



Florence & Venice

The finest and best-known art and architecture in the Western world

3–10 March 2025 (ML 633)

8 days • £3,710

Lecturer: Desmond Shawe-Taylor

Wide-ranging survey with Renaissance emphasis.

Includes a private visit to the Basilica di San Marco to see the transcendental splendour of the Byzantine mosaics.

Off-peak dates, smaller group than usual.

To achieve a proper appreciation of Italian art and civilization, there can be no better way than immersion in the incomparable cities of Florence and Venice. There are similarities between the two city-states: the simultaneity of their periods of greatness (with consequent rivalry); the extraordinary wealth generated by pioneering commercial and manufacturing enterprise; republican and democratic political systems; and, above all, the brilliance of their material culture, both bequeathing a corpus of painting, sculpture and architecture of incomparable quantity, quality and influence.

And there are differences. Florence, an inland city, is largely built of local rough-hewn *pietra forte*, a tough brown stone, with columns and arches of *pietra serena*, grey and severe. Venice, the greatest maritime power of its time, imported coloured marbles and white limestone from around the Mediterranean and brick from its hinterland. Florentine art is tough, linear and monumental, while in Venice primacy is given to colour, gorgeous and evanescent. Venice's lagoon location and its myriad canals are beyond different: they are unique.

Florence was, of course, the cradle of the Renaissance. Giotto, Brunelleschi, Donatello, Botticelli, Michelangelo, Raphael and Leonardo are some of the great names studied on this tour. Today Florence is a vibrant, contemporary city, but the past is omnipresent: from the medieval city walls and distant vistas of olive groves to the narrow alleyways, expansive *piazze* and imposing *palazzi*, all reminders of the vast banking wealth which drove its artistic preeminence. Trade with the East was the source of Venice's wealth, and the connection has left its indelible stamp, with western styles tempered by a richness of effect and delicacy of pattern redolent of oriental opulence.



Florence, Ponte Vecchio, watercolour by A.H. Hallam Murray, 1904.

Seeing the highlights of these two cities in succession, with enough time in each to enable some depth of experience, provides one of the great aesthetic journeys the world has to offer.

Itinerary

Day 1: Florence. Fly at c. 8.00am (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Pisa. Transfer to Florence in time for a late afternoon visit to the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi chapel, which has exquisite frescoes by Benozzo Gozzoli. First of four nights in Florence.

Day 2: Florence. Avoid much of the daily crowd by heading early to the Uffizi, Italy's most important art gallery, which has masterpieces by every major Florentine painter as well as international Old Masters. Piazza della Signoria was the civic centre of Florence and has masterpieces of public sculpture. Continue to the Palazzo Pitti which houses several museums; the Galleria Palatina is particularly outstanding for High Renaissance and Baroque paintings.

Day 3: Florence. A Medici morning includes S. Lorenzo, the family parish church designed by Brunelleschi, and their burial chapel in the contiguous New Sacristy with Michelangelo's largest sculptural ensemble, as well as the Cappelle Medicee and the Laurentian Library. In the afternoon see also his David and the 'Slaves' in the Accademia, and Sta. Maria

Novella, the Dominican church with many works of art (Masaccio's *Trinità*, Ghirlandaio's frescoed sanctuary).

Day 4: Florence. The cluster of cathedral buildings occupies the morning; the baptistry with its Byzantine mosaics and Renaissance sculpture; the polychromatic marble Duomo itself, capped by Brunelleschi's massive dome; and the collections in the superbly renovated cathedral museum. The afternoon is devoted to the Bargello, a medieval *palazzo* housing Florence's finest sculpture collection with works by Donatello, Verrocchio and Michelangelo, and the vast Franciscan church of Sta. Croce, favoured burial place for leading Florentines and abundantly furnished with sculpted tombs, altarpieces and frescoes.

Day 5: Florence, Venice. Travel by rail to Venice (business class) for the first of three nights there. Take an introductory walk in the Piazza S. Marco and visit the incomparably beautiful Doge's Palace with pink Gothic revetment and rich Renaissance interiors.

Day 6: Venice. The Accademia is Venice's major art gallery, where all the Venetian painters are represented. Some free time in the afternoon. In the evening there is a private after-hours visit to the Basilica of S. Marco, an 11th-century Byzantine church enriched over the centuries with mosaics, sculpture and precious objects.

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continued

Day 7: Venice. In the morning cross the *bacino* to Palladio's beautiful island church of S. Giorgio Maggiore and then to the tranquil Giudecca to see his best church, Il Redentore. The afternoon is on the other side of the Grand Canal, in the San Polo district, location of the great Franciscan church of Sta. 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 8: Venice. Visit the vast Gothic church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo and the early Renaissance Sta. Maria dei Miracoli with its multicoloured stone veneer. Cross the lagoon by *motoscafo* (water-taxi) to the airport. Fly from Venice to London Heathrow, arriving c. 7.15pm.

Accommodation. **Hotel Santa Maria Novella, Florence** (hotelsantamarianovella.it): delightful 4-star hotel in a very central location. **Hotel Splendid, Venice** (starhotels.com): delightful, quiet 4-star hotel situated halfway between Piazza San Marco and the Rialto bridge. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use throughout.*

How strenuous? This is a particularly strenuous tour. The nature of both Florence and Venice means that the cities are more often than not traversed on foot. Although part of their charm, there is a lot of walking along the flat (and up and down bridges in Venice); standing around in museums and churches is also unavoidable.

Group size: between 8 and 18 participants.

Lecturer

Desmond Shawe-Taylor. Distinguished art historian and museum administrator whose posts have included Surveyor of The Queen's Pictures and Director of Dulwich Picture Gallery. He studied English Literature at Oxford and took an MA in History of Art at the Courtauld Institute. He has written extensively on English eighteenth-century portraiture and other subjects, and curated a series of exhibitions at the Queen's Gallery in Edinburgh and London, dealing with Dutch and Flemish 17th-century art.

Practicalities

Price – per person. **Two sharing:** £3,710 or £3,570 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,280 or £4,140 without flights.

Suggested train itinerary: London – Paris – Turin – Milan – Venice: c. 20 hours.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 319); private coach for airport transfer to Florence; first-class rail travel from Florence to Venice; a vaporetto pass for the time spent in Venice; travel between Venice airport and the hotel by water-taxi; luggage portage from Florence to Venice and from the hotel in Venice to the airport; hotel accommodation; breakfasts; 1 lunch and 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.