



ISTANBUL TO VENICE: THE BYZANTINE LEGACY

with Dr Kathleen Olive

Explore the wealth of the Byzantine Empire, from its eastern capital at present-day Istanbul to its apotheosis in Ravenna and enduring influence on Venice

HIGHLIGHTS

- Unpack your bags for long stays in central Istanbul and a family-owned boutique hotel in Venice
- Discover a Roman legacy in Istanbul's hippodrome, Basilica Cisterns and impressive walls
- Chart the rise of Christianity at Hagia Sophia and in Ravenna's mosaic-encrusted churches
- Survey superlative medieval art, including Padua's Scrovegni Chapel
- Appreciate a different aesthetic, from Ottoman tiles to a little-known museum of Greek icon painting in Venice and cutting-edge modern art
- Enjoy outstanding scenery from land to sea, including a day on the Bosphorus and excursions into the Venetian lagoon

IN A NUTSHELL

DATES: 09-24 October 2024

ITINERARY: Istanbul (6n),
Ravenna (2n), Venice (7n)

PRICE: \$11,500pp twinshare

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT:
\$2,650 for sole use of a double
room

FITNESS: Moderate: walking
tours; stand in museums;
ability to get on/off water taxis

GROUP SIZE: max. 16 places



Limelight Arts Travel Pty Ltd
Level 6, 84 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000
(02) 8599 4201
www.limelight-arts-travel.com.au

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OVERVIEW

For over 1,000 years, the Byzantine Empire was a European byword for sophistication. Its government and navy, art and architecture were emulated from afar, and even everyday details captivated people, from the humble fork – introduced to Western Europe through Venice – to a penchant for the emperor's red shoes.

This 16-day tour surveys the impressive legacy of the Byzantine Empire, commencing with a week-long stay in its capital. Present-day Istanbul – Byzantium, Constantinople, Stamboul – still boasts its strategic position, located at the mouth of the Bosphorus, straddling Asia and Europe, East and West. From Constantine onwards, successive Eastern Roman emperors made extensive investments in their capital city and its infrastructure, churches and palaces. The emperors' adoption of Christianity gave them a potent new visual language of authority that projected well beyond their Mediterranean empire.

Travelling to Ravenna in Italy for 2 nights, we enjoy a unique opportunity to compare a Byzantine metropolis with the messages of power and prestige conveyed in a regional capital. For centuries, Ravenna was a centre for Roman, Byzantine and Ostrogothic rule, but it fell into a decline in the Middle Ages and its mosaic-encrusted churches, chapels and tombs are beautifully preserved as a result.

Finally, we unpack our bags for a week in Venice, enjoying the Byzantine legacy on Torcello and in San Marco's glowing mosaics. Exploring Venice's maritime trade, foreign communities and their places of worship, we admire great art and architecture, from Carpaccio and Bellini to Titian, Tintoretto and the birth of modern art.

TOUR LEADER

Dr Kathleen Olive has a PhD in Italian Studies from the University of Sydney and is well known for her lectures on European art, architecture and history. She has led small group cultural tours to Western Europe, the USA, Asia and Australasia for twenty years, and is a national lecturer for the Australian Decorative and Fine Arts Society (ADFAS). Kathleen is known for her engaging and attentive leadership of a group.



Above, from top: Hagia Sophia; mosaics in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna; view onto Ca' Pesaro, Venice; Giotto's frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel

Below, tour leader Dr Kathleen Olive



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DETAILED ITINERARY

WEDNESDAY 09 OCTOBER – ARRIVE ISTANBUL (D)

We highly recommend arriving into Istanbul with time before our tour begins, so that you can explore some of the attractions that are not included in our one-week stay; we can assist with pre-departure accommodation bookings. An arrival transfer from Istanbul Airport is included for all participants; contact us for further information. Meet your tour leader Dr Kathleen Olive and fellow travellers at 5.00pm in the lobby of our hotel for an **orientation stroll** of our neighbourhood before a welcome dinner in a local restaurant. Overnight Istanbul.

THURSDAY 10 OCTOBER – ANCIENT ROME (B, L)

After a talk by Kathleen in our hotel this morning, we venture to Sultanahmet on a **walking tour** exploring the city's glorious ancient past. Commissioned in the sixth century by Emperor Justinian, the **Basilica Cistern** serviced the Great Palace and surrounding areas with its 80,000-ton water storage capacity. We descend under the city to examine the rows of 336 marble columns, evoking a grand cathedral as they rise ethereally from the depths. We continue to the **Hippodrome**, the centre of Byzantium and of Ottoman life for 1,400 years. It was used as a public arena for chariot races and political gatherings. Monuments symbolising the strength of the Empire, such as the Serpent Column from Delphi and Obelisk of Theodosius, still remain in situ today. There is time before lunch to walk through the seventeenth-century **Arasta Bazaar**. Originally a stable for the Sultan's horses, it has been converted into a lively market. After free time we gather back at the hotel for another talk this evening. Overnight Istanbul.

