



Gardens & Villas of the Veneto

Renaissance to recent in & around Padua, Verona & Vicenza

21–27 April 2026 (MM 929)

7 days • £3,470

Lecturer: Amanda Patton

Curated selection of the most interesting and beautiful gardens on Venice's hinterland.

Gardens are the focus but the villas are usually visited, often with the owner-inhabitants.

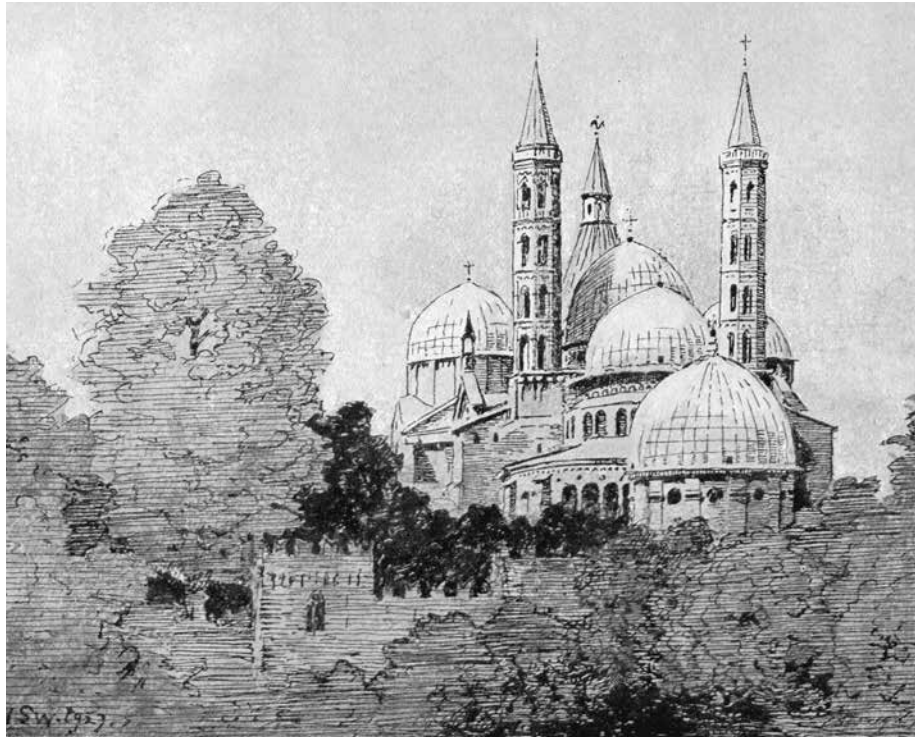
Many of the visits are by special arrangement.

The landscape of the Veneto is one of contrasts. The fertile plain on the immediate hinterland of Venice, criss-crossed by causeways and dykes, became the summer playground of rich Venetian patricians as their agricultural holdings sprouted ever increasing numbers of luxurious villas. Many were accessed directly from the Grand Canal through a diversion of the River Brenta.

Further inland and southwest from Padua, the landscape is transformed by the Euganean Hills: tree-clad conical eruptions of volcanic rock, which have been quarried for stone for the *calli* and *campi* of Venice since the sixth century. In contrast, to the north, the snow-capped mountains of the southern limestone Alps form a jagged backdrop to the sage-rich meadows that adorn roadsides and villages, while wisteria, roses and irises scramble through the gardens of the many villas peppered through the countryside.

This varied topography defined the development of the villas and gardens that were created between the 15th and 18th centuries with the enormous wealth generated by the Republic of Venice. In the plains, villas were elevated from the landscape to enlarge the impact of the building on the surroundings and to provide viewing platforms, galleries and balconies to allow gardens to be seen from above. Windows, *allées* and strategically placed statues were artfully arranged to heighten the effect and lend a grandeur to the setting that the level landscape militated against.

Gardens were made largely for enjoyment and entertainment – mazes, loggias, carved gods, dwarfs and Arcadian figures along with theatres and water jokes were all part of the spirit of the time. It was not all pleasure-seeking, however. Venice was at the forefront of trade with the East, and along with precious commodities came new plants. To capitalise on this increase in knowledge and diversity, the Botanic Garden of Padua was founded in 1545 – the first of its kind – to study plants and



Padua, Church of St Anthony, after a drawing by Inglis Sheldon-Williams in 'A Dawdle in Lombardy', 1928.

herbs and their medicinal potential. This ethos of discovery and experiment is still the driving force for this UNESCO World Heritage Site, evidenced by the impressive new glasshouses.

