



Palaces & Villas of Rome

From Empire to Papacy: the power of magnificence

24 February–2 March 2025 (ML 628)

7 days • £3,830

Lecturer: Dr Michael Douglas-Scott

The home to the origin of the word *palazzo* is the perfect place to study its history.

Buildings that span the millennia, from the imperial residences of the Roman empire to princely Baroque splendour.

A spectrum of edifices: political headquarters, papal residences, embassies, royal apartments.

Many visits by special arrangement, including an out-of-hours private opening of the Vatican, shared with participants travelling on *Essential Rome*.

The word *palazzo* in Italian now refers to any urban dwelling, modern apartment blocks included. Its origins were more august, however, going back to the 'palatium': the extensive residence of the Caesars on the Palatine Hill in Rome.

These imperial associations were then assumed by the medieval popes, who called their residences at the Lateran and the Vatican 'palaces'. The sprawling, fortified strongholds of the Roman baronial families, such as the Colonna and Corsini, also acquired this name, as did the municipal town hall on the Capitol. The popes periodically had difficulty in asserting their authority over their Roman subjects and had to leave town, but their return from Avignon after an absence for most of the fourteenth century was followed during the next two by an extraordinary period of urban renewal. During the Renaissance, popes rebuilt and decorated the Vatican to stress their links with St. Peter, claimed as the successor of Christ and the foundation of their sacred authority. Cardinals followed suit, building on a magnificent scale. Their enormous palaces became satellite courts, sometimes rivalling those of the popes themselves.

Palaces changed from fort-like structures to classically inspired residences built around *all'antica* courtyards. Inside, they were laid out according to a ceremonial sequence of rooms linked by aligned doors that set the standard for state apartments across Europe for centuries, including at Versailles. In the Baroque period, Roman palaces acquired an unprecedented level of decorative splendour, their princely collections of antiquities and old master paintings displayed in purpose-built galleries whose frescoed ceilings proclaim the



Gardens of the Villa Borghese, watercolour by Alberto Pisa.

glory of the families who owned (and often still own) them. Many of these remarkable residences have survived intact, as have the suburban villas to which their owners would retire to escape the summer heat of the city centre.

Itinerary

Day 1: Fly at c. 12.45pm (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Rome Fiumicino.

Day 2: Explore the origins of the palazzo on the Palatine Hill. Visit the Domus Augusti, the House of Augustus, which forms part of the vast Palace of Domitian. The present appearance of the Capitol, first centre of ancient Rome, was designed by Michelangelo, and the surrounding *palazzi* are museums with outstanding ancient sculpture. Nearby Palazzo Venezia is a medieval house that was converted to a papal palace; it contains an art collection. By contrast, Palazzo Doria Pamphilj is Rome's largest noble palace; the picture collection includes paintings by Caravaggio, Titian and Velázquez.

Day 3: Palazzo Corsini is a late-Baroque palace which houses a gallery of antiquities, while the delightful Villa La Farnesina has frescoes by Raphael in the Loggia of Cupid and Psyche. Next, discover Palazzo Spada, which accommodates a large art collection and the famous *trompe-l'oeil* gallery by Borromini.

Day 4: Perched on the Pincian Hill is the 16th-century Villa Medici, the seat of the French Academy. Return to the vicinity of the hotel; Palazzo Barberini is Rome's National Gallery, with paintings by most of the Italian Old Masters. In the evening there is a private visit to the Vatican Palace. With Michelangelo's ceiling fresco, his *Last Judgement* and the quattrocento wall frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, together with Raphael's frescoes in the *Stanze*, this is the most precious assemblage of painting in the western world.

Day 5: Palazzo Colonna is an agglomeration of the building and decoration of many centuries, and has a collection that includes works by Bronzino, Titian, Veronese and Guercino. The 17th-century Great Hall is surely one of the most magnificent secular rooms in Europe. Continue to the magnificent Palazzo Pamphilj, the Brazilian embassy overlooking Piazza Navona, followed by Palazzo della Cancelleria, begun in 1485 by Cardinal Raffaele Riario. The latter is a masterpiece of Early Renaissance secular architecture and has frescoes by Vasari of the life of Pope Paul III.

Day 6: Palazzo Farnese at Caprarola is a magnificent example of the Mannerist style housing a plethora of spectacular frescoes including those in the *Room of Maps* by Giovanni Antonio da Varese. One of the many residences built by the Farnese family, its construction was originally entrusted to

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Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, but was later taken over by Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola. It is memorable also for its characteristic pentagonal composition and spiral staircase.

Day 7: In the morning visit the Villa Borghese, which holds Rome's finest collection of paintings and sculptures. Some free time before driving to the airport, via the Domus Aurea, Nero's vast landscaped 'golden house'. Fly from Rome Fiumicino, arriving at London Heathrow at c. 7.15pm.

Lecturer

Dr Michael Douglas-Scott mixes scholarship with accessible discourse, wit with reasoned opinion, and is highly sought-after as an art history lecturer. He has lectured for York University (London campus) and Birkbeck College, University of London, specialising primarily in 16th-century Italian art and architecture. He studied at the Courtauld and Birkbeck College and lived in Rome for several years. He has written articles for *Arte Veneta*, *Burlington Magazine* and the *Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes*.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,830 or £3,680 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,460 or £4,310 without flights.

Suggested train itinerary: London – Paris – Milan – Rome: 17–19 hours.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 320); travel by private minibus; hotel accommodation; breakfasts; 1 lunch and 3 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions, including a private visit to the Vatican (shared with another MRT tour); all tips for waiters, drivers and guides; all taxes; the services of the lecturer.

Accommodation. Grand Hotel Palace, Rome (grandhotelpalacerome.com): 5-star hotel in an impressive building complete with frescoes by Guido Cadorin. Excellently located on Via Veneto. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? Unavoidably, there is a lot of walking on this tour. The historic area is vast, and vehicular access is increasingly restricted. Minibuses are used on some occasions but otherwise the city is traversed on foot. The tour should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Fitness is essential.

Group size: between 9 and 19 participants.