FRIDAY 11 OCTOBER – THE LATINS IN GALATA (B, L)

This morning we ascend to the panoramic balcony of the **Galata Tower** for spectacular views across the Bosphorus and the Marmara Sea, from the Golden Horn to Topkapi Palace and Hagia Sophia. Originally constructed by the Byzantines as a lighthouse, the tower was destroyed by fire and rebuilt as part of the Genoese colony in 1348. The tower houses a museum reflecting the three great empires that have ruled Istanbul over sixteen centuries. At the **Museum of Innocence** – created by Orhan Pamuk at the same time as he wrote his prize-winning novel of the same name – we explore the themes of love and humanity celebrated in the book. The quirky collection of everyday objects reflects life in Istanbul through the 1960s and 70s. We enjoy lunch at the charming Belle Époque **Pera Palace Hotel**, where passengers from the Orient Express graced the elegant glass-domed Kubbeli Lounge – and where Agatha Christie is said to have penned *Murder on the Orient Express* in room 411. The afternoon is at leisure before Kathleen gives a talk in the hotel. Overnight Istanbul.



SATURDAY 12 OCTOBER – BYZANTIUM (B, L)

Today commences at the storied **Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque**, an architectural jewel first constructed by Emperor Constantine. The largest Byzantine church in Istanbul, it was where Christian rulers were crowned. When the Ottomans conquered Constantinople under Sultan Mehmet, it was converted into a mosque with the addition of a minaret, a mihrab facing Mecca, Turkish calligraphy and tiles. Christian iconography remains in the gold, silver and terracotta *tesserae* mosaics, depicting scenes from heaven and the archangels Gabriel and Michael, Jesus and Mary portrayed alongside Emperors Constantine and Justinian. From 1934, when Kemal Atatürk secularised the monument, it served as a museum and was converted back to a functioning mosque in 2020. We continue to **Little Hagia Sophia**, originally a church dedicated to Sts Sergius and Bacchus, patron saints of Christians in the Roman army. The unusual dome prepares us for a similarly irregular octagonal dome, which we will see at San Vitale in Ravenna. Original green and red marble columns are capped with white capitals bearing the monograms of Emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora. After lunch, we survey the incredible wealth of treasures from the Assyrian, Hittite, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman civilisations held at the **Istanbul Archaeological Museum**, on an exclusive visit. The extensive collection of statuary and the intricately carved Alexander and Lycian Sarcophagi, recovered from the Necropolis of Sidon in Lebanon, and the “Istanbul through the Ages” exhibition are highlights of our visit. We continue to a section of the fifth-century city **Walls of Constantinople**, which defended against invasion by land and sea until they were finally breached by Ottoman cannons in 1453. Returning to the hotel, there is a talk before the evening is at leisure. Overnight Istanbul.

SUNDAY 13 OCTOBER – ADVENT OF THE OTTOMANS (B)

We depart by coach to **Rumeli Hisari**, situated at the narrowest point of the Bosphorus Strait. A defensive fort built by order of Mehmet the Conqueror in preparation for the conquest of Constantinople, this castle and Anadolu Hisari, on the opposite shore, allowed the Ottomans to control sea traffic. This effectively cut off supply and military aid to the Byzantine Empire. A unique example of Ottoman military architecture, the castle consists of three large towers, and several smaller towers completed in a brisk four-month period. The fort lost its military significance following the conquest in 1453 and operated as a customs checkpoint, military barracks and a prison. Returning along the **Bosphorus** by ferry provides a pleasant perspective from which to view the city skyline. The remainder of the afternoon and evening are at leisure. Overnight Istanbul.



MONDAY 14 OCTOBER – THE OTTOMANS (B)

As the main residence and administrative centre of the powerful Ottoman Sultans for over 400 years, the opulent **Topkapi Palace** holds a significant place in Istanbul's history. We explore the sprawling grounds and pavilions, laid out between the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus. Exquisitely crafted Iznik tiles decorate the **Harem**, the imperial family headquarters but also the place where the sultan accommodated up to 300 concubines schooled in Islam and Turkish culture and language. After lunch near the palace, we visit the **Museum of Islamic Arts & Crafts**. The museum brings together Turkish and Islamic art through its rich collection of carpets, glassware, calligraphy and ceramics dating back to the seventh century. A number of artefacts we see are contextualised by reference to exemplars now in Venetian museums and galleries. Continuing to the **Sultanahmet Mosque**, we survey the Sultan's imperial display of strength, designed to surpass the Hagia Sophia in size and majesty, to placate Allah and to bring victory in warfare. After crossing the courtyard, as large as the mosque itself, we discover how over 20,000 blue and white floral Iznik tiles adorning the interior lend the Blue Mosque its common name. The late afternoon and evening are at leisure. Overnight Istanbul.