Itinerary

Day 1: Stra. Fly at c. 10.30am from London Heathrow to Venice (British Airways). First of three nights in an elegant villa on the Brenta Canal at Mira Porte.

Day 2: Vescovana, Rivella, Valsanzibio. Today we visit two flower-filled gardens. In contrast to Stra, the Villa Pisani at Vescovana is a more modest affair, with an English-inspired Romantic garden of the 19th century. The garden designed around the 16th-century Villa Emo at Rivella was created in the 1960s. Villa Barbarigo at Valsanzibio is a Baroque masterpiece complete with water jets, boxwood maze and extensive pools, designed as an allegory of man's progress towards salvation.

Day 3: Padua. Spend the morning at the beautiful and historic Botanic Garden at Padua. The oldest such establishment in the world, it was founded in 1545 by order of the

Venetian government and was absorbed by the university shortly after. The oldest living plant dates to 1550. In the afternoon, there is a choice of spending time in this gem of a city or of returning to rest in the hotel and its gardens.

Day 4: Fracanzan Pievone, Frassanelle, Costozza. Villa Fracanzan Pievone maintains a traditional orchard and kitchen garden, among the few left in the Veneto. The charming artificial caves excavated under the Villa Frassanelle in the 1880s by Count Alberto Papafava replicate the natural caves within his park, complete with secret passageways, stalactites and underground lakes. The final visit is to the Baroque gardens of the Villa da Schio at Costozza, where we also visit the winery and sample the wines of the estate. Continue to Vicenza for the first of three nights.

Day 5: Trissino, Castelgomberto. Through a series of terraces, walks and panoramic belvederes, the gardens of Trissino Marzotto link two villas set into a hillside dominating the Agno valley. The upper villa was converted from a medieval fortress, while the lower is now a romantic ruin. The private garden of

Gardens & Villas of the Veneto continued

Villa da Schio is a beautifully proportioned Italian garden set in the plain below Trissino. Free afternoon in Vicenza, the exceedingly handsome little city embellished by the architect Andrea Palladio and his followers.

Day 6: Negrar, Grezzana. The Pojega Garden at Villa Rizzardi, commissioned in 1783, is one of the last remaining examples of an Italian-style garden created before the fashion for landscape gardens took hold. Incorporating three descending terraces, it takes full advantage of the steep hillside with formal gardens, hornbeam avenues and a green theatre. Visit Villa Arvedi, whose impressive parterre was designed to be viewed from above, followed by lunch in the Baroque grotto. See also the Giardini Giusti on the outskirts of nearby Verona; created in 1580, it is among the finest Renaissance gardens in Europe.

Day 7: Stra. Visit the Villa Pisani at Stra, one of the most opulent of the Brenta villas, owned briefly by Napoleon. Within a bend in the Brenta canal, the garden was inspired by Le Notre's long vistas at Versailles where Andrea Pisani Alvise had been ambassador to Louis XIV. Fly from Venice to London Heathrow, arriving c. 5.15pm.

Lecturer

Amanda Patton. Multi-award-winning garden designer, writer, broadcaster and artist. A Registered Member and former Vice-Chair of the Society of Garden Designers, and Member of the Garden Media Guild, she has created Show Gardens at Chelsea and Hampton Court, and has designed over 300 mainly private gardens which have featured in numerous books and national magazines. She lectures widely including at the London College of Garden Design, the RAC and the Lurie Garden in Chicago. Her particular interests are conceptualism within gardens and contemporary garden design.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,470 or £3,160 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,990 or £3,680 without flights.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 320); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 2 lunches and 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions and 1 wine tasting; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Hotel Villa Franceschi, Mira Porte (villafranceschi.com): a 5-star hotel in a 16th-century villa in the centre of Mira Porte. **Hotel Campo Marzio, Vicenza** (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 throughout.*

How strenuous? There is quite a lot of walking, much of it on rough, uneven ground in the gardens. Sometime sites require the coach to park approximately one mile away. The tour would not be suitable for anyone who has difficulties with everyday walking and stair climbing. Average distance by coach per day: 69 miles

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.