



Ravenna & Urbino

Byzantine capital, Renaissance court

13–17 October 2025 (ML 815)

5 days

Lecturer: Dr Luca Leoncini

A study in contrasts: one a city with origins as a major Roman seaport, the other an enchanting little Renaissance settlement high in the hills.

In Ravenna, some of the greatest buildings of late antiquity with the finest Byzantine mosaics.

In Urbino the Ducal Palace, the greatest secular building of the Early Renaissance.

Private evening visit to San Vitale, Ravenna's finest church, and the adjacent Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, to see the magnificent mosaics.

Why combine them? Both are somewhat out of the way, yet near to each other. First run almost 30 years ago and still a firm favourite.

Ravenna was once one of the most important cities in the western world. The last capital of the Roman Empire in the West, she subsequently became capital of the Gothic kingdoms of Italy and of Byzantine Italy. Then history passed her by. Marooned in obscurity, some of the greatest buildings and decorative schemes of late antiquity and the early medieval era were allowed to survive unmolested until the modern age recognised in them not the onset of decadence and the barbarity of the Dark Ages but an art of the highest aesthetic and spiritual power. The Early Christian and Byzantine mosaics at Ravenna are the finest in the world.

Urbino, by contrast, is a compact hilltop stronghold with a very different history and an influence on Renaissance culture out of all proportion to her size. The Ducal Palace, built by the Montefeltro dynasty over several decades, is perhaps the finest secular building of its period. Piero della Francesca, Raphael and Baldassare Castiglione were among those who passed through its exquisite halls.

The justification for joining in one short tour these two centres of diverse artistic traditions is simple. They are places to which every art lover wants to go but which are relatively inaccessible from the main art-historical centres of Italy, yet are close to each other. For many years this has been one of our most popular tours.



Ravenna, Mosaics in S. Apollinare, 20th-century engraving.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 8.00am (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Bologna. Drive to Ravenna, where all four nights are spent.

Day 2: Ravenna. In the morning see the outstanding National Museum, with excellent Byzantine ivory carvings. The Orthodox baptistry has superlative Early Christian mosaics and S. Apollinare Nuovo has a mosaic procession of martyrs marching along the nave. In the evening there is a private visit to the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, lined with 5th-century mosaics, and the splendid centrally planned church of S. Vitale with 6th-century mosaics of Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora.

Day 3: Ravenna. The Cathedral Museum possesses fine objects, including an ivory throne. Visit the Cooperativa Mosaicista, a laboratory for the restoration of mosaics (*by appointment only and subject to confirmation*) and the Mausoleum of Theodoric. The afternoon is free.

Day 4: Urbino. The Palazzo Ducale grew during 30 years of Montefeltro patronage into the perfect Early Renaissance secular environment, of the highest importance for both architecture and architectural sculpture. The picture collection in the palace includes works by Piero della Francesca, Raphael and

Titian. There are exquisite International Gothic frescoes by Salimbeni in the Oratory of St John.

Day 5: Classe, Rimini. Drive to Classe, Ravenna's port, which was one of the largest in the Roman Empire. Virtually all that is left is the great Basilica of S. Apollinare. Continue to Rimini and visit the Tempio Malatestiano, church and mausoleum of the Renaissance tyrant Sigismondo Malatesta (designed by Alberti, fresco by Piero della Francesca, sculpture by Agostino Duccio). Drive on to Bologna airport for an afternoon flight arriving at Heathrow at c. 7.00pm (March) or c. 6.00pm (October).

Lecturer

Dr Luca Leoncini. Art historian specialising in 15th-century Italian painting. His first degree and PhD were from Rome University followed by research at the Warburg Institute in London. He has published articles on the classical tradition in Italian art of the 15th century and contributed to the Macmillan Dictionary of Art. He has also written on Mantegna and Renaissance drawings.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £2,070 or 1,910 without flights. Single occupancy: £2,410 or £2,250 without flights.

Ravenna & Urbino continued

By train: London – Paris – Turin – Bologna – Ravenna: 15–19 hours. Contact us for advice.

Included: travel by private coach; hotel accommodation; breakfasts; 3 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer.

Accommodation. Palazzo Bezzi, Ravenna (palazzobezzi.com): a 4-star superior hotel, located on the edge of the historic centre of town. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? There is inevitably quite a lot of walking and standing in museums on this tour. Some of the walking is uphill or over cobbles. The coach cannot be used within the town centres. Average distance by coach per day: 65 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.