TUESDAY 15 OCTOBER – TO RAVENNA (B, D)

We check out of the hotel this morning and head to Istanbul Airport for our flight to Venice. Arriving in the early afternoon, we board a private coach and travel to Ravenna, stopping en route at **Pomposa Abbey** in Emilia-Romagna. The church, founded in the sixth century, was later populated by a community of Benedictine monks and features a towering Romanesque campanile that dominates the landscape. No longer operating as an abbey, its church still hosts an active congregation and we admire its richly decorated floor and outstanding frescoes of scenes from the Old and New Testament and the Apocalypse. Continuing to Ravenna, we check in before an orientation stroll and dinner in a local restaurant. Overnight Ravenna.

WEDNESDAY 16 OCTOBER – RAVENNA: ROMAN, BYZANTINE & GOTHIC

Our **guided walking tour** this morning commences at the **Church of San Vitale**, connecting Istanbul with Ravenna through its Byzantine architecture and the mosaic depictions of Emperor Justinian with his consort Theodora. In the garden of San Vitale sits the **Mausoleum of Galla Placidia**, a small and unassuming building that belies a stunning interior completely covered in precious fifth-century mosaics. We continue to the **Domus dei Tappeti di Pietra** (or House of Stone Carpets), where a mosaic-laden Roman villa was discovered by accident in 1993. We visit the **Neonian Baptistery** and **Archbishop's Chapel**, two excellent examples of early Christian monuments and of Late Antique wall mosaics. After free time for lunch in the Piazza del Popolo, we pay our respects at the **Tomb of Dante**, buried here after exile from his native Florence, and we visit the **basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo**, the sixth-century palatine chapel of Ostrogothic king Theodoric the Great. Returning to the hotel, the evening is at leisure. Overnight Ravenna.



THURSDAY 17 OCTOBER – THE MIDDLE AGES BETWEEN CONSTANTINOPLE & VENICE (B, D)

We check out and call in at the sixth-century **basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe**, where Ravenna's port of Classis once housed the second fleet on the Roman imperial navy. We continue to the ancient university city of Padua, to admire Giotto's extraordinary cycle of frescoes on an extended visit of the **Scrovegni Chapel**. There is free time for lunch before we continue to Venice to unpack our bags for the next seven nights in La Serenissima. After checking in, we enjoy dinner in a nearby restaurant. Overnight Venice.

FRIDAY 18 OCTOBER – VENETIAN GOVERNMENT & TRADE (B)

Our day begins at the **Doge's Palace** where our guide explains the maritime republic's complicated political system: the elected Doge or duke was a figurehead, held in check by senate and "Byzantine" voting systems. Ascending the impressive golden staircase into the palace, we enter the Senate meeting rooms and Doge's apartments, decorated with works by Veronese, Titian and Tintoretto that depict the city's history. After free time for lunch near Piazza San Marco, there is an optional visit to view Venice's art and history at the **Correr Museum**. Later, on a private tour with our guide, we experience the splendid golden mosaics of **St Mark's Basilica** as they shimmer and glow in the evening light. The remainder of the evening is at leisure. Overnight Venice.

SATURDAY 19 OCTOBER – THE LAGOON (B, L)

Today we board a private launch to **Torcello**. Venice's first settlements were established in the northern reaches of the lagoon, prior to being decimated by successive outbreaks of malaria. A spectacular example of Venetian Byzantine architecture, the **Basilica of Santa Maria Assunta** preserves a ninth-century arched portico, remarkable mosaic floors and a panoramic bell tower with superb views across the lagoon. We enjoy a typical Venetian seafood lunch overlooking the gardens at the charming **Locanda Cipriani**, before our launch takes us to the small island of **San Francesco del Deserto**. St Francis of Assisi visited here on his return from the east and the monastery remains home to a small community of Franciscan friars. We are greeted by a monk and guided through the convent, gardens and two beautiful cloisters. We return to the hotel by launch, enjoying the late afternoon views across the lagoon to Venice's magical skyline. The evening is at leisure. Overnight Venice.



SUNDAY 20 OCTOBER – MEDIEVAL & EARLY RENAISSANCE ART (B)

This morning we explore the quiet residential neighbourhood of San Polo. The unassuming exterior of **Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari** hides sumptuous interiors, with paintings by Giovanni Bellini and Titian, and monumental altars to celebrated Venetians such as the sculptor Antonio Canova. The nearby confraternity of the **Scuola Grande di San Rocco** commissioned Tintoretto to decorate its walls and ceilings over a period of 25 years, resulting in the lavish 'Sistine Chapel of Venice' that we admire together. The afternoon is at leisure, or you may wish to join Kathleen to survey the exclusively Venetian art at the **Accademia Galleries**. Overnight Venice.

