



The Venetian Land Empire

A spectrum of north-east Italy's finest art and architecture

19–28 May 2025 (ML 695)

10 days • £4,880

Lecturer: Dr Michael Douglas-Scott

Huge range of art and architecture from ancient Roman to modern, with the Middle Ages and Renaissance predominating.

Encompasses some of the greatest historic cities and loveliest hill towns in Italy, with landscapes ranging from mountains to alluvial plains.

The touch of Venice is visible everywhere, but these great centres have their own traditions and histories.

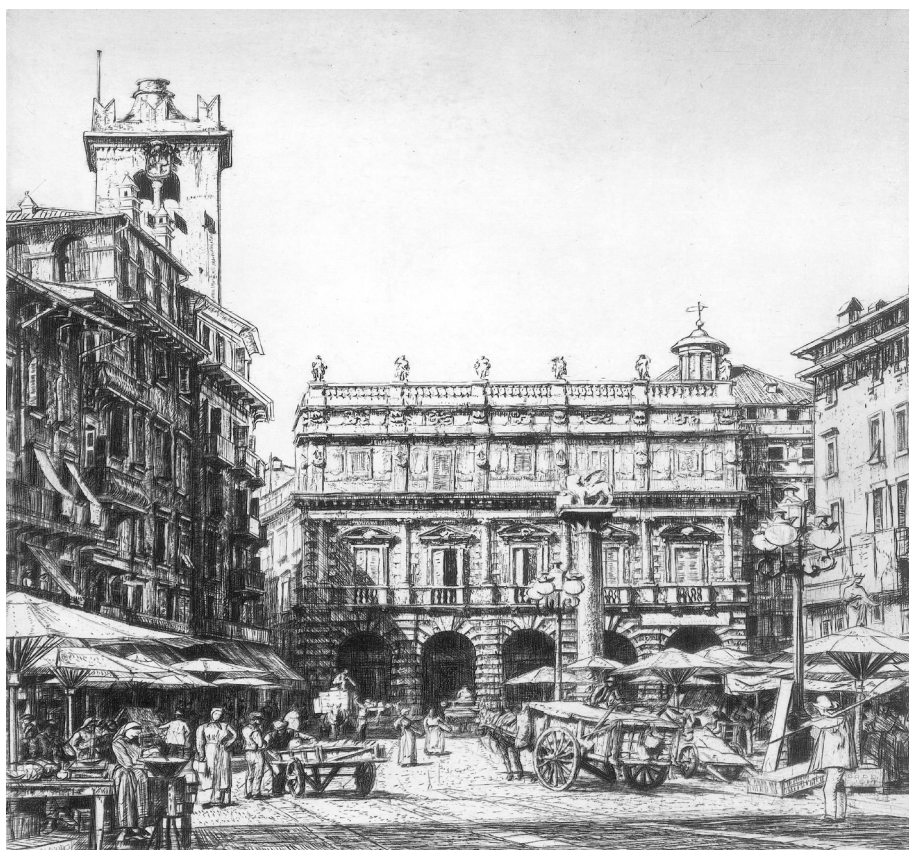
Only two hotels, both five-star.

The maritime empire of the Republic of Venice consisted of a congeries of colonies along the Adriatic and into the eastern Mediterranean, acquired to protect the all-important trade with Constantinople and the East. But Venice had two empires; and the land empire, the *terra ferma*, was markedly different in character. Stretching across northern Italy from the lagoon to within 30 miles of Milan, it encompassed innumerable densely populated and highly sophisticated cities and territories.

These mainland possessions were no mere subordinate appendages to La Serenissima, and had histories far longer than that of the relatively upstart maritime republic. Largely pieced together in the 15th and 16th centuries by conquest and negotiation, the rule of La Serenissima had to respect the pride and traditions – and wealth – of these formerly independent city states.

The consequence is a region of immense variety and artistic wealth. Padua, Verona, Treviso, Vicenza, Brescia, Bergamo – these are some of the most illustrious, historically important and artistically well-endowed places in Italy. Asolo, Bassano: these are among the loveliest hilltop towns, and not among the most visited. Most have Roman or pre-Roman origins; at many the medieval circuit of walls is still intact. Architecture ranges from Ancient Roman through early medieval, Romanesque to Gothic, and on to Renaissance, Neoclassical and modern.

A recurring theme is the genius of Andrea Palladio, creator of paradigmatic villas and urban palaces; and work by Carlo Scarpa, the 20th-century Venetian architect, also makes repeated appearances.



Verona, Piazza delle Erbe, etching by Francis Dodd c. 1925.

In the fields of painting and sculpture, the Trecento (14th century) is particularly well represented, with Giotto's finest fresco cycle heading the list. From the 15th century are masterpieces by Pisanello, Donatello, Mantegna and Bellini; the High Renaissance and Mannerism are brilliantly represented by Titian, Giorgione, Veronese, Bassano and Lorenzo Lotto; the 18th century by Tiepolo, the consummate master of the age.

