

Art Treasures of Northern Italy



Tuesday 13 - Monday 19 September 2022

The breadth of art, architecture and cultural heritage in Italy is quite extraordinary.

Although Rome and Venice are probably the most visited cities, each region boasts its own impressive collections, important churches and distinctive history. Our tour aims to bring to life the treasures that are to be found in the north of a country that has played such a central role in the development of Europe and beyond throughout history.

We shall be based in a hotel on the outskirts of Mira for 2 nights, and a further 4 nights in Ferrara, the former capital of the Este dynasty and now a World Heritage City.

TUESDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2022

Independent travel arrangements to Bristol airport. We will check in for our scheduled EasyJet flight to Venice, due to depart Bristol at 10.35 and arrive in Venice at 13.45 local time. *(Please note that the tour price does not include flights).* We will be met on arrival by our local coach and tour escort and travel to **Mira**, where we will check into the 4 star **Villa Margherita** for 2 nights' bed and breakfast accommodation. The hotel overlooks the River Brenta and was once a noble residence that dates back to the 17th century. After some time to freshen up, **dinner** will be served in a local restaurant. A shuttle service will be provided to and from the restaurant this evening.

WEDNESDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2022

We will meet our local coach and travel to **Padua**. The city's artistic and architectural highlight is undoubtedly the **Scrovegni Chapel**, one of Giotto's most famous works. Enrico Scrovegni, the Paduan sponsor of the artist, was extremely rich and ambitious, and in 1300 he acquired the area around the Arena in order to build a palace with a chapel. Giotto painted a series of frescoes, including *Scenes from the Life of Joachim*, *Scenes from the Life of the Virgin* and *Scenes from the Life of Christ*. On the back wall, the Florentine artist also painted a single grandiose scene, *The Final Judgement*. We will also enjoy a short walking tour of the central area prior to an afternoon at leisure. At the end of the afternoon we will return to our hotel. **Dinner** will be served in a local restaurant and a shuttle service will be provided to and from the restaurant this evening.

THURSDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 2022

We will check out of the hotel after breakfast, and travel by coach to **Vicenza** - the great city of Palladio celebrated the world over for its splendid and varied architecture. We will begin the day with a walking tour which will include a visit to the **Teatro Olimpico**, a fascinating structure representing a piazza and streets in perfect perspective. The Teatro Olimpico is Europe's oldest surviving indoor theatre, designed by Palladio in 1579 for the Vicenza Accademia Olimpica to stage theatrical performances.

This was Palladio's last project, which opened after he died with a performance of Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*. Perfectly preserved, the semi-circular indoor theatre recalls the design of ancient Greek venues. Completed by his pupil, the theatre is a remarkable structure built largely of wood and plaster and painted to give the appearance of marble. We will also visit the Gothic church of **Santa Corona**, which was built in the mid 13th century to house a thorn from Christ's crown. The church displays several important works of art, including the *Baptism of Christ* by Bellini and Veronese's *Adoration of the Magi*. There will be free time for lunch in the centre of Vicenza.

This afternoon we will visit the Villa Capra and the Villa Valmarana ai Nani. The **Villa Capra** "La Rotonda", one of Palladio's masterpieces, was built as a belvedere overlooking the town. This perfectly symmetrical villa is the epitome of Palladian architecture. A pleasant contrast exists between the white walls, terracotta roof tiles and green lawns. Immediately acclaimed for the way in which the villa blends with its surroundings, it has been much imitated with copies as far away as St Petersburg, London and Delhi. We hope to include this visit by special arrangement (*subject to availability*). From La Rotonda we will walk the short distance to the 17th century **Villa Valmarana ai Nani**, whose interior is frescoed by Tiepolo and his son, Giandomenico. The villa provides a perfect example of the way in which Palladio's villas established an enduring tradition. The wall alongside the villa is topped by figures of dwarfs, which give the building its name "*ai Nani*" (literally "of the dwarfs"). Following the visit we will continue our journey to **Ferrara** and the **Mercure Ferrara**, our base for the next 4 nights. After some time to freshen up, we will take **dinner** together in a local restaurant.

FRIDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 2022

After breakfast at the hotel, we will enjoy a morning of visits in **Ferrara**, the former capital of the Este dynasty and now a World Heritage City. Ferrara has a rich history of art and architecture and boasts particular originality in its architecture. The city is often referred to as the 'first modern city in Europe', due to its unique urban framework.

Our morning will begin with a **walking tour** in the company of our local specialist guide, followed by a visit to the **Palazzo Schifanoia**, the summer residence of the Este family, built in 1385. The most famous room in the palace is the 'Room of the Months', whose murals depict scenes from each month of the year, including works from Tura and a selection of Ferrarese artists. The gallery reopened in June 2020 following extensive structural reinforcement work deemed necessary in the wake of the two powerful earthquakes that struck Emilia-Romagna in 2012. The remainder of the day will be at leisure in Ferrara.



