



Versailles: Seat of the Sun King

The greatest palace & garden

11–14 July 2025 (ML 738)

4 days • £2,240

Lecturer: Patrick Bade

Focused tour examining the most influential of European palaces and related buildings.

A study not only of art, architecture and gardens but also of history and statecraft.

Includes a performance of Vivaldi and Guido's *Four Seasons* at the Versailles Opéra Royal.

Versailles was the grandest and most influential palace and garden complex in Europe, and arguably the most lavish and luxurious and most beautifully embellished too.

It was much more than a building to house the monarch, his family and his court. It was conceived as the seat of government when France was at the apogee of her power, and as a structure to demonstrate and magnify the power of Louis XIV, to subdue his subjects and to overawe foreigners. A study of Versailles encompasses not only architectural history and garden history but also political science and the psychology of power.

Built and altered by five French kings, Versailles is several palaces. Even during Louis XIV's reign elements changed constantly, reflecting not only changes of taste but also political realities as they changed from decade to decade. Indeed, at its core it remains a small-scale hunting lodge built by his father (surely meant to be demolished in due course), and apartments were refurbished and parts added right up until the Revolution.

Enlarging the understanding of Versailles and to set it in context we also visit the château of Vaux-le-Vicomte, in many ways its inspiration. Attention is likewise paid to the town of Versailles, first laid out by Louis XIV, as well as to the park and gardens at Versailles.

Itinerary

Day 1: Versailles. Leave London St Pancras at c. 9.30am by Eurostar for Paris. Drive to Versailles where all three nights are spent. Spend the afternoon immersed in the grandeur, the beauty and the symbolism of the King's and Queen's apartments, which culminate in the Hall of Mirrors.



Versailles, steel engraving 1839.

Day 2: Versailles. Morning lecture followed by a walk to view the grand approach to the palace and some of the its dependencies in Versailles town. Continue with a guided tour of the King's Private Apartments. Evening performance at the Opéra Royal (the château's opera house): *The Four Seasons* (Vivaldi), *The Four Seasons* (Guido); Orchestra of the Opéra Royal, Stefan Plewniak (solo violin and conductor).

Day 3: Versailles. Explore the palace's gardens, which remain largely as Le Nôtre created them, the parterres, basins and sculpture around the palace and the avenues and canal which seem to stretch to infinity. Then visit the family retreats of Grand Trianon, Petit Trianon and the Domaine de Marie Antoinette.

Day 4: Vaux-le-Vicomte, Paris. The greatest country house and garden complex of its time (1656–61), Vaux-le-Vicomte was built by Nicholas Fouquet, Louis XIV's finance minister. It is in many ways the predecessor of Versailles, for Louis XIV, after arresting Fouquet for corruption, plundered the property

and later employed its chief designers and craftsmen at Versailles. Continue to Paris for the Eurostar arriving at St Pancras at c. 6.30pm.

Participants combining this tour with *The Seine Music Festival* spend two nights in Paris before the festival (not included in the price of the tour). Please contact us if you would like us to provide a quote for booking a hotel on your behalf.

Lecturer

Patrick Bade. Historian, writer and broadcaster with wide-ranging art-historical and musical expertise weighted towards French history and culture. He resides in Paris for several months of the year, where he has a home in the 10th arrondissement. Educated at University College London and the Courtauld Institute, he was senior lecturer at Christie's Education for many years. He has also worked for the Art Fund, Royal Opera House, National Gallery and the Victoria & Albert Museum. He has broadcast for Radio 3 and 4 and Classic FM and has published several books.

Versailles: Seat of the Sun King
continued

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £2,240 or £1,980 without Eurostar. **Single occupancy:** £2,540 or £2,280 without Eurostar.

Included: rail travel by Eurostar from London to Paris (Eurostar Plus); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 1 lunch and 2 dinners with wine, water and coffee; all admissions to gardens and châteaux; first category ('Prestige') concert ticket; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Hôtel Le Louis Versailles Château (all.accor.com). A modern 4-star hotel within walking distance of the château. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? There is a lot of walking and standing around. The gardens cover a large area and paths are often uneven so sure-footedness is essential. You need to lift your luggage on and off the train and wheel it within stations.

Group size: between 10 to 22 participants.