



## The Venetian Hills

Renaissance art in the foothills of the Dolomites

2–6 April 2025 (ML 653)

5 days • £2,240

Lecturer: Dr Carlo Corsato

Ravishingly beautiful landscapes from vine-clad foothills to the peaks of the Dolomites.

Altarpieces and frescoes by Venetian masters, mediaeval to Rococo.

Some of the loveliest hill towns in Italy, including the birthplace of Titian.

'Hills' and 'Venice' are not accustomed to finding themselves in the same sentence; sited on (and sometimes under) an estuarial lagoon, elevation above (or below) sea level in Venice is measured in centimetres. But on a clear day a range of hills can be seen rising to the north. On a very clear day the snowy peaks of the Dolomites come into view.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages the proud little communities which populated these hills one by one submitted to the rule of La Serenissima, as did much of northern Italy. Political hegemony was followed by cultural influence, clearly manifested still in the disorientating sight of Venetian-style Renaissance *palazzi* set against precipitous pine-clad hillsides.

But the cultural forces did not flow only in one direction. As is often the case with an artistically flourishing metropolis, many of the creators were outsiders. Titian was born in the rugged Cadore mountains, Cima from the gentler hillside town of Conegliano, Marco Ricci from hilltop Belluno. These and many other artists enjoyed successful careers in Venice; but most kept in contact with their natal towns, accepting commissions for, or donating paintings to, their parish church.

These hill towns are among the loveliest in Italy, and they are set in ravishing landscapes which range from vine-clad foothills to soaring limestone peaks. Most of them are quite small, but the architectural ambitions of their inhabitants were otherwise: the historic centres are dense with fine buildings and arcaded streets which give protection from mountain downpours and summer sun.

The ostensible theme of this tour is painting of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but other aspects of the art and history of the region will not be ignored. The base is Follina, a tiny community which grew up around a monastery in the mountains.



Asolo, engraving from *The Magazine of Art*, 1887.

### Itinerary

**Day 1.** Fly at c.12.00pm (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Venice. Drive through the hills to Follina where all four nights are spent.

**Day 2: Vittorio Veneto, Conegliano.** The tiny city of Serravalle (now joined with Ceneda to form Vittorio Veneto), occupying a gorge scoured by the River Meschio, has a fine group of mediaeval and Renaissance buildings, 15th-century frescoes in the chapel of S. Lorenzo and a Titian in the cathedral. In the church of Santa Maria in Ceneda there is an exquisite Annunciation by Previtali. Drive to the birthplace of Giambattista Cima del Conegliano, the lovely town from which the artist took his name. Visit the cathedral to see one of his greatest works (1492). Finish the day with a wine tasting.

**Day 3: Maser, Asolo, Bassano.** The Villa Barbaro at Maser, built by Palladio for two highly cultivated Venetian brothers, has superb frescoes by Veronese. The lovely hilltop town of Asolo was home to three exceptional women: Queen Caterina Corner, the actress Eleonora Duse and the writer and traveller Freya Stark. Visit the cathedral where the *Assumption of the Virgin* by Lorenzo Lotto has been treasured in the past 500 years. Bassano del Grappa is a

highly attractive town in the foothills of the Dolomites with a series of picturesque squares with painted façades. Home of the prolific Bassano family of painters, there are several of their works in the civic museum.

**Day 4: Belluno, Pieve di Cadore, San Vito di Cadore.** Drive north along the valley of the Piave into an ever-more dramatic mountain landscape. Sitting athwart a promontory looped by the Piave, Belluno is a beautiful little city with a Renaissance cathedral and Venetian-style palaces. Among the fine paintings is an exquisite Madonna & Child by Cima in the Museo Civico. Titian was born in the little town of Pieve di Cadore; see here the parish church with paintings by him and his family. In San Vito di Cadore, see the two altarpieces by Vecellio.

**Day 5: Treviso.** Once an important fortress city, Treviso has a fine historic centre with imposing public buildings and many painted façades. Selective visits here include the cathedral with its Malchiostro Annunciation by Titian, as well as the civic museum and convent of Santa Caterina which houses a collection of Renaissance masterpieces by Cima da Conegliano, Lotto, Bassano and Titian. Fly from Venice airport, arriving at London Heathrow at c. 5.30pm.

The Venetian Hills  
continued

## Lecturer

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**Dr Carlo Corsato.** Art historian and lecturer specialising in early-modern art and architecture in Italy and Flanders. He obtained his PhD from the University of Verona on 16th-century painting in Venice and the Veneto. He has lectured and given invited talks at a number of institutions, including the Morley College, the Courtauld Institute, and the universities of St Andrews, Glasgow, and Buckingham. He was visiting scholar at the Dutch Institute in Florence and St John's College, Cambridge. He has contributed to international scholarly journals and exhibition catalogues, and co-edited the first completed monograph on the church of Frari, Venice.

## Practicalities

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**Price, per person. Two sharing:** £2,240 or £2,020 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £2,390 or £2,170 without flights.

**Included:** flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 319); travel by private coach; breakfasts; 2 lunches and 2 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips for waiters, drivers; all taxes; the services of the lecturer.

**Accommodation. Hotel dei Chiostri** (hoteldeichiostri.com): 4-star hotel in the little hill town of Follina, installed in former abbey buildings. *Double rooms are junior suites; single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

**How strenuous?** The tour involves quite a lot of walking, some of which is uphill or in the town centres where vehicular access is restricted. Streets are often cobbled, and the tour should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Agility, stamina and sure-footedness are essential. Many of the historical buildings visited are sprawling and vast. Some days involve a lot of driving. Average distance by coach per day: 62 miles.

**Group size:** between 10 and 20 participants.