be morning mists and it will be overcast for at least some of the time, but equally likely are days of unbroken sunshine and brilliant blue skies, with a wonderful clarity in the air.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 1.30pm (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Venice. Cross the lagoon by *motoscifo* (water-taxi) to the hotel.

Day 2. In the morning see the incomparably beautiful Doge's Palace with pink Gothic revetment and rich Renaissance interiors. In the afternoon, cross the Grand Canal to the San Polo district, location of the great Franciscan church of S. Maria Gloriosa dei Frari which has outstanding artworks including Titian's Assumption, and the Scuola Grande di S. Rocco, with dramatic paintings by Tintoretto.

Day 3. Vicenza. A first excursion to the mainland. Walk through the city centre to Santa Corona, then visit the epoch-making theatre (Teatro Olimpico) and Palazzo Chiericati which houses an excellent art gallery. After lunch, visit Villa Valmarana 'ai Nani' with superb frescoes by Giambattista Tiepolo and his son, and conclude the day with a specially arranged wine tasting.

Day 4. Visit the Ca' Rezzonico, a magnificent palace on the Grand Canal, now a museum of 18th-century art. In the afternoon see the vast

gothic church of SS. Giovanni. In the evening there is a special after-hours private visit to the Basilica of S. Marco, an 11th-century Byzantine church enriched over the centuries with mosaics, sculpture and various precious objects.

Day 5: Padua. A day trip to Padua, among the most illustrious of Italian cities, and a leading centre of painting in the 14th century. The great fresco cycle by Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel is a major landmark in the history of art. Colourful and lively works by Altichieri and Giusto de' Menabuoi are in the vast multi-domed Basilica di S. Antonio and the Oratorio di S. Giorgio. Visit also the Anatomical Theatre in Palazzo del Bo, the first permanent anatomical theatre in the world.

Day 6. Christmas Day. A free morning, opportunity perhaps to attend a service in S. Marco or the English church. Before lunch see the palaces on the Grand Canal from the most Venetian of vantage-points, a gondola.

Day 7. The morning walk includes S. Zaccaria and S. Giovanni in Bragora, two churches with outstanding Renaissance altarpieces by Vivarini, Bellini and Cima. The Scuola di S. Giorgio degli Schiavoni has a wonderful cycle of paintings by Carpaccio. Spend the afternoon in the Accademia, Venice's major art gallery, where all the Venetian painters are well represented.

Day 8. Visit the Scuola Grande dei Carmini,

Venice at Christmas
continued

with paintings by Tiepolo. Travel by *motoscafo* to Venice airport and fly back to London Heathrow, arriving c.7.00pm.

Lecturer

Dr Susan Steer. Art historian specialising in Venice. Her MA concentrated on the city's art and architecture and her PhD on Venetian Renaissance altarpieces. As post-doctoral researcher with the University of Glasgow and Neil MacGregor scholar at the National Gallery, she worked as a researcher and editor on the National Inventory of European Painting, the UK's online catalogue of European paintings. She has extensive experience of teaching History of Art for university programmes in the UK and Italy, teaching for the University of Warwick in Venice. Susan has recently been appointed as the Venice representative for the British charity, the Venice in Peril Fund.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £4,690 or £4,470 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £5,870 or £5,650 without flights.

Suggested train route: London – Paris – Turin –

Milan – Venice: c. 13 hours.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 320); travel between Venice Airport and hotel by private water-taxi, some journeys by *vaporetto* and one by gondola; accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 2 lunches and 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips for waiters, porters; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. The St Regis, Venice (marriott.com/en-us/hotels/vcexr-the-st-regis-venice): A historic and elegant 5-star hotel positioned at the mouth of the Grand Canal with magnificent views of Santa Maria della Salute directly opposite. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? The nature of Venice means that the city is more often than not traversed on foot. Although part of her charm, there is a lot of walking and crossing of bridges; standing around in museums and palaces is also unavoidable. This tour should not be undertaken by anyone who has difficulties with everyday walking and stairclimbing.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.