



Ancient Rome

Art & architecture of the classical world

2–8 March 2026 (MM 890)

7 days • £3,510

Lecturer: Dr Mark Grahame

A comprehensive exploration of Rome's ancient remains, in situ and in museums.

Also includes visits outside Rome: Ostia, the well-preserved ancient port of Rome, and Tivoli, for Hadrian's enormous villa complex.

Major monuments as well as daily details.

When the Aurelian walls were built around Rome in the third century ad, the area enclosed was about fifty times that of Londinium and the present-day City of London. Rome's population at that time was around a million, a figure not surpassed by any city in the world until the nineteenth century (by which time the world's population had increased tenfold).

Such was the scale of ancient Rome – formidable to any modern city-dweller with a little historical imagination; awesome, incredible even, to most citizens and subjects of the Empire. The size was appropriate for the capital of an empire which stretched from Upper Egypt to the Cairngorms, and from Atlantic Africa to Babylon, but the impedimenta of imperial administration were not the sole determinants of its size and status. As a kernel from which the Empire grew, and protagonist in myth and history, it was a spiritual home for every Roman citizen, and the fount of civilisation.

Of course, decline and fall ensued. Rome was relieved of responsibility for half the Empire when Constantinople was founded; it lost its caput status first to Milan and then to Ravenna; it was sacked by the Goths in ad 410. At one point during the Middle Ages the population shrunk to a hundredth of its ancient peak. As late as the nineteenth century the Forum was known as the Campo Vacchino because cows grazed among the ruins.

After more than a millennium of destruction it is surprising that so much remains. And yet, Rome still *is* Ancient Rome through the very fabric of its being. The sheer scale impresses the observer, but so also does the extraordinarily high level of skill in art, craft and construction, and the sophistication of a society which produced such accomplishments. This tour will look at the visible remains of ancient Rome and bring them alive by placing them in the context of the tumultuous history and of everyday life, which



The Roman Forum.

reached peaks of refinement and ease while never banishing the lewd, violent and squalid.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 10.45am from London Heathrow to Rome (British Airways), where all six nights are spent.

Day 2. Visit the Colosseum, the largest of ancient amphitheatres, and the Arch of Constantine, sculpturally the richest of triumphal arches. The Roman Forum – the civic, religious and social centre of Ancient Rome – has the remains of many structures famed throughout the Empire.

Day 3. A morning walk includes the Pantheon, the most complete of Roman buildings to survive, and Ara Pacis, Augustus' monumental altar of peace. Visit the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, built on the site of the Baths of Diocletian. Palazzo Massimo, home to the majority of the National Roman Museum's collection, contains wonderful Roman frescoes and stuccoes.

Day 4: Tivoli, Rome. Drive to Tivoli for Hadrian's Villa, extraordinarily lavish and designed by the emperor himself, drawing inspiration from the sites he saw during his travels. Lunch in Tivoli and some time to explore this pretty town in the heart of the *Campagna Romana*.

Day 5. In the morning, visit Trajan's Markets, remarkably complete and evocative, as well as Trajan's Column and the Imperial Fora. The Capitoline Museums have some of the best ancient sculpture in Rome and provide access to the administrative heart of Republican Rome. Some free time.

Day 6. The day starts with the Domus Aurea, Nero's vast landscaped 'golden house', before following the Appian Way – one of Rome's earliest and most strategically important roads – culminating at the Baths of Caracalla, the best preserved of the several such complexes that emperors constructed in the capital for general enjoyment.

Day 7: Rome, Ostia. Drive to Ostia, the ancient port of Rome at the mouth of the Tiber. Silt led to its decline and abandonment. In the preservation of everyday details it is comparable to Pompeii – though without the crowds. Fly from Rome Fiumicino to London Heathrow, arriving at c. 7.15pm.

Ancient Rome
continued

Lecturer

Dr Mark Grahame. Archaeologist, lecturer and Member of the Chartered Institute of Archaeologists (MCIfA). He obtained his PhD from Southampton University and his thesis on the spatial layouts of the houses of Roman Pompeii was published as a British Archaeological Report and a series of journal articles. He has coordinated an adult education programme in archaeology at the University of Southampton (2002–2011) and has taught courses on the archaeology and history of the Roman Empire for Cambridge and Oxford Universities' Institutes of Continuing Education. He is currently the director of the heritage consultancy, M-Arc Heritage Ltd., a company which he founded in 2018.

Practicalities

Price. Two sharing: £3,510 or £3,280 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,190 or £3,960 without flights.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 319 and 320); travel by private minibus; hotel accommodation; breakfasts; 2 lunches and 3 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips for waiters, drivers and guides; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Hotel Donna Camilla Savelli (vretreats.com/donna-camilla-savelli): a pleasingly restored former baroque monastery, now 4-star hotel, set at the foot of the Janiculum hill in Trastevere. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? This is a particularly strenuous tour; there is a lot of walking, some of it over rough ground on archaeological sites. Sure-footedness is essential. 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. Some days involve a lot of driving. Average distance by coach per day: 21 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.