



Palladian Villas

The greatest house builder in history

2–7 June 2026 (MM 946)

6 days

Lecturer: Dr Sarah Pearson

26–31 October 2026 (MM 210)

6 days

Lecturer: Dr Michael Douglas-Scott

A survey of various surviving villas and palaces designed by Andrea Palladio (1508–80), the world's most influential architect.

Stay throughout in Vicenza, Palladio's home town and site of many of his buildings.

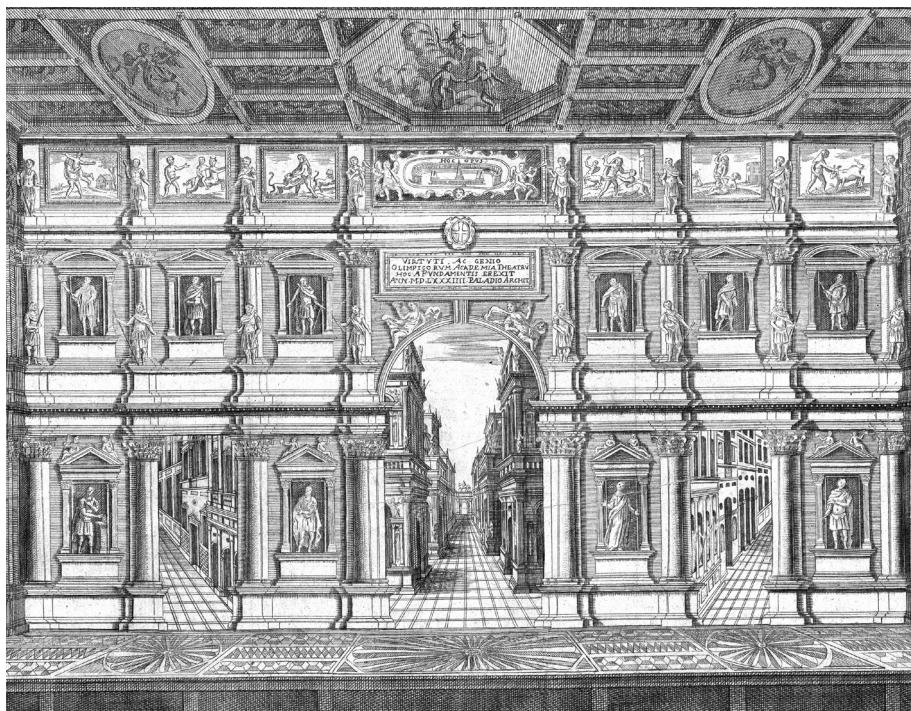
With many special appointments, this itinerary would be impossible for independent travellers.

Utility is the key to understanding Palladio's villas. In 16th-century Italy a villa was a farm, and in the Veneto agriculture had become a serious business for the city-based mercantile aristocracy. As the Venetian maritime empire gradually crumbled before the advancing Ottoman Turks, Venetians compensated by investing in the *terra ferma* of their hinterland.

But beauty was equally the determinant of form, though beauty of a special kind. Palladio was designing buildings for a clientele who, whether princes of commerce, traditional soldier-aristocrats or gentlemen of leisure, shared an intense admiration for ancient Rome. They were children of the High Renaissance and steeped in humanist learning. Palladio was the first architect regularly to apply the colonnaded temple fronts to secular buildings.

But the beauty of his villas was not solely a matter of applied ornament. As can be seen particularly in his low-budget, pared-down villas and auxiliary buildings, there is a geometric order which arises from sophisticated systems of proportion and an unerring intuitive sense of design. It is little wonder that Andrea Palladio became the most influential architect the western world has ever known.

Many of his finest surviving villas and palaces are included on this tour, as well as some of the lesser-known and less accessible ones.



Teatro Olimpico, Vicenza, 18th-century-engraving.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 10.30am (June) or c. 8.45am (October) (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Venice. Explore one of Palladio's most evolved, most beautiful and most influential buildings, the Villa Cornaro at Piombino Dese. Drive to Vicenza where all five nights are spent.

Day 2: Vicenza. See in Vicenza several palaces by Palladio including the Palazzo Barbaran da Porto, which houses the Palladio Museum, and the colonnaded Palazzo Chiericati. His chief civic works here are the Basilica – the medieval town hall nobly encased in classical guise – and the Teatro Olimpico, the earliest theatre of modern times.

Day 3: Bagnolo di Lonigo, Poiana Maggiore, Fratta Polesine. The Villa Pisani at Bagnolo di Lonigo, small but majestic, is considered by many scholars to be Palladio's first masterpiece. The Villa Poiana, another early work, has restrained but noble proportions. The Villa Badoer at Fratta Polesine, from the middle of his career, is a perfect example of Palladian hierarchy, a raised residence connected by curved colonnades to auxiliary buildings.

Day 4: Vicenza, Lugo di Vicenza. The hilltop 'La Rotonda', a 10-minute drive from Vicenza, is the most famous of Palladio's buildings, domed and with four porticoes. In the foothills of the Dolomites, Villa Godi Malinverni is an austere cuboid design with lavish frescoes inside. Some free time in Vicenza.

Day 5: Bassano del Grappa, Maser, Fanzolo. At the lovely town of Bassano there is a wooden bridge designed by Palladio. The Villa Barbaro at Maser, built by Palladio for two highly cultivated Venetian brothers, has superb frescoes by Veronese, while the Villa Emo at Fanzolo typically and beautifully combines the utilitarian with the monumental.

Day 6: Malcontenta. Drive along a stretch of the canal between Padua and the Venetian Lagoon, which is lined with the summer retreats of Venetian patricians. The Villa Foscari, 'La Malcontenta', is one of Palladio's best known and most enchanting creations. Fly from Venice to London Heathrow, arriving at c. 4.45pm (June) or c. 7.15pm (October).

Many of the villas on this itinerary are privately owned and require special permission to visit. The selection and order may therefore vary a little from the description above.

Palladian Villas continued

Lecturer

Dr Sarah Pearson. Architectural historian and writer specialising in Italy. Her MA focused on the architecture of Andrea Palladio and her PhD investigated convent building in Northern Italy with particular reference to the Duchy of Urbino and the Sienese architect Francesco di Giorgio Martini. Other interests include Renaissance art and English Brutalist architecture. She has taught at the Universities of Reading and East Anglia, and currently lectures at Madingley Hall at the University of Cambridge.

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

Included: travel by private coach; hotel accommodation; breakfasts; 2 lunches and 3 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation, Hotel Campo Marzio (hotelcampomarzio.com): just outside a city gate of Vicenza, this 4-star hotel is well located and comfortable, with decent-sized rooms. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? The tour involves a lot of walking, sometimes uphill and over unevenly paved ground, as the coach can rarely get close to the villas or enter town centres. There is a lot of standing outside and inside villas. A good level of fitness is necessary. It should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Some days involve a lot of driving. Average distance by coach per day: 58 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.