Itinerary

Day 1: Castelfranco Veneto, Asolo. Fly at c. 9.00am (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Venice. Drive to the delightful little walled town of Castelfranco to see Giorgione's *Madonna Enthroned* in the cathedral, one of the treasures of Renaissance Italy. Continue to the lovely hilltop town of Asolo where the first six nights are spent.

Day 2: Treviso. Once an important fortress city, Treviso retains imposing public buildings and many painted façades. The cathedral has a Titian *Annunciation*, but the most memorable paintings are the 1352 frescoes of learned friars by Tommaso da Modena at the Friary of St Nicholas. Return to Asolo via the Villa Barbaro at Maser, designed by Palladio for two highly cultivated Venetian brothers, with more superb frescoes, this time by Veronese.

Day 3: Bassano, San Vito. Excursion to nearby Bassano del Grappa, a highly attractive hill town with a series of picturesque squares and painted façades and a wooden bridge designed by Palladio. Home of the Bassano family of painters, there is a major holding of their works in the civic museum. On the return journey, visit the Brion cemetery complex by Carlo Scarpa, which is 20th-century architecture at its most beautiful and moving.

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continued

Day 4: Padua. The medieval town hall and surrounding squares are among the finest of such ensembles in Italy. Giotto's fresco cycle in the Arena Chapel is one of the greatest achievements in the history of art. Further outstanding 14th-century fresco cycles are those by Giusto de' Menabuoi in the Baptistry and by Altichieri in the vast domed Basilica of St Anthony.

Day 5: Vicenza. Vicenza is architecturally the noblest and most homogenous city in northern Italy, much of the fabric consisting of 16th-century aristocratic residences. Andrea Palladio spent most of his life here; his buildings include the town hall (Basilica Palladiana), an epoch-making theatre (Teatro Olimpico) and several grand houses. The Palazzo Chiericati houses an art gallery.

Day 6: Vicentine villas, Asolo. Two major villas are located just outside Vicenza, 'La Rotonda', the most famous of all Palladian villas, and Villa Valmarana 'ai Nani', with superb frescoes by Giambattista Tiepolo and his son Giandomenico. Return to Asolo for some free time (The Lorenzo Lotto altarpiece in the cathedral is not to be missed.)

Day 7: Montecchio, Verona. There are more Tiepolo frescoes in the Villa Cordellina in Montecchio Maggiore. Continue to Verona and visit first the 18th-century Giusti Gardens for wonderful views over the city, before visiting the Pisanello fresco's in Sta. Anastasia. The remaining three nights are spent in Verona.

Day 8: Bergamo. The ramparts around the Upper Town of Bergamo are immensely impressive, as befits the westernmost outpost of the Venetian empire. This is among the most attractive of old city centres in Italy, and the architectural complex of the Piazza del Duomo includes the Romanesque cathedral and the Renaissance Cappella Colleoni with frescoes by Tiepolo. See the outstanding collection of paintings in the Accademia Carrara on the way to the Lower Town.

Day 9: Brescia. A centre of Lombard power, Brescia was swallowed by the Venetians in 1426. The refurbished Santa Giulia City Museum shows remarkable artworks and artefacts from Roman onwards, and the Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo has a very good picture collection. The Rotonda is a 12th-century round church, the Broletto one of the earliest surviving town halls and the Loggia a beautiful Renaissance building.

Day 10: Verona. One of the most richly stocked and beautiful of the historic cities of Italy, Verona was a major Roman settlement, a powerful medieval nation-state and an important fortress through to Austrian rule in the 19th century. Visit the art museum in the supremely elegant red-brick castle, refurbished by Carlo Scarpa, as well as San Zeno, a splendid Romanesque church with an altarpiece by Mantegna. Fly from Marco Polo Venice Airport, returning to Heathrow at c. 8.00pm.

Lecturer

Dr Michael Douglas-Scott mixes scholarship with accessible discourse, wit with reasoned opinion, and is highly sought-after as an 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: £4,880 or £4,610 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £5,760 or £5,490 without flights.

Suggested train itinerary: London – Paris – Lyon – Milan – Padova – Montebelluna: c. 21 hours

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 320); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation; breakfasts; 6 dinners, 1 lunch with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Albergo Al Sole, Asolo (albergoalsoleasolo.com): small 5-star hotel, full of charm, with wonderful views from the terrace and a good restaurant. Due to the boutique nature of the hotel, rooms vary in size and decor, and single rooms may be true singles with a queen size bed (140 x 190 cm). **Due Torri Hotel, Verona** (hotelduetorri.duetorrihotels.com): luxurious 5-star, excellently located near Piazza delle Erbe. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? The tour involves a lot of walking in town centres, where coach access is restricted, and a lot of standing in museums and churches. A good level of fitness is essential. You will be on your feet for lengthy stretches of time. Some days involve a lot of driving – average distance by coach per day: 59 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.