Este Castle, Ferrara

SATURDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 2022

After breakfast at the hotel we will travel by coach to **Mantua**. Mantua (Mantova), is a provincial town surrounded on three sides by lakes, and was home to one of the greatest Renaissance courts in Europe. From 1328 -1708 the Gonzaga family ruled the city, creating a centre of stability, learning and culture. Upon arrival we will meet a local guide and visit the **Palazzo Ducale**, once the largest palace in Europe covering 34,000 square metres with a population of more than a thousand courtiers. The official residence of the Gonzaga lords of Mantua until the 17th century, it was filled with priceless treasures, now largely dispersed.

There are many wonderful rooms still to admire, particularly the Camera degli Sposi with its glorious frescoes of Lodovico II Gonzaga and his family by Andrea Mantegna, and an unfinished series of frescoes by Pisanello depicting the exploits of the Knights of the Round Table. There will be some free time for lunch in central Mantua prior to an afternoon visit to the **Palazzo Tè**, a grand suburban villa and pleasure palace

commissioned by Federico II Gonzaga, on the site of the family's stables at Isola del Tè. The architect was Giulio Romano, Federico's favourite artist and a former pupil of Raphael. In the frescoed decoration of the Palazzo Giulio's fertile imagination triumphed: the Sala dei Cavalli, the Sala di Amore e Psiche, and supremely, the Sala dei Giganti are astonishing feats of imagination and artistry. At the end of the afternoon we will return to our hotel in Ferrara for an evening at leisure.

SUNDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2022

Today we will travel out of Ferrara towards the Adriatic Riviera to the city of **Ravenna**. The city was once the capital of Byzantine Italy, famous for its wealth of art treasures and magnificent mosaics, which will be the main focus of today's visits. Several of the monuments we will see are listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Our first visit of the day will be the extraordinary **Domus of Stone Carpets** ('I Pavimenti'), which were recently discovered and are located 3 metres below the level of the road. This is a magnificent collection of 14 highly decorative 5th and 6th century mosaics from a Byzantine Palace.

We will then continue to the **Mausoleum of Galla Placidia**, which contains the earliest wall mosaics in the city. Galla Placidia (386-452) was the sister of Roman Emperor Honorius, who moved the Western Empire from Milan to Ravenna. This Latin cross plan mausoleum was built in honour of his sister.

The exterior is noticeably plain and sombre in stark comparison with the lavish and ornate interior, which is covered in exquisite mosaics representing the victory of life over death.

We will also visit the octagonal **Basilica of San Vitale**, which dates back to 548 and was built by Giulianus Argentarius. The basilica houses fine examples of early Christian Italian art alongside many ornate mosaics with a noticeable Eastern influence. The basilica also boasts frescoes by Caféozzi and Gandolfi of Bologna. There will be free time for lunch.

MONDAY 19 SEPTEMBER 2022

This afternoon we will continue our walking tour of the historic centre with a short visit to the 5th century **Church of San Francesco**, which houses interesting mosaics. Of particular interest is **Dante's Tomb**, an adjoining modest neoclassical construction. The poet was exiled from Florence and died in Ravenna in 1321, and the tomb was erected in the 18th century by architect Camillo Morigia in order to house Dante's sarcophagus.

We will also visit **Sant'Apollinare Nuovo**. The basilica dates from the 6th century and has a magnificent marble portico, which was added in the 16th century. It also boasts a cylindrical bell tower, which is typical of Ravenna in the 9th and 10th centuries, and a magnificent collection of mosaics.

Our day will also include the basilica of **Sant'Apollinare in Classe**. Located in Classe on the outskirts of Ravenna, the Basilica is also dedicated to St Apollinare, the patron saint of Ravenna and is characterised by its spacious nave and large windows which flood the interior with light. It is also renowned for its stunning mosaics which are to be found in the presbytery, and date primarily from the 6th century. At the end of the afternoon we will return to our hotel in Ferrara. A final **dinner** will be served in a local restaurant this evening.

We will check out of our hotel after breakfast and travel by coach to Venice Marco Polo Airport for our return British Airways flight to London Heathrow airport, due to depart at 13.00 and arrive in London at 14.20. *(Please note that the tour price does not include flights).* We will continue our homeward journey to Bristol by coach.

Please note that participants must be able to walk a reasonable distance at a pace to keep up with the group, including on uneven surfaces e.g. cobbles, steps and slopes. All participants are required to bring and be able to use a mobile phone, which must have a roaming facility for making and receiving calls in Italy. The phone must be kept charged and switched on at appropriate times and the number must be made available to the tour leader and guide.

As this tour has been planned many months in advance, and due to the various Covid-19 related measures and restrictions that may be in place at the time of your visit, the final itinerary may vary slightly from the above.

Please be aware that under current Italian legislation, all visitors to Italy must hold a 'Green Pass', also known as an EU digital COVID certificate. This can be obtained from the NHS with proof of a double vaccination.

It is your responsibility to comply with the relevant vaccination/testing requirements that are in force at the time and to check that you are in possession of the correct documentation.

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