



The Art of Florence

Cradle of the Renaissance

9–15 February 2026 (MM 882)

7 days

Lecturer: Desmond Shawe-Taylor

23–29 November 2026 (MM 236)

7 days

Lecturer: Dr Flavio Boggi

The world's best location for an art history tour: here were laid the foundations of the next 500 years of western art.

Still retains a dense concentration of great works. The Renaissance is centre stage, but medieval and other periods also feature.

Architecture, painting and sculpture – all the arts are examined, the lecturer's commentary geared to maximise your appreciation.

A first visit to Florence can be an overwhelming experience, and it seems that no amount of revisiting can exhaust her riches, or stem the growth of affection and awe which the city inspires in regular cultural pilgrims.

For hundreds of years the city nurtured an unceasing succession of great artists. No other place can rival Florence for the quantity of first-rate, locally produced works of art, many still in the sites for which they were created or in museums a few hundred yards away. Giotto, Brunelleschi, Donatello, Masaccio, Botticelli, Michelangelo, Raphael, Leonardo – these are some of the artists and architects whose works will be studied on the tour, fully justifying Florence's epithet as the cradle of the Renaissance.

Florence is, moreover, one of the loveliest cities in the world, ringed by the foothills of the Apennines and sliced in two by the River Arno. Narrow alleys lead between the expansive *piazze* and supremely graceful Renaissance arcades abound, while the massive scale of the buildings impressively demonstrates the wealth once generated by its precocious economy.

It is now a substantial, vibrant city, yet the past is omnipresent, and, from sections of the medieval city walls one can still look out over olive groves and lines of cypress trees.

Though the number of visitors to Florence has swelled hugely in recent years, it is still possible during the quieter months, and with careful planning, to explore the city and enjoy its art in relative tranquillity.



Florence, watercolour publ. 1904.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 11.30am (British Airways) from London City to Florence. In the late afternoon visit the chapel in the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, which has exquisite frescoes by Benozzo Gozzoli.

Day 2. Brunelleschi's Foundling Hospital, begun in 1419, was the first building to embody stylistic elements indisputably identifiable as Renaissance. See Michelangelo's *David*, the 'Slaves' in the Accademia and the frescoes and panels of pious simplicity by Fra Angelico in the Friary of S. Marco. In the afternoon visit the redoubtable Palazzo Pitti, which houses several museums including the Galleria Palatina, outstanding particularly for High Renaissance and Baroque paintings.

Day 3. Avoid the busiest of the daily crowds by heading early to the Uffizi, Italy's most important art gallery, which has masterpieces by every major Florentine painter as well as international Old Masters. After, pause to take in Piazza della Signoria, civic centre of Florence with masterpieces of public sculpture. The afternoon is free for independent exploration.

Day 4. The cluster of cathedral buildings occupies the morning; the baptistry with its Byzantine mosaics and Renaissance sculpture; the polychromatic marble Duomo itself,

capped by Brunelleschi's massive dome; and the collections in the superbly renovated cathedral museum. Lunch is at a restaurant on the Piazzale Michelangelo before a visit to S. Miniato al Monte, the Romanesque abbey church with panoramic views of the city.

Day 5. Visit Michelangelo's Laurentian Library, whose architectural components would herald the onset of Mannerism. A Medici morning includes S. Lorenzo, the family parish church designed by Brunelleschi and their burial chapel in the contiguous New Sacristy with Michelangelo's enigmatic sculptural ensemble. The afternoon is devoted to S. Maria Novella, the Dominican church with many works of art (Masaccio's *Trinità*, Ghirlandaio's frescoed sanctuary).

Day 6. See the Renaissance statuary at the church-cum-granary of Orsanmichele, then the Bargello, housing Florence's finest sculpture collection with works by Donatello, Verrocchio, Michelangelo and others. Walk to the vast Franciscan church of S. Croce, favoured burial place for leading Florentines and abundantly furnished with sculpted tombs, altarpieces and frescoes. In the afternoon are the extensive Boboli Gardens, at the top of which is an 18th-century ballroom and garden overlooking olive groves. See the Masaccio/Masolino fresco cycle in the Brancacci Chapel, a highly influential

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work of art which guided all subsequent generations of Renaissance artists.

Day 7. Visit S. Spirito, Brunelleschi's last great church, with many 15th-century altarpiece, and the Rucellai Chapel in the deconsecrated church of S. Pancrazio, now part of the Museo Marino Marini. Fly from Florence Airport, arriving at London City at c. 5.30pm.

Lecturer

Desmond Shawe-Taylor. Distinguished art historian and museum administrator whose posts have included Surveyor of The Queen's Pictures and Director of Dulwich Picture Gallery. He studied English Literature at Oxford and took an MA in History of Art at the Courtauld Institute. He has written extensively on English 18th-century portraiture and other subjects, and curated a series of exhibitions at the Queen's Gallery in Edinburgh and London, examining Dutch and Flemish 17th-century art.

Dr Flavio Boggi. Art historian specialising in medieval and Renaissance Italian art. He trained both in Scotland and Italy and is now head of the department of Art History at University College Cork, Ireland. He has published widely on the artistic culture of Tuscany. He is also interested in Emilian painting and has co-written two books on the Bolognese artist Lippo di Dalmasio.

Practicalities

Included: travel by private coach for airport transfers; hotel accommodation; breakfasts, 1 lunch and 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. **Hotel Santa Maria Novella** (hotelsantamarianovella.it): a delightful, renovated 4-star hotel in a very central location. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? This is a particularly strenuous tour. The tour involves a lot of walking in the town centre where the ground is sometimes uneven and pavements are narrow. It should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Fitness is essential.

Group size: between 8 and 18 participants.