



Verona at Christmas

with Mantua and Padua

21–28 December 2023 (MJ 142)

8 days • £3,320

Lecturer: Dr Susan Steer

See the grand Roman amphitheatre, excellent art gallery and exquisite churches in Verona.

Excursions to nearby Mantua and Padua, both with a wealth of stunning art and architecture.

Includes a visit to a Valpolicella winery, owned by the descendants of Dante Alighieri.

Based in a luxurious 5-star hotel in the centre of Verona.

Beyond the fictional details of character and action in *Romeo and Juliet* there lies a historical truth. The picture of turbulence and factional strife bears a much closer resemblance to the actuality of medieval Verona than to Shakespeare's own Elizabethan London. Passion and violence and the fierce rivalries of class and clan are vividly expressed by the architecture of Verona – though shorn now of the stark realities of struggle and power-play, it is the magnitude of ambition and beauty of design which shine through.

Verona's sequence of ancient squares and dense web of streets and alleys are as impressive and entrancingly picturesque as any in Italy. The great civic buildings and many of the churches were erected during the era of relatively democratic communal government, which coincided with the age of Romanesque. Here the austere nobility of bulk and line is softened by the pinks and creams of the building stone, and enlivened by some of the finest sculpture of the time.

The debilitating struggle between the real-life counterparts of Capulets and Montagues allowed the commune to be usurped by one of the most tyrannical of Italian city-state dynasties, the della Scala. By then, Gothic had become prevalent. Even the most intimidatingly defensible dwellings were blessed by an ineffable grace with delicate mullions, swallowtail battlements and crimson brickwork.

After incorporation in the Venetian Empire, artistic embellishment continued. Pisanello, Mantegna, Titian and of course Veronese, a native of the city, have left paintings here, and Renaissance architecture makes many pleasing appearances. But Verona is far older than the upstart of the lagoon. The presence of the second-largest surviving amphitheatre of



the ancient world – and excellently preserved Roman theatre, bridge and city gates – demonstrate the importance of the *colonia* in the Roman world.

The River Adige, draining waters from the Dolomites, scours an S-bend through the city and affords pleasing prospects, as do the bluffs on the eastern rim. Looking across the towers and terracotta roofs from up here it is difficult to imagine that Verona was ever other than a haven of peace and civilized values.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 9.20am from London Gatwick to Verona (British Airways).

Day 2: Verona. Walk through some of the streets and squares at the heart of the city. The Piazza delle Erbe (still the produce market) and Piazza dei Signori are surrounded by magnificent medieval palazzi and an exquisite Renaissance loggia. See elaborately sculpted della Scala tombs and frescoes by Pisanello in the Gothic churches of S. Anastasia and S. Fermo Maggiore. The Romanesque cathedral has a fine sculpted portal and an Early Christian church within.

Day 3: Padua. Of Roman origins and with a subsequent history similar to Verona, Padua

ranks as the other leading city of the Veneto *terra ferma*. Giotto's fresco cycle in the Scrovegni Chapel is a landmark in the history of art, marking the beginning of the modern era in painting. Other important 14th cent. frescoes are by Giusto de' Menabuoi in the baptistry and by Altichiero in the cathedral, the vast multi-domed Basilica di S. Antonio.

Day 4: Verona. The Castelvecchio, with its swallowtail merlons and fortified bridge, is a beautiful example of medieval military architecture, and now houses Verona's excellent art museum. The Roman amphitheatre once seated 30,000 (and today seats 15,000 during the summer opera festival). Free afternoon in Verona.

Day 5: (Christmas Day). Free morning, and the possibility of attending a church service, before an excellent Christmas lunch.

Day 6: Mantua. With medieval and Renaissance arcades lining the streets and squares, Mantua is a place of immense beauty, and contains some of the foremost art and architecture of the Renaissance. Visit the Ducal Palace, a vast rambling complex, the aggregate of 300 years of extravagant patronage by the Gonzaga dynasty (Mantegna's frescoes in the Camera degli Sposi, Pisanello frescoes, Rubens altarpiece). The extraordinary Palazzo Te, built

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and decorated by Giulio Romano, is the major monument of Italian Mannerism.

Day 7: Sant'Ambrogia di Valpolicella. In the morning visit the church of S. Zeno, a major Romanesque church with sculpted portal and a Mantegna altarpiece. Outside Verona, visit the atmospheric Villa di Serego Alighieri, surrounded by Valpolicella vineyards, for a private wine tasting and lunch. 21 generations after Dante Alighieri's son bought the estate, the house and surrounding land still belong to his direct descendants, the Counts Serego Alighieri.

Day 8. Fly from Verona, arriving London Gatwick at c. 2.20pm.

How strenuous? There is quite a lot of walking on this tour and it is not suitable for anyone who has difficulties with everyday walking and stair climbing. Average distance by coach per day: 24 miles

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.

Lecturer

Dr Susan Steer. Art historian specialising in Venice and the Veneto. Her PhD concentrated on the altarpieces of Bartolomeo Vivarini, whereas her MA considered the art and architecture of the Veneto from the middle ages to the Renaissance. As post-doctoral researcher with the University of Glasgow and Neil MacGregor scholar at the National Gallery, she worked as a researcher and editor on the UK's online catalogue of European paintings. She has extensive experience of teaching History of Art for university programmes in the UK and Italy, particularly the Warwick University Venice term. Susan now represents the Venice in Peril Fund in Italy.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,320 or £3,210 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,950 or £3,840 without flights.

By train: London – Paris – Milan – Verona: between 13 and 15 hours. Contact us for more information.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 320); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 2 lunches and 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Hotel Due Torri, Verona (hotelduetorri.duetorrihotels.com): a luxurious 5-star hotel in the historic centre of the city, formerly an 18th century-palace. Bedrooms are richly decorated in a traditional style. Single rooms throughout are doubles for sole use.