MONDAY 21 OCTOBER – HIGH RENAISSANCE & BAROQUE ART AND ARCHITECTURE (B)

On a **walking tour** of the expansive Castello district, we encounter Giovanni Bellini's wonderful sixteenth-century altarpiece of the Virgin and Child flanked by saints in the **church of San Zaccaria**. We continue to the **church of the Greeks** in Venice, a vibrant community whose masterpieces of Byzantine iconography transported from Constantinople, precious illuminated manuscripts and sacred vestments are displayed in the adjacent Museum of Icons. (The museum has erratic hours, so we will visit schedules permitting.) At the **Scuola dalmata di San Giorgio** we observe the ongoing conservation of Vittore Carpaccio's cycle of paintings on the life of St George and St Tryphon. After a break, we visit **Santa Maria dei Miracoli**, the small and beautiful early Renaissance church. Its interiors are swathed with luminous pink and grey marble. Returning to the Rialto, the evening is at leisure. Overnight Venice.

TUESDAY 22 OCTOBER – FOREIGN COMMUNITIES AND VENICE (B, L)

Prior to being gifted to a cohort of Armenian monks, the island of **San Lazzaro degli Armeni** – a short water taxi trip from the Lido – served as a leper colony and medieval quarantine station. Today the island remains a working monastery and an important repository of Armenian culture and literature, housed in its library, museum and art gallery. Byron assisted the monks in a dual language dictionary project while living on the Grand Canal. We return along the Grand Canal to **Cannaregio**, where lunch is enjoyed in a local restaurant. After lunch, we explore the neighbourhood known as the **Ghetto**. It was once home to Jewish merchants, medical professionals and financiers, who were obliged to reside in the area. Our private tour visits two synagogues, discreetly situated on the uppermost floor of existing buildings, and a *midrash* for reading and prayer. (Please note: the buildings of the Ghetto are ancient and vulnerable, and close for restoration at little notice.) Returning to the hotel, the evening is at leisure. Overnight Venice.



WEDNESDAY 23 OCTOBER – MODERN & CONTEMPORARY ART IN VENICE (B, D)

This morning we visit **Ca' Pesaro**, Venice's museum of modern art. Situated in a grandiose seventeenth-century palace on the Grand Canal, the museum was established in the 1890s thanks to the bequest of Duchess Felicita Bevilacqua La Masa. It houses fantastic works of modern art that were collected by the city following the first decades of the celebrated Biennale of Art. At the opulent **Mocenigo Palace Museum**, also bequeathed to the city by Venetian nobility, we explore Venice's staggering history of textiles and costume. Numerous mannequins display the elaborate fashions of the nobility from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, documenting the skill of the weavers, embroiderers, lacemakers and tailors. A recent expansion hosts a **museum of perfume**, dedicated to the art of fragrance. After free time for lunch, we continue our modern art journey at the **Peggy Guggenheim Collection**, to admire the important works collected by Peggy in from the 1920s to 1960s. Tonight we gather for our farewell dinner, with a unique food and wine menu that celebrates the historical cuisine of the Venetian Maritime Republic over several centuries. Overnight Venice.

THURSDAY 24 OCTOBER – DEPART (B)

The tour ends at the hotel after breakfast.



INCLUSIONS

- 15 nights' accommodation at 4* hotels
- All breakfasts and 9 lunches or dinners
- All ground transport, boat transport, guided tours and entrance fees to sites as mentioned in the itinerary, and tipping
- Expertise of and commentary by Australian tour leader throughout
- Expertise and assistance of a Turkish speaking national guide, in Istanbul
- One-way flights in Economy class, travelling from Istanbul to Venice

HOTELS

The Galata Hotel 4* Istanbul, 6 nights

<https://www.thegalataistanbul.com/>

Palazzo Bezzi 4* Ravenna, 2 nights

<https://palazzobezzi.it/en/home-english/>

Hotel Al Codega 4* Venice, 7 nights

<https://www.hotelalcodega.com/>

NB: hotels of a similar standard may be substituted.

TOUR DETAILS

DATES

09-24 October September 2024

TOUR LEADER

Dr Kathleen Olive

ITINERARY

Istanbul – 6 nights

Ravenna – 2 nights

Venice – 7 nights

PRICE

\$11,500pp twinshare

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT

\$2,650 for sole use of a double room

FITNESS

Moderate: walking tours; stand in museums; ability to get on/off water taxis

GROUP SIZE

Maximum 16 places

DEPOSIT

\$1,500pp at the time of booking

FINAL PAYMENT DUE

26 July 2024

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

By booking on this tour, you accept our terms and conditions, which can be found on our website:

<https://www.limelight-arts-travel.com.au/terms-and-conditions-tours>

