



Turin at Christmas

Palaces, porticos & piazze

20–27 December 2023 (MJ 145)

8 days • £3,440

Lecturer: Dr Luca Leoncini

Great art and architecture, particularly rich in palaces.

A grand city unaccountably neglected by tourists, despite being a major cultural centre.

Gastronomic highlights include a wine tasting and two michelin-starred restaurants.

Spreading across a plain at the foot of the Alps and along the upper reaches of the River Po, the gracious, spacious capital of Piedmont takes visitors by surprise with the beauty of its location and its streetscape.

Turin was developed on a grand scale in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as the capital of Savoy, an independent state from the Middle Ages and a kingdom from 1720. Later exchanges of territory led to the title of Kingdom of Sardinia. In the nineteenth century Piedmont became administratively and industrially the most advanced state in Italy, and the springboard for the *risorgimento*. Turin was the first capital of the newly united and independent Italy, 1861–65.

The historic centre is laid out on a regular plan with broad avenues and *piazze* of remarkable architectural homogeneity. Guarino Guarini (1624–83) and Filippo Juvarra (1678–1736), among the best architects of their time, both worked here for much of their lives.

Though once a major industrial centre (a reputation which has unjustly deterred cultural tourists), this is not evident in the centre. Within Italy Turin now has a reputation for a high quality of life, and is repositioning itself as one of the major cultural centres in the north of the country.

The 2006 Winter Olympics were the catalyst for an extensive programme of civic regeneration and restoration. The proximity to the mountains not only brings visual benefits but helps to make the city one of the most agreeable in Italy in which to live.

Itinerary

Day 1: Fly at c. 8.00am from London Gatwick to Turin (British Airways). Lunch at the hotel before visiting the little church of S. Lorenzo, a Guarini masterpiece, the cathedral, with Guarini's Chapel of the Holy Shroud, and the sumptuous Consolata church.



Turin, Palazzo Carignano, wood engraving, 1861.

Day 2: Turin. Begin with a walk through the beautiful, arcaded Piazza San Carlo. Palazzo Reale, the principal royal residence, is largely of the late 17th cent. but has interiors of the 18th and 19th cents. Housed here are masterpieces from the Galleria Sabauda. After lunch a second guided walk past Palazzo dell'Università, the metal dome and spire of the 19th century Mole Antonelliana and Piazza Vittorio Veneto.

Day 3: Alba. Drive to Alba, chief town of the Langhe, for a wine tasting in the Castle of Grinzane Cavour, a spectacularly situated UNESCO heritage site, home of the first regional *enoteca* to open in Piedmont, now almost 50 years old. Lunch at a *Slow Food* restaurant. Return to Turin for some free time.

Day 4: Racconigi, Saluzzo, Staffarda. The Castello di Racconigi was one of the summer residences of the Savoys; the front overlooking the park is by Guarini (1676). Continue to Saluzzo and walk around the charming historic centre of the mediaeval town at the foot of Mount Monviso (3841m above sea level). The Abbey of Staffarda which retains an impressive Romanesque church with cloister and chapter house.

Day 5, Christmas Eve: Turin. The Palazzo Carignano has a remarkable curvaceous facade by Guarini. Piazza Castello is splendid, the greatest of the buildings being Palazzo Madama by Filippo Juvarra (1721), now housing the art gallery. Free afternoon, followed by Christmas dinner.

Day 6, Christmas Day: Turin, Superga. Free morning, with the option of attending a church service. After Christmas lunch drive to the Basilica di Superga, the burial site of the Italian Royal family, a votive church designed by Juvarra magnificently sited on a hill overlooking the city and mountains.

Day 7: Venaria. The Venaria Reale (Amedeo Castellamonte 1660, Juvarra 1714–28) is the largest of the suburban palaces, a magnificent complex which reopened in 2007 after comprehensive renovation. Continue to Stupinigi and visit the royal hunting lodge (Filippo Juvarra, 1730). Dinner at a michelin-starred restaurant.

Day 8: Homeward journey. Drive to Turin airport; returning to Gatwick at c. 12.30pm.

Turin at Christmas
continued

Lecturer

Dr Luca Leoncini. Art historian with a speciality in 15th-century painting and a wide knowledge of Italian art and architecture, he obtained a degree and PhD at Rome University and studied at the Warburg Institute in London. He has also written on Mantegna and Renaissance drawings. He is one of MRT's longest serving lecturers.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,440 or £3,320 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,780 or £3,660 without flights.

Included: air travel (economy class) on scheduled British Airways flights; private coach for excursions and transfers; accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 3 lunches and 4 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. Grand Hotel Sitea, Turin (grandhotelsitea.it): a 4-star hotel, comfortable, elegantly furnished and very central. *Single rooms are double rooms for sole use; all rooms are deluxe category.*

How strenuous? The tour involves a lot of walking in town centres, where coach access is restricted. There is a lot of standing in museums and churches and a considerable amount of uphill walking around the historic centre of Saluzzo. Average distance by coach per day: 37 miles.

Small group: between 10 and 22 participants.