



Roman & Medieval Provence

The south of France in the Middle Ages

16–22 October 2026 (MM 214)

7 days • £3,270

Lecturer: Dr Alexandra Gajewski

A remarkable richness of Roman remains and ambitious medieval architecture and sculpture.

Wide-ranging highlights include the Roman theatre at Orange, an extraordinary survival, and the great papal palace at Avignon.

Some outstanding Romanesque architecture – at St Trophime, Arles, Silvacane, Aix – in a natural setting of exceptional attractiveness.

Based throughout in Avignon at the historic 5-star Hôtel d'Europe.

Famed for its natural beauty, its wealth of Augustan and second-century monuments, and the quality and ambition of its medieval work, Provence can seem the very essence of Mediterranean France. But its settlement was – historically – surprisingly concentrated, and the major Roman and medieval centres are clustered within the valleys of the Durance and Rhône.

This is the area which was marked out for development in the first and second centuries AD, and the range and quantity of Roman work which survives at Orange, St-Rémy and Arles is impressive. Indeed, as one moves into the Late Antique period it is precisely this triangle which blossoms – and in Arles one is witness to the most significant Early Christian city of Mediterranean Gaul.

This Roman infrastructure is fundamental, and the pre-eminent Romanesque churches of Provence may come as something of a surprise, being notable both for a predilection for sheer wall surfaces and an indebtedness to earlier architectural norms.

But it is above all the sculpture which is most susceptible to this sort of historicising impulse. The Romanesque sculpture of Provence is more skilfully and self-consciously antique than any outside central Italy, and is often organised in a manner designed to evoke either fourth-century sarcophagi, or Roman theatres and triumphal arches. The façade of St-Trophime at Arles is a well-known example of this, but it is a theme we also encounter in many of the smaller churches – places such as Pernes-les-Fontaines and Montmajour – where exquisite friezes of acanthus and vinescroll are



used to both elaborate and articulate exteriors of stunning delicacy. For once the truly great late medieval building we see is secular: the mighty papal palace at Avignon.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 11.00am (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Marseille. Drive to Avignon, where all six nights are spent.

Day 2: Avignon. The Palais des Papes is the principal monument of the Avignon papacy, one-time site of the papal curia and by far the most significant 14th-century building to survive in southern France. The collections of late Gothic sculpture and painting in the Petit-Palais act as a splendid foil to the work at the papal palace, while the cathedral houses the magnificent tomb of Pope John XXII.

Day 3: Villeneuve, Orange, Pont-du-Gard. A day spent mostly within sight of the Rhône, beginning with Pope Innocent VI's now ruined Charterhouse at Villeneuve-lez-Avignon. The day's real star is Orange, site of the greatest

of all Roman theatres to survive in the West. In the afternoon visit that astonishing feat of engineering that brought water over the River Gardon at the Pont-du-Gard.

Day 4: Pernes-les-Fontaines, Vaison, Venasque. Gentle stroll through Pernes, a delightful fortified river town with an important Romanesque church and 13th-century frescoed tower. At Vaison-la-Romaine the sublime late Romanesque cathedral is attached to a northern cloister. Drive in the late afternoon over the Dentelles de Montmirail to the stunning early medieval baptistery at Venasque.

Day 5: St-Rémy-de-Provence. Drive along the northern flank of the Alpilles to St-Rémy-de-Provence, Glanum of old, and proud possessor of one of the truly great funerary memorials of the Roman world, the cenotaph erected by three Julii brothers in honour of their forebears. Some free time in Avignon.

Day 6: Montmajour, Arles. Explore the superlative complex of churches, cemeteries

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and conventual buildings that once constituted the abbey of Montmajour. In Arles the amphitheatre is a justly famous early 2nd-century structure of a type developed from the Colosseum. The Romanesque Cathedral of St-Trophime is home to one of the greatest cloisters of 12th-century Europe. The Musée Départemental Arles Antique houses a quite spellbinding collection of classical and early Christian art.

Day 7: Silvacane, Aix-en-Provence. At Silvacane, a major late-12th-century Cistercian abbey, the monastic buildings descend a series of terraces down to the River Durance. Finally visit Aix, where the cathedral provides an enthralling end to the tour, with its extraordinary juxtaposition of Merovingian baptistery, Romanesque cloister, 13th-century chancel and late medieval west front. Fly from Marseille, arriving at London Heathrow at c. 6.45pm.

Lecturer

Dr Alexandra Gajewski. Specialist in medieval architecture. She read Art History at Münster University, Germany, followed by a PhD in Gothic architecture in northern Burgundy from the Courtauld Institute of Art. She has lectured at the Courtauld, at Birkbeck College and at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She has just completed a European project at the Centro de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales in Madrid, where she was part of a research team investigating 'The Roles of Women as Makers of Medieval Art and Architecture'. She is Deputy Editor of the *Burlington Magazine*.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,270 or £3,010 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,830 or £3,570 without flights.

Included. Flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (aircraft: Airbus A320/319); travel by private coach throughout; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts and four dinners with wine, water and coffee; all admissions; all gratuities for restaurant staff, drivers; all state and airport taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager; hire of radio guides for better audibility of the lecturer.

Accommodation. Hôtel d'Europe, Avignon (heurope.com): central 5-star hotel in a former 16th-century residence.

How strenuous? Quite a lot of walking is involved, particularly in the town centres. The tour is not suitable for anyone who has difficulties with everyday walking and stairclimbing. There are some long days and coach journeys. Average distance by coach per day: 32 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.