



Florence at Christmas

Cradle of the Renaissance

20–27 December 2023 (MJ 141)

8 days • £3,760

Lecturer: Dr Michael Douglas-Scott

The world's best location for an art-history tour: here were laid the foundations of the next 500 years of western art.

Still retains an astonishingly dense concentration of great works. The Renaissance is centre stage, but medieval and other periods also feature prominently.

Includes an excursion to the exquisite hilltop town of Siena.

Led by Dr Michael Douglas-Scott, expert in Italian art and architecture.

For hundreds of years Florence nurtured an unceasing succession of great artists. No other place can rival it for the quantity of first-rate, locally produced works of art, many still in the sites for which they were created or in museums a few hundred yards away. Giotto, Brunelleschi, Donatello, Masaccio, Botticelli, Michelangelo, Raphael, Leonardo – these are some of the artists and architects whose works will be studied on the tour, fully justifying Florence's epithet as the cradle of the Renaissance.

It is moreover one of the loveliest cities in the world, ringed by the foothills of the Apennines and sliced in two by the River Arno. Narrow alleys lead between the expansive piazze and supremely graceful Renaissance arcades abound, while the massive scale of the buildings impressively demonstrates the wealth once generated by its precocious economy.

It is now a substantial, vibrant city, yet the past is omnipresent, and from sections of the medieval city walls one can still look out over olive groves.

Though the number of visitors to Florence has swelled hugely in recent years, Christmas is the perfect time to visit, when the ancient streets are at their most charming, and it is possible, being winter, to explore the city and enjoy its art in relative tranquillity.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 11.30am (British Airways) from London City to Florence. In the late afternoon, study the buildings and sculpture in the Piazza della Signoria, civic centre of Florence with masterpieces of public sculpture.



Florence, watercolour publ. 1904.

Day 2. Visit the Bargello, housing Florence's finest sculpture collection with works by Donatello, Verrocchio, Michelangelo and others. The granary-cum-church of Orsanmichele has sculpture by Donatello, Ghiberti and Verrocchio. See the Byzantine mosaics and Renaissance sculpture in the cathedral baptistry in the afternoon, and visit a private palazzo.

Day 3. See Brunelleschi's Foundling Hospital (1419), the first building wholly in Renaissance style. The Early Renaissance is wonderfully and colourfully represented by the enchanting paintings by Fra Angelico in the Friary of San Marco. See Michelangelo's David and the 'Slaves' sculpture in the Accademia. Visit the Uffizi, which has masterpieces by every major Florentine painter as well as international Old Masters.

Day 4: Siena. Day trip by coach to Siena, the most beautiful of Italian hill towns. Walk through exquisite streets to Il Campo, the main scallop-shaped 'square', and visit the Palazzo Pubblico, the elegant 14th-century town hall, with frescoes by Simone Martini, Ambrogio Lorenzetti and others. Visit the splendid cathedral of white and green marble, many times enlarged, and the baptistry. In the cathedral museum see Duccio's Maestà, the finest medieval painted altarpiece to be found anywhere. Visit the hospital of Santa Maria

della Scala, which has a rich collection of 15th-century frescoes.

Day 5. In Santa Trinita there are fine frescoes by Ghirlandajo. See the Masaccio/Masolino fresco cycle in the Brancacci Chapel, a highly influential work of art which influenced all subsequent generations of Renaissance artists. Visit Santo Spirito, Brunelleschi's last great church, and the extensive Boboli Gardens, at the top of which is an 18th-century ballroom and garden overlooking olive groves. In the afternoon visit the redoubtable Palazzo Pitti, which houses several museums including the Galleria Palatina, outstanding particularly for High Renaissance and Baroque paintings.

Day 6. (Christmas Day). Free morning, with a range of options for a church service, followed by Christmas lunch. After lunch, visit S. Miniato al Monte, the Romanesque abbey church with panoramic views of the city, and walk back down to the hotel via the Oltrarno if you wish.

Day 7. A Michelangelo morning: visit his Laurentian Library, whose architectural components would herald the onset of Mannerism, and the New Sacristy of San Lorenzo, burial chapel of the Medici family and Michelangelo's enigmatic sculptural ensemble. See the exquisite frescoes by Benozzo Gozzoli in the chapel of the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi.

Florence at Christmas continued

In the afternoon visit Santa Maria Novella, a Dominican church with many works of art.

Day 8. In the morning, visit the vast Franciscan church of Santa Croce, favoured burial place for leading Florentines and abundantly furnished with sculpted tombs, painted altarpieces and frescoes. Fly from Florence airport to London City, arriving at c. 4.15pm.

Lecturer

Dr Michael Douglas-Scott. Art historian who mixes scholarship with accessible discourse, wit with reasoned opinion, and is a highly sought-after art history lecturer. He has lectured for New York University (London campus) and Birkbeck College, University of London, specialising primarily in 16th-century Italian art and architecture. He studied at the Courtauld and Birkbeck College and lived in Rome for several years. He has written articles for *Arte Veneta*, *Burlington Magazine* and the *Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes*.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,760 or £3,380 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,270 or £3,890 without flights.

Suggested train route: London – Paris – Turin – Florence: c. 13 hours.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Embraer E90); travel by private coach for airport transfers; hotel accommodation; breakfasts, 1 lunch, 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Hotel Santa Maria Novella (hotelsantamarianovella.it): a delightful, renovated 4-star hotel in a very central location. All rooms booked for this tour have a view over the piazza. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? The tour involves a lot of walking in the town centre where the ground is sometimes uneven and pavements are narrow. It should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Fitness is